

The Ari'zal's Mystical Psychology, Building the Feminine Menorah

Commentary to Parashat T'tzaveh

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“And you shall command the Children of Israel and they shall take to you olive oil pure and pressed for illumination to raise up the continuous lamp.” (Ex. 27:20).

Introduction

The mystical teachings of the Ari'zal have always had dual applications. Not only do they describe the nature of the outer metaphysical worlds; they also describe the inner worlds of man, his psyche, and psychology. Inherent within the Kabbalistic teachings is the message of how we humans are to evolve beyond our present physical limitations and to reach our full human potential as beings created in the image of G-d. This can only come about through our scrupulous observance of all the mitzvot of the Torah. Yet, part of this observance requires of us to understand the deep psychological and transformational effect the mitzvot have upon us when we practice them or even merely study about them.

The mitzvot were given to us to enable us to transform our lives. Even a simple mitzvah, like the lighting of the Menorah observed during Temple times teaches us profound lessons about how human potential must be built, cultivated and developed. In this following selection, the Ari'zal reveals to us a profound teaching about how our physical human natures are to be transformed and elevated into the realms of the spiritual. As always the Ari'zal conceals much in his few words. Therefore, my commentary will endeavor to give you insight into the depths of the Ari'zal's mystical psychology.

Sefer HaLikutim 39b

Text *And they shall take to you olive oil, pure...*” It is known that Malkhut is the purified candelabrum (Menorah) and She [resides] behind Z.A.

Commentary – The text opens by taking for granted that we the readers understand a basic Kabbalistic principle, which is that everything in the universe has its source in and is a manifestation of one of the ten sefirot (or a portion thereof). The arrangement of the Tabernacle and all its vessels was ordained by G-d to identically replicate here on earth the sefirotic order of the spiritual planes. Therefore, each and every item in the Tabernacle held profound spiritual significance. Its form and position had to be precise in order

for it to properly act as a conduit to manifest the sefirotic spiritual energy which lay at its source.

The Menorah, the eternal lamp corresponded to the final sefirah Malkhut. The sefirah Malkhut is also referred to as the sefirotic Face (Partzuf) Nok (the Feminine), who is “bride” to Z.A. (the Masculine/Tiferet). She is said to stand “behind” Z.A. Now, with regards to the supernal sefirot, there is no physicality to ascribe terms such as front or back, or above and below. Therefore, when these terms are used we must understand their metaphorical nature. Malkhut/Nok is the final sefirah of the ten. As such, She is the ultimate receiver, in that She receives from all above Her. Her sefirotic “mate,” from whom She receives directly is Tiferet, who is the center and binder of the six sefirot Hesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzah, Hod and Yesod. These sefirot are referred to by their sefirotic Face (Partzuf) Z.A. (Zeir Anpin, the Small Face).

The lights that reside in Z.A. are tremendously powerful. The Nok is unable to receive them without proper preparation. Therefore, prior to this preparation, Nok is said to “stand behind” Z.A., similar to Eve, who was a part of Adam’s body prior to Adam’s sleep and Eve being removed. When Adam was created the Midrash teaches that he was created with two faces, one in front (Adam), and one in back (Eve). As it is above, so it is below.

The term “stand behind” means that the light initially received by Nok is not the full radiance of Z.A. The full radiance is referred to as the Face side. Lesser radiance is referred to as “behind.” Malkhut/Nok is the metaphor given to the realms of physical space. In order for our world to be rectified, meaning elevated to a point where it can fully manifest a spiritual connection and be transformed thereby, it must receive the spiritual radiance in appropriate dosages. Too much spiritual influx too soon would cause the disintegration of the atomic fabric that holds physical space together.

G-d, therefore, ordained the Tabernacle (and later Temple) service to maintain this crucial state of balance between the physical and spiritual dimensions. The physical light of the physical Menorah therefore acted as a conduit for spiritual energy, transforming it and enabling it to act as a stabilizing agent between the realm of the sefirot and the realms of physical space and human consciousness.

