

Nullified Within the Infinite Light

Reb Noson of Breslov

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Reb Noson's teaching is based on Likutey Moharan I, 65 – one of Rebbe Nachman's key lessons, which discusses the "Master of the Field" who brings all souls to perfection, the experience of spiritual ascent, self-nullification in prayer, the ultimate illusion of evil, and transcendence of suffering. One of the intriguing concepts of this lesson is that of "making one" out of the sequential words of prayer – so that when one has recited the last word of prayer, he still remembers the first word. This happens when one binds his mind and heart to each word of prayer, thus uniting with each word completely. Then the entire prayer bears this quality of unity, and is not merely a string of separate words. This nullifies all harsh judgments and afflictions.

Rosh Hashanah is the great and awesome Day of Judgment. Due to the severity of the heavenly judgment aroused then, it is necessary to nullify oneself completely – to the point that one becomes absorbed within the Infinite Light. One beholds the ultimate goal, the perfected world where everything is entirely one and entirely good, and all harsh judgments dissolve.

This is the paradigm of the sleep of Rosh Hashanah, discussed in the kabbalistic meditations of the ARI. One removes and negates his self-awareness, and becomes subsumed within the ultimate, which is the Infinite Light. Thus, all harsh judgments and all afflictions cease and desist.

However, it is impossible to remain constantly in this state of self-nullification; it can only be experienced intermittently, in a manner of "advance and retreat (ratzo va-shov)" [alluding to the living angels in Ezekiel's vision of the Merkavah / Divine Chariot]. And when one returns to ordinary awareness following the state of self-nullification, the harsh judgments and sufferings intensify, because they see (so to speak) that one wishes to overcome them. Yet while one remains in the state of self-nullification, they have no effect; for one has transcended everything and become subsumed within the Infinite. Only afterward do they increase. This is like the struggle of two combatants.

However, through the after-impression of this light which remains after the return to ordinary awareness, one experiences joy. This joy enables one to draw forth new Torah insights. These Torah insights "cool off" and annul the judgments and sufferings that seek to latch onto a person after he returns from the state of nullification.

This is reflected by the shofar service of Rosh Hashanah. The shofar is associated with Receiving the Torah, an event that was accompanied by the sound of the shofar. When

we sound the shofar, we elicit the spiritual power of the Receiving of the Torah -- which is an aspect of drawing forth new Torah insights via the "afterglow" of illumination that follows the state of absorption in the Infinite Light. This is the paradigm of "awakening from sleep" [i.e., spiritual sleep].

Thus, the main tempering of judgment on Rosh Hashanah is accomplished by the sounding of the shofar. For the tempering of judgment goes hand in hand with returning from the state of nullification, when [these forces] seek to prevail. Then they must be tempered by the shofar blasts, which are bound up with the elicitation of Torah insights. As a result, the light of Oneness illuminates the mind – for in essence, everything is one.

This is the fundamental tikkun (reparation) of prayer. One must bring the [multiplicity of the words of] prayer into a state of unity, so that when one comes to the last word of the prayer, he still remembers the first word. This is the perfection (sheleimus) of prayer. Thus, Rosh Hashanah is called the "Day of Remembrance." Then, the faculty of memory is rectified (Otzar HaYirah, Rosh Hashanah #36).