

R. Shimon Bar Yochai on the Shabbat

Hi. I promised to bring Rashbi but it didn't work out. He said that he would be pleased to come. He mentioned in passing that if anyone here had an evil thought pass through his or her mind, he might accidentally burn us all to a crisp with a glance from his eyes, like those lucky folk who met him and his son on their way out from the cave way back when. And that's fine, he said, there was more room in the beit hamidrash in heaven than there is in the Conservative Yeshivah, anyway. So I said that maybe it would be better if he just sent a message, and this is what he told me to say (it's a bit similar to what the Zohar teaches on the three meals of the Sabbath in Parashat Yitro, but that's just a coincidence). Now, I don't know what any of this means, but he told me to say it, and I'm afraid not to.

He said that Torah is the particular path of Israel in realizing the meaning and purpose of human life. Torah and Mitsvot, he said, structure our minds and our lives in such a way that the shefah elohi or divine flow fills us with power and motivation and happiness in the fulfillment of God's Word. The shefa elohi or divine flow is the name of a unique constellation of the things all people value: things like love, justice, beauty, spirit and truth. Torah is the way God taught Israel to realize these things.

Now the structure of Torah life is such that this shefah elohi (or divine flow) enters our weekly lives through the Shabbat. The seventh day is a critical point in which The Divine Mother, the source of all, and the Divine Daughter, God's presence in the material world of our experience, join hands in order to support us and allow us to receive the shefah, the divine flow, into our lives. It is this flow which sustains us through the week until the next Shabbat.

Now, I asked Rashbi if this meant I needed to set two more places at the table, and whether the divine Mother and Daughter were vegetarians, and he evidently felt that I didn't understand, so he added the following explanation, which didn't help.

He said that the Divine Mother and Daughter wouldn't take up extra space because they are names for the parts and processes of your mind – that is the structure of your thoughts and feelings. There are other parts – for instance, a father and a son. He said that since people are largely about basic human relationships, these are useful ways to describe the parts of the mind. These parts and processes also characterize the revealed aspect of God because we are created in God's image.

So, he went on, to say that Shabbat is the point in which the Mother and the Daughter join hands, is to say that in a person living Torah, Shabbat creates a certain kind of relationship between certain aspects of that person's mind. This might be called a state of consciousness. Shabbat consciousness, he said, opens an inner gate which allows the shefah elohi, divine flow, to flow in – and this is the stuff of our spiritual life.

Finally, Rashbi explained that this shefa flows into us primarily at the three meals of the Sabbath – and that each meal is about a fine tuning of some aspect of our inner state. Friday night meal, he said, is receiving the Kalah, the daughter or bride, and she meets the groom at our table. On Saturday morning we address God as transcendent – the unknown and hidden source of all things. And finally, at seuda shlishit, the third meal, it all comes together, and we address God through an image of the First Person, Adam or Chavah, an image we strive to imitate, and this prepares us for the new week.

Now here I finally understood: Adam and Chavah are definitely vegetarians. For some reason my kippah caught on fire, Rashbi closed his eyes and was gone.

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