

Meditations For Spiritual Unity

How to Perform (Kabbalistic Yihudim) in English

Teachings from the Tzva'at HaRivash

(The Testament of the Ba'al Shem Tov), Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer,

***A secret among secrets of the Kabbalists.
How to make every word you speak
a meditative act that bonds your soul to G-d.***

By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok

Copyright © 1998 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The greatest of all Kabbalistic accomplishments is the level of human consciousness called devekut. Devekut means bonding. It is used to refer to that level in which one is constantly aware of the presence of G-d.

This awareness is not some simple intellectual acknowledgement. Rather, achievement of this state enables one to "see" the otherwise invisible Hand of G-d working in all things. One who is in a state of devekut with G-d not only sees G-d's actions; he can, as if, read G-d's mind. When one is bonded to G-d one knows G-d, His movements, His ways, and most importantly, His Will. The bonding of devekut is absolute. It is the surrender of the individual mind to the Supernal Mind, which is G-d.

Devekut is actually counted as one of the 613 commandments that the Jewish people are required by G-d to observe. Being that outright bonding to G-d in any physical sense is impossible and silly to imagine, the observance of this requirement is traditionally fulfilled by one being integrally connected to religious teachers (Rabbis) and their institutions that offer Torah instruction.

For the Kabbalist, those who seek G-d as He truly is, the commandment of devekut is carried out through the performance of special, highly advanced meditations. These meditations are designed to train the mind of the Kabbalist to become intuitively aware of the presence of G-d and the workings of His Divine Hand.

More than this, once the Kabbalist has achieved devekut and bonds with G-d, the Divine power can flow through him or her. In this way the Kabbalist becomes the master of miraculous powers. He becomes the Hand of G-d and the agent of Divine service.

The techniques of devekut meditation are by no means secret. They have been written in texts for centuries. Those who can read Hebrew and Aramaic literature can easily find these texts in Hebrew book stores. The instructions in these works are usually not concealed in mystical metaphors; usually the teachings are quite straightforward. Why then do not more people make use of them?

This question is not a new one. Even the Biblical prophets asked this of the people of their generations. Why don't we want to come close to G-d in the way that He Himself has chosen?

The answer to this question, whether in Biblical days or today, seems to be that most people simply are not interested. Instruction is readily available, yet most choose not to make use of it. Whether due to personal spiritual laziness or other reasons, the treasured techniques of devekut bonding with G-d lie unused.

Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer, the Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of the Hasidic movement in 17th century Europe, opened up Kabbalah practice to the masses. Unlike the Ari z"l (Rabbi Yitzhak Luria) before him, the Ba'al Shem Tov emphasized practice over study. His message was that it is what we do that transforms us, not what we know. The Ba'al Shem Tov, therefore, instructed much on the topic of devekut, teaching it to whoever wished to learn. More than this, the Ba'al Shem Tov simplified the system to make it "user friendly" to all.

The simplicity of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings makes devekut meditative practices available to everyone who wishes to make use of them. One great revelation that he revealed was that aspects of this meditation did not have to be performed exclusively in the holy tongue of Hebrew.

Actually, there are forms of devekut meditation that are best performed in the vernacular language spoken every day. There is a great secret behind this practice, as I will explain.

One of the most sublime forms of devekut meditation is called by the Kabbalists Yihudim. These are the meditations that are performed to create a unification of supernal realms. In short, due to the sins of man, our minds do not properly perceive the presence of G-d. Yihudim meditations enable us to perceive G-d in the most mundane things; through our conscious intent we unite non-corporeal spiritual realities that have been disjointed due to our lack of spiritual perception.

This is accomplished by analyzing verses of scripture, and even common, everyday speech, for numerical equivalents to Holy Names.

In Hebrew the numerical and alphabetical systems are identical. Each letter has a corollary numerical value. Each word or group of words, therefore, has its own unique number. Knowing this number enables the Yihud practitioner to ascertain which holy Name(s) have equal numerical value.

Words or word groups of equal numerical value are said to be radically connected to one another in intimate fashion. Thus, to know which holy Name(s) are numerically equal to a scripture verse recited, or to the words spoken, elevated those words via the numerical equivalent and makes them spiritually holy. In this way even the most mundane speech can be analyzed to find what numerical values therein will reveal underlying holy Names. In this way every word or speech becomes holy. One's mind is constantly thinking about G-d until awareness of G-d's presence becomes second nature.

Also, every word spoken and viewed numerically is charged with the spiritual power of the holy Name(s) concealed within the equivalent numerical values. Thus, each and every word becomes holy and is reunited with G-d, the source of all breath, the power behind every word. A union of mundane physical and sublime spiritual has been made, wherein the physical is elevated. This is how a yihud, a spiritual unification, is performed.

This was the intent when the Ba'al Shem Tov taught that G-d wants us to serve Him in all different types of ways. It is easy to recognize our service to G-d by the performance of traditional religious worship. But G-d wants more of us than ritual by rote; this is why G-d creates circumstances for us wherein we are forced out of our regular religious regimens. By finding ourselves in new situations we are forced to seek G-d even at those times and in those places.

This is the secret of devekut: that we can recognize the presence of G-d even in those places where we did not think G-d to be.

In the religious world of Orthodox Judaism, people are constantly involved in the study of Torah and the performance of sacred rituals. However, sometimes reality rears its ugly head and we are forced out of our comfortable little worlds. This force which appears to be dragging us away from religious observance and our environment is, nonetheless, from G-d. G-d wants us to recognize that He is everywhere inside of and outside of religion. G-d can never be contained exclusively within the context of religion, for as the verse says: "The whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. 6:3).

