

A Personal Word from HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

KosherTorah, Past, Present and Future

*By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok
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I very rarely ever get personal with our communications, but in light of the times, I believe that now should be one of these rare times.

Like everyone else, I struggle to make a living. Like everyone else I have issues with family, health, the community and everything else. Although I have been a Rav now for a quarter century and have been practicing some of the most secret of Kabbalistic traditions and practices, I have still not been able to free myself from my most gnawing problem. I am still a human being and still have to suffer through the daily affairs of normal everyday life. In spite of however much like an angel I wish to be, I still find myself to be more and more human.



Many years ago in my youth I would have thought my humanity to be such a hindrance to my spiritual aspirations. Over the years, I have grown in wisdom. I recognize just how much my normal human life; with all its problems and limitations is exactly what has granted me the wisdom I have gained. Instead of my humanity being a hindrance to my spirituality, it has actually been my greatest support. What I once thought a contradiction I have found is actually a well balanced harmony.

In psychology we have a concept called synchronicity. This fancy term simply means that there are external affairs and experiences that somehow reflect to us ideas and issues going on inside our psyche. I have spent a good deal of my life asking what I consider to be the important questions. I ask, "what does this mean," and "what am I supposed to learn from this." I have learned that I cannot control most of what happens around me and to me, yet, I can very well control how I respond and react to those circumstances.

Indeed, I have realized that who and what I am as a person is defined by what I do and how I do it. My character as a human being is forged not by what I believe but rather by what I do. I therefore look to recognize the Higher Hand in everything and everywhere. I do not believe there is anywhere where that Higher Hand is not present. I have learned that if I take the moment to pause, think and open my mind, I can see the Invisible Hand ever so subtly, in whatever form it is presently choosing to manifest. I even see it now in these words as I prepare them for you to read.

Years ago, I began my yeshiva to provide for others what I myself found to be so profound and valuable. To my surprise I discovered over many years that much of what I have found to be so amazing many others just did not care about it at all. I always thought that maybe if I changed my approach and style of communication that I could clear up any misunderstandings and thus enable everyone to recognize that which is truly valuable and to change accordingly. Even in this, time has proven me wrong again.

I had to come to the sad conclusion that no matter how hard I tried to reach certain people, there are just those who do not want to be reached. In wisdom, acquired over a generation, I realized that this too was in accordance to the Higher Hand. Thus I stopped trying to reach the unreachable and decided to work only with those who seek the support that I could provide. After all, I am only one of the many pawns that Heaven uses to accomplish its goals. If I am not the right pawn for the job, then Heaven will simply play me in another move and allow yet another pawn to continue the work in those areas in which I am not effective. I see this wisdom in this and no longer fight it. I have learned to surrender to the Higher Hand and to surrender what I want and think is best, simply because, as much as I do know, there is so much more that I do not.

I started my KosherTorah.com website simply to create a web presence for our yeshiva. At the time I had no intentions and had no idea that I would eventually make our website the primary form of our contact and communication with our many readers and students. Back in the early 1990's no one had yet thought of the idea of a "cyber-yeshiva" dedicated to serving the Torah needs of students worldwide. Times have changed and so has the way in which Torah now reaches the masses. I believe this to be a good thing. KosherTorah has readers and students in countries around the world, Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and secular. Although my religious agenda is clear, I nonetheless welcome all our readers from whatever walk of life they may be.

When I started KosherTorah, like all my fellow Rabbis I endeavored to write essays that showed deep intellectual challenge. I translated many never-before translated materials from books very few had ever heard of. I wrote commentaries on topics explaining them to a depth that no one else was doing. My book "Walking In The Fire" is a good collection of this style of my writing. Then, after many years, it dawned on me. With all the work that I had been doing, it was becoming ever clearer to me that the majority of my reading audience was still not getting the message that I believe is the foundation of all the Torah.

I saw reflected in the words of even the greatest of Kabbalists, Abulafia, the Rashash, the Ba'al Shem Tov and so many others that the purpose of all Kabbalah study is for the sake of "tikkun hamidot," this being the same as the unity of the Holy One blessed be He and the Shekhina, the union of Tiferet and Malkhut, the union of YKVK and ADNY and the union of Heaven and Earth. The tikkun hamidot refers to the refinement of the six sefirot of Zeir Anpin (ZA) and the Nok. What this actually means was not necessarily a reference to happenings in worlds and dimensions beyond our present reality, but rather something much closer to home. All this Kabbalah talk was simply a metaphorical way of emphasizing the importance of human character development and the maturity of personality. This is the very same exact message that was preached for centuries by the Biblical prophets. Like Shlomo HaMelekh said so long ago, "there is nothing new under the sun."

