

Tetsavveh—You command  
Exodus 30:11-34:35

## **Part 1: Kindling the eternal light with pure oil**

“And as for you, you shall instruct the Israelites to bring you pure olive oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling the Eternal Lamp.” [Ex 27:20]

And why is there an unnecessary ‘and you’ at the beginning of this sentence?

And what does it mean to bring pure olive oil?

“And you, you shall speak to all who are wise of heart...” [Ex 28:3]

What does this mean? Who is wise of heart?

The Isbitza Rebbe explains:

”And you will command the children of Israel..take unto yourself pure olive oil.”(Ex 27:20)

“Unto yourself,” meaning to the wisdom inherent in every soul of Israel, and all the wisdom of Israel is called in the name of Moshe Rabeynu. To this the blessed God commanded that every one of Israel shall take to the wisdom inside of him some pure olive oil, meaning refined wisdom...”

Living Waters: A commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Isbitza, translated by Betsalel Philip Edwards  
p. 157

We take pure oil to the wisdom within our own souls.

We take pure oil to kindle the eternal light.

The wisdom within each of us is touched by the essence of Moses.

We must purify the oil.

The Sefat Emet gives us metaphors to expand the meaning of these words.

“In the Midrash: “A candle of God is the soul of man” [Prov. 20:27]. ‘The blessed Holy One said: ‘Let My candles be in your hand and yours in Mine.’ And what is the candle of God? That is Torah...Whoever does a mitzvah is like one who lights a candle before the blessed Holy One and gives life to his soul which is called a candle—‘a candle of God is the soul of man.’”

The Language of Truth: The Torah Commentary of the Sefat Emet, translated by Arthur Green p. 123

“The meaning of ‘a candle of God’ is that God’s providence in the lower world is through the souls of Israel. By means of their service Israel draws divine providence and the light of God’s countenance into the world.”

Ibid. p. 123

And we learn:

There are two sorts of darkness. One comes about through the evil inclination and the ‘other side’—that is true darkness, but it can be negated by means of the mitzvot. That is why doing a mitzvah is like lighting a candle before God—it is preparing a place where His glorious Presence can dwell. By means of this you enliven your soul, the candle.

Ibid. p. 124

But the supreme light is also considered darkness to us since it is beyond our reach. The holy books thus refer to it as darkness. The more light a person brings about in the physical darkness, through doing the mitzvot, the more that one will enlighten his soul from the [‘dark’] light above.

Ibid. p. 124

“ There is a hidden point within the souls of Israel, of which Scripture says: ‘If you seek it as you do silver and search for it as for treasures...’ [Prov. 2:4]. This inwardness reveals itself as a result of great effort, a struggle of the soul and the body, to purify the physical. Thus we are like the verdant olive tree: what an effort it is to bring forth that oil!”

Ibid. pp. 124-5

And the Sefat Emet uses the same metaphor another way:

“Now Scripture also says: ‘For a commandment is a candle and Torah is light,’ [Prov. 6:23]. The souls of Israel are the wicks that draw up the oil after the light. Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him, the root of Torah is the light. Thus we read: ‘Let them take olive oil unto you’ [Ex. 27:20]—draw toward the wick. The mitzvot are the lamps, vessels in which oil and wick are joined to the light.”

Ibid. p. 125

“The blessed Holy One’s counsel was to choose one person in each generation to represent purity, through whom purity would flow to all of Israel.

You too can do the same. Set aside one quality, or one special mitzvah, about which you take fabulous care. Through this you will be able to draw light and redemption to all your qualities.’

Ibid. p. 125

“Even though Moses was greater than Aaron, the priesthood was given to Aaron, who was separated’ [1 Chronic. 23:13] (from us). Moses, as prince of Torah, had to be attached to all of Israel...”

“Because Moses gave his life for Israel, God repaid him by having his power remain within them forever. Nearly every Jew has the light and spark of Moses our Teacher.

Ibid. p. 126

The spark of Moses is within each of us; never separate.

Through our refinement, through our actions, we can bring light to the darkness of the other side of our character, which is present in all of us. And we can draw light down from the darkness of the unknowable Divine.

### **Chant: Ner Elohim nishmat Adam**

The candle of God is the soul of the human (Proverbs 20:27)

### **Silence**

## **2. The necessity of Including the darkness within**

From the Zohar

“And you, bring near to you....”

Here is this repeated formula, the extra “and you” at the beginning of each of these commandments God gives to Moses:

“And you, bring near to you Aaron your brother and his sons...” [Ex 28:1]

“And you, you shall speak to all who are wise of heart...” [Ex 28:3]

“And you, you shall command the Children of Israel...” [Ex 27:20]

“And you, take you choice spices...” [Ex 30:23]

“Well, all is in supernal mystery, to include *Shekhinah* with him.”

Zohar, Vol. VI, Daniel Matt translation, p. 1

With this extra ‘and you’, God instructs Moses to include the *Shekhinah* within himself.

