

B"H
Yeshivat Benei N'vi'im
KosherTorah.com

The Tikunei Zohar of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai

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Text

"Rabbi Shimon arose and fled to the wilderness of Lod. He there hid himself in a cave along with his son Rabbi Eliezer. A miracle occurred. A carob tree and a spring of water came forth. They ate from those carobs and drank from that water.

Eliyahu, may he be remembered for good, came to them twice everyday and taught them. No man knew of this

This is called the Tikunei (Rectifications) of the Zohar. These are the seventy faces of the Torah that were expounded by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai on the word Bereshit according to the secrets of the Torah.

Rabbi Shimon arose and began with these words before the Shekhina. He began and said: "The enlightened will shine like the brilliance (zohar) of the heavens" (Dan. 12:3)"

The "enlightened," this refers to Rabbi Shimon and his friends. They were very careful. When they gathered to make this work, they received permission, as did Eliyahu along with them, as did all the souls of the yeshivot to descend among them; as did all the angels who are concealed and [who come by] the path of thought.

Above them all, permission was granted to all the Holy Names, to all the Havayot, and to all the appellations to reveal to them the concealed secrets, each Name according to its level. Permission was also granted to the Ten Sefirot to reveal to them concealed secrets. Permission of this nature was not given to reveal such things until comes the generation of Mashiah."

Commentary

With these words begins the deepest and most profound of all Zoharic literature. The secrets within the Tikunei Zohar are the foundation of everything Kabbalistic that came after it. The work contains seventy chapters called "Tikkunim." Some are short, others

are extremely long. Each one contains pearls of Kabbalistic wisdom, yet unseen in English.

Zoharic literature is not a single book. Even the Zohar itself is a compilation of numerous texts, organized together as one. However, that work did not include all the Zoharic texts. The Tikkunim and the Zohar Hadash are two other works that were published separately after the main body of the Zohar and under their own titles.

Legend has it that there is more Zoharic literature yet undiscovered. If the Dead Sea Scrolls could be hidden for two thousand years and then found, maybe soon we will merit other discoveries of lost Zoharic texts.

Rather than to prolong with unnecessary introduction, let us proceed directly to the text.

In the days after the Bar Kokhba rebellion, Jewish life in Israel was in turmoil. The Roman authorities had no love loss for Jews and had spies everywhere looking for troublemakers. In a conversation once, Rabbi Shimon, talking with other Sages, commented that all the benefits of Roman society had a bad side to them. Overheard by a traitorous Jew, Rabbi Shimon's words were reported to the Roman authorities. Fearing his seditious nature, the Roman sought to kill Rabbi Shimon as they had his teacher, Rabbi Akiva.

Fearing for his life, Rabbi Shimon, and his son Eliezer, fled into a cave and hid there for a period of twelve years. It was during this time, that he was able to invest his full efforts and time to have revealed to him the secrets of the Torah. Indeed, his efforts were greatly rewarded. The opening words of the Tikunei Zohar reveal to us the manner in which these revelations occurred.

The text begins by saying that they “received permission” and that “permission was granted” to reveal the concealed things. From this, we learn a profound truth. There are levels of knowledge inaccessible to human intelligence. If permission is not given from above, then certain aspects of understanding will forever be hidden from human understanding. In other words, we are not masters of our own intellects. There is a Higher Force that enables or disables us from having access to higher forms of knowledge and understanding.

The hidden knowledge cannot be accessed without permission. Once permission is granted, the knowledge is transmitted. This process of transmission and reception is called in Hebrew, “the reception” or as we know it today, the Kabbalah.

What is most important to understand here is the nature of this transmission of information. The text says that Eliyahu was given permission to reveal secrets. Yet, more than he, the Holy Names and the Sefirot themselves were given permission to reveal their secrets.

Here the language of the text reveals to us something profound. It does not say that the secrets of the Holy Names and Sefirot could be revealed, rather the text clearly says that it is the Names and the Sefirot themselves that are doing the revealing. Apparently, the text is revealing to us, however subtly, that Holy Names, Sefirot and their like, all have identities and a consciousness of their own. They are not merely tools in the hands of

their craftsman. They are craftsmen in their own right, with souls, consciousness, and choice. They were given permission to reveal themselves.

