



Korach 5769

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Has the Time Come to Learn Mysticism?

[from "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Parashat Shelach 5769 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Many ask: Perhaps the time has come for us to delve into Jewish mysticism? The answer is not just "perhaps," but "certainly." In any event, this is the strongly held opinion of our master Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, that this is the only way to save our generation from heresy, which is our greatest threat, and to restore the generation to repentance (Orot Ha-Teshuva 4:9). Obviously, there is no slight intended here to all the other holy spheres of the Torah – Gemara and Halachah, ethics and faith. Yet none of these will succeed without the soul of the Torah, the mystical component of the Torah.

You might ask: Are we so much greater than previous generations? Does our studying mysticism not constitute arrogance? Shouldn't the simpler parts of the Torah, so full of purity and holiness, suffice for us? The answer is that certainly, we are insignificant, but you cannot compare different generations, and now the time has come. Beforehand, it had not yet come. For example, Rav Kook explained at the end of a long treatise that over the course of the Exile, all the nationalistic ideas were stored away in Jewish mysticism, because they had no basis in "reality." Now, however, that the nation is being reborn, we have to reveal all of these concealed ideas that have to do with nationalism and having a state, so that we can revive the foundation of our rebirth. (Orot 117-118).

Obviously, that does not mean that the time has come regarding ALL the secrets. Rav Kook testified that it was hard for him to describe which secrets would cause damage if revealed, and which would bring a blessing. He discussed this in the context of renewing the path to repentance. In the Exile, the concept of repentance was linked to reverence and submission, but now that the light of salvation is shining forth, it should be linked to joy and courage. Yet

we have to proceed with great caution to make certain that our education does not nullify the caution and reverence that was present down through the generations among fine, righteous Jews (Letter 378, printed at the beginning of Orot Ha-Teshuva). Indeed, this is a very important consideration; but in general, the time has certainly come for the secrets of the Torah, as Rav Kook testified about himself: “There is nothing from my own thoughts and opinions that does not have a source in the writings of the Arizal” (Li-Shloscha Be-Elul 1:46).

One might ask: Did our great master, Rav Kook, forget an explicit ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, that learning mysticism is just for people who are great in Torah, “once they have filled themselves with ‘meat and wine’, namely, the dietary laws and all the laws of the mitzvot?” (Rav Moshe Isserlis’s comment on Yoreh Deah 146:4). This ruling was supported by all the commentaries on Shulchan Aruch. Surely he did not forget.

Rav Kook wrote countless times that mystical knowledge is not for the masses who will not understand a thing. Rather, it is only for elite few (Orot Ha-Kodesh 1:46). The longing for mystical knowledge belongs to those elite individuals, not for those who throw around the terms without understanding their inner meaning (Letters vol. 1, p. 232). Rav Kook wrote: “There is a great shortcoming to the standard student of Kaballah, in that he does not first employ his intellect, delving into the Torah’s sources to become wise in Divine matters.” In other words, they don’t learn faith in depth. “Rather, they stuff themselves with the mysticism written in books. Through such study, their intellect is not elevated. All that happens is that sort of obscure emotion illuminates their being” (Orot Ha-Torah 10:7). “Sometimes, lack of intelligence can bring a student to mysticism” (ibid., ibid., 8). “When, in fact, is it good to study the Torah’s secrets? After one has exhausted all the other holy fields of study” (ibid., ibid. 1). Mysticism is not for “those who cling to it without the proper preparation” (Orot Ha-Teshuvah 4:9). Those people “take literally all of those holy secrets, which stand at the pinnacle of the universe, thereby increasing strife amongst Israel” by talking about the “mixed multitude” (Ma’amarei HaRe’iyah, page 59).

If someone jumps ahead of himself, before he has learned conventional ethics, he will be harmed, and he will lose it all (see Rav Kook’s article on “Studying the Spirituality of the Torah” from Orot Ha-Torah, published by “Sifriyat Chava”, p. 193). “Unless the intellect is first refined, studying Kabalah brings mishap to the world” (ibid. p. 225). “Lofty research at the wrong time causes illusions, religious hallucinations or heresy” (ibid. 240). “Studying mysticism unprepared, jumping into it only out of weakness based on an inner yearning, coupled with laziness and idleness, causes the form of that mysticism to be blurred. This occurs when it is studied by people unconnected to reality, people who lack the capability to grasp the living world...” (Orot p. 93).

Rav Kook certainly knew that mysticism is only for the elite few; hence its study does not appear in the detailed curriculum he wrote for the Mercaz Ha-Rav Yeshiva (Ma’amarei HaRe’iyah, p. 62).

If so, what is the meaning of his call for the uncovering of the Torah’s mysteries? It means rewriting them in a conventional style, as he, himself, did in his many books, or as the Maharal did before him. Those elite, down through the generations, who studied the Torah’s secrets, elevated the generation by their influence, and through their illuminating all the

spheres of life with the light of these lofty lights, thereby bringing the world eternal blessing. (Orot Ha-Kodesh 1:86).


Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Q: Where is King Shlomo buried?

A: In the graves of the House of David. Their location is not known.

Q: What is the meaning and purpose of an "Amen Meal"?

A: It is a new invention.

Q: Should we imitate Hashem and forgive someone even if he caused great pain and did not ask for forgiveness?

A: Yes. This is not an obligation but an act of piety, and each person should act how he feels is best.

Q: If a pot was used to actually cook on Shabbat, can it be thereafter, or does it need to be kashered?

A: The Mishnah Berurah rules that it needs to be kashered before it can be used again, but one can rely on the lenient opinions. Yalkut Yosef.

