

be one that leaves the bodily self behind; it too must be uplifted and come with us into God's presence.

SHEMEN HA-TOV

The View vis à vis dealing
with difficult people.

Love your neighbor as yourself; I am Y-H-W-H.
(LEV. 19:18)

The author of *Orah le-Hayyim* [R. Avraham Hayyim of Zloczow] once asked R. Shmelke of Nikolsburg how it is possible to fulfill this commandment when my neighbor treats me badly. He gave him a reasonable answer that he was able to accept. "Aren't all the souls of Israel one?" he asked. We were all there together in Adam; each individual soul contains some sparks of that original whole—some from Adam's hands, [some from his feet, etc.], as the holy books tell us.

Now sometimes it happens that a person accidentally strikes himself, even quite hard [on his head]. The head is ruler of the body. But if that person were to pick up a club and strike the hand that had unintentionally hit him, we would consider him a fool. Why should he hurt himself yet again!

The exact same thing is true here. You and your fellow person are a single soul. That person has done you harm due to lack of awareness. When you strike him back, you will be hurting yourself. Think rather that everything that happens comes from God and that God has many emissaries.

But he asked him further: "If you see a person doing what is evil in God's sight, how is it possible to love him?" He replied: "The soul of every person is, as we are taught, a part of God above. Have compassion for God, since one of His holy sparks has become trapped in such a shell!"

The final comment, without saying so directly, is a reading of the end of this verse. Why should you love your neighbor as yourself? Because you are both part of the single Self of Y-H-W-H. The real tragedy of human evil is that a spark of divinity, capable of endless beauty and elevation, has been dragged into the dust.

From Speaking Torah: Spiritual Teachings
from around the Maggid's Table

integrative power. *Dáat* refers to a state of spiritual wakefulness, awareness of the divine presence that underlies and fills all of existence. Egyptian bondage is read by our author as an exile of *dáat*, life in a mental state so bounded by the enslavement of constricted consciousness¹⁸³ that one remains unaware of that presence, seeing only the outer corporeal world. The Exodus or redemption, therefore, is chiefly a matter of awakening to *dáat* and thus realizing that all aspects of the cosmos—and one's own life—are united in divine Being. But the term *dáat* always bears within it the context of the first biblical appearance of the root *y-d'*, whence it is derived: "Adam *yaddá* his wife Eve" (Gen. 4:1), a link of which our author frequently reminds us. The "knowing" to which it refers is thus one not only of intimacy, but one that leads to union, as Genesis (2:24) also tells us: "He will cleave (*davaq*) to his wife and they will become one flesh." *Devequt* is the most widely used kabbalistic term for attachment to God or mystical union, and it too bears this erotic connotation going back to its first usage in Genesis.¹⁸⁴

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The six intervening *sefirot* between *dáat* and *malkhut* are the subject of very frequent discussion in the *Me'or Eynayim*, probably more so than in any other work of the Miedzyrzecz circle.¹⁸⁵ The two triads, composed of *hesed*, *gevurah*, and *tiferet* followed by *neṣaḥ*, *hod*, and *yesod*, are never referred to as *sefirot* here but often by the alternative term *middot*.¹⁸⁶ That word literally means "measures" and was used by the kabbalists to refer to the progressive limitation or "measuring out" of divine radiance as it is passed down the stages of the *sefirotic* ladder. But the term is also used, already in the mishnaic period, to refer to moral qualities, both positive and negative.¹⁸⁷ In Yiddish parlance, a *bal mides* (= *báal middot*) is a moral individual, a trustworthy person. It is in this sense

183. This is *galut ha-dáat*. The link to Egyptian bondage is based on an old and frequently quoted reading of *Miṣrayim* as *meṣar yam*, "Egypt" as "narrow straits." Hence "narrowness" of mind.

184. The devotional usage of the root *d-b-q* is based on several references in Deuteronomy, including 10:20, 11:22, and 30:20. The question of whether *devequt* refers to mystical union, or whether there is an ultimately unitive experience at all in the Jewish sources, is the subject of a great critique of Gershom Scholem by Moshe Idel, whose views are now considered quite convincing. See Scholem, *Messianic*, 203–226 and Idel in *Kabbalah*, 59–73 and (with Bernard McGinn) in *Mystical Union*.

185. He has this most in common with the *Or ha-Me'ir*, where almost every homily is built around a weaving together of the *middot*, restoring the *qomah shelemah*, the "complete figure," of both God and person. This and some other commonalities make it possible to depict these two as constituting a sub-school within the Maggid's circle, though their works reveal significant differences of temperament.

186. He occasionally also uses the term *sikhliyyim*, "intellects," borrowed by the kabbalists from medieval philosophy. See below, *Re'eh*, #II, n. 30.

187. This meaning is especially familiar from its usage in M. Avot, Chapter 5. On the centrality of the raising up of *middot* in the *Me'or Eynayim*, see also Zori, *Not in the Hands of Heaven*, 246ff.

