



Introduction

July 26, 2004, Erev Tisha B'Av 5764. I woke up from a sound sleep at 2:30 a.m. this morning. I had an unclear sensation about a dream I just experienced. After performing my halakhically required tasks, I sat down to sleep again. After a half hour I could not. I felt something was troubling me. Something was on my mind although I couldn't exactly say what it was. With frustration growing I felt like I was compelled. Therefore, I fired up the computer and without anything particular in mind I sat down and let nature take its course. The following is the result.

The Great Lesson

By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Learn a great lesson about the Torah from the Kabbalistic classic the Sefer Yetzirah. In its first chapter the sacred text states that "the end is in its beginning and its beginning is in its end." These profound words can be discussed philosophically for a long time, but the more one complicates their meaning, the more one will miss their simple and straightforward meaning.

Straight and to the point, the meaning is clear; whatever is to be found at the end of the road already is there at its beginning. This is a very important lesson about the Torah. As we say with regards to the holy Shabat, so is it true regarding the entire Torah, "sof ma'aseh, b'mahshava tehilah" (last in action, first in thought).

In Pirkei Avot, our Sages of old have defined for us the proper course of Torah study. At the young age of five one is to begin studying Mikrah, this is the study of the TaNaKh (Bible). At ten one begins the study of Mishna. This is the study of Halakhot Pesukot (clear and direct Jewish Law). Only after these two courses of study is one supposed to begin the study of Gemara, which is the study of the reasoning underlying the ordination of the Laws.

This sequence of study makes a lot of sense. First one is to study the sources, then the lessons emanating from those sources, and finally how those lessons emanated from the sources and are connected to them.

In our many sins and lack of coherent direction this plain and most direct sequence of Torah study is not followed by almost every Orthodox Yeshiva in the world today. While we have an abundance of Gemara study and just as many Torah students who can rattle off memorized page after page of rote Gemara study, we have a severe shortage of any Torah student (and Rabbi) that has ever read and mastered the entire TaNaKh. Worse than this, after many years of Gemara study, most students have never opened up and



intensely studied the Shulchan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law) and are therefore ignorant of the practical applications of Torah Law.

The modern course of Yeshiva students have failed to produce students, graduates and Rabbis who know the most sacred sources upon which all of Judaism is based. Ask any Orthodox Rabbi today whether while in Yeshiva or even afterwards when he attended a class in or even merely opened up to learn Biblical books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zecharia and Malakhi, or the books of Daniel, Iyob, Kohelet or Mishlei? Other than for just a few minutes a day, ask any Orthodox Rabbi today whether while in Yeshiva or even afterwards how much times he spends studying the Shulchan Arukh and its commentaries, and how much time he devotes to pouring over the numerous Responsa literature of the Aharonim that is the foundation of modern Halakha? If your Rabbi has not covered and is not an expert in these most important areas of Torah study that is the foundation of all Judaism, one needs to seriously ask just how well prepared one's Rabbi truly is!

The basics of the Torah are the lessons of the prophets. Our Holy Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed centuries ago because we failed to heed the message of the prophets. To this day, we fail G-d and Torah by not studying and pouring over their every word to see how we have erred and to rectify it.

The lessons of the prophets are the words of our Living G-d, preserved for us throughout eternity to morally instruct us and guide us. The words of the prophets are not academic polemics to be debated and analyzed intellectually. Their words are straight and to the point.

The message of the prophets is aimed at the heart, not at the head. It was because our hearts were hardened before G-d that we as a nation were punished. It is because our hearts are still empty that we have not yet merited our national redemption.

Many so-called serious students of Torah shy away from the simple messages of the prophets and TaNaKh because they do not consider them to be enough of an intellectual challenge. This foolish misunderstanding is easily refuted by the words of the Sefer Yetzirah quoted above. For the deepest and most profound teachings of the entire Torah can be found in its most simple and easiest to understand sections. The lessons of the Torah at its most simple and its most profound are one and the same. This is true whether one is studying either the Laws of Torah or its secrets.

