

The Essential Kabbalah



The Heart of Jewish Mysticism

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CASTLE BOOKS

IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE LIGHT

WHATEVER ONE implants firmly in the mind becomes the essential thing. So if you pray and offer a blessing to God, or if you wish your intention to be true, imagine that you are light. All around you—in every corner and on every side—is light. Turn to your right, and you will find shining light; to your left, splendor, a radiant light. Between them, up above, the light of the Presence. Surrounding that, the light of life. Above it all, a crown of light—crowning the aspirations of thought, illumining the paths of imagination, spreading the radiance of vision. This light is unfathomable and endless.

AN EXTRA SPIRIT

YOU FEEL an extra spirit—arousing you, flowing over your entire body, bringing pleasure. It seems as if fine balsam oil has been poured over you from your head to your feet—once, maybe more. You are overjoyed, in delight and trembling: the soul in delight, the body in trembling. Like a rider racing a horse: the rider is joyful and exuberant, while underneath, the horse quivers.

THOUGHT REVEALS itself only through contemplating a little without content, contemplating sheer spirit. The contemplation is imperfect: you understand—then you lose what you have understood. Like pondering a thought: the light of that thought suddenly darkens, vanishes; then it returns and shines—and vanishes again. No one can understand the content of that light. It is like the light that appears when water ripples in a bowl: shining here, suddenly disappearing—then reappearing somewhere else. You think that you have grasped the light, when suddenly it escapes, radiating elsewhere. You pursue it, hoping to catch it—but you cannot. Yet you cannot bring yourself to leave. You keep pursuing it.

It is the same with the beginning of emanation. As you begin to contemplate it, it vanishes, then reappears; you understand—and it disappears. Even though you do not grasp it, do not despair. The source is still emanating, spreading.

IN MEDITATION, everything depends on thought. If your thought becomes attached to any created thing—even something unseen or spiritual, higher than any earthly creature—it is as if you were bowing down to an idol on your hands and knees.

IMAGINATION

THE FIERCE power of imagination is a gift from God. Joined with the grandeur of the mind, the potency of inference, ethical depth, and the natural sense of the divine, imagination becomes an instrument for the holy spirit.

GATHERING MULTIPLICITY

ONE WHO descends from the root of roots to the form of forms must walk in multiplicity. One who ascends from the form of forms to the root of roots must gather the multiplicity, for the highest form unites them all, and the root extends through every form that arises from it at any time. When the forms are destroyed, the root is not destroyed.

REMEMBER GOD and God's love constantly. Let your thought not be separated from God. I declare, both to individuals and to the masses: If you want to know the secret of binding your soul above and joining your thought to God—so that by means of such continuous contemplation you attain incessantly the world that is coming, and so that God be with you always, in this life and the next—then place in front of the eyes of your mind the letters of God's name, as if they were written in a book in Hebrew script. Visualize every letter extending to infinity. What I mean is: when you visualize the letters, focus on them with your mind's eye as you contemplate infinity. Both together: gazing and meditating.

I, RABBI ISAAC of Akko, was contemplating, according to the method I received from the great one of his generation—great in humility, the wisdom of Kabbalah, philosophy, and the science of permutation of letters. He insisted that I set the ten sefirot in front of me, as it is written: "I set YHVH before me always." I saw them today above my head like a pillar, with their feet on my head and their heads high above, beyond all the four worlds: emanation, creation, formation, and actualization. As long as I was contemplating this ladder—the name of the Blessed Holy One—I saw my soul cleaving to Ein Sof.

TO ATTAIN you must be alone, so that your contemplation not be disturbed. In your mind, cultivate aloneness to the utmost. Strip your body from your soul, as if you do not feel that you are clothed in matter at all—you are entirely soul. The more you strip yourself of material being, the more powerful your comprehension. If you sense any sound or movement that breaks your meditation, or if any material imagining arises within you, then your soul's contemplation will be severed from the upper worlds. You will attain nothing, since supernal holiness does not abide with anyone attached by even a hair to the material realm. Therefore prophecy or the holy spirit is called deep sleep, dream, or vision. To sum up, even if you are worthy for the holy spirit to rest upon you, if you do not train yourself to completely strip your soul from your body, the spirit will not rest upon you. This is the secret reason that a band of prophets has timbrels, flutes, and other instruments, for through the sweetness of melody, aloneness descends upon them and they strip their souls. Then the musicians stop the melody, and the prophets remain in that supernal state of union and they prophesy.

If you wish to attain aloneness, you must first return to God from having strayed and missed the mark. Be careful not to miss again. Train yourself to eliminate negative habits such as anger, depression, impatience, and chatter.

If you wish to attain aloneness and to receive the holy spirit, regard every insight you gain and every light you perceive as darkness. When you see that you have attained a little, concentrate more deeply in your meditation, until you experience a pure spirit speaking within you words of Torah, wisdom, devotion, purity, and holiness—on its own, without your will. Having attained this, impel yourself to draw forth

the holy spirit often, until you weaken and verge on fainting. Then strengthen yourself and pray this prayer with perfect intention:

"Master of all the worlds! To you it is revealed and known that I am not engaged in all of this for my own glory, but rather for the glory of your name, for the glory of the oneness of your being, so that I will know you, how to serve you and bless your name. Enable me to search for you, discover you. Strengthen me, embolden me. Enlighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Create a pure heart for me, O God; rejuvenate within me a steadfast spirit."

Draw forth the spirit until you see and know for certain that it is bound to you perpetually, inseparably, engraved within you.

Sanctify your limbs and adorn them with good deeds, making yourself into a throne for the divine presence, your body an ark for Shekhinah. When you do a good deed, you sanctify yourself.

THE GREATER you are, the more you need to search for your self. Your deep soul hides itself from consciousness. So you need to increase aloneness, elevation of thinking, penetration of thought, liberation of mind—until finally your soul reveals itself to you, spangling a few sparkles of her lights.

Then you find bliss, transcending all humiliations or anything that happens, by attaining equanimity, by becoming one with everything that happens, by reducing yourself so extremely that you nullify your individual, imaginary form, that you nullify existence in the depth of your self. "What are we?" Then you know every spark of truth, every bolt of integrity flashing anywhere.

Then you gather everything, without hatred, jealousy, or rivalry. The light of peace and a fierce boldness manifest in you. The splendor of compassion and the glory of love shine through you. The desire to act and work, the passion to create and to restore yourself, the yearning for silence and for the inner shout of joy—these all band together in your spirit, and you become holy.

WHEN YOU train yourself to hear the voice of God in everything, you attain the quintessence of the human spirit. Usually the mind conceals the divine thoroughly by imagining that there is a separate mental power that constructs the mental images. But by training yourself to hear the voice of God in everything, the voice reveals itself to your mind as well. Then right in the mind, you discover revelation.

"As I was among the exiles on the River Kevar, the heavens opened and I saw visions of God."

As Ezekiel was gazing at the river, Holiness opened the seven heavens for him, and he saw the Power.

A parable has been told. To what can this be compared? To someone who went to the barber. The barber cut his hair and handed him a mirror. As he was looking in the mirror, the king was passing by. He saw the king and his entourage in the mirror as they passed the doorway. The barber exclaimed, "Turn around! See the king!" He replied, "I've already seen him in the mirror."

So, Ezekiel was standing on the River Kevar. As he was gazing at the water, the seven heavens were opened for him and he saw the Glory of Holiness, along with celestial creatures, ministering angels, bands of angels, seraphs, and angels with sparkling wings, all joined to the heavenly chariot. As they were passing through heaven, Ezekiel saw them reflected in the water. As it is written, "on the River Kevar," the River of Already.

God said to Abram, "Go forth."

God said to Abram, "Go to your self, know your self, fulfill your self."

THIS VERSE is addressed to every person. Search and discover the root of your soul, so that you can fulfill it and restore it to its source, its essence. The more you fulfill yourself, the closer you approach your authentic self.