Whatever feels to you like mundane and non-spiritual, such as holding a boring job, is actually an opportunity to discover G-d in disguise. We are so accustomed to distinguish between where we feel G-d to be and where we don't. This is an illusion that G-d Himself helps us to break.

In reality, G-d is in all of our daily activities, whether it be something mundane or sublime. Every word we speak, even for business or for casual social interactions, has a numerical value. By analyzing our words for their underlying numerical patterns we come to understand that G-d is in every word we speak.

Even those words spoken in languages other than Hebrew can be made to relate to the holy tongue by the simple means of word or sound association. For example, take the word "bread". Even if you do not know that the Hebrew word for bread is "lekhem", the English word will still take us back to G-d. Let us investigate some of the possible word sound associations.

"Bread" rhymes with "head", "wed", "said", and "dead". Perhaps the mention of the word "bread" can remind us of these rhyming words which spell out for us a concept: G-d "said" that we are "wed" to Him (by receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai). He is our spiritual "head" without which we are spiritually "dead". Thus, each time we hear the word "bread" we can remember the rhyming words of the concepts that come forth from it. In this way we train our minds to see the spiritual in the mundane.

For those who know Hebrew, the English word "bread" sounds exactly like the Hebrew phrase b'rad (in descent). Thus the word "bread" might remind us that G-d Himself is "in descent" amongst us at all times.

On and on we can go with examples based on the simplest of associations; this is the meaning of serving G-d "in all different ways". One who repeats this action and becomes regular with it will experience a transformation of consciousness that will lead one to recognition of the invisible Hand of the Al-Mighty.

Once this vision is seen it can never be erased or forgotten. The bonding with G-d has thus occurred; the commandment has thus been fulfilled.

=

Tzva'at HaRivash, Text and Commentary¹

1:5 “Every person must serve the blessed Holy One with all one’s might; for everything is necessary before the blessed Holy One, because He desires us to serve Him (see Note 19 below) in all different types of ways.”

1:6 “The meaning of this is that sometimes a person becomes involved with other people (in conversation) and is, therefore, unable to study (the holy Torah). Yet, one must be constantly united (in mind) with the blessed Holy One, and perform meditations (see Note 21 below) of spiritual unifications (yihudim). Thus when a person needs to go about his business and is not able to pray and study as he might wish, one must, nonetheless, serve Him in different types of ways.”

“Do not distress yourself by this, for the blessed Holy One desires that we serve Him in all different ways; sometimes on one way, sometimes in another. Therefore, when your daily affairs beckon you, [they are placed there for you to] serve Him in these places.”

“A great rule: Look to G-d in all your actions and focus your mind upon Him, for all things that come before you come from Him, blessed be He.”

Note 19. “Thus does G-d send to us many different types of trials in life. Sometimes they are trials in our learning Torah or its opposite. Sometimes they are trials in expressions of the attribute of mercy and sometimes its opposite. Thus it is with all the attributes.”

“For each and every attribute there is a benefit when it is applied in its right way and place. Being that we are always on the scales [of balancing our lives], it behooves us to apply every attribute in accordance with its proper measure, no more and no less. In this way do we merit a good outcome [in all matters in life].”

Note 21. “If you merit and become accustomed to unite His blessed Name, you will continually remember the Name before your eyes, and thus you will be able to receive anything you wish. You can speak to your colleague in business with absolute faith.”

“Every word that comes forth from your mouth includes the unifications of His holy Names, be they in the first letters, last letters, numerical values or permutations. [All] bind your actions to His blessed Name.”

¹ Tzva'at HaRivash with the Even Yisrael commentary. Makhon Da'at Yosef, Jerusalem, Israel, 1991, pages 39-44/

“Even in any language, whatever tongue you speak will have within it unifications of His blessed Names.”

“Do not wonder how yihudim (unifications) can be performed in any language. Just as every angelic prince is nurtured from holiness, so every language receives its life force from the Holy Tongue (Hebrew). They are nurtured by the [sounds of] the holy letters.”

:This then is [the act of] sifting when Israel is performing spiritual unifications in all the vernacular languages. This is a wondrous treasure that one should accustom one’s self to do: to contemplate before one’s own eyes the letters of [your] speech, what comes forth from your mouth. This is what we have received.”

Conclusions

All sounds have their source in the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet; the letters and words of all languages receive their spiritual energy from Hebrew. This explains why yihudim can be performed in any language; for we are simply serving G-d “in different ways”, these ways being the different ways in which sound manifest (i.e. languages).

Prayer also can be recited in any language, for prayers actually ascend from one’s heart. The words that one uses are merely vessels for the intensity of one’s devotion; thus, the more one’s heart is into the prayer, the stronger the prayer will be.

When the mind is constantly aware of the presence of G-d, the heart is in a state of awe. Prayers offered in awe are always answered.

Even in daily affairs, the awe-inspired heart and G-d filled mind act as subconscious guides to always direct us in the right and holy paths. Simply put, when we are right with G-d internally, He guides and protects us externally. Everything that comes our way, therefore, is for the greater good, whether we can see it or not.

The righteous person accepts this and flows with it; the wicked person resists and attempts to “swim against the tide”. The resulting misfortune is a personal creation.

The lesson we learn from this is simple: trust G-d, follow His path, and He will guide you right.

Right now, every word you speak conceals within it secret Names. Seek them out by whatever means you know. You will see for yourself and come to recognize that indeed “the whole earth (and every word spoken therein) is full of His glory” (Is. 6:3).