



קונטרס  
"שויתי ודוממתי"

# *Shivisi v'Domamti:* Torah and the Aesthetic

By Eliezer Berger  
[dafaleph.com](http://dafaleph.com)

# קונטרס

## שויתי ודוממתי

והוא השתדלות כזעיר מטפת ים החכמה בעניות דעתי ממש בענין  
כח המדמה בציירו היופי הנאות והערב מכח השכל והאמת,  
ההתפעלות מבריאת הבורא יתברך ויתעלה, מדעת עליון לנוה אפריון,  
בהשפעת ה' הטוב והמיטיב עלינו, אפילו ברבות מחשבות בלב איש,  
בשוא גליו אתה תשבחם, ובתפילה נעימה בקול דממה דקה שנטעם  
ונראה כי טוב ה' אשרי הגבר יחסה בו, שנהיה עובדי ה' אחד יחיד  
ומיוחד ולומדי כל תורתו באמת לאמיתה ובאמונה שלימה וידיעה  
מוחלטת. ברוך ה' לעולם אמן ואמן.

מאת

הקטן שבחבורה ממש אליעזר ברוך

בן ר' חיים הכהן שליט"א

ק"ק דנו ראשעל

התחלתי בפרשת שירה, שנת תשע"ז הבעל"ט



With endless thanks to *HaShem Yisbarach*,  
my family, who have nurtured my imagination,  
my friends, whose camaraderie I am blessed with,  
and my Rebbeim, who have guided me in the infinite  
beauty of Torah.

# CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE TRUTH OF CREATION</b>	<b>10</b>
YICHUD HASHEM	11
THE DIALECTIC	13
MIDOS & METAPHOR	15
THE TORAH UNIVERSE	17
<b>REALITY AS THE AESTHETIC</b>	<b>20</b>
PROPHECY & IMAGINATION	21
IDOLATRY & FANTASY	24
NATURE IS SUPERNATURAL	27
LANGUAGE OF THE ORCHARD	30
NOSTALGIA & HIDDUR MITZVAH	32
<b>TORAHCRAFT</b>	<b>36</b>
UNCOMMON SENSES	37
HUMAN CREATION	38
THE GREAT MACHINE	40
SIMPLICITY IN SUBURBIA	42
<b>THE QUEST</b>	<b>45</b>
P'RISHUS, KEDUSHAH, AND TAHARAH	46
BEAUTY IN PARADOX	50
SEEING IN COLOR	52
EPIC LEARNING	55
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>57</b>
AFTERWORD	58
AUTUMN	60
WINTER	64

## Preface

The Torah is absolute and Divine. *HaShem* is the Creator. Humans like to be creative and are born with interests and skills. How does any of this fit together? Is art meaningful or even allowed? Does *HaShem* care what looks beautiful or awesome to you? What about science? Why does it all seem so incoherent?

I have long tried to unweave that feeling of wonder that plagues me with an overwhelming sense of being and so strongly fuels a desire for expansion. Creativity is a mysterious mess of fear and beauty, a force that builds empires and destroys them, a manic sprint into colorful chaos. So much of life seems stagnant; creativity proclaims brazenly to harness the chaotic. Fantasy is so easy and so vivid that it totally deluges everything else. The soft glow of a lamppost in the blue hours of an early winter evening, complemented by an ancient, howling wind, the tangible silence of that crisp air and the places it takes you back to – it's all so obvious to the one who appreciates it. It begs to be included in songs of the Creator's praise. It speaks so deeply to your essence that you wonder why you haven't been purified by its very existence in your mind. We know more than just physicality, intuitively and sometimes intellectually, and yet, our imaginations use physicality. We struggle to get past it, to make something of it, to celebrate a holiday, or something, around it. Everything must have its boundaries, definitions, and methodologies, of course, but harmony must emerge from those limitations. Nations should have borders, homes should have walls, but there must also be peace and cooperation. The same is true for how we use our bifurcated minds.

How might our short lives on this earth, infected by superficial stupor and material intoxication, become something worthwhile? Maybe people with serious mental illnesses grasp things we can't. Maybe quantum uncertainty and paradoxical calculus are glimpses of reality above time and space. Maybe complex relationships and the crashing waves of our personal stories are realizations of what's always going on, slingshots by which we are hurled into a real fantasy. With this perspective, everything begins to converge. Our frozen experiences begin to thaw and melt, our wandering knowledge settles and bears fruit, our every fiber joins itself unto the other in a great and awesome convalescence.

There seems to be an entire demographic of Jews that become disinterested in Judaism because they feel that it lacks individuality or stifles their creativity. We could very easily be dismissive about this, considering the creative or aesthetic desire to be yet another distraction. We could be even harsher about it and overgeneralize all beauty to be materialistic or idolatrous. With some exposure to Torah learning, it is not hard to find *sefarim* deeply rooted in Torah and *mesorah* about the real dangers of excessive pleasure, sinful pursuit of beauty, and a superficial mindset. The root of individualism is often arrogance on some level or another. This sector of the community assumes it is forsaken in this regard, and seeks a convenient alternative in Western culture or ideas.

Meanwhile, some aspects of Torah seem to be mostly unknown, either because they are not necessarily applicable to *Halacha l'maaseh*, or because there has never been a perceived need to develop them. The *Mussar* movement, *Chassidus*, ways of learning *Shas* and *Poskim* in-depth, commentaries on *Tanach*, and the writing of *Torah she'b'al peh* and *Toras ha'nistar* all emerged from a profound

need to revitalize an essential element of Torah and *mitzvos*. When this is needed, it is incumbent upon those who sense the void to fill it with an authentic approach, comparable conceptually to the *mitzvah* to bury abandoned human remains. Granted, one must prioritize one's learning; in our time, though, things like *mishnayos*, *aggad'ta*, *Talmud Yersushalmi*, and the concepts that emerge from them remain largely foreign to all but the greatest *talmidei chachamim*. Some subjects in Torah are so exotic that they have become easy prey for the more superficial and often corrupt world of academia.

In Jewish education and outreach, it is often difficult to get people interested in Judaism unless they are receptive to an unfamiliar ideology and lifestyle or ready to sacrifice some of their interests in the process of growth. It is intriguing to people that the Torah encompasses all of reality, but in our deep exile it is almost impossible for us to give concrete examples of how to see the world through the Torah's lens. The Torah is so vast and intricate, and we are so lacking in our grasp of it (due to lack of knowledge, non-Jewish culture, our own inadequacies, and our distance from *ma'amad Har Sinai* and *nevuah*). Many attempts have been made to develop a worldly Jewish perspective in modern times, with varying degrees of authenticity and success. It is certainly commendable to add to one's understanding and appreciation with knowledge of the world, but we always run the risk of underestimating our subjectivity and distorting the truth. On the other hand, if we approach life and knowledge simplistically, we are left with only a vague sense of wonder and a limited vocabulary for what *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is trying to tell us. Some would say we need balance. In my humble opinion, we need a better paradigm.

My goal here is not to describe or scrutinize these phenomena. I am also not providing the secular perspectives of aesthetics,



ontology, epistemology, and the like, even though they sometimes have places within this discussion. *Baruch HaShem*, in this era of plenty we have a growing number of resources about the concept of *hiddur mitzvah*<sup>1</sup>, the wonders of Creation, and even the therapeutic and educational value of creative expression. Some may even be familiar with the practical *halachos* of art. Instead of reinventing the wheel (or collecting *piskei Halacha*), I wanted to present some aspects of Torah that may seem obvious or irrelevant, and to show that these are fundamental guidelines for appreciating the profound beauty of life. I hope to begin with a dense summary of the patterns of reality and our place in it, so it may take some work to get to the main subject of this project. Those without background in those topics may find them difficult and confusing. However, I believe that with patience and *siyata di'shmaya*, the broad construct here will come together from the most abstract to the most concrete, and all of the steps in between should be necessary and enriching.

It cannot be emphasized enough how unsuitable I am for this astronomical task in thought and deed. Whatever is not in sources must therefore represent a perspective and not be taken as assertions or practical advice. However, I advise that you look up the sources and read the footnotes, because those sources say endlessly more than I could, and contain the concepts themselves in context and depth. I hope to make this personal as well, because this is as much a goal for me as it is a project for others. May it be *r'tzon HaShem* that this endeavor be fruitful and true, and may we all merit the fulfillment of the

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Gemara