

The Misunderstood Mystical Talmud

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The Babylonian Talmud is the foremost collection of Jewish mystical teachings, second only to the Bible itself. The Talmud is thus one of the most misunderstood collections of literature today. While modern publishers, such as the Artscroll, have translated and enumerated the Talmud in a way never before accomplished, nevertheless, this magnanimous work still falls short in the long run because it fails to recognize the Talmud's undercurrent of psychic, mystical teachings.

Indeed, all modern Talmudic study falls short in this one specific area. Let me compare the Talmud to the practice of medicine. Modern western medicine looks at the human body as isolated individual parts, and then treats each part separately from the whole. Similar to this, Talmudic study is looked at topic by topic, or section by section. However, in eastern medical traditions, the human body is a homogeneous whole. When eastern practitioners treat an illness they address the entire body and not just a single part. This too is the proper way to “study” and understand Talmud, for all its Sages and editors were all Sages of “eastern” wisdom.

The entire Babylonian Talmud is a homogeneous whole, and needs to be viewed as such, in order to recognize the underlying current of flow that moves throughout its many pages. We must remember that the Talmud is not a record of live conversations. Rather, the text is an edited work, whose authors chose with great intent what to write, how exactly to phrase it, and exactly how to format the text. The text as a homogeneous whole thus reflects a psychology and an energy meridian system, similar to the flow of Nefesh/Chi in the human body. Just like Acupuncture can influence the flow of energy in the body, so too tapping into the stream of flow into the psyche/energy of the Talmud enables one to see the greater picture and flow of consciousness that is hiding beneath the surface of the written word. Of all the mystical texts in Judaic literature, it is probably the Talmud that leads them all. The Talmud is a great example of capturing into words the ebb and flow of human thought through the mystery of oscillating consciousness, discussed in the Sefer Yetzirah.

The authors of the Talmud edited together many different types of teachings weaving them together in an amazing blend that is anything but a rational, straight line of thought. Starting with commentary on the Mishnaic oral law, Talmudic discussion will delve deeply into explorations of logic, and then with a sudden sharp turn, digress to discuss a story, episode, or relate a mystical, moral tale based on historical characters. The modern “rational” way of Talmud study either glosses over these diversions or deletes them entirely. In so doing, those who do not take the time to delve into these stories and legends, and never fully understand, not only what they say, but why they were placed there in the first place.

It would have been more logical to compile the Talmud in two separate sections, law discussions in one set of volumes and the legends and stories in another, completely separate set of volumes. Such collections of Talmudic legends do exist today with the 17th century publication of the book, Ayn Yaakov. But this is not the order chosen by the Talmud's original 6th century editors. They had their own agenda, one based on ancient mystical principles. They intentionally blended all the sections exactly as they did. This format forces the reader (learner) to shift mental gears and to oscillate back and forth from rational, intellectual thinking to psychic intuitive contemplation. Without this constant oscillation of mind going back and forth, from page to page, and from subject to subject, one is not catching the actual flow of the Talmud and is thus not learning the actual teachings that the editors placed therein.

The majority of Sages quoted throughout the Talmud, and especially its final editors were all well versed and practiced in the ancient meditative teachings of the Merkava and Hekhalot traditions. In other words, however rational and intellectual the editors and Sages mentioned in the Talmud appear to be, they also had their psychic, intuitive side. This enabled them to experience spiritual realities and to conceal these realities in the words that were orally passed down through the ages and eventually codified. While many students will read their words and endeavor to understand them, so very precious few ever bother to ask the even deeper questions, why did they say these things, why in this or that way, aside from the surface meaning of the words, what is the deeper real meaning of what is being said? Being that most never bother to ask these questions, most never know that there is hidden knowledge therein.

But this has always been the way of the ancients, to hide deeper meanings underneath garments of what appears to be simple words. This is seen throughout the Bible, especially in the books of Solomon, and the prophetic books. This same structure was followed in later apocalyptic works such as the books of Enoch, and this traditional method continued and was practiced by the Sages of the Mishna and the Talmud. Therefore, as with all these other books, the Talmuds too, (both the Jerusalem and especially the Babylonian) have to be penetrated beneath their surfaces in order to understand the subtle clues and secrets the authors concealed within. Eastern authors wrote with an eastern mentality following ancient eastern traditions. This is the way it has always been with all authentic Judaic literature.

Here now is an interesting fact. The Talmud, in its preset form, has been with the Jewish people, for about 1500 years. Its unique open-ended discussions of Jewish law practices have inspired debate and controversy for all this time. These same open-ended debates have led to many different conclusions by many later Sages, many of which became the basis of the variant practices of Jewish law that we see today, such as Sephardi and Ashkenazi. The Talmud, in spite of enabling so many expressions of variance and difference, still has been the one uniting factor that connects all Jews throughout the known world throughout the many centuries. This itself is proof how the Talmudic Sages tapped into the collective unconscious of the greater nation of Israel and structured the Talmud to express all the variants to be found in the greater consciousness of the collective people.

