

The Deepest Kabbalah *is the Simplest Truth*

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Learn this lesson well: HaSod HaAmok Hi HaPshat HaPashut. The deepest Kabbalah is the simplest of truths. It is the secret of the “open heart” and why G-d says of Israel, “you are my people.”

All too many students of Torah who enter the mystical halls of Kabbalah study often walk straight into a dilemma, the likes of which they do not recognize. Although they may learn texts and commentaries, very rarely does anyone ever really understand what it is that it all means.

Original Torah mystical texts, were always written in Midrashic and almost poetic forms. Their language and verbiage are a highly stylized form of symbolism used specifically to inspire within the learner thoughts of wonder and imagination. Spiritual reality is not literally a mirrored form of physical reality. Spiritual reality is a complex and different realm than is the physical world. Spiritual reality is actually the domain where the human intellect and human emotion meet and merge.

Essentially original Torah mystical texts were written to explain and teach what today we would call the psychology and workings of the mind/soul. The original focus of this literature was always to direct the individual student to look within oneself and through mental processes today referred to as meditation and to delve into one's unconscious to explore and discover those hidden depths that truly define our humanity.

With the loss of self referral and the non-practice of mind expanding techniques, modern Torah mysticism is nothing more than a hollow and empty shell of its former self. It is no wonder that today's students of Torah mysticism read much, memorize a great deal, but actually learn very little.

Without an emphasis on the cultivation of inner intuitive awareness, Torah learning which was supposed to put one in touch with the unconscious mind and through it to what we call the spiritual domains in turn has become just another of the many schools of philosophy and academia. So many students and teachers alike, read the books and memorize their every word and at the same time have almost no idea what it all means. Almost no one stops to question the system. Almost no one anymore asks, “how do I really get connected?”



When the proper questions are not asked, the proper answers can never be discovered. Therefore, the blind lead the blind and proclaim with voices growing ever louder how it is only they who can really see. Any time Midrashic language (focused as it is on story-like examples) is not understood metaphorically, as the stories themselves suggest, then even their Pshat (simple meanings) becomes confused and unsure. Clouding the difference between poetry and prose confuses the mind and leads to all kinds of self deceptions and great misunderstanding about Torah and religion.

There is much controversy about certain segments of Torah mysticism. Everyone familiar with Torah and Judaism acknowledges that the existence of the prophetic mystical traditions dating back through Talmudic times back to the Biblical era itself. However when it comes to certain schools of the theoretical Kabbalah, controversy abounds. Accepted as the authoritative work of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, the thirteenth century discovery of the Zohar has not held it back from rising to a position of prominence in Torah literature third only to the Bible and Talmud themselves.

However, as well accepted as the Zohar is, there still remains those minority schools in the Torah camp who oppose its teachings and deny its authority. Although these groups are roundly condemned and some branded as heretical, nonetheless upon exploration, some of their criticisms of the Zohar have a side of legitimacy.

Although this small essay cannot address all such criticisms, I do wish to address one major point and that is whether or not the criticisms themselves are actually based on a proper understanding of what the Zohar is teachings or whether the criticisms are based upon what the Zohar is perceived to be saying. Anything when misunderstood can be made to say that which it does not. The Zohar, due to its highly symbolic literary style sets itself up to be misunderstood and thus subject to the criticism of those who misunderstand it. It is no wonder that Zoharic literature was originally intended to be studied by only a closed secret society.

It is also no wonder how detractors from the authenticity of the Zohar often point to the Zohar's outright mention of things from the Babylonian Talmud, written hundreds of years after the Zohar was supposedly composed. However, being that the Zohar is not a monolithic book, but rather a collection of numerous books, there is no reason to believe that they were all written all at once. There is nothing wrong in believing and common sense does seem to suggest that Zoharic literature was a living body of knowledge that was added to over many centuries. The original teachings may be those of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai and later teachings be those of the members of this Zoharic secret society. One way or another, the question is not who wrote what, but rather how much of this is authoritative Torah? Judging from the vast majority of Torah Sages throughout many ages, the answer to this is resoundingly clear that it is all legitimate and authoritative. And as for the detractors, they may make noise, but that is about all the influence that they have had.

The problem faced by the detractors of the Zohar is unfortunately not limited to them. Many students of Torah often lack the depths of sophistication to properly understand the words of our Sages, be they written in the Zohar, Talmud or Midrash. Many times did our Sages write in symbolic, almost poetic terms, and all too often many who read their words fail to understand the nature of how and why they were written.

