

RELEASING THE HIDDEN LIGHT

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Releasing the Hidden Light ¹

Reach into the basket of complimentary images and you will find many suitable contributions from the plant kingdom. Only one, however, actually becomes so identified with Klal Yisrael that it lends us its name. "Hashem has **called your name** ??a leafy olive tree, beautiful with shapely fruit."² Scripture compares us to the vine,³ the fig tree⁴, the date palm⁵, the cedar⁶, the nut tree⁷, but they are all runners-up to the olive tree. We are not explicitly called any of them - save for olive tree. What makes the olive tree stand out?

A medrash⁸ puts it this way. "While the olive is still on the tree, they let it shrivel. They then take it down from the tree and beat it. After beating it, they bring it to the olive- press for pressing. They follow this with placing great weights upon it [to apply even greater pressure.] In this manner, the olive yields its oil. So it is with Yisrael. The nations beat them, [moving them] from place to place. They incarcerate them and place them in chains, etc. Finally, they do *teshuvah*, and HKBH answers them."

At the root of this is a striking difference between all other common fruits and the olive. All of them have discernable substance and tissue. Besides that, the olive has a seeming "hidden" property of great human utility. After - and only after - the series of crushing activities listed by the medrash, the olive reveals its capacity to give light. Other fruits may also be ground and squeezed, but what they yield remains food. When the prescribed activities are applied to the olive, however, it metamorphoses into a radically different object. What used to be a foodstuff now becomes a source of light and illumination.

A great light exists within every Jewish *neshamah* as well. It is hidden and suppressed by the physical and substantive parts of the person. They prevent the person from recognizing and detecting the great light within. That light emerges - just like the light from the olive - only after the physical has been forcibly removed. When this happens, the Jew shines with the Light of the Divine.

The parallel ends here. Unlike the olive, that physical nature need not change through beating and pain. There is a different route that the hidden light can exit. All that is necessary is that a person should rend his heart before Hashem.

It is no ordinary light that shines forth from within the *neshamah*, but a portion of the *Ohr HaGanuz*, the hidden, spiritual light that shone at the beginning of Man's development. Noting Man's comportment in the generations of the Flood and the Dispersion, when his actions were thoroughly debased, Hashem sequestered this light for the benefit of the righteous of the future. This light of Divinity would be revealed at the time of the complete *tikkun*, when the "world will be full of knowledge of Hashem, just as waters cover the sea."⁹ In that time, "the sun will no longer be the light of day...but Hashem will be the light of eternity."¹⁰

The Menorah's light as well was nothing ordinary, but was sourced in the *Ohr HaGanuz*. It's function was to shine a light of Divinity into the heart of each and every Jew, regardless of his station in life. We can readily understand the special - and rather extreme - requirements of purity of the Menorah's oil. To match the hidden light of the Menorah we needed oil that represented the power of illumination locked into and hidden within the olive.

Medrash Tanchuma¹¹ teaches that the *Ohr HaGanuz* was intended for those who toil in Torah. We can now appreciate that the medrash does not simply mean that *talmidei chachamim* are entitled to a wondrous reward for their effort. Rather, *talmidei chachamim* follow the course we charted. By denying themselves sleep and the accoutrements of genteel living, they release themselves from the hold of their physical, substantive natures. "The nation that walked in darkness saw a great light."¹² This "nation" means *talmidei chachamim*, who darken their physical eyes, giving themselves over entirely to the service of Torah which, as we know, weakens a person's strength and breaks the hold of his physicality. Having done that, they are then able to see the Divine light that others cannot.

The essential parity of the universe¹³ dictates that if there is a hidden light (which is not entirely suppressed, but available through special instrumentalities like the Menorah and the *talmid chacham*), there must be an equivalent anti- light. Indeed, Amalek plays precisely this role. The *kelipah* of Amelek represents a power of darkness and evil whose nature is also hidden and blocked from vision. As long as it holds sway, the *tikkun* cannot take place. While Amalek is left intact, the light of Divinity is blocked from illuminating our world.

All of this takes place in the microcosm of the life of every individual. Part of our necessary growth is eradicating the Amalek within. Each of us has some hidden predilection towards various types of evil. It is not just the physical - which by nature is antipodally different from the spiritual - that blocks Divine illumination. Bad character traits and *midos* have the same effect. How well we root out that evil directly determines our ability to detect the supernal light of Divinity that is available to us if we wish it.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom pgs. 221-222

² Yirmiyahu 11:16

³ Tehilim 80:9

⁴ Ibid.; Hoshea 9:10

⁵ Shir HaShirim 7:9

⁶ Tehilim 92:13

⁷ Shir HaShirim

⁸ Shemos Rabbah 36:1

⁹ Yeshaya 11:9

¹⁰ Yeshaya 60:19

¹¹ Noach, 3 s.v.aileh toldos

¹² Yeshaya 9:1

¹³ i.e. the requirement that the balance of discernable good and evil must be kept equal in order to preserve human free choice, without which there is no purpose in Creation

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