

Transforming Kabbalistic Metaphors into Practical Action

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Does evil pursue us, or are we, in our ignorance, pursuing evil? If indeed, we are so ignorant, what can we do about it?

Kabbalistic literature speaks prolifically about the forces of severity (gevurah) and judgment (din). We are warned how these forces are the very source of all hardship, pain and suffering that we human beings face daily. One would think that, armed with such awareness and knowledge, that these forces would be avoided like the plague. Yet, on the contrary, when we look at our daily lives and surroundings, we find that, instead of pushing away the forces of severity (gevurah) and judgment (din), we are actually pursuing them, embracing them, and reinforcing them. We then so obviously ask why, and how, have we become surrounded by so much evil? Who but we ourselves create the evil that we ourselves so obviously embrace?

Kabbalah speaks so prolifically about our human condition and what we can, what we must do, to improve ourselves individually and to improve our world, as a whole. Yet, this most simple, but profound message often gets lost under layer upon layer of misunderstood Kabbalistic metaphor and symbolisms.

Indeed, it seems to be that one of the greatest impediments to understanding Kabbalistic teachings are the very metaphors and symbolisms used to express those teachings. For thousands of years, the secrets of the Torah have been handed down in the form of one metaphor after another. Each school developed its own symbols, some similar to, some very different from, those that came before it, and after it. Why is this?

Most, too this day, still do not grasp the very nature of why there even exists that which we call the “secrets of the Torah.” Equally misunderstood is why these mysteries need to be kept secret and protected by walls of metaphor and symbolism. What’s the big secret? What is being protected?

Rather than ask what is being protected, we should instead be asking, what is it that need protecting? We will find that the answer to this may be most unsettling. **It is not the Torah of God that needs to be protected, rather it is us that needs to be protected from certain knowledge, that without proper preparation, we are not able to handle and integrate properly into our daily lives.** At no other time more than the present do we see just how ominously true this ancient insight has been proven true. Today, Kabbalistic literature permeates many aspects of Torah life, and at the same time, more and more misunderstandings about it grow and grow. Why is this so?

The problem with disseminating Kabbalah is not the Kabbalah. **The problem with disseminating Kabbalah is with those who are receiving it.** In other words, the teachings are all fine and good, but the same cannot be said about those who are attracted to its teachings. Without proper preparations, Kabbalistic teachings are often

misunderstood in one form or another, when a metaphor is understood literally or a symbol is mistaken to mean something entirely other than its original meaning.

Without actual access to Kabbalah's original intent and meaning, all the books written to explain it still remain closed doors. More than this, the proliferation of such books adds to the growing confusion and misunderstandings. I am not the first to recognize these revelations and draw these conclusions. We find the same sentiments expressed by none less than the Ari'zal himself back in the 1570's. This is not a new problem, but it is a consistent one.

In order to understand Kabbalah correctly, one must understand first and foremost that it is an art form. Its beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

One can teach another how to form art, create music, or write poetry. One cannot teach another how to create beauty. Can one be taught to recognize beauty? Can one be trained to create like DaVinci, Michaelangelo, or like Mozart?

Art and beauty arise from within one's soul essence. Such beauty does not come from one's head, rather it comes from one's heart. Such beauty is unique to the individual, and thus cannot be copied or imitated by any other.

This is also the case with Kabbalah, and before it, the reception of prophecy. **Prophecy and Kabbalah both are art forms**, they are unique to their receivers. This is why no two prophets ever saw the same vision, and why no two artists ever create the same art.

Beauty is not a function of the rational mind, it is a function of the feeling heart. **Kabbalah can thus never be understood with the rational mind, any more than one can fine art, sculpture, music or poetry. No heart, no understanding.** This it is written in the Ptah Eliyahu prayer, "binah liba, u'va halev mevin."

Now do not be disturbed that, in the sefirot, the heart corresponds to Tiferet and Binah refers to the Left Brain. Understanding is an attribute of Binah and Binah is Left Brain, therefore understanding is a function of the mind, not the heart, right? No, wrong! Such a conclusion is a clear example of the misunderstandings of which I speak.

A man's heart is literally in the middle of his chest pumping blood. Yet, a man's heart metaphorically, symbolically, is in the depths of his mind, beyond rationality, where thought meets feelings, and the two merge into something new.

This "something new" is what the Bible calls "knowledge." Yet this knowledge is not of the intellectual kind, rather it is a deeper sense of intimate personal knowing. It is in this sense that the Bible uses the verb "to know" to indicate sexual union. Having sex is "to know" the other. Such knowledge is not academic, it is something far deeper, and indeed defies the academic mind to explain.

Who can explain either love or passion? These cannot, and are not explained, but they most certainly are experienced. Ask any lover! Ask anyone who appreciates art, music or poetry!

Some things simply defy words, some things simply cannot be described. These things are usually much more real than those things that can be described and condensed into words. So it is with Kabbalah.

- * **Kabbalah is a matter of beauty, and a matter of heart.**
- * **Kabbalah does not speak to one's intellect, but rather to one's imagination.**
- * **Kabbalah speaks about the inner mind and psychology of man, and not about some nebulous cosmology out there “over the rainbow.”**
- * **Kabbalah that is not internalized is not true Kabbalah.**
- * **Kabbalah that does not inspire one to become a better human being is not true Kabbalah.**

All these sentiments did not begin with me, I am only echoing that which was taught long ago by the Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of the Hasidic movement.

Severity and judgment represent forces of separation, division, and contraction. These are considered to be the sources of evil. **Whenever we create divisions and separations between groups, ideas, and peoples, we also equally create the conflicts, jealousies and strifes that come into existence alongside the initial divisions and separations.** This is only natural and expected. Why then do we go forward with such vigor to separate and divide?

Why do we create our own conflicts? This is what is unnatural! This is what Kabbalah comes to teach us is very dangerous!

Because we fail to understand the Kabbalah, we continue to misunderstand ourselves. Thus our struggles and strife continue to plague us, all because we persist and insist to misunderstand poetry for prose and to then dismantle it, disgrace it and discard it.

When will we ever learn? Today, perhaps, if we are open to not only hear the truth, but also to see it with our own eyes. Ta'Shma, come and listen with your mind. Ta'Hazeh, come and see with your heart!

Let your heart see and allow it to guide your mind. Together we can create unity! **Unity in the world begins with unity within the individual psyche.**

Improving our world is referred to in Kabbalah as Tikkun. It actually translates as repair. **First we repair ourselves, starting with our hearts. From here, we can repair the world!** This was the message of the Biblical prophets, and this is still the message of the true Kabbalists who follow in their footsteps.

Don't read Kabbalah with your head. Feel it in your hearts, and thereby gain understanding!