

Masekhet Atzilut

An Ancient Kabbalistic Text

Translation & Commentary

By

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"Eliyahu Ben Yosef opened, it is written, (Psalm 28), "the secret of HaShem is for those who fear Him and His covenant is for those who acknowledge them." From this we learn that the Holy One blessed be He does not reveal His secrets other than to those who fear Him.

Even if a man of Israel were to study Bible, Mishna, Talmud, Agadah and Tosafot, but he has no fear [of G-d], then in vain does he swim in the mighty waters. All his efforts are for naught.

And the one who [truly] fears Heaven [he] pursues the concealed and [the] Ma'aseh Merkava which is the essence of wisdom and knowledge, as it is written, (Psalm 102), "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of G-d."

The fear [of G-d] is a brass shield and an iron sword and [the] one [who possesses it] will not be afraid of anything, as it is written, (Isaiah 33), "the sinners in Zion were in fear." They were in fear of sinning, but they were not afraid. [This is] because the Shekhina was adorned before them and protects them and reveals to them sublime secrets.

This is "the secret of HaShem is for those who fear Him." And it is written, (Job 21) "the fear of HaShem is wisdom, and turning from evil is understanding." (Masekhet Atzilut 1)

These wise words speak for themselves. Unfortunately, although people read the words, they often overlook their message. The text here clearly states that without one possessing the honest and sincere personality trait of Yirat Shamayim (fear of Heaven) any and all study of Torah, the greatest mitzvah of them all is consider null and void. Without the fear of Heaven all religious observances are hypocritical (Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov, Shemot 1).

בעזרי"ת

מסכת אצילות

היא ברייתא בחכמת הקבלה לחכמים
קדמונים מזמן דוד המלך ע"ה בענין עשר
ספירות ונתחברה על ידי יערישיה
וזכריה אליה בני ירוחם הנזכרים בדברי
הימים א' ח'

ונספף על זה פירוש גנוי מרומים להגאון המקובל ר'
יצחק אייזיק חבר ז"ל בעל פתחי שערים, וכל ענינו
להראות כיצד רמזים הקדמות הארז"ל במסכת זו.
וכן מובאים בו התומך דבורה להרמ"ק על עשר
ספירות בדרך הנהגה ומוסר, ופירוש האילן לר'
שלמה לוריא המהרש"ל, ובסופו מסילות החכמה והם
ל"ב כללים בחכמה על פי הקדמות הארז"ל
ממהר"ם מפיראש. ועל פירוש גנוי מרומים ציונים
ועיונים ומפתח הקדמות וערכים

Our text here does not simply state nebulously that one has to be Yirat Shamayim; it actually spells out for us what the expected Yirat Shamayim needs to be. One who is truly Yirat Shamayim will by nature have a personality that first seeks out the secrets of Torah as an academic pursuit and then continues in the meditative practices of transcending physical space/time through the expansion of consciousness here called Ma'aseh Merkava.

Read the words above; they are quite clear. Without these two pursuits of the study of the secrets of Torah and the practices of Ma'aseh Merkava, one is not considered to be Yirat Shamayim; and without being Yirat Shamayim, one is considered to be a hypocrite, whose entire efforts in Torah study are a complete waste of time. These are strong and harsh words, but disagree as one may wish, these are the words written by the ancients who proclaim them to be true!

Learning the secrets of Torah can never be accomplished through academic pursuits alone. One can read and learn all the books about Kabbalah ever written and still walk away completely ignorant of what it means to bond with HaShem and to practice Ma'aseh Merkava. Like with all other mitzvot of the Torah, it is not the learning that counts but the doing (Lo HaMidrash Halkar Eleh HaMa'aseh).

When it comes to embracing the secrets of Torah one cannot do this from the pages of a book, one needs practice. The practices of Ma'aseh Merkava are meditative exercises used to expand human consciousness. Only in this higher enlightened state can one gaze into the Torah and intuitively perceive the secrets therein. Mere human academic accomplishments do not expand human consciousness to the point of granting one this psychic insight.

Fear is instinctual. Love is acquired. Fear is innate and natural; one does not need to learn it. Either one has it or one does not. Look to the natural world for example. Animals have instinctual fear of that which can cause them harm. Because we human beings have lost our connection to the natural, we have lost our natural instinct of fear. This is much to our own harm. As we can see with society's ills, all our societal and individual harm comes about because we have forgotten our instinct to stay away from that which harms us. We use our intellect to justify all type of unjustifiable behaviors. Such lack of vision always leads to death.