Text *The entire essence of Her building and rectification is by the two revealed Hasadim of Netzah and Hod of the Male.*

Commentary – The Ari’zal will now begin to explain the details of how Malkhut/Nok is “built” and “rectified,” meaning how She matures to become equal to the Male Face and thus enabled to stand “in front” of Him as opposed to “behind.” In other words, how is physical space (and the human consciousness connected to it) elevated to the point where it can merge with

spiritual reality? This comes about through the sefirot forces of Netzah and Hod, which are part of Z.A. (the Male Face). These two sefirot are referred to as “revealed Hasadim (mercies).” In other places these two sefirot are said to be the source of prophecy. A brief word about the role that these two sefirot play in the greater scheme of the sefirot is here appropriate.

Netzah means victory, but can also mean conquering. Netzah is the outgoing force that is focused specifically on to bringing order and organization. While order itself might be a Left column characteristic, the desire to bring order comes from the expansive, giving nature of Hesed. Netzah, therefore, manifests the outgoing desire that seeks to dominate for the sake of giving good. Netzah is the force that imposes the justice of Tiferet.

Hod, meaning glory, compliments Netzah in that it brings home the benefits of what is conquered. For while Netzah conquers all for the sake of the collective good, Hod takes the outgoing benefits of Netzah and focuses those rewards for its own personal benefit. Thus the justice of Tiferet is imposed through Netzah and enjoyed through Hod.

Netzah and Hod are called “revealed Hasadim” for many reasons. The source of these mercies is in the upper sefirah Hokhma. They are revealed here in Netzah and Hod to empower them. When Malkhut achieves a relationship with Netzah and Hod, then She also achieves connection to Hokhma (and the Keter within it). This connection unites all the sefirot and manifests as the establishment of a proper order in the individual and collective psyche of mankind, enabling there to be spiritual contentment, psychological balance and social tranquility in the physical worlds. This is called the “building of the Malkhut” which is the establishment of a sane individual and stable society, one that has achieved a proper balance between spiritual and physical realities.

In order to accomplish this, however, the forces of Netzah and Hod must be able to unite with the Malkhut. However, the sefirah Yesod intervenes between them and Malkhut. Therefore, to overcome the spiritual “distance” these sefirot do something remarkable.

Text *The matter is this, now as we have explained how these Hasadim fall and descend willingly within the Yesod.*

Commentary – The forces of Netzah and Hod separated as they are from the Malkhut by the sefirah Yesod, descend into it in order to draw close. The problem however is that the lights of Netzah and Hod are far greater than that of Yesod. To enter therein requires a great squeeze or a “strike” as the Ari’zal calls it.

What this means is this. Yesod is the force of libido, creative or sexual energy. It is unfocused and of itself does not manifest in one form or another. Netzah and Hod, on the other hand, are outright forms. Netzah is the form of the imposition of justice and balance. Hod is the form of the benefits achieved thereby. When Netzah and Hod are squeezed into Yesod, then one's sexual energy is transformed and focused onto creating a stable and ordered psyche on the inside and society on the outside.

Text *By the power of that strike, they return to ascend from below to above.*

Commentary – Once the sefirotic energies of Netzah and Hod are squeezed into Yesod and thus united with Malkhut, the excess light, by force of compression inverts its direction and travels upwards instead of down. This is all part of the Divine plan for there to be cyclical harmony in creation.

Text *The matter is that the light of the Feminine is not direct light (ohr yashar). Rather She is returning light (ohr hozer) from below to above.*

Commentary – Herein lies the secret of the Malkhut, as well as the secret of the collective rectification, the coming of Mashiah, the evolution of mankind and all other things as well. This is the secret of MahN, the Feminine Waters that ascend from below to above and cause there to be an arousal of the spiritual powers causing them to desire union with the physical worlds.

The light of the sefirot descends from above to below. Yet, just prior to reaching the bottom of the sefirotic tree, the light of Netzah and Hod are squeezed into Yesod and unite with it. The light that is received by Malkhut, instead of merely radiating upon Her actually gushes onto Her with such force that the light actually inverts direction and (as if to say) “splashes” above. This ascending light, called Ohr Hozer (lit. returning light) is essential for the physical universe. For without the desire for spiritual ascent rising from the individual minds and souls of people, there would be no human or social evolution at all. Mankind would revert to being primitive, unenlightened and immoral animals.