This lack of knowledge and learning has led many to misunderstand Torah and to disregard and disrespect the Torah Sages. The old adage unfortunately rings so true; "a little knowledge can cause of lot of harm." Students of Torah need to understand what it is they are learning before they can draw any conclusions about the lessons. Without such a proper understanding one can argue if there is indeed any learning whatsoever?

Zoharic literature, like the majority of older Torah mystical literature presents ideas, concepts and realities that to most logical minds make no logical sense. This is not because the said authors were irrational writers, but rather because the said authors wrote from a framework which other authors who proclaimed superior logic could not understand. Essentially what we have is the age old difference between the poet and the prose writer, with the poet, as usual, being misunderstood in the limited and narrow light of so-called rationalism.

Torah mystical literature, while written in such symbolic, metaphorical tones, still is centered on explaining a level of consciousness that delves deeper into the unconscious mind than what the rationalist can perceive. The problem here is that the rationalist mind cannot conceive of any deeper consciousness beyond what for him is rational.

The rationalist (pashtan) is essentially mentally handicapped in that he cannot learn how to think with the intuitive, psychic side of his mind. The pashtan rationalist is literally half-brained and cannot even become aware of his own lack of perception. Therefore, rather than acknowledge his own lack of perception, the rationalist instead turns and condemns any such perceptions outside his scope of vision and seeks radically to delegitimize them. This is an age-old psychological problem that is essentially collectively human in nature. It is not a problem limited to Jews or students of Torah. Every religion and every culture has had to face this struggle between its visionaries and those overly-bound to their mental safety-zones that they fear all kinds of insights and growth.

The mystical Torah-based visionary mind does not seek to ascend into Heaven with the intent of leaving behind Earthly living. On the contrary the Torah visionary seeks Heavenly union for the sake of bringing Heaven down to Earth. Essentially when understood properly, all Torah mysticism revolves around the point of how one is supposed to delve into the depths of one's own soul for the purpose of making oneself a better human being. The proclamation here is simple, in order to draw close to G-d one must first draw closer to one's own humanity. Until one learns what it means to become fully human one will never understand what it means to be like the Divine.

Torah mysticism is not about the mysterious, the ethereal or for that matter the mystical. True Torah mysticism is actually not mystical at all. We have another term today to describe it. Torah mysticism should rightly be called Torah psychology. Yes, the Kabbalah of the Biblical Prophets always revolved around the call to higher morality and proper character. Nothing has changed in this message since the days the Biblical prophets first proclaimed it.

Therefore, if one is to study the Zohar, the writings of the Ari'zal or any of the later Kabbalists, one must remember this great rule. All the Olamot (worlds), Sefirot and Sefirotic Faces being spoken of are not descriptions of realities in some other realm. Rather they are descriptions of realms existing within the human mind and soul. All the Olamot (worlds), Sefirot and Sefirotic Faces exist inside each of us individually. The rectification of the worlds spoken of in Kabbalistic literature is the rectification of the personality and character within each individual student. Even the ancient teachings of Ma'aseh Merkava have always been focused on this one topic.

Torah is about self improvement. Torah mysticism, Kabbalah or otherwise shares this same goal. The learning therefore is not for academic purposes of acquiring information. Rather the learning is for the sake of gaining insight and revelations into one's own inner self with the intent of transforming oneself into a better human being. Rationalist intellectual learning can never accomplish this. One does not see graduates of colleges being better human beings. On the contrary we often see how superior intellects breed superior arrogance with the price being the condemnation of those who truly seek to better humanity.

The deepest Kabbalah always presents the most basic truths. Kabbalah is about simplicity, about knowing oneself and living life as it was meant to be: as beings created in the Divine Image. This is an experience that has to be learned from within. It cannot be learned from the outside. This is why rationalists have such a hard time with it. Rationalists always see the outside world. They do not know how to look inside themselves. As such they are blind. It is a great danger for communities to be guided by the blind. For those who cannot see certainly cannot lead, in spite of their arrogant claims to the opposite.

All students of true Torah Kabbalah have to divest from their academic pursuits and seek the true knowledge internally. With this great discover they will find the true meanings not only of the Kabbalah, but also of the rest of Judaism. So spoke the great Rabbi Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna. This also was the understanding of the Ba'al Shem Tov and so many other Sages, modern and ancient. They are our role-models in the quest for truth.