

Shavuot 5770

Although commonly called “*Shavuot*” (Festival of Weeks) because it occurs seven weeks after Passover, the early rabbis called this festival “*Atzeret*” (Gathering or “Getting it together”). We “get ourselves together” through the process of consciously counting the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot. Reb Nosen teaches that this process is alluded to in the verse from Song of Songs 5:5, “I took my bitterness (literally myrrh) along with my spice.” In other words, to “get ourselves together,” which is the only way we can receive the Torah on Shavuot, we need to go through a seven week process of consciously witnessing both the positive and negative parts of ourselves. We have to become whole through recognizing and owning our “shadow” as well as our “spice.” Without this wholeness, we can’t receive new Torah, because the holy sparks of the potential for new Torah are buried in the very *qelippot* (shells) of the shadow. However if we are brave enough to bring the light of consciousness to the shadow, we can not only release the extremely contracted holy energy that sustains the *qelippot*, but also significantly expand that energy when it is released. So, this seven week experience of *Sefirah* (Counting the Omer), *I took my bitterness along with my spice*, is the very way we get to Shavuot.

Derakheha darkhey no’am ve-chol netivoteha shalom (Ways of Torah are ways of calmness and all Her pathways are Peace.)

In Hebrew the word for being whole (*SHaLeM*) and the word for peace (*SHaLoM*) have the same root. This teaches us that receiving Torah (the Ways of Peace) and achieving wholeness is basically the same thing. Indeed, the mystery here is expressed in the Zohar’s teaching: *oraita kudsha berich hu ve-yisrael chad hu* (Torah, the Blessed Holy One, and a whole person are essentially one.) So if we want Torah which guides us in the Ways of Peace and we want to know the Blessed Holy One whose name is Peace, we ourselves have to seek peace through a total integration of all our parts, bitter and spicy.

That isn’t so easy, but it becomes easier when we take to Heart another secret, namely that Peace and Love are also inseparable. This is indicated by the well-known *gematria*: *echad* (one) and *ahavah* (love) both equal 13, teaching us that the key to wholeness and peace (which have the same root) is the power of Love. Generally, the dark places within us are refugees from Love, qualities that we hide because they are so “unlovable.” But the more they remain concealed and unloved, the more they appropriate precious energy that we need to be whole and without wholeness—no peace.

We may try to complete ourselves in myriad ways, often in the form of various cravings, but the only *ultimately* effective remedy is Love itself, because Love is the divine power that unites everything always. Unfortunately, the Love actually present and revealed in the world of time and space is always limited due to our current state of consciousness which is a result of *tzimtzum* (Divine contraction). So we suffer from the *yetzer hara* (negative impulse) that undermines our higher aspirations. The impulse that produces such suffering fragments us, separates us from others, and is driven by insatiable cravings that conceal the very element that could satisfy us. This condition our sages called being under the control of our hearts. For our purposes, it would probably be better to understand this as tyranny of the lower mind (in which the *yetzer ha-ra* is like a reckless dictator).

However, while the amount and quality of Love actually present in the world of time and space is always contracted, the Power of Love itself is unlimited. It is only that in our current state we can't yet hold the full Power of Love. So the contracted state of actual Love is itself an expression of the unlimited Power of Love that enables us to maintain our precious existence with the potential of expanding our capacity for Love through aspiration. When we come to terms with this paradox, we can find the holy sparks in the Shadow, which contains just enough Love to exist (unless we contribute more energy to it through failing in our aspirations).

What is aspiration? Desire for the guidance of Torah and knowledge of the Holy Blessed One. But this aspiration can never succeed without expanding our capacity to Love, because Love is the very nature of Torah and Divinity Itself. Those who are successful in their aspiration are called by Rebbe Nachman (in *Liqqutey MoHaRaN*, 33): "Heroes of Divine Power, Maker's of the Divine Word." (see Psalms 103:20). One can become such a hero only through integration of the *yetzer ha-ra* and releasing its sparks. That is to say, such a person who is also likened to an angel, gains extraordinary power through finding the Divine Power of Love present in the shadow and not just in the "spice." Rebbe Nachman explains that such a person is called a "Maker of the Divine Word" because through integrating the shadow, Torah is revealed in the very place where it was hidden. The Hero of Divine Power makes Torah appear.

So this conscious effort to expand the Power of Love and bring it to places of concealment is the secret of drawing new Torah into this contracted world of time and space. In our tradition, we generally divide Torah into two categories, *nigleh* (revealed) and *nistar* (concealed). Conventionally, people often think this division distinguishes the exoteric biblical and rabbinic teachings from the esoteric mystical teachings of Kabbalah. But Rebbe Nachman's understanding is far deeper. *Nigleh* refers to all Torah, exoteric and esoteric alike, that we presently have. But *nistar* doesn't mean already existing esoterism. It refers to the Torah of the future. Torah that hasn't entered time and space yet, because the consciousness here is not yet high enough to "make" it. This is the limitless Torah of the Divine Mind Itself (*Torah she-ve-Da'ato*) which is expressed as the unlimited Power of Divine Love. Through our aspiration to achieve integration by finding and releasing the greatly contracted energy of Divine Love concealed in the shadow, we can draw more of the unlimited Torah and unlimited Power of Divine Love into our expanding and evolving world of time and space. In doing so, we may be liberated from the oppressive and depressing influence of the *yetzer ha-ra*, as the Midrash says don't read "*charut*" (engraved into the Tablets) but "*cherut*" (freedom from the *yetzer ha-ra*) that comes through released and enhanced sparks that "make" Torah.

Rebbe Nachman concludes that while few of us may have direct access to the ultimately hidden Torah of the Divine Mind Itself, everyone has access to some level of *da'at* (higher mind), a level of consciousness that reflects the Divine Mind Itself. Within that higher consciousness, whatever its present level, is the source of our aspiration. Through joining our hearts to that higher consciousness we can gain greater access to the Power of Love that can free us from the tyranny of the *yetzer ha-ra* and make us whole. The more of us that can thus aspire to become "Heroes of Divine Power," the more of the Hidden Torah of the Future we can bring down now and "make" real in our world of time and space.

Keyn yehi ratzon (may it be so).