Therefore, we learn that when one approaches a Holy Name, a Sefirah, or their like, one actually develops a relationship with it on a personal level. This is no mere philosophical contemplation upon an attached and removed concept. Rather this is a living and personal relationship with an actual other. More about this will have to be discussed at another time.

All of these entities and powers came to teach Rabbi Shimon while he was in the cave. Yet, not all powers and souls are the same. Spiritual entities have different manners of manifesting themselves here in the physical world. From time to time Eliyahu appears in flesh and blood, as do other Tzadikim. However, this is not the common mode, not for them and especially not for the Higher Powers.

In his Benyahu commentary, the Ben Ish Hai comments that the learning of the secrets of the Torah from the higher spiritual powers follows the course of the reception of prophecy. Similar to Rabbi Yosef Karo and his magid, the higher forces do not manifest physically, but rather they merge with the mind of the speaker, communicate through his thoughts, and speak through his lips. In Hebrew, this is called Hasagat Ruah haKodesh, or Divine inspiration.

Ruah HaKodesh is not the product of philosophical contemplations, nor can it be achieved through intellectual pursuits. In order for one to receive Ruah HaKodesh, one has to become a worthy receptacle.

The process of refining oneself to be an appropriate vessel to receive Ruah HaKodesh is long and arduous. It requires of one first and foremost a refinement of character and a transformation of personality. Interestingly, a high level of academic accomplishment does not seem to be a prerequisite for receiving Ruah HaKodesh. One's refined behavior is what makes one worthy of this reception (ref. Tana D'vei Eliyahu, Rabbah, Chapter 9).

Apparently, only the one who has received Ruah HaKodesh can truly be called a Kabbalist. For the Hebrew word for Kabbalist, Mekubal means one who has received. Even if one has become a master of all Kabbalistic literature through his academic efforts and abilities, such a one has not thereby received Ruah HaKodesh, and therefore, should not rightly be called a Kabbalist, regardless of his academic achievements.

Although one has refined oneself appropriately to serve as a vessel for receiving Ruah HaKodesh, this does not mean that one will receive it. For all the while that one is ready to receive, unless there is first a transmission, there is nothing to receive. In other words, as worthy as one might be, this does not mean that the Higher Powers are obligated to communicate to such a one.

The Higher Powers make the decision when and to whom to communicate. Therefore, even with the best of preparation one will not necessarily receive a heavenly revelation. This is the intent in the Talmud, where it is said that many tried to accomplish that which Rabbi Shimon did, but none of them succeeded. This does not mean that they were not

worthy (although many might not have been) but rather because the Higher Power chose not to communicate with them.

What is unique about all Zoharic literature is that Rabbi Shimon and his students were most worthy and the Higher Powers chose them to receive the secrets of Torah. Such choices by the Higher Power are few and far between. Rabbi Haim Vital, the Ari'zal's faithful redactor, recorded that for hundreds of years Ruah HaKodesh was absent from the Kabbalists. He said that the RaMBaN was the last one to receive the Divine communiqué prior to the Ari'zal. Therefore, all Kabbalistic books written after the RaMBaN until the Ari, Rabbi Haim said were mere intellectual speculations, thus of no value and should not be learned (ref. Introduction to Sefer Etz Haim).

The text says that the nature of the secrets revealed in the Tikunei Zohar is not to be revealed until the generation of Mashiah. In light of current events, many are of the opinion that we are presently in this generation. This is why Kabbalistic interest and teachings are so prevalent today.

The Gaon of Vilna, one of the brightest stars of European Jewry wrote a couple of hundred years ago that the study of Kabbalah would help bring about our long awaited redemption. While everyone might acknowledge the words he said, not many people live up to them. The study of Kabbalah in religious circles is still horribly neglected.

The study of Kabbalah is required by Halakha (Jewish Law). Granted, there are parameters. However, Kabbalah detractors ignore the parameters and endeavor to malign this sacred study. Those Rabbis who participate in maligning the study of Kabbalah can honestly and accurately be said to be acting against the best interest of the Torah and the Jewish people (ref. Tikun 43). These detractors, regardless of their position in the Rabbinat should be ignored and scorned. In light of current events, we cannot afford to be sympathetic to anything that might hinder our promised redemption.

In light of current events, I begin this commentary on the Tikunei Zohar with the prayer that this study may enlighten all who read it and bring many back into the ways of the Torah and mitzvot observance.