

BAAL SHEM TOV INSIGHTS

Issue 32: Shemot

By Rabbi Simon Jacobson · Exclusive for Members

I AM A CHILD AND BELIEVE Beyond the World of Logic

SUMMARY

Who is closer to the truth – adults or children? Ostensibly it would seem that a mature adult, whose mind and emotions are fully developed, would be able to access the truth more than an undeveloped child. Indeed, for many years, until just recently, secular psychology saw a child as a “dumb” adult in the making. Religious Puritans even saw children as “born in sin” and as little savages that needed strong measures to keep them in line!

The Baal Shem Tov – and Torah in general – sees things, shall we say, a bit different. Actually quite different; a perspective which is the exact opposite than the secular view: A child is the closest possible thing to the truth. The simplicity of the child touches – far more than any adult – the simplicity of the Essence of all existence! Indeed, it is the developed mind of the adult that conceals and blocks the experience of pure truth...

In this week’s insight, discover the moving way the Baal Shem Tov describes himself as a child... A powerful story captures the life-altering words of the Baal Shem Tov to a great scholar who was left confused in his ponderings on the existence G-d.

Above all, we will learn how to tap our single most powerful resource: Your inner child.

What is a Child?

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I Am A Child and Believe

The Midrash on this week's Torah portion (on the verse¹ *"and He said, I am the G-d of your father"*) refers to Moses as a "child." As it is written: "A *pesi* believes everything".² What is the meaning of *pesi*? A child. Because in Arabia, they call a child a *pasia*.³

The Baal Shem Tov told his students:⁴ "After all the profound levels of understanding that I attained in the supernal roots of the Torah and the mitzvos, and after all the spiritual pleasure that I experienced, I put everything aside to *serve G-d in simple faith. Ich bin a na'ar un gleib* – I am a child/fool⁵ and believe! And⁶ even though it is written: "A fool believes everything," it is also written:⁷ "G-d protects the fools."

The Perplexed Scholar

Rabbi Shmuel Kaminka related the following story with the Baal Shem Tov: In the city Satinov there was a scholar who once, on a Friday following the prayers, immersed himself in deep contemplation on the existence of G-d. Poring over different

philosophical texts from the early philosophers, the scholar could not reach any clarity, to the point that he remained perplexed and confused in his ponderings.

Sensing the scholar's predicament, the Baal Shem Tov came from Medzibush to see the scholar. The Baal Shem Tov approached him and said (in Yiddish): "Ihr kleret tzi es iz doh a Go-t. Ich bin a na'ar un gloib." "You are wondering whether there is a G-d. I am a child/fool and believe."

A child is the closest possible thing to the truth. The simplicity of the child touches – far more than any adult – the simplicity of the Essence of all existence!

With these words the Baal Shem Tov left him and returned to Medzibush. The scholar thought to himself: "Who revealed to this man [the Baal Shem Tov] this secret of what I was thinking? Clearly this is a proof and a sign that there is a one and only Creator, Who reveals secrets to those

that fear Him."

The Aristocrat and the Pauper

In another place the Baal Shem Tov offers us a beautiful and profound analogy to explain King David's words in Psalms:⁸ "A prayer of the pauper when he enwraps himself and pours out his words before G-d."⁹

Two people were invited to see the great king with the opportunity to ask for whatever they wish. One, an educated, sophisticated aristocrat. The other, a poor, illiterate pauper. The aristocrat was the first one to arrive for his appointment. As he entered the magnificent palace, he was taken by all the beau-

tiful architecture and furnishings, the exquisite collections of art and literature, the wide variety of exotic fruit, spices and wines from around the world, the sheer majesty of the king's glorious domain. As he made his way from chamber to chamber, he became completely mesmerized by all the surroundings. In fact, because of his excellent education and sophisticated taste, his deep appreciation for all these treasures completely seduced him, to the point that he lost sense of time and... missed his appointment with the king!

Then came the pauper. With no education, no taste, no etiquette, he walked through all the beautiful chambers, oblivious to the magnificence around him, and went straight into the king's inner sanctum. There he asked the king for everything – for wisdom, riches, beauty and the ability to appreciate and acquire the majestic treasures of the king.

Says the Baal Shem Tov: When you stand before the Heavenly King pray like a pauper. Suspend all your faculties, your sophistication, your intelligence and knowledge. And just stand “naked” and innocent before the King, enwrap yourself and pour out your words before G-d. Then you will get all your wishes fulfilled, including all the Divine revelations.

The Power of Innocence

The Baal Shem Tov is obviously not advocating illiteracy. He is teaching us an invaluable life lesson.

Each of us has two dimensions to our being – mirroring two dimensions in the

Divine experience:

1) Our expression. The way we express and reveal ourselves through our faculties. In Chassidic language this is called “*giluim*,” literally revelations, defined expressions – which includes all the ways we manifest in this world. These expressions all have distinct parameters and limits.

2) Our essence, which is beyond any form of defined expression and limited parameters.

As human created in the Divine Image, these two dimensions within us is rooted in and evolved from two dimensions of the Divine:

1) *Giluim*. Divine expressions. How G-d expresses Himself through wisdom, majesty, beauty and all the Divine emanations and attributes in the cosmic order. Though they are all expressions and extensions of the Divine, each has its own definitions

and parameters.

2) *Atzmus*. The Divine Essence, which is beyond any form of expression and definition.

Touching the Essence

There are times – and perhaps this defines most of our lives – when we experience and relate to the “revealed” expressions of the Divine. Just as most of the time we engage life through our own defined expressions. This is clearly a very important part of our lives – the way we interact with each other and with G-d in a defined expressive fashion.

...just stand “naked” and innocent before the King, enwrap yourself and pour out your words before G-d. Then you will get all your wishes fulfilled, including all the Divine revelations.

But, when you want to connect with the Essence of G-d, with G-d Himself as he stands in His pure and innocent Essence, beyond any form of expression, then you need to suspend your defined “*giluim*” and stand like a “pauper,” stripped of all sophistication, knowledge and taste, and pour your soul out to G-d the King.

If you allow your aristocratic attainments and your sophisticated appreciations to control you, then you may reach great heights, but you will only be able to access and relate to the Divine revelations. And as such, you will be seduced by the magnificent manifestations at each station of the journey, but you will miss your destination – your appointment with the King Himself, the Divine Essence, as He stands in His own inner sanctum.

The only way to access *Atzmus*, the Essence, is to suspend your faculties and stand like an empty-handed pauper, like an innocent child, and pour your heart out to the King.

The Power of the Child

This is what the Baal Shem Tov told his students: “After all the profound levels of understanding that I attained in the supernal roots of the Torah and the mitzvos, and after all the spiritual pleasure that I experienced” – after all the *giluim* – “I put everything aside to serve G-d in simple faith. *Ich bin a na'ar un gleib* – I am a child and believe! And even though it is written: “A fool believes everything,” it is also written: “G-d protects the fools.”

Based on this, let us now revisit the psyche of the child and that of the adult. The innocent child, precisely because his faculties are not yet developed, is the closest we will ever be to the truth – to our own essence and to the Essence of G-d.

The simplicity of the child and his innocent faith touches – far more than any adult – the simplicity of the Essence of all existence! While the developed mind of the adult, may experience great revelations, but at the same time it conceals and blocks the experience of pure truth.

The sophisticated adult can miss his appointment with the King. The child will not.

No matter how old you are, each of us has our inner child intact. Nothing can be healthier than getting – and staying – in touch with your child, with your own innocent essence, and allowing it to inform all your *giluim*, your defined experiences, expression and faculties.

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the Divine revelations.

Learn from the Baal Shem Tov – a scholar far greater than any one of us – how to suspend our intelligence for something far greater:

I am a child and I believe!

Sometimes, the wisest one of them all is the fool...

Sources: Yesod HaAvodah (by Rabbi Avrohom of Slonim) Letter 24. Likkutei Dibburim vol. 3 491c. Keser Shem Tov Hosafos section 155-157. Sichas Shabbos Parshas Shemos 5725.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Shemos 3:6.

² Mishlei 14:15.

³ Midrash Rabbah, Shemos 3:1. The Midrashic commentaries (Yefei Toar, Maharzav) explain the connection in various ways: 1) G-d appeared to Moshe in the image of his father (Amrom) so as not to startle or frighten the young Moshe, who was a child (pesi) at the time. 2) Pesi also comes from the word pitui, to entice or seduce. G-d enticed the young Moshe by appearing to him as his father. "Pesi – a person seduced (pesi) – believes everything" he sees and hears. Once Moshe was engaged, G-d said to him "I am not your father, but the G-d of your father," as the Midrash continues.

⁴ Rabbi Avrohom of Slonim writes that he heard this from the mouth of the tzaddik Rabbi Noach Milechvitz.

⁵ Na'ar means both a child and a fool, like pesi, which literally means fool but also means child, as the Midrash explains. In this context fool is not used in a derogatory way (as someone who is beneath and lacks intelligence), but as someone who suspends all his faculties to connect through simple faith to the Divine that is beyond intelligence and knowledge. See Tanya ch. 18: "In relation to the Almighty, Who is beyond intelligence and knowledge, and Who can in no way be comprehended by any thought — all men are like fools before Him," and they can therefore grasp Him only through faith.

⁶ Rabbi Avrohom of Slonim writes that he heard this addition from the tzaddik "R' M'" (he does not write out the full name, only the acronym). Some say that this is referring to Reb Mordechai, the tzaddik Rabbi Mordechai of Lechovitz. But others feel that is more likely Reb Moshe, referring to Rabbi Mosh'ke of Kabrin, the teacher of Rabbi Avrohom of Slonim (from a footnote in Sefer Baal Shem Tov, where this insight is cited).

⁷ Psalms 116:6.

⁸ 102:1.

⁹ See, with variations, Keser Shem Tov section 97.