Ibid. p. 1, footnote 2

Moses is to include the Divine Presence within himself.

And Moses is told:

“From here: And you, you shall speak to all who are wise of heart, him whom I have filled, with a spirit of wisdom. [Ex 28:3]...The spirit of YHWH will alight upon him: a spirit of wisdom (Isaiah 11:2)...

“...because none of them came to perform the work until the Holy Spirit spoke within them, whispering to them; then they performed.”

Ibid. p. 2

“...The Holy Spirit commanded them, enlightening them to perform the work with perfect intention.” Ibid. p. 3 “From the midst of the Children of Israel.

Why from the midst of the Children of Israel?... For the Children of Israel exist below to open ways, to illumine paths, to kindle lamps, and to draw everything from below above, so that all will be one. Therefore it is written: You, cleaving to YHVH your God, are alive every one of you today! (Deuteronomy 4:4)

Ibid. p. 14

“...All is bringing near—for one who knows how to unify and serve his Lord; for when an offering is found to be fitting all is drawn near as one and radiance of the [Divine] Face appears. But when an offering is not found to be fitting or unification is unfit, the [Divine] Face is sad, radiance absent, the moon is covered, and the Other Side reigns.”

Ibid. pp. 14-15

And continuing from the Zohar—

What is a fitting offering? One that includes the Other Side—includes death, the evil impulse, Satan.

It is our job to learn to include the other side.

This is Job's error.

“According to rabbinic law, sacrificial portions and fat that were not totally consumed by fire during the day can be burnt on the altar throughout the night. According to the Zohar, such portions are intended to nourish the demonic power.”

Ibid. p. 17, footnote 44

“Job's error was that he offered ascent offerings, which, being totally consumed on the altar, provide nothing for the Other Side. If he had included a portion for the demonic power, then Satan would have been assuaged.”

Ibid. p. 17, footnote 46

“...Job shunned evil so much that he refused to offer anything to the Other Side. But his extremism had dire consequences: Satan, having been deprived of his portion, exacted retribution from Job by attacking him and thus ‘taking what was his.’”

Ibid. p. 18, footnote 48

So how do we remember evil? How do we remember to include it, keeping conscious of its possibility, so it does not dominate us?

The Zohar teaches us that through awareness of our own capacity for idolatry, and by examining our self-serving anger, we become wiser.

The Zohar uses the idea of hametz to equal idolatry. On Passover, we get rid of all hametz, all leavening from our homes.

“When Israel went out of Egypt, they left their domain—alien domain, the domain called hametz, evil bread. That is why idolatry is called so, and this is the mystery of the evil impulse, alien worship, also called ...leaven. This is the evil impulse, for so it functions in a person, like leaven in dough: entering one’s innards little by little and then increasing, until the whole body is permeated by it. This is idolatry, of which is written ‘There shall be no alien god in you’ (Psalms 81:10)—literally!  
Ibid. p. 19

“Idolatry itself is called hametz, which is identified with the evil impulse, because this impulse begins like a bit of leaven, offering small temptations, and then swells with a person, gradually overwhelming him.”  
Ibid. p. 19, footnote 51

And the Zohar tells us that awareness of anger can help us find ours and other’s idols.

“Here the blessed Holy One commands a person and warns him to be wary of those who pervert their way from good to evil, and defile their souls with that alien defilement.”  
Ibid. p.20

“...how can we determine whether to approach [another person]... or avoid him? By his anger he is really known, and recognized for who he is. If, in a moment of anger, he maintains that holy *neshamah*—then this is a fitting human being, this is a servant of his Lord, this is a consummate man. And if that person does not maintain her—uprooting this supernal holiness from its place, to supplant it with the Other Side—then this is surely a person who rebels against his Lord, and it is forbidden to approach him or associate with him. This one is called ‘he who tears his soul in his anger’ (Job 18:4)—tearing and uprooting his soul on account of his anger, and enabling an alien god to dwell with him.”  
Ibid. p. 21

“The anger raging within such a person is idolatrous.... because it signifies arrogant pride, which challenges God.”  
Ibid. p. 22, footnote 55

Can our anger help point to our arrogant pride?

“By three things is a person’s character known; by his cup [i.e., how much he drinks, or the effect this has on him], by his pocket [i.e., how he spends], and by his anger.”  
Ibid. p. 21, footnote 54

“Only in the case of anger [can the] the soul itself [be] defiled—and actually replaced by the demonic power fueling anger.”  
Ibid. p. 23, footnote 60

We must not make the mistake of Job. We need to know our own capacity for the darkness of idolatry. We need to examine what function our anger serves. This begins the ceaseless process of refinement. This is where our work of eternal return begins. Yes, we have anger. We can have a deep recess of anger that takes on a life of its own. Our work is to not be like Job. We must include this darkness in what we raise to God.

**Chant: Sh'chora ani v'navah**

I am Dark and Beautiful (Song of Songs 1:4)

**Silence**

**Part 3: The eternal cycle**

We must learn over and over again, from innocence to wisdom, to judgment, to compassion, to innocence, and round again.

Our cycle of holidays hold this process, to create a vehicle for our personal and collective refinement. The holidays are containers for us to gain wisdom into the two kinds of darkness. We can examine our relationship with the darkness of the evil impulse, the 'other side.' And, we touch the darkness of the unknowableness of the Holy One, and the spark of Divine Presence within. We learn draw a thread of light from the Darkness.

From the Zohar we learn--

From Passover to Shavu'ot we go on a journey from protection to robustness.

"...when Israel went out of Egypt, they did not know the essence and mystery of faith. The blessed Holy One said 'Let Israel taste a remedy, and until they eat this remedy, no other food should be visible to them. Once they had eaten matsah, which is a remedy for entering and knowing the mystery of faith, the blessed Holy One said, 'From now on, hametz is suitable for them and they may eat it, because it cannot harm them'—especially since on the day of Shavu'ot supernal bread is available, a cure for all!"

Ibid. p. 29

"...on the first Shavu'ot, they could taste the supernal nourishment of Torah, the ultimate cure."

Ibid. p. 29, footnote 75

From Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kipper we make a passage through the Days of Awe, from pure judgment, to self-knowledge with compassion, to utter joy.

"For on this day of Rosh Hashanah, that hametz ascends and accuses the person and vilifies him. It stands this day accusing the world, and the blessed Holy One sits in judgment over all, judging the world. "

Ibid. p. 30

On Rosh Hashanah--“Now is the time for supernal harsh Judgment to be aroused, and when it is aroused, the Other Side is empowered along with it.”  
Ibid. p. 34

“This arousal empowers the demonic force, which accuses Israel of their sins and obscures the light of the Shekhinah, symbolized by the moon.”  
Ibid. p. 34, footnote 86

“That Other Side exists as a hard shell that cannot be broken, except by the advice given by the blessed Holy One to Israel, as is written: ‘Blast the shofar on the new moon, on the covering for our festival day’ (Psalms 81:4)—in order to break that covering, by which the moon is covered and cannot shine. When Israel below arouses the shofar, the sound issuing from it strikes the air, splitting firmaments until it rises to that mighty rock covering the moon. He perceives and discovers an arousal of Compassion ascending, then poised above; he is confounded. Then that sound persists and removes Judgment. Once Compassion has been aroused below, so too above: another supernal shofar is aroused, emitting a sound that is Compassion; and sound meets sound, Compassion meets Compassion. By arousal below, there is similarly arousal above.”  
Ibid. p. 35

“Similarly it is written: ‘Serve YHVH in joy (Psalms 100:2)—a person’s joy draws another, supernal joy. Thus, just as this lower world is aroused, so She draws from above. Therefore Israel hastens to arouse a sound through the shofar—mystery of Compassion, comprised of fire, water, and air, becoming one. Ascending, it strikes this precious stone, which is imbued with the colors of that sound. Then, according to Her appearance, so She draws from above.”  
Ibid. p. 36

“Once She is arrayed by this sound, Compassion issues from above and settles upon Her, and She is encompassed from below and above. Then the Other Side is confounded: he looks and sees the radiant face and his power weakens and he cannot accuse. And this precious stone displays radiance in every direction, radiance below and radiance above.”  
Ibid. p. 36

“When does She display radiance above? You must say, on Yom Kippur. When Yom Kippur arrives and this precious stone is illumined by radiance above, drawn by radiance below, and that Denouncer is confounded, then Israel prepares one goat below for that harsh desert over which he rules.”  
Ibid. p. 36

“come and see: The goat that Israel sends to the desert is in order to give a portion to that Other Side, with which to be occupied.”  
Ibid. p. 37

“When a radiant face and complete joy appear, and the people of Israel emerges free on that day, then from that day on, joy is openly revealed. For even that Other Side delights in their joy and is transformed into being joyous together with them, because once he sees that he cannot prevail against them, dominating them, he wants to rejoice with them from now on... they gave him a portion...”  
Ibid. p. 40

“...the people of Israel emerges free on that day...On Yom Kippur, if they have repented and been purified. Then they rejoice openly on the Festival of Sukkot, and even the demonic Other Side delights in their joy.”  
Ibid. p. 40, footnote 104

**Chant: V’sham nashir shir chadash u’vir’nana na’aleh**

And there we will sing a new song; with joy we will go up. (from Tzur Mishelo)

## **Silence**

## References

Living Waters: A commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Isbitza, translated by Betsalel Philip Edwards  
The Language of Truth: The Torah Commentary of the Sefat Emiet, translated by Arthur Green  
Zohar, Vol VI, translated by Daniel Matt  
(p. 33 there is a discussion of the ‘desert companions’ I did not use, but want to explore further. These are the same desert contemplatives who Philo discussed.)

Text: Rhonda Karlton Rosen, [Rhonda.k.rosen@gmail.com](mailto:Rhonda.k.rosen@gmail.com)

Chant: David Goldstein