Over 700 years after the Talmud came the Zohar and, in a way, “stole the show.” In many ways the Zohar disagrees with the Talmud on certain law practices. Yet, the law remains

firm that the authority of the Talmud overrides any authority accredited to the Zohar. Indeed, the Zohar itself is claimed to be the most important mystical text in Judaism, but this is not so. Although unknown to most, the Talmud is far more mystical than the Zohar and contains within its very structure teachings and revelations not found in the Zohar.

Whereas the Zohar may address secrets of worlds beyond, the Talmud addresses the secrets of this world. This is the underlying principle why most Talmudic discussions begin with the term, “come and listen,” whereas the Zohar introduces its discussions with the term, “come and see.” We listen to the ways of this world, but see and gaze into the ways of the worlds above.

Many claim how the Zohar has been and still is the salvation of the Jewish people. Yet, little do they know how superior the Talmud is over the Zohar. So superior is the Talmud that the vast majority still cannot even recognize its secrets all the more so fathom them. The Zohar can be compared to garments, whereas the Talmud can be compared to the flesh and body. We learn far more about the person from their body than we do from their garments. Needless to say we learn more from the soul than from the flesh, yet the soul of Torah is to be found underneath the words of the TaNaKh (Bible), for TaNaKh is even more sublime than the Talmud.

Secrets within secrets, methods within methods, practices within practices, this is the way the prophetic path has been drawn, and how it is walked. One starts with the simple, masters it, and then moves on into deeper and deeper material, all with an emphasis on practice, which leads to experiences within the spiritual worlds. These experiences reveal what is, and what is not, both real and true. Without these experiences, whatever words any Sage writes are just that, words, words that are disconnected and misdirected. The Talmud includes many of these as well, specifically to teach the adepts, who know how to extract the secrets, how not to be deceived or misdirected.

The Sages of the Talmud knew with prophetic insight that the children of Israel were destined to live through a long and hard future. Even in spite of the modern-times birth of the State of Israel, that which we call “the exile” is still far from over. The Talmud was written to serve as our guide during these dark times, regardless of how many centuries it may last. The Talmud is not a manual to teach one about prophecy. Rather, the Talmud is a manual to teach us how to live in this physical world of ours, with all its harshness.

Whereas earlier books of Judaic literature taught adepts about the prophetic mysteries and how to connect with YHWH and the angels, the Talmud was specifically designed to teach us how to connect with ELOHIM, God as revealed as ADONAI, Lord of the natural world. The Talmud comes to teach us about nature, about life in this world, about reality at this time, and how we can all best harmonize with them and live the best accordingly. In this, we live naturally and thus please God, ADONAI-ELOHIM.

The Talmud is not a book of prophecy, it is the work of human beings. The Talmud was not written by God, it was written by man. Yet, the men who codified the Talmud were brilliant, wise, God fearing men, who were in touch with the Divine, and were thus able to channel its secrets into their words. Does the Talmud have any mistakes in it? I certainly hope so! The

Talmud reflects the mind of man, and what mind of man has no mistakes? This too is one of the secrets that the Talmud itself conceals.

Nothing of man is perfect, as man himself is not perfect. We do not seek perfection, because that is beyond our humanity. What we do seek is our best, imperfect as it may be. To guide us to this, in all our human humility, was the Talmud codified. The Talmud can teach us how to be like God, but more so, the Talmud is here to teach us more so how to live like decent, moral, righteous human beings.

Ebb and flow, back and forth, rational to intuitive, literal to metaphorical, left brain to right brain, this is the way of Torah, and this is the way of Talmud. When one's mind cannot move fluidly back and forth, from Binah (Understanding) to Hokhma (Wisdom), and from Hokhma back to Binah again, then such a mind is limited in what it can see and what it can understand. Such a mind is only "half-brained." Such a mind misses the full picture and thus never learns that which the masters of Talmud originally designed to be learned.

The secrets of the Torah reside within every page of Talmud. This was how the original Kabbalah was formatted. While many today might not like mysticism, more so because it challenges their academic, rational worldview, nevertheless the original Torah and Talmud were not books of rational academia. Until the academics recognize this and make the necessary psychological efforts to expand their minds and consciousness, they will be forever disconnected from the Living Torah, and thus from YHWH.

For YHWH is ELOHIM, this is the basic proclamation of Torah. One cannot approach YHWH until one is in union with ELOHIM. Union with the "Lower Face" by nature, must come before union with the "Upper Face." The Talmud contains so much, and yet is understood by so few, especially by those who daily comb its pages, but who rarely ever exercise psychic intuition to delve into those pages with the expanded consciousness of those who see beyond the surface.

The Talmud is not meant to be subject to dialectic argument and irrational applications (pilpul). Yet it is meant to be contemplated and meditated upon, even as outlined in the Sefer Yetzirah. In the last few hundred years, a few Rabbis have come forth and written books about some of the secrets found in the Talmud. Of all their great efforts, still, they have only scratched the surface.

Talmud study needs a comprehensive overhaul in order to understand the mystical, metaphysical concepts upon which it is based. If we can accomplish this, we will be taking a giant leap forward in our spirituality and in drawing closer to our Living Torah and our Living God.