When one learns the secrets of Torah one is not learning a topic but rather a new way to think and see. One learns to see the depths in everything, even the depths of that which is on the surface. The depths of a thing in Torah language are called the heart of the matter. And we are taught to love G-d with all our hearts and to place His words upon our hearts (Deut. 6:5-6). Love is something acquired. We do not naturally love; we learn to love. Yet, we are equally commanded to fear G-d. Indeed, our Sages teach that the fear of G-d comes before the love of G-d.

The beginning of wisdom, like the pasuk says above, is the fear of G-d, not the love of Him. Fear is instinctual. When we regain our instincts, we are using our physic intuitive knowing. When we reacquire that, we achieve wisdom. Wisdom is the sefirat Hokhma; Hokhma is intuition and therefore also instinct. Thus when we regain the instinctual, we have regained wisdom/Hokhma. The sefirat Hokhma corresponds in Kabbalah to the Olam (dimension) of Atzilut, the domain of the Divine. Therefore to regain instinct is to touch the Divine. This is the beginning of wisdom/Hokhma/Atzilut. This and only this is the true Torah, like the section above clearly states.

Yirat Shamayim serves as both a shield of defense and a sword to attack. How is this so? The answer again is instinct. Every martial artist and warrior knows that in spite of however much training they receive in theory, their ability to be victorious is based upon their experience. Like I said above, Lo

HaMidrash Halkar Eleh HaMa'aseh. Every fighter fights on instinct. He/she knows in advance when to block and when to strike. One can in essence sense the next move of one's opponent faster than one's eyes or brain can process it. One acts with a speed faster than intellectual processing and is already blocking or striking, without having to think about it. The mind actually slows down the warrior. His/her body acts instinctually, faster than what the senses can process. Every successful warrior knows this to be true.

As it is with a warrior of the flesh, so is this true with warriors of spirit. They fight with instinct. They know in advance what is and what is not proper. They can instinctually recognize the good and with equal instinct recognize the bad. They have awareness that transcends words and still can be justified with simplicity without the need to be overly-philosophical and having to convince or "brainwash."

True Yirat Shamayim is not superficial superstitions and fears. Such is the way of the fool, never the way of the wise. Only those who know living Torah know wisdom. Only that which is alive can keep one alive. Thus living Torah keeps one alive. Without this wisdom/Yirat Shamayim, one's Torah is dead, and like the text says above, all one's efforts in learning such "dead" Torah is worthless. This is the difference between what we call the "dead" Torah of Mashiah Ben Yosef and the living Torah of Mashiah Ben David. Those with wisdom will understand here the secret of redemption.

Instinctual wisdom keeps one away from harm; whereas evil is understood and recognized intellectually. Evil is harmful; this should not only be instinctual; it should also be logical. Therefore when we approach something that we may or may not feel to be dangerous, we use our senses coupled with our intuitive internal wisdom and explore, analyze and discover the truth of the matter. Once we have discovered the truth of a thing it is easy to explain its danger (or lack of it). Proper understanding brings with it simplicity and clarity. Simplicity is here the key.

When something is clearly understood one can explain it simply and easily. Without such an understanding we must question what one really knows. Too much talk covers up ignorance. Simple, straight, logical talk shows understanding. Yet, if someone says something simple, but stupid, we recognize the lack of understanding and also the lack of wisdom in such words and ideas. These must be dismissed.

The instinctual mind of wisdom "smells" in superficiality the weakness and falsehoods in such positions. This is how we use our intellects to ascertain truth. We distinguish between fears of foolishness and the fear of Heaven.

Embracing living Torah means using both our Binah brain and our Hokhma brain. Only when the two are merged together do we then use our full minds. Without a full mind, no one can have full Torah. Without full Torah, there is a great shortage in the soul and thus in the world.

In Pirkei Avot it is said that a Voice cries out from Sinai everyday saying, "woe to the world for the disgrace shown to Torah." Who today has the inner ear to hear the inner Voice? Only those with combined understanding (Binah) and wisdom (Hokhma) have the inner ear to hear (Ta Shma) and the inner eye to see (Ta Hazeh). The proof of this is not in words, but in actions; actions of simplicity, actions of instinct, actions of wisdom (not superstitious foolishness) and actions of truth. This is the living Torah, the mighty shield and sword in our hands.