Text *For at the moment of ascent from below to above then its radiance is released without from behind Z.A. and is given to the Feminine.*

Commentary – Prior to the light being squeezed into Yesod and from there showering onto Malkhut, there was not enough spiritual motivation to cause any type of spiritual growth. While it is all well and good for Nok to continuously, receive Her light from Z.A., there comes a time when the Nok must rise and become the equal of Z.A. full stature to full stature. This is G-d's design and plan for the universe.

Now, to explain. The physical universe is completely dependent upon the higher dimensional planes that we call the spiritual worlds. The most basic atomic structures of matter are only held together by the energy they receive from the spiritual dimensions. This latent spiritual force underlying all physical matter holds the secrets for both technological and human spiritual advancement. G-d “pours down” a potent influx of spiritual energy into the physical universe, focused on certain items or things, in this case the Menorah of the holy Tabernacle.

G-d has commanded us to do certain things, i.e., mitzvot. When we accomplish these tasks we arouse and accelerate the spiritual energy underlying matter and it begins to transform the matter into spiritual material. Alongside this happening our minds and souls begin to transform with our thoughts becoming more abstract and sublime, enabling us to perceive greater depths and understandings in reality. Both spiritual enlightenment and technological discovery are accomplished in this manner.

Therefore, when we do the proper actions as outlined by G-d in His Torah, then we cause the light of Netzah and Hod to be squeezed into Yesod. This leads to a gusher of light being poured over Malkhut with the residual light ascending from below to above, taking us and our physical world along with it.

Text *If [things] did not happen in this manner, there would be no building for the Feminine at all.*

Commentary – This is the Law of the universe. If the desire for change and growth does not ascend above to supplicate it, then no change or growth will EVER occur. In essence, we are masters of our own fate. What we desire is what we receive, for either good or evil.

Text *Thus the verse says, “pressed for illumination,” meaning that these olives, which [correspond] to the two Hasadim of Netzah and Hod, are first pressed within the Yesod.*

Commentary – The Halakha of the oil for the Menorah was that the olives had to be pressed, but not squeezed. Only the first two drops of oil that came forth from a light pressing of the olive was considered pure enough for the Menorah. So it is here with the sefirot of Netzah and Hod. It is not that their entire essence is squeezed into the Yesod. Rather, just the exact amount of pressure is exerted upon them in order for them to radiate just the right amount of light into the Yesod. Too much light and the Yesod would not be able to handle it. Too little light and the Malkhut would not be able to offer Ohr Hozer. Only when these two “drops” merge with the light of the creative/sexual Yesod energy is it transformed. Thus when the Malkhut receives it, this transformed energy enables Her to ascend.

Text *Therefore, pressing is of the side of the Tzadik (Righteous One) as mentioned in the Zohar. For herein [in the Yesod] are [the Netzah and Hod] pressed by the power of the strike and the descent.*

Commentary – The Zohar always refers to the sefirat Yesod as the Tzadik. This is a reference to Yosef who guarded in sexual purity by not committing adultery with the wife of Potifera.

Sexual energy is creative energy. When it is used for purposes of holiness, then holiness is achieved. The one who does such is called a Tzadik because he/she properly used sexual energy is a positive creative way. On the other hand, when sexual energy is abused and wasted, when one follows his/her animalistic nature, all that is created is the reinforcement of the animal side of the human soul. The spiritual side is akin to being dead.

Sexual energy, therefore, is a powerful tool. When used correctly it can motivate one to the greatest heights of intellectual and spiritual discovery. This is why the Torah refers to sex as one “knowing” the other. When sex is abused, used merely for physical gratification, then its spiritual side is exiled, and one’s soul goes into exile as well. One remains an animal instead of elevating and becoming fully human. In such a case, Malkhut/Nok stay disconnected from above. This is considered a sin equivalent to murder, adultery, and idolatry all rolled up into one.

Text *Therein they are crumbled into numerous smaller parts.*

Commentary – The lights of Netzah and Hod are said to be subdivided into multiple smaller lights. The actual text uses the word “crumbs” to signify just how small the light is subdivided. In this way, the lights can penetrate the Malkhut without causing damage, due to their initial brilliance. In this way also, these sparks of Netzah and Hod, sheathed in Yesod can enter many different areas within the Malkhut/Nok, causing elevations all over.