Many people today flock to the study of Kabbalah. They are intoxicated by its profundity. This in and of itself is not a bad thing. However, even Kabbalah study that delves into the mysteries of the invisible worlds is founded upon a simple premise and purpose. And without the pursuit of this, even Kabbalah study can be misguided.



The entire Torah was given to us for one reason. The wisdom of Kabbalah was revealed to us for one reason. The one reason, in the words of the Kabbalah is for us to perform a spiritual union between the Holy One, blessed be He and His Shekhina, which is the same as to unite the sefirotic Partzufim of Zeir Anpin and Nukba, which is the same as uniting the sefirot of Tiferet and Malkhut. Every properly learned Kabbalist will tell you that this is the purpose of all. Yet, can that very same Kabbalist simplify matters for you and tell you what all these Kabbalistic metaphors mean? If not, then said Kabbalist better go back to the basics, because he has missed the whole point of years of study.

The Kabbalistic message did not come from nowhere. It did not need special Divine revelation, not from Eliyahu HaNavi, not from the Zohar and even not from the Ari'zal. The Kabbalistic message is what the message of Torah has always been, the same message spoken over and over again by the Prophets.

The message is clear. The message is and has always been that the most important thing in the world, the message and meaning of the entire Torah and the Kabbalah is that we as human beings learn to rectify our personalities and character and to live as holy and righteous human beings created in the image of our Divine and blessed Creator.

The prophets have wailed from generation to generation, their words recorded for us through posterity. Their message is simple and can be summed up in one word. How much easier can that can it be. The one word is this: REPENT!

The word does not need much explanation. You want to know what G-d requires of us and what He seeks from us? Simply go back to the words of the prophets.

Read and learn Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zecharia, Malakhi, and even Daniel. Read them by themselves, without all their extensive commentaries. Read their words with your heart, not your head. Let the message of our blessed Creator sink into your soul. Allow it to arouse your hearts!

When the Kabbalists speak about rectifying supernal worlds, they are actually talking about the worlds within the human psyche. In essence, all of Kabbalah is about the rectification of character.

The unification of the Holy One, blessed be He and His Shekhina, the unification of Zeir Anpin and Nok, and the unification of Tiferet and Malkhut are three metaphors for the same reality. The Holy One, blessed be He, Zeir Anpin and Tiferet are three metaphors referring to the six sefirot that in Kabbalah are called the Midot (attributes). These are the elements that underlie the formation of both the six days of creation and the human



personality. The Shekhina, Nok and Malkhut are metaphors for the physical world, including our human body.

The secret of unification therefore is simple and summed up as follows: Manifest the proper alignment of character (the sefirotic midot) within our lives and in the world (Malkhut). This is considered the most sublime message of the most advanced Torah study of the Kabbalah. At the same time, this is and has always been the message of the prophets. As the Sefer Yetzirah has said, the end is in its beginning and its beginning is in its end.

All Torah study, all Kabbalah study is aimed towards this end, the refinement and rectification of character. When we can accomplish this formidable task, then we will succeed in bringing Geulah (redemption) to our world.

This message is simple and straightforward. It might even be too simple for the more academically minded amongst us. Yet, this is where the truth lies. G-d wants to be in our hearts. G-d wants our hearts to be guided by Him. Sometimes our heads get in the way of this.

The solution is simple. Return to the basics. Return to the prophets, sip in their words as one would drink medicinal tea. Allow the spirit of our Living G-d move in your heart as both your mind and heart ponder their sacred words. Hear the message that for so long we have missed.

Return to the source, walk the right path in simplicity. Allow the wisdom of our Living G-d to shine in your hearts without confusion, question or doubt. When we return to our Living G-d, He in turn will return to us. And how do I know this profound truth? Because I read it in the prophets. Their predictions for destruction certainly came true. I believe that their predictions for restoration will therefore also become equally true.

We have a great task before us.