From The Light of the Eyes: Homilies on the Torah, Rabbi Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl
Trans. Arthur Green



וְאֵרָא

Va-Era

ME'OR 'EYNAYIM

... The secret meaning of the Egyptian exile is that true awareness was in exile; people were unable to attain the awareness required to serve our blessed Creator, that of which Scripture says: "Know your father's God and serve Him" (1 Chron. 28:9). Awareness is the root that brings one to full love and fear of God. Know in faith that "the whole earth is filled with God's glory," "there is no place devoid of God," and that God is the true pleasure of all pleasures and the life of life. Then you will come to realize that within any pleasure, were the flow of divine light and the life-force to disappear from it, that pleasure, like all created things, would return to primal chaos, to the void. This is true of all the worlds, both higher and lower: if one could imagine that God's vitality might depart from them, they would be as naught.

God is thus the essence of all things. One who has faith in this will surely not lust after any this-worldly pleasures. If their essence is the blessed Creator, it would be better to hold fast to that true Pleasure! In this way you do not bring about separation from your Root, taking the pleasure only as it appears in physical form. Doing so would make you a separator, dividing the cosmic One from His own presence. All things are called *shekhinah*; that is the life-force of our blessed God, dwelling within all things. If you conduct yourself as most common folk do, you really become a separator, God forbid.

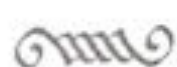
One who has this awareness should look in all things at the inwardness that gives them life. This is God's blessed presence. Cleave to it and you

will come to both awe and love. Of love the Mishnah teaches, on the verse “You shall love Y-H-W-H your God ... with all your might” (Deut. 6:5), that the word *me’od* (“might”) indicates that “you should love God with every quality that He measures out to you (*me’od/moded*). You should thank Him profusely for it” (m. Berakhot 9:5).

“With every quality” means the following. God is infinite, having no borders or limitations. But this world is limited. How could it possibly bear the flowing light of divine life that exists within all things? But God rules the world by His divine qualities. God measures and reduces the intensity of His presence in accord with what the world can bear. This is what “measured qualities” means.

All this was brought about by God’s unattainable wisdom. Sometimes God calls forth one quality, sometimes another, in accord with what His wisdom dictates is needed at each particular time.... The same is true of each person of Israel: God reduces the intensity of divine presence in accord with each person’s mental powers. Sometimes the quality is that of *hesed* [free-flowing love], sometimes of *rahamim* [balanced compassion]. At each particular time, that person is only capable of receiving God through that quality. As a person of awareness, you should accept God’s presence as it is measured out to you in that moment, rejoicing to receive it. Serve God in love and awe. Be thankful that you are aware, for awareness (*da’at*) embraces all the qualities....

When Israel were in Egypt, awareness was in exile; the shell, which preceded the fruit, served to cover it. This is the hard shell of the nut spoken of by Scripture in “I went down into the garden of nuts” (Song 6:11), referring to the exile in Egypt. The nut has a hard outer shell and several finer membranes inside it, hiding the meat within. The hard outer shell was broken in Egypt, so that we can see what is inside. The thin membranes are still there, until our messiah comes (speedily, in our day!). Then inwardness will be revealed completely....



To be free, to be liberated from Egyptian bondage, is to be aware of God as fully as you are able. This means accepting that God’s presence can reveal itself to you in multiple ways. Not all of those are easy to receive; they can include judgment or the “left hand” of God as well as the love that comes from God’s right. Part of awareness is the faith that you are being given the particular gift of divine presence that you need and are able to receive.

This gift of awareness serves to break through the hard shell that surrounds us. It is not clear in the text whether this process is fully determined by God or whether all God gives us is a nutcracker, one that we still have to employ to do the work.

OR TORAH

God [*elohim*] spoke to Moses, saying: "I am Y-H-W-H. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai; by My name Y-H-W-H I was not known to them."
(Ex. 6:2-3)

... The blessed Holy One needed to reduce His light in creating the worlds, so that the light could be received and the creatures not be obliterated by it. This reduction (*tsimtsum*) is considered a negative or "judging" force, one that limits the flow of a love that by nature seeks to spread forth. It serves like a vessel that contains water, not allowing it to simply flow. Even though this reduction seems judgmental, in fact it too is an act of love. Everything that exists, anywhere in the worlds, must contain an element of goodness, which is divine love. "The world is built on love" (Ps. 89:3). Even though this is a withholding of love, the worlds would not exist without it.

This aspect of judgment is represented by the name *elohim*. But that very name contains an admixture of love within it, in the name *el*. "God's love [*hesed el*] all the day" (Ps. 52:3). This is also the meaning of "Y-H-W-H *elohim* is sun and shield" (Ps. 84:12). The name Y-H-W-H refers to the sun [*tif'eret*], as is known, [while *elohim* represents its "shield," *malkhut*]. "Sun" and "shield" are like these two names. You cannot stare into the sun without a shield or visor that separates you from it but allows you to take pleasure in its light. So too the name Y-H-W-H: its radiance, meaning the love and compassion contained within it, is so very intense that the world requires a shield or barrier so that we can receive that light. Thus God had to restrain and limit it, using the name *elohim*....

This is the meaning of **I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai; by My name Y-H-W-H I was not known to them.** This reduction or *tsimtsum* is called forth by the name *shaddai*, for it means "That [*she*] I said to My world: 'Enough!' [*dai*]." God limited the love, so that it not overflow. Nevertheless, this aspect of judgment is called El Shaddai, reflecting the presence of love within it. This withholding itself was