Q: Why do we mourn for someone who has died? After all, it is for his spiritual repair and ascension.

A: For what we are lacking.

Q: Is it permissible to sleep for one night in a room without a mezuzah?

A: There are those who are lenient if there is no place else to sleep.

Q: I am not sure if I recited a blessing before eating. What should I do?

A: Reciting the blessing in thought, since you will fulfill your obligation according to some authorities but will not take Hashem's Name in vain. Pri Megadim.

Q: I just had a difficult birth which resulted in my having many stitches, and I want to rest at my mother's house. My husband is opposed since he wants to have the Brit Milah at his parents' house. What should we do?

A: You take precedence. When he gives birth, the Brit Milah can be at his parents' house.

Q: It is permissible to use a brush which has bristles from a wild pig?

A: Yes. It is also permissible to wear clothing from its skin.

Q: How is it that Jews changed so much that Ethiopians are dark skinned and Ashkenazic Jews are light skinned?

A: Many converts joined.

Q: Is it permissible to receive organs from a Jew who committed suicide?

A: Certainly. This is will be a spiritual rectification for him.

Q: Why is it forbidden to go to a bar?

A: It is a corrupt place. Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 1:1-2.

Q: Is there are obligation to remove one's watch when putting on Tefillin?

A: One should remove it, but some are lenient.

Q: I feel arrogance when I invite people to a completion of a tractate of the Gemara. What should I do?

A: It is possible to have a meal on your own.

Q: Is it permissible to read the New Testament? Can you provide the source?

A: It is forbidden. Rambam, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 2:2.

Q: Is it permissible to play poker?

A: It is obviously similar to all other nonsense. But if it is for small amounts of money - there is no problem of theft.

Stories of Rabbenu — Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

"And His mercies extend to all of His works"

At the end of our Rabbi's class on Maran Ha-Rav Kook's commentary on the siddur, "Olat Re'eiyah," some students entered to talk to him about an important matter. He motioned to them not to say anything and that they should sit next to him on the couch. The students were surprised by the need for silence since nobody was in house. Our Rabbi also sat silently and left his book open. After a while, he said with a wonderful smile: "He has desired it for His dwelling" and he repeated: "He has desired it for His dwelling" (Tehillim 132:13). The students assumed that this was what our Rabbi was teaching from "Olat Re'eiyah." He smiled again and said: "He has desired it for His dwelling" and pointed at the book. The students looked closely and saw a moth on the book. Our Rabbi did not want the students to scare it, he therefore told them to enter quietly. After a few minutes, the moth flew away on its own. Our Rabbi closed the book and began to talk.

A student lived with our Rabbi to aid him, but our Rabbi would not allow the student to throw out the garbage, but he did it himself. The student once wanted to see why he acted this way. He saw that our Rabbi opened the garbage very gently, and he also heard him make all sorts of soft sounds. He explains that he opened the lid this way in order not to scare the cats, and he made the sounds to move them from there.

Our Rabbi was once walking and talking to a group of people in the street when he suddenly stopped and put his finger to his lips to tell them to be quiet. He stood quietly for a few minutes, and then continued on his way. When he was asked why he did this, he explained that a cat was eating from the garbage, and if they passed it would get scared, run away, lose the food and be upset.



Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Riding a scooter and bicycle on Shabbat

Question: Is it permissible for children (ages 7 and 10) to use scooters or bicycles on Shabbat in Jerusalem (within an eruv)? There seem to be different customs in our area of Jerusalem (Katamon).

Answer: There is an established custom not to ride bicycles on Shabbat. Riding on a scooter and riding a bike with training wheels is considered different, however, and not including in the custom. It is forbidden to change the custom of a place, but since there are various customs in your neighborhood, it is permissible to ride a scooter or a bike with training wheels.

*From Rav Aviner's Commentary on Birkat Ha-Mazon,
entitled Shir Ha-Ma'a Lot*

Second blessing of the Birkat Ha-Mazon

"Yehoshua established the blessing for the Land when they entered the Land" (Berachot 48b). Why did Yehoshua bin Nun connect the Land of Israel to the act of eating? Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Cohain Kook, explained: Ostensibly a person eats for his own personal good, to benefit and strengthen his body. This is certainly proper, and nevertheless a person is called upon to exalt himself to a higher level than his personal existence, i.e. to be concerned about the entire Nation. Therefore, after one gives thanks to Hashem for the food which grants him natural existence, he is raised to an understanding that with this he is able to be a trustworthy member of his Nation, and to devote himself to building it in its Land (Olat Re'eyah vol. 1, pp. 362-363). Our Rabbis, the Achronim (later authorities) considered why no blessing was established on the fulfillment of the mitzvah of settlement in the Land of Israel. The Vilna Gaon explained that in fact Yehoshua bin Nun, when he entered the Land of Israel, established this blessing in the prayer after eating for this very purpose.



Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for
the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

A Critical Wife

You cannot build a close connection, which is the foundational of marriage, in this manner. If you have a strong inclination to criticize and blame without seeing the outcome of what this does, it prevents him from speaking freely and opening up. He shuts down and contemplates every word as if being interviewed by a reporter or police investigator. It is true that a husband and a wife should be able to mutually and freely correct one another's behavior, but you are overly critical, your style is unpleasant and when you begin it opens the floodgates. Don't you notice that your husband prepares for the onslaught, closes the blinds and does not listen in order to save his soul. As a result, for an extended period, go to the opposite extreme: refrain completely from criticizing, even when it is justified, in order to gain his trust. This takes a long time and will be difficult for you, but you will both feel the benefit and build your friendship for your benefit and your children's benefit, even if it begins as artificial. An interesting challenge.

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