Text *By this [procedure] comes out the oil that is appropriate for the candelabrum (Menorah), who is the Feminine. Thus does it say, “pressed for illumination,” meaning to illuminate the Menorah.*

Commentary – Thus the pressing of the lights of Netzah and Hod into Yesod and their subsequent subdivisions when penetrating into Malkhut illuminates the Menorah. This means that the physical world of Malkhut/Nok is energized and motivated to elevate itself and become reunited fully with the spiritual dimensions.

Text *He explained more and said, “to raise up the continuous lamp,” means that the building of the Feminine is impossible other than [through] the returning light from below to above.*

Commentary – As said previously, it is the desire from below which arouses Heavenly action. Throughout Kabbalistic literature, we are told that Mashiah will come when we want him bad enough to come. Our desires and whole-hearted yearnings have the power to move the Heavens. We humans, however, grossly underestimate our own spiritual powers. We believe that if we pray hard enough, G-d will act. In truth, if we pray hard enough, with sincere devotion and desire, then G-d will bless us and enable us to act for ourselves. Because most do not practice this great principle, we continue in a spiral of exile.

Text *Therefore, this needs to be so. Therefore, it says, “to raise up the lamp,” meaning the lamp of the Malkhut shall raise the light from below to above. This then is “to raise up.”*

Commentary/Conclusions – As it is above, so is it below. The sefirotic light of G-d flows cyclically, from above to below and then circles around from below to above. G-d has ordained that there be a focal point of reception for His light here in the physical world. Without the light reaching this focal point, it cannot “bounce” back up as Ohr Hozer (returning light). The focal point, as we have learned, is the performance of the mitzvot. Yet, mere action of the mitzvah is only its vessel. In order for a mitzvah to be complete, it requires the emotional and intellectual devotion of the doer. It is the inner energy generated from the human psyche, when coupled with the correct action of the mitzvah that generates the Ohr Hozer. This is the general lesson of how we are to rectify and elevate our physical world, yet there is still another application to all this.

Notice that the physical world, Malkhut/Nok is always referred to as being Feminine. While this is on one side a metaphor, on another side it is quite literal. In other words, our universe and all that is within it, including everything male, is in essence female. Therefore, the rectification of the female in human society is paramount to human redemption.

Our holy Rabbis have taught us that it was in the merit of the Jewish women that Benei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt. We are also taught that the final redemption will be like the first. In this respect, it is not hard to speculate that it will again be in the merit of Jewish women that Mashiah will finally come. Therefore, it is imperative for women to cultivate their collective spiritual consciousness in holiness and to separate with full feminine vigor from the unclean spiritual ideals and models offered today by the idolatrous new age movement, women’s liberation and world religions.

Individual women must seek to bond with a man (similar as does Nok with Z.A.) who is embodied with the sparks of Netzah and Hod. This means he must be a spiritual man of inspiration, full of the fear of G-d and love for His

Torah. When a woman is properly bound to such a man, he unleashes in her a powerful spirit that molds both him and their children. The woman thus becomes the Malkhut, Nok, the Shekhina, the embodiment of the Divine Presence here on earth.

While Jewish Law does not require a woman to marry as it does a man, it is still necessary for a woman's spiritual rectification to be married. Regardless of age, a woman should seek to find a proper Torah husband, with whom she can build a Torah home, and spread Torah values throughout the world.

Again, until the Malkhut is elevated there is no tikkun (rectification). Therefore, the proper cultivation of female spirituality is tantamount to the lighting of the eternal Menorah in the Tabernacle/Temple. Today's Jewish woman must become as spiritual as Sarah, wise as Rivka, persevering as Leah and Rahel, powerful like Miriam and Devorah and a leader like Hulda. Rectification of the Malkhut is the rectification of today's women.

Just as the Menorah was the focal point for bringing down sefirotic energy in the days of the Tabernacle/Temple, so today the focal point is the study and observance of Torah. Today's women must become more than merely religious and Torah observant, they must manifest the zealous Yesod creative energy to impose Torah justice (Netzah) to create Jewish homes that benefit from this (Hod).

May G-d bless us all with the courage to manifest His powers of imposition and benefit coupled with creative energy into all our lives, Amen.