

Emergent Judaism: How an Ancient Tradition Gets New Ideas

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“Stringing Pearls” – Making Midrash by Juxtaposing Old and New

Midrash Song of Songs Rabba, Parsha 1

מדרש שיר השירים רבא. פרשה א

<p>Your cheeks are comely with plaited wreaths, your neck with strings of jewels.</p>	<p>נאוו לחייך בתרים, צואריך בחרוזים.</p>
<p>Ben Azzai was sitting and learning and there was fire all around him. The other students went to Rabbi Akiva and told him. He came and said to him, “I hear that you were learning and fire was all around you.” He answered, “Yes.” He said, “Perhaps you were dealing with (the secret mystical text) the Chambers of the Chariot?” He answered, “No, I was sitting and threading together words of Torah, and from the Torah to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to the Writings, and the words were as joyous as on the day they were given on Sinai, and as sweet as the very day they were given. For was not their giving at Sinai with fire? As it is written, “And the mountain was ablaze with flames.” (Deut. 4:11).</p>	<p>בן עזאי היה יושב ודורש והאש סביבותיו, אזלון ואמרון לרבי עקיבא ר' בן עזאי יושב ודורש והאש מלהטת סביבותיו, הלך אצלו ואמר לו שמעתי שהיית דורש והאש מלהטת סביבך, אמר לו הן אמר לו שמא בחדרי מרכבה היית עסוק, אמר לו לאו, אלא הייתי יושב וחורז בדברי תורה ומתורה לנביאים ומנביאים לכתובים והיו הדברים שמחים כנתינתן מסיני והיו ערבים כעיקר נתינתן, וכן עיקר נתינתן מסיני לא באש היו נתנין הה"ד (דברים ד) וההר בוער באש,</p>

Rabbi Abahu was sitting and learning and there was fire all around him. He said, "Perhaps I'm not stringing the words of Torah properly." For Rabbi Levi said, "There are those who know how to thread but don't know how to drill, and there are those who know how to drill but don't know how to thread. But I know how to thread and how to drill.

ר' אבהו היה יושב ודורש ואש
מלהטת סביבותיו אמר שמא
איני חורז בדברי תורה כתיקנן
דאמר ר' לוי אית דידע למחרוז
ולא ידע למקדח ואית דידע
למקדח ולא ידע למחרוז ברם
אנא הוינא חרוזא ואנא הוינא
קדוחא

Know what you know well: Experience the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts:

The Piaseczner Rebbe, Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapiro, *Sefer Derekh HaMelekh, Parshat Shemot*

The mitzvot (individual commandments) reveal only the "limbs", while the *sefer* (book) reveals the essence, the whole structure of which the mitzvot are only the limbs.

Therefore, when one looks into a book or hears words of Torah, if one only sees or hears one or two things, and especially if someone only wants to hear a nice idea or "drosh" – one only hears the "limbs" and misses the teacher's wholeness, and doesn't encounter the prophecy within the words. Therefore, this person only knows what he heard – because he didn't encounter the whole teacher, the conduit of prophecy, and he'll remain in all his actions in the same state of doubt and ignorance as before he heard anything.

Therefore, when you study, take only one or two books, according to the time you can allot to them, and study them deeply. And when you hear Torah from a teacher, return often and learn a lot from him. Because it is in

the combining of all the limbs that the essence or the person's wholeness is revealed and it is through that wholeness that God reveals prophecies. And then a person knows not only the words that one heard, but will also come to reveal *from within oneself* new thoughts and paths and understandings.

Reversing Entropy: Add Your Story:

Haggadah:

"In every generation a person must see himself as though he [personally] had gone out of Egypt, as it is stated, "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt'" (Exodus 13:8).

Two Hasidic Stories:

There was a man with an overcoat. But the overcoat got old and worn out, so he cut it down and made a vest out of it. But eventually that got old and worn out so he made a handkerchief out of it. But, eventually, that got worn out so he made a button out of it. One day the button broke off and fell into the river. At first, he was upset. After all, he couldn't make something from nothing. But then he brightened up: Yes, he could! He could now make a story out of it. And he did.

When Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, saw that the Jewish people were threatened by tragedy, he would go to a particular place in the forest where he lit a fire, recited a particular prayer, and asked for a miracle to save the Jews from the threat. Because of the Holy Fire and faithfulness of the prayer, the miracle was accomplished, averting the tragedy. Later, when the Baal Shem Tov's disciple, the Maggid of Mezrich, had to intervene with heaven for the same reason, he went to the same place in the forest where he told the Master of the Universe that while he did not know how to light the fire, he could still recite the prayer, and again, the miracle was accomplished. Later still, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov, in turn a disciple of the Maggid of Mezrich, went into the forest to save his

people. "I do not know how to light the fire," he pleaded with God, "and I do not know the prayer, but I can find the place and this must be sufficient." Once again, the miracle was accomplished. When it was the turn of Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn, the great grandson of the Maggid of Mezrich, who was named after the Baal Shem Tov, to avert the threat, he sat in his armchair, holding his head in his hands, and said to God: "I am unable to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, and I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story. That must be enough."