I realized that students of Torah were becoming so overly intellectual that they were completely missing the point of what Torah is really all about. Torah is about the heart and the refinement of everything that heart means, personality, character and behavior. How this message has gotten lost under piles and piles of intellectual compositions full of words and ideas, but completely lacking in heart and passion.

Now you can see how I have come full circle to embrace my humanity. Torah was not given to angels. Torah was never meant to be an erudite course of advanced academic accomplishment reserved only for the elite. Torah is all about the here and now and is meant to be for everyone, regardless of one's level of academic pursuits.

The Kabbalah speaks about the exile having begun with the destruction of the First Temple, not the Second, with the loss of the Ark of the Covenant and the direct connection with HaShem that comes through prophecy. Ultimately, the First Temple and our subsequent exile ever since has been due to one specific cause; this being our continual refusal to heed to admonitions of the prophets. To this day, even most religious Jews have no idea as to what the prophetic message is. Most Jews to this day, including almost every Orthodox yeshiva in Israel and abroad do not study or even read the books of the prophets. How do we ever expect our exile to end and the Mashiah to come when we never address the circumstances that got us in this predicament in the first place?

All of the true Kabbalah is focused on this issue; what we need to do in order to perform the great tikkun, the necessary repairs in order to usher in the Messianic age. What the Kabbalah teaches through its magnificently difficult web of symbolism and imagery is simply that we each as human beings have got to get our acts together and start acting more human and less like soul-less animals. Funny, this was the exact same message of the Biblical prophets.

So, this is what I teach; character improvement, moral discipline and personality refinement. These I place as paramount over all other teachings of the Torah. These personal improvements are what we each need to learn and do in order to make the great tikkun and to prepare the way for the coming of Mashiah. I cannot think of anything more important than this!

I have found that teaching Kabbalah without properly explaining it only serves to distance people from its intended message. Most students of Kabbalah today have no idea of the real and personal meaning of the teachings they study. They may be able to quote to you book after book and commentary after commentary, but let them pause and explain what it all means and you will usually find a whole lot of talk without much really being said. This is why I stopped teaching the façade of Kabbalah and only teach now its true essence.

One cannot escape the reality that we live in this world. This is our home and the place that even after death we will return. We fail to recognize what it is that we need to be practical and realistic. We all too often become so Heavenly minded that we become no Earthly good. This indeed has happened to large segments of the Orthodox community, especially in Israel. This is an intolerable situation that will require terrible upheavals in order to change.

I know that these upheavals are coming, they are inevitable. I for one welcome their advent. I believe I reflect Heaven's sense of disgust when I see all the hypocrisy, arrogance and irresponsibility that exist today and tolerated under the name of religion. I believe that Heaven will wipe this out entirely along with anyone so stupid to cling to it in its death throes. So much for fools and the wicked; they get what they deserve and one will have to go elsewhere to get any sympathy. I have none for them.

KosherTorah is here for those who want to make a difference and want to learn how to do it. I assure you, I am no great Rebbe, mystic, Mekubal or anything else. I am a regular, normal human being, and I am proud of being so. It is the only thing that I find that is worthy of pride that I can actually be a creation made after the Divine Image. I am no angel or any other kind of Heavenly being. Torah was not given to angels or to Heaven. It was given to us, human beings to observe and practice here on Earth. This is what I do and this is what I teach.

Do you want to rise up to Heaven? You are indeed welcome. Just remember that in order to do so, you must first have your feet firmly planted on the ground. One cannot go up before one is first able to get down. KosherTorah is here just for this purpose.

Practically speaking, just like you, I need to make a living. This is why I produce a full line of educational materials. I sell my wares just like every other merchant. Unfortunately, my Torah wares are not as popular as are the more flamboyant types. I cannot and will not compete with the likes of the big yeshivas that only clone the problem instead of contributing to the cure.

If you like what I have written here, then welcome to KosherTorah. I pray that I will have a whole lot more to share with you for your personal growth and betterment. This is, after all, why I am here: for you!

Like every other Torah organization, we get by with the help of our friends. Therefore, if you feel and believe as I do and want to contribute to making the great tikkun, the right and real way it has always meant to be, then please show your support by making an online contribution to my efforts. I am a one-man show here and I only get by with the help of Heaven. If you are Heaven's hand in this, then I welcome to support.

Any amount you can give is appreciated. You can give a little or a lot. You can give once or often. You can donate online or mail KosherTorah your check. There are many ways, but they all add up. I do not have the time or resources to always say thank you and send fancy gifts. So, let me say here and now a hearty thanks to all my supporters. You are all in my heart and prayers and more than this, I am here for you. With your support you enable me to be here, so I can be here for you. For this, more than anything else, I thank you.

What more can I say other than this: let us all do the right thing, simply because it's right. Thank G-d right now for all the good you have right now. I can't think of anything more important and I can't think of a better way to close this essay. Thank you for your time in reading this. Shalom.

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forever!