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The Kabbalah of Love: Part One

By Shifra Hendrie

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(This is the first article in a new series on the Kabbalah of Love - stay tuned for upcoming articles!)

Intimate Love.

What feelings do these words stir up in you? Longing? Excitement? Pleasure? Fear?

Whatever the feeling, if thinking about intimate love makes your heart beat faster, I'm not surprised. This feeling is more powerful than almost any we can experience. That's because it's nothing less than the touching of two souls.

Three years ago I suffered the terrible loss of a younger brother. In an attempt to actually experience something beyond the painfully limiting framework of the physical world, I made a couple of visits to a hypnotherapist who practiced past-life regression therapy.

Under hypnosis, I had an experience that I will never forget. I don't know whether it was a dream, a memory from another life, or my soul expressing itself through images, but this is what happened:

During the session, the therapist directed me to get in touch with "a memory from an earlier time". Suddenly, out of nowhere, I saw myself as a young woman, Polynesian perhaps, with long dark hair. I was standing in front of a small white hut, tall green bamboo plants swaying gently on each side. I walked forward and entered the hut. Inside I saw a simple room, a dirt floor and a long low wooden table. Cross-legged by the table sat a young man. As I entered, he looked up into my eyes and smiled at me.

What happened next is something that made an indelible impression on me.

As I saw his smile I felt a blinding, overwhelming love pass from him into me. The sensation was as strong as a physical blow. Without conscious thought, instantaneously, my entire being responded. I was flooded with a sensation of light, joy and oneness. I felt my heart - my whole essence - leap out of

my body toward him.

The experience was dazzling.

I don't think intimacy gets more intense than this, the tangible, intense, overwhelming merging of two souls drawn to each other out of pure essential love.

Here's my question: From where did this experience come? I was lying on a couch in a hypnotist's office. Outside of the silent therapist, nobody was there but me. In actual fact, at that moment of overwhelming love, unity and connection, I was, on the physical plane at least, entirely alone.

Whether or not this incident actually took place in some earlier life, at that moment this tangible joy,

love and connection was coming solely from inside of me.

From where precisely did it come? Where was it hiding before this experience? And where did it go back to when the session was over? How can a feeling so pure, bright and overwhelmingly real be here one moment, gone the next?

Many years ago, when a cousin of mine was four years old, she suddenly looked down at herself and exclaimed: "I'm all alone!" Her mother quickly reassured her: "Don't worry, Sweetheart, I'm right here."

My cousin's response? "No, I mean in here! I'm all alone in here!"

That feeling of 'all alone' is something every one of us can relate to. Our bodies separate us from each other and from our Source in the unifying Oneness from which we come. But just beneath the surface there is a part of each of us that is never disconnected, never alone. This part is always present, but is concealed - often completely - behind the stories, struggles and concerns of our ego-based identities.

This 'all alone' is the profoundest of illusions. And it's all the more profound because it feels so very real.

But this illusion is no accident. In order to allow for the existence of limitations, boundaries, separateness, polarity, conflict, and free choice (i.e. human existence) G-d performs a feat more challenging than any we can imagine. Like the hand within the puppet, He hides Himself within the fragmented details of Creation while at the same time remaining their activating force. Like the concealed hand does for the lifeless puppet, the spark of G-d concealed within you makes you alive. The goal: to see through the illusion and live in alignment with the truth.

In truth, despite my example, you are not a puppet. You are created in the image of G-d. You are invested with conscious awareness and the power to choose.

You can choose to relate to yourself only within the context of your limited 'role'; the specific circumstances, struggles and goals of your daily life. You can believe, or at any rate live, as if that is the whole picture. This is like identifying with the appearance and role of the puppet and with the script

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of whatever play is being acted out today.

Or you can choose to look deeper, seeing through the limits of your ego-based identity and immediate life circumstances to the Creative Divine spark that makes you live.

So what's this got to do with love?

Back to my experience. I didn't know who I was, much less who the man was. I was disconnected from all stories, agendas, past and future. I was disassociated from my identity, the puppet. But the love - the leaping of my heart, my essence, to connect with another, was very, very real.

That's because love is an indelible part of the landscape of the soul. Like the spark within a flintstone – invisible but unextinguishable – the spark of pure unconditional love is concealed but infinitely present within the essence of every one of us.

Kabbalah often compares the soul to the flame of a candle. Just as a flame is always reaching up, trying to reconnect with its source in the supernal fire, at the pure heart of all love and yearning is the

soul's passionate desire to reconnect with its Divine Source.

Within every human being who walks the face of this earth, there is a pure spark of the Divine Source of us all. Just as we're drawn to connect with our Source, we are drawn to connect with that spark. Your own pure essence is seeking to connect with the pure essence and spark of another.

As long as you identify exclusively with the puppet, i.e. your limited ego-based identity, the love that you experience will be limited as well. You will allow yourself to embrace only that which reinforces your ego, helps you meet your 'survival' needs, and protects you from a frightening sense of vulnerability. This level of love, although very human and an integral part of most relationships, is conditional and agenda-based.

But when you identify with the Divinity within yourself, the part beyond the stories and agendas, you create an opening for your essence. This automatically creates an opening for the essence of others. And wherever essence touches essence - love - authentic love – becomes revealed.

Making it real:

There are two basic paths to creating this opening, and both are important:

CREATE AN OPENING: Challenge the limiting boundaries of your identity by doing things that take you out of your comfort zone. It's especially important to do this in your relationships. For example: allow yourself to be vulnerable, let someone else be right, listen to understand instead of to be understood, open yourself to a new point of view, give generously of your resources even when it feels hard.

FILL YOURSELF WITH LIGHT: Nurture your inner spark by doing things that connect you with G-d

and your own soul, a higher, truer plane of reality. Communicate with your Creator from your heart. Get more deeply acquainted with G-d's perspective and your soul's mission by learning, absorbing and integrating the deep, powerful light of Authentic Kabbalah. Give charity and practice kindness. Watch for your messages and for opportunities to make a difference.

All of these things will help you to expand the limits of who you know yourself to be and create an opening and channel for your essence to express itself.

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Shifra Hendrie is a personal and spiritual coach who has been studying principles of authentic Kabbalah for over 20 years. Her workshops deliver this transformational spiritual wisdom in a unique and powerful way. To download Shifra's fascinating new book, "Seven Kabbalah Secrets that Can Change Your Life", free for a limited time only, go to www.KabbalahOfTransformation.com.

Bible & Kabbalah: The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

By Rabbi Michael Ozair

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There is continuous creation,
out of the new ideas discovered in the Torah.

Zohar, Genesis, Introduction, 52

OUR PURPOSE FOR THE STUDY

Students of Kabbalah understand the Torah (Hebrew Bible) as a mystical book wherein the Kabbalistic system is embodied in allegories and symbols. Thus, the Torah and the Kabbalah are dependent on and complete each other. . The illumination emanating from the study ignites the soul, setting it on fire with the awareness of a deeper and Higher Reality. Its study and insights are themselves mystical experiences.

Why Study Them in "Blocks"?

The need for exploring these archetypal accounts in weekly blocks can be understood in the idea that what Spirit has to teach us, must be taught in segments. Spirit does not confront us with its totality, for it would be far too vast, too immense on our psyche to integrate all lessons of spiritual growth at once, therefore it is broken down into parts, or what we call the weekly parsha or Torah portions.

Creating a Collective Portal of Light

For thousands of years now, we have studied these sacred texts. It is taught by the Kabbalists that when we collectively learn the parsha of that specific week with its spiritual teachings, we tap into a portal of Heavenly Light. The more people engaged in this study, the stronger the portal becomes. The portal creates an opening for the Earth and her inhabitants to be flooded with Shefa, Divine Light, which is very much needed today to penetrate the veil of mass consciousness on our planet.

Those who have done their spiritual work will be more able to quickly assimilate the Light into their beings and use it to propel themselves forward in their earthly endeavors.

INTRODUCTION – BIBLICAL TEXT:

"Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart" (Exodus 10:1)

In this week's Torah portion, we read that G-d hardens Pharaoh's heart. In Hebrew thought, the heart is the core of a person, the seat of emotions, intellect and will. Regarding the above Biblical verse several questions must be raised: If G-d was controlling Pharaoh's heart, then Pharaoh had no choice to do what he did and was therefore not really making his own decisions. Why then blame Pharaoh for anything? Additionally, where is the Free Will in all this?

The following commentaries based on Judaism's Hasidic tradition shed some very interesting insight into the entire Biblical account, and of course, into ourselves.

It will comprise of three sections, with each section introducing a Spiritual Law:

- First Law – Light is Impartial
- Second Law – Law of Accountability
- Third Law – Law of Correction

FIRST LAW: LIGHT IS IMPARTIAL

The following is a beginning point, taught as a fundamental principle by Reb Nachman of Breslov:

"From the mouth of the Most High comes neither good nor bad. What emanates is a simple Light. However, according to the level of the vessel that receives the Light, so is Light inside formed and perceived."

In other words, Reb Nachman is saying the following:

Light, as revealed in our world, is not selective, nor does it discriminate. It is present in It's entirety at all times and in all places. This Light follows the direction we put our attention and energy. Since this Light is all-inclusive and all-pervading, we have a responsibility with

where we focus our attention.

Since Light does not discriminate as to where It is led, then why could It not be the very energy behind the hardening of Pharaoh's heart? It is Pharaoh who is choosing to harden his heart, Light is just the energy he is using towards his own decisions. As it says in the Talmud, "The door shall be opened for one who comes knocking to defile himself" (Masechet Yoma: 38b)

This is where free choice comes in. According to the Torah, we are even given "assistance" even to make the wrong choices. Again, this is because the Light does not discriminate. It gives of Itself to all.

With this in mind, the following Hasidic commentary comes as a very interesting point to WHY Pharaoh needed G-d's Light to harden his own heart:

"Pharaoh needed to be strengthened by G-d in order to keep his composure and make his own choices. Moses and Aaron, were after all, great tzaddikim (holy sages), full of signs and wonders. It would have been impossible not to surrender to them had not Pharaoh's heart been made stronger by G-d."
(Source: Rabbi Eliezer Ish Horowitz in Noam Megadim).

This idea of G-d being the fuel behind even one's misdirected, foolish and evil intentions may be shocking, but it is not something new. Our tradition recognizes that conscious thought is the starting point of every new creation, and since our world is a Free Will Zone, we have a responsibility of where we direct and focus our thoughts/energy.

In other words, Torah teaches us personal accountability that must be taken with great sensitivity and awareness, as we come to realize what a tremendous power we have at our conscious disposal. Learning from Pharaoh's misuse of Spiritual Law, we need to do the opposite, as we shall soon see.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Since Light is impartial, does this justify Pharaoh's position? Absolutely not.

The Zohar (3:47b) states, "The greatest revelation of G-dliness is the Light that emerges from Darkness." Thus we see that not only is there value to darkness – but when we attempt to draw Light out from it, it becomes the GREATEST display of G-dliness.

Reb Tzadok HaCohen adds the following insight regarding darkness:

"The (Hebrew) word for darkness – choshech can be read in two different ways,(depending on whether we read the interchangeable middle letter as a shin or a sin) A dot on the right side will give us the word choshech–darkness. A dot on the left will yield the word chosech–to withhold. What then is darkness but the withholding of Light?"

If darkness is the withholding of Light, our job in the world then becomes to reveal it.

A good place to begin is within ourselves.

"Every time you find yourself at conflict with a part of yourself that is self sabotaging –the Pharoah part – remember that the force of might that is behind this destructive part is really an unconscious and misdirected power, a "hardening" of G–d. When you unravel the hardened heart, you will discover that the intention is pure and the power is G–dly, and thus, transformable." – Rabbi Avraham of Trisk (Magen Avraham)

What happens to those, such as Pharoah, who do not seek to "unravel the hardened heart"?

When one does not take a personal accountability of their resistances to change, it is inevitable that plagues break out. It took 10 plagues until Pharoah, the archetype of resistance, was able to surrender to the inevitable change that awaited him.

This introduces us to our Second Law – the Law of Accountability.

SECOND LAW – LAW OF ACCOUNTABILITY

In order to understand the Metaphysics behind the Law of Accountability we need to further understand what our role is in dealing with Light and Darkness.

According to Judaism's mystical tradition, when we encounter darkness, we have an option by which we are held accountable: to either push it away or to transform it. The difference is the following:

"When light PUSHES AWAY the darkness, eventually another darkness shall come. When the darkness itself is TRANSFORMED into light, it is a Light that no darkness can ever again oppose. It is a higher grade of Light" (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson zt"l – the late Lubavitcher Rebbe).

The Pharoah of the Torah text not only neglects to transform his darkness into light, or even push it away, but resists it, and thus becomes further hardened by it, as a result.

Again, this Pharoah part of ourselves is in truth a Divine part of ourselves but one that remains blocked and unevolved.

The greater the resistance to the Moshe (Moses) liberating force within, the more we witness on ourselves strange behaviors, violent demonstrations of wrath, and crazy outbreaks of irrationality – in other words – plagues.

PHAROAH'S FATE – THE LAW OF CORRECTION

The universe shows us that our daily encounters in the world will persuade us to embrace our inner

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contradictions, challenge us to make compromises while offering us the reward of wholeness if we surrender to Reality.

Like Pharaoh, when we resist what we perceive as an opposition or threat to our reality, we inevitably attract and must face conflict.

Like Pharaoh, when we are unable to take appropriate actions, we inevitably become the victims of Life's correction.

Like Pharaoh, whatever we refuse to embrace about ourselves will ultimately deprive us of our peace.

G-d indeed hardens Pharaoh's heart and indeed punishes him. But G-d is not the one to blame for it. Pharaoh is.

The text implies that during the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. It was not until the end of the plagues that the text changes to "G-d hardening Pharaoh's heart".

This is because although we are given free choice in this universe, it is only up to a point.

In Kabbalah we have what is called, "The Law of the Vessel" or "Law of Correction" which means, the universe (Vessel) has within it a self correcting mechanism. When anything reaches an extreme, the Universe corrects it by bringing it back into balance. When a body gets too cold, it shivers. When it gets too hot, it sweats. Likewise, according to the Law of the Vessel, if someone decides to do harm of their own volition, they are given free reign to do just that (which is the nature of free choice), but there'll come a point where their

ability to freely make their own wrongful moral and spiritual choices will be taken away from them, and both that person and their acts of evil will be undone. Therefore, as our Sages have taught, our Universe is comprised of a delicate balance, perfect in its own way, of both Mercy and Justice – Chesed and Gevurah.

In the meantime, let us continue moving forward with honesty, humility and a willingness to be advocates for G-d's Light. Tomorrow still holds many seas to cross, a wilderness to wander, and a Promised Land that awaits both you and I.

Blessings,
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