



Shlomo gave so much, brought into the world so much, and shared so much. He left us with things that had we not crossed his path almost assuredly we would never have received them. Of all his teachings what Shlomo most bequeathed us was to hear song - to want to hear song - to ache to hear song - to know that song is in everything. He taught us to listen to the song of the broken heart and the falling tears, the song of the setting sun and the rising moon, the song of the children and parents, the song of Jews and Jerusalem, the song of husband and wife, the song of Israel and the Holy Temple, the song of brothers and sisters, the song of love and G-d, the song of You and Me, the song of Shabbat and Yom Tov, the song of G-d and Torah, the song of Creator and Creation. He taught us his songs and the music he sang is his Torah, the Torah that he used to connect us to the Holiest Song of all - the Song of the Holiness of Being and Oneness.

Daniel Nakonechny, Beit El, Israel

I was never taught sweetness. My teachers were mostly trained in Gateshead Yeshiva or were Holocaust survivors. On coming to America they were Lithuanian-trained graduates of a system that prided itself on intellectual mastery and erudition, never sweetness.

Torah was thus to be mastered and the Talmud represented Torah, most of time. Even the weekly Parsha and the novellae we were expected to display were judged on the merits of explaining the *pshat* or plain meaning of the text, and to resolve conflicts and difficulties with grammatical irregularities or plain contradictions between one text and another in the Bible. But sweetness? Who ever heard of sweetness? It would have been as if you would ask me to find sweetness in mathematics or physiology! I would have laughed.

But sweetness is what precisely the Hassidic Masters demand we find in Torah, in the sacred texts of our tradition. The revolution that is Hassidut is not merely confined to the praxis or to the prayerful posture of the devotee, rather it extends to the intellectual and the learning experience itself. It affects all areas of life especially the mind.

Let us explore this with the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, the Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Reb Moshe Chaim Efraim of Sadilkov, whose work was printed in 1808. We will focus on two teachings, the first that discusses the very notion (already stated in the Talmud) that God's vitality and essence is somehow enclothed in the material words of Torah; and the second Torah that claims that we must seek the sweetness inherent in Torah to access the divine.

Parshas Re'eh

“It is well known that the (first word of the decalogue *anochi* meaning I, in ‘I am the lord your God’) *anochi* can be deconstructed to represent the initial letters of the following words “*anah nafshi kesavis yehavis*” meaning “I myself am written into the text” (Talmud Shabbat 104a) and I have already written elsewhere¹ that when a person learns Torah *lishma* (meaning for its own sake-without ulterior motives) then he injects *chayus* (meaning vitality) which is the aspect of spirit and soul (*ruach and neshama*) into Torah, which is the aspect of *nefesh* (life), and he thus makes the Torah pure and complete (*t'mima and sh'leima*).

Here Rebbe claims that the very act of studying Torah is the infusion of one's own spirituality i.e. levels of *ruach* and *neshama* into the text and thereby accesses the very Divine that inspired the text originally. Because the I-ness of God Himself is inscribed into the very nature and materiality of the text of Torah, one gains access by learning without ulterior motive, to that very pristine purity and wholesomeness. One infuses *chayus* or vitality into the text by learning this way and completes the Torah by adding this soulness and thereby rescues Torah from its own lower level of soul/*nefesh* by adding *ruach* and

¹ Parshas Vayigash, Ki Sissa, and Acharei Mos

neshama to it. The act of studying Torah thus becomes an act of inscription as well as incarnation of spirit.

Parshas Ki Savo

“The Talmud Berachos 5a states ‘There is no good (tov) other than Torah’, and In Talmud Chagiga 12a, ‘and God saw that the light was (too) good’ so he buried (hid) it for the saints (in the future).

My grandfather of blessed memory (the Holy Baal Shem Tov) said ‘ It was buried (hidden) in the Torah’.

The novella (chidush) of the Holy Master over and above the well know midrashic comment of the goodness of creation being hidden for the future was that it was hidden specifically in the torah itself. Thus implying that any saint can access this hidden good by applying himself to Torah.

So this is the meaning of the verse “And you shall be joyous with all the good (which the Lord gives you)” (Deut 26:11) the good in Hebrew *ha-tov* meaning five aspects of Tov/goodness i.e. you will merit the five lights (buried or hidden) in the the 5 books of the Five Books of Moses. This means you will merit to access the Torah of truth...and all your joy will emanate from Torah only.

The Degel now applies the goodness of torah with feeling the joy of this goodness that automatically results from its study.

As the Ohr HaChayim points out on the words “and you shall rejoice” (op cit) if only a person could taste of the sweetness of the true Torah they would almost go insane and go out of their minds because of its sweetness.

Just to savor his words!! Here Rebbe artfully composes a subtle combination of his grandfather’s holy words that the goodness and light of Torah which were hidden for the saints were actually buried in Torah and the definite article of ha-tov means the letter the or numeral five pointing to the five Books of Moses. The primordial light and good is buried and hidden in these five books of Moses. The Ohr HaChayim adds that the Torah is so sweet that one could literally go out of one’s mind if one really tasted the true Torah. The Degel seems to suggest that this means tasting the sweetness of Torah.

The light and goodness of Torah is its sweetness.

What is this Torah they are talking about? What is this sweetness? Where does it come from? Who teaches such sweetness?

Reb Shlomo comes to mind. When I first came to hear his Torah and his songs I realized that you can only understand Reb Shlomo's songs if you understand his Torah and you can only understand his Torah if you understand his songs! The two were inextricably linked. He understood the power of song and the sweetness of Torah.

For those of us born into the intellectual world of Torah study this came as a revelation!

Our recovery must include the search for sweet Torah! Our scanning of our traditions and its texts must recover those that give sweetness as the Hassidic masters demand!

Our study and learning must be able to infuse the Torah with love and soul so as to rescue it too from mere *nefesh* the lowest level of spiritual vitality. The struggle for the soul of Torah, rather than mere rhetoric or midrashic poetics, is raised in its stakes to its very survival! The Torah cries out for the saint or zaddik to find Her and rescue Her by infusion of soul. Once discovered only sweetness is found, and such a sweetness that one desires nothing else, one literally goes out of one's mind or so we are told.

This dual pathway of seeking the sweetness within and finding happiness comes because God Himself is incarnated within the text. The very first word of the most important Biblical text the Ten Commandments, *anochi* "I am the Lord your God" the very introduction of Self-the authority behind the very commandments, the word itself is expanded to reflect four other words (method known as *notarikon*) which mean the embodiment of the divine in the text.

Seeing God in the text is taken beyond the metaphorical and talmudic midrashic interpretation to new levels of mystical meaning by the Hassidic Masters. It now comes to mean a textual experience of the divine by accessing hidden "lights" literally buried within at the time of creation itself. The zaddik is able to taste the divine light and experience such pleasure as no other by bringing his own soul to the textual table.

This reminds me of poetry surely! And Rebbe Nachman (especially the blind beggar!) In poetry I am exposed to hidden lights that move me to tears and expose my deep wells of connection to nature and life.

Let me end with a poem by Rav Kook translated by Itzchak Marmorstein which uses all the metaphors of light Torah and experience we have been discussing:



Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook

TECHIYA - Renewal

*Give me, give me
rays of light,
Too much for me, too much
these pits of darkness.*

*Give me the gift
of purity of thought,
Enough for me, enough
these prisons of confusion.*

*Gift me, gift me
with the power of desire,
Extend to me
balls of fire.*

*I'll explode with them
the false towers and structures
And the vanity of vanities
that dwell within.*

*I proclaim liberation
for my words and my pen
Without keeping
my wine in its barrel.*

*And without fear
the anxiety of the enslaved*

*We will announce together
words/matters of unity/uniqueness/unification.*

*Our words like arrows
will hit their marks,
And to our quarreling brothers and sisters
speak of our wrongdoing.*

*To raise ourselves beyond the divisions,
for the greatness of the people,
To expand our consciousness
as broad as the ocean.*

*To shake the dust
from the lands of our exile
That are cleaving
to our sickly hearts.*

*To understand the principle
that is everything,
The Torah, our destiny,
the power of the Divine.*

*To be concerned for the soul,
the soul of our people,
Turned over desolate,
in its exile from its home.*

*To awaken life,
for the renewal of the people
On the earth and in the heavens,
As they are there.*