



58

REVEALING THE HIDDEN

KABBALAH, THE INNER DIMENSION OF JEWISH TEACHING, IS IN FASHION. Film stars say they are studying it in Hollywood, Israeli hippies explore it in Tel Aviv cafes. There are orthodox study groups which present it. In a variety of forms Kabbalah or Chassidic teaching is available on the web. What is it?

Torah is not one-dimensional. There is the Revealed, outer Torah and also the Hidden, inner aspect of Torah. The Sages tell us these were both there at Mount Sinai, where the Torah was given, as described in the Sedra¹. Let us see how.

What happened at Sinai? Led by our great teacher Moses, the entire Jewish people gathered at the foot of the beautiful Sinai mountain. There had been a tremendous build up to this event, including the Plagues and the Splitting of the Sea. Then, gathered together in the Sinai desert, there were several days during which the people prepared for a unique experience.

Finally, at last, it happened: there was fire on the mountain, thunder and lightning, the sound of the Shofar. It was out of this world. It was the most tremendous visionary meeting of an entire nation with G-d one could possibly imagine. The Zohar² says that all existence suddenly seemed different: whichever way a person looked, they could feel they were hearing the Divine energy declaring "I am G-d..." In a most wonderful, indescribable way they heard the Ten Commandments.

The Sages tell us that the details of the text of the Ten Commandments hint at all the 613 Mitzvot of the Torah³. Moses later explained these Mitzvot to the people: all the detailed laws of Jewish life. These constitute

the 'revealed' Torah, the 'body' of the Torah. At Sinai these detailed laws were not obvious. Only the Ten Commandments were revealed.

On the other hand the spiritual experience, the awareness of the presence of G-d, the tremendous feelings of awe which everyone felt, all relate to the inner dimension, the 'soul' of the Torah. This kabbalistic-chassidic aspect was revealed openly at Sinai⁴.

Through the ages both aspects of Torah have been transmitted. The revealed Torah is the basis of standard Jewish education. These laws, such as how to keep Shabbat and Festivals, kashrut, laws of marriage and of business, are discussed and explained in the Mishnah, Talmud, Rambam and the Code of Law.

However, the Talmud also contains many stories and comments with deep spiritual meaning, expressing the inner teachings of the Torah, although this is not always apparent. There is also a more intense version of Jewish mysticism, contained in books like the Zohar. This is not for everyone. Without proper guidance, one might misunderstand their message. Hence for many centuries this kind of study was restricted to just a small elite.

However, 250 years ago the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chassidism, declared that the Jewish people need the input of the inner dimension of Torah. This will help us aspire to central Jewish values such as true love of G-d and dedicated love of one's fellow. We also need the inner dimension in order to appreciate the relevance and personal and global significance of all the practical 'revealed' laws of Jewish life.

The Tanya by Rabbi Shneur Zalman, written round 1800, translated into English and other languages, and also other books available in print and on the web⁵, help us make contact with this important aspect of Jewish thought. The inner dimension helps each of us as an individual internalise the inspiration of the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and live our lives following its eternal message.

1. Exodus chs.18-20. 2. Quoted in Tanya I ch.36. 3. See Rashi to Ex.24:12. 4. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 1 pp. 149-50. 5. Surf www.chabad.org, and audio classes of the Alef Kabbalah group and Project LeChaim at www.chabadresearch.net (of course, not on Shabbat!)

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



SEDRA YITRO

LEADERS

The score was four nothing and Ben was starting to stress a little. After all, he was the captain and his team Lightningflash was losing, he was trying all the tricks but the opponents, named Thunderbolt, had much better team-work and they seemed to outsmart him every time. Ben had good players and he was shouting out instructions to them as they played but it was just not working.

“Ben,” his best friend Adam said at half time, “what are we going to do? They are smashing us, I mean each person is playing well but we just don’t seem to have the team-work sorted out.”

Ben was sweating and out of breath, he had just run his heart for the ball and then missed the goal by an inch.

“You have to sort out the line-up,” Adam was saying. “You have to get our players to play properly as a team, working with each other. You can’t just expect that you’re going to shout out a command and people are going to hear what you’re saying. And even if they do, that’s not getting us anywhere!”

Ben’s normal breathing pattern was slowly coming back to him and his mind was starting to see things more clearly.

“I don’t understand,” Ben said. “if we have the best players on the field why aren’t we winning? I bet if you match each of our players one for one against the Thunderbolts we are much better, so why are we losing?”

Ben was frustrated and upset. He also wanted to say “and I am a much better player than the captain of the Thunderbolts”, which in a way was true, but he didn’t feel Adam would take very kindly to hearing that, since the Lightningflashes were so obviously losing the game.

“You know,” Adam said, “you remind me of what Moses was doing before Yitro gave him advice. Moses knew that he had the wisdom to tell people what to do. So he wanted everyone to get taught right from the source, and he had everyone asking him for day to day advice.”

“And then Yitro came along,” Ben said, remembering what he had heard in class.

“He could see that Moses needed to set up a system of leaders and guides throughout the whole nation. Like that Moses wouldn’t get tired out... I always like to concentrate in lesson before a game, I find it helps me play better.”

“Right,” Adam said, “so Yitro saw that you have to have a system where everyone works as a team together, not just Moses telling everyone what to do. When you have a team, you win!”

“I see,” Ben said “I have to make people feel that they can make decisions and that they are all working together. Not just trying to hear what I’m shouting from the other end of the field.... You are right, Adam.”

“That’s it!” Adam said excitedly.

“Come on guys!” Ben called out, working out in his mind what he was going to say to his team. Taking an example from Moses and Yitro, he was going to set them up like a system of leaders, working together, who without a doubt would win the second half.

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***