

Sparks

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The Simple Art of Ecstasy *How to See Divine Presence Here and Now*

“ And let them make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell amongst them.”
— Exodus 25:8

In this week's Torah Portion we encounter the precise design and magnificent beauty of the holy tabernacle and its' vessels. What is the relationship between this physical construct and feeling the presence of G-d dwelling amongst us?

YOU CAN SEE G-D

Once I was giving a seminar, and I asked everyone to look around the room and point to beauty. The first interesting result was that everyone pointed to something different. One man pointed to his wife. A woman named Bea pointed to a glass menorah (a Hanukkah candelabra) that was sitting on a windowsill. I asked Bea how she saw beauty in that menorah. Did she see beauty with her physical eyes? "Well," she answered, "the glass is translucent, and its delicacy has an ethereal quality. The shape is pleasing to the eye and because it is glass you can see the blue sky through it." But that was only her intellect giving meaning to the raw data of what she was seeing. Really, her physical eyes could only see glass molded into a nine-pronged shape. It was her soul that saw beauty and knew that it was beauty.

Another man, named Herb, pointed to a ray of sunlight shining on the white stone floor. "You think that's beauty?" I asked Herb. "That's just photons bouncing off minerals. What made you see beauty?"

Beauty is really a Divine quality that we see with the eyes of the soul. According to Kabbalah beauty is one of the ten manifestations of G-d referred to as *sefirot*. The incomprehensible divine is manifest in the comprehensible experience of beauty. The divine endless light shines through the quality of beauty expressed in that finite light ray bouncing off that finite stone floor.

Then I asked the seminar participants to point to the quality of power. Jackie pointed to a painting hanging in the room. We all acknowledged that it was a powerful picture. But how did we know that? It was just canvass with lines and forms painted on it. The eyes of the soul see power. Sometimes we meet a powerful person. We know this person is powerful, because our soul perceives the manifestation of intrinsic power, another one of the 10 *sefiros* [manifestations], even if the person is just sitting drinking a cup of tea.

Once I was having lunch with Kirk Douglas, who at the time had grown a beard for a movie and was not so easily identifiable by his trade-mark dimpled chin. Yet heads turned when he walked through the room. The other diners might not have known who he was but they knew for sure he was somebody.

If you want to have an instant glimpse of how easy it is to identify the *sefiros*, take a minute to close your eyes and try to picture life. What do you see? A baby? A field of flowers? A forest alive with birdsongs? Whatever it is you are envisioning, you know it is life. You know it not with your analytical brain, but with your soul. Your soul has the capacity to see the Divine quality called life. Now close

your eyes and picture love. What do you see? Perhaps you picture a mother kissing her baby. Again, what part of you recognizes that as love? Your physical eyes see only a big creature pressing moist lips on the cheek of a little creature. But your soul knows that that is love.

When you see life, beauty, power, love, you are seeing G-d. This is because G-d is life, although we can't say that life is G-d, because G-d is not just life, He is also beauty, power, truth, wisdom, kindness, justice and all the other *sefiros*. And even if you added them all together, you could not say that G-d is the sum total of these qualities because G-d is so much more — above and beyond all this.

Now we have a better sense, through the eyes of experience, what the *sefiros* really are — qualities of reality.

The endless light of G-d, shines through the qualities of love and life and beauty and kindness and power and truth. These qualities are no-thing. That's why they are eternally real. All *things* pass away, but these qualities are timeless.

Kabbalah teaches that what really attracts us, what really confers value, is precisely this no-thing quality. What makes art attractive and valuable? Technically, it is just a bunch of paints smeared on a canvas. But the Divine quality of beauty is channelled into the world through this painting. That's what attracts me to it. The artist knows the right combination of lines, colors and contrasts that allows G-d's beauty to flow into this world. That's why it has value. My soul is attracted to the no-thing quality, G-d's beauty in the painting. The artist didn't create beauty, beauty already existed, but he created a vessel for its expression.

Here lies the secret to precise construct of the tabernacle and its vessels. G-d revealed the exact design and dimensions that would channel His presence in the world.

THE DIVINE ATTRACTION

What is it about a person that truly is attractive? Kabbalah says that it's the quality of G-d. A beautiful man or woman is a channel of G-d's beauty in the world, just as a kind man or woman is a channel for G-d's kindness in the world.

Every human being is a unique vehicle of various Divine qualities. That's what attracts people. We are attracted to the special quality of G-d in the person that we love. That's really what's going on. Therefore Kabbalah claims that all love essentially is directed only to G-d.

When I'm standing in front of the Grand Canyon, am I in awe of that big pit in the ground, or am I encountering the grandeur of G-d through the Grand Canyon? Am I in awe of the stormy sea, water surging up and down, or is it the quality of power, which is manifesting through the sea? The Kabbalah teaches that all awe is really only directed to G-d.

Particularly with human beings, we become confused about the real source of the qualities we love and admire. I hear an eloquent, brilliant speaker, and I am in awe of her wisdom. Did the speaker create wisdom? Did she give it its worth? Does she own it? Is she the master of it? Did it start with her? Will it end with her?

Her wisdom is really not hers at all, it's actually a ray of G-d's endless wisdom. When I see an athlete accomplish an incredible feat, I am in awe of his strength. But that strength is really a manifestation of G-d's power.

This confusion, between what we think we love and its true Divine essence and source, is what idolatry was all about. When you read the Torah, you see that the sternest condemnations are reserved for the sin of idolatry. You think, "What's the big deal about idolatry? Those primitive people liked to bow down to trees and stones, but when humanity evolved, they left behind that nonsense."

When was the last time I felt an urge to bow down to a tree? Or to a rock? Have you ever had an urge to bow down to the sun? Do you know why you and I have no such urges? Because idolaters were on a much higher level of sensitivity to G-d than you and I are. They were so acutely aware of the Divine qualities shining through the phenomena of nature that they felt compelled to worship that tree and that rock as a manifestation of G-d. Of course, the confusion, which the Torah warns us against, is to mix up G-d with His manifestations. The sun really does express the power of G-d. So worship G-d, don't worship the sun!

We, sophisticated, modern people, make the exact same mistake. We are attracted to something — the opposite sex, art, jewelry — and we could spend our lives chasing these things. We suffer from confusion. It's really G-d we want. But we confuse G-d with His manifestations. We confuse the presence with the packaging.

Let's look at sexuality. Sexuality is a cosmic drive. According to Torah, it's not something to be renounced. When a person has a sexual urge to unite with another person, it's not an urge for a body; it's a spark of the Divine yearning to unite with another spark of the Divine, an urge to become a channel to manifest Divine oneness. Precisely because sexual energy has such a powerful potential, it can be dangerous when it gets out of control, when it is misdirected. It's easy to forget that sexuality is meant to be directed to the service of G-d, to life, to revealing the connection to the All and the Ultimate.

This also explains why sometimes Albert is attracted to Gigi, he's blown away by how gorgeous Gigi is, but when he gets to know her, he loses interest. Why? Because at first glance Albert is attracted to the Divine beauty of which Gigi is a manifestation. But as they start to interact, Albert realizes that Gigi is missing so many other Divine qualities. She might have beauty, but she lacks wisdom, she lacks truth, she lacks kindness, she lacks love. So Albert loses interest, because he wants a full manifestation of G-d. Or Albert might meet Henrietta, who doesn't embody beauty, and at first he is not attracted. But when he gets to know her, and becomes aware of her kindness, then he becomes attracted. Did Henrietta invent kindness? Is she the source of kindness? No, Henrietta is a vehicle for G-d's kindness. That's really what Albert is attracted to.

When the Israelites built the Tabernacle and dedicated it to channeling G-d's presence into our lives — the world and its' physical pleasures would all glow with ultimate divine radiance.

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