

Sparks

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Is G-d a Lover or a Judge?

When we take a bird's eye view of the holidays that inaugurate the New Year, we see a collection of diverse and disturbing images for G-d. The predominant image for G-d, on Rosh Hashanah, is King and Judge who is writing us into a cosmic Book of life or death. Yom Kippur is associated more with G-d as a compassionate forgiving Father. Sukkot features G-d as a lover---the sukkah also symbolizes a wedding canopy. And on Simchat Torah we reach the height of intimacy and complete union with G-d. What are we to do with all this imagery? Are we really supposed to believe all this?

Surely all these images are only metaphors for a higher divine truth that is beyond spoken words and conceptual images. We can only know the divine truth experientially. Anyone who believes that G-d is literally a King, Judge, Father or Lover is making graven images of G-d and committing spiritual idolatry. What then is the meaning and value of all these metaphors?

As far as metaphors go, these are the closest images that allude to the truth. According to Jewish mysticism, these conceptual metaphors are vehicles to access the transcendental truth of G-d. They are the metaphors that can take us to the threshold of the immediate and direct experience of G-d that is beyond all words and concepts. Any other metaphors wouldn't even get us close to the truth.

Our task and goal on these holy days, is to use these metaphors of King, Father and Lover towards building our consciousness and awareness of G-d, so that we can receive and experience G-d's guiding power, forgiveness and love.

With every word of prayer and every detail of the rituals, we are building the right metaphors necessary to channel the divine truth into our life. Think of all these metaphors as the code number to a great combination lock. The Torah gives us the right balance and combination of metaphors necessary to unlock the vault and get to the real treasures of divine truth.

We need to believe that G-d is like a King and Judge who stands over us and judges us on Rosh Hashanah. We then need to believe that G-d is also like a forgiving Father, who picks us up, supports and forgives us on Yom Kippur. And then on Sukkot, G-d is like our Lover, close to us, holding us in a loving embrace. All this unlocks the door to experiencing the ecstasy of our intimate connection with G-d on Simchat Torah.

This is the true meaning and power of faith. Faith is not a collection of ideas that we adopt. It is an orientation to life and the Source of all life-G-d. Faith is a way of seeing. Unlike the popular saying "Seeing is believing", Jewish mysticism teaches, "Believing is seeing." In other words, the greater our faith is in G-d, the more G-d can become manifest in our lives. The more we believe that G-d is like a King, the more divine power and guidance can enter into our lives. The more we believe that G-d is like a compassionate Father, the more compassion and forgiveness can become manifest in our lives. And the more we believe that G-d is like a Lover, the more divine love, intimacy and oneness can fill our lives. The more we believe, the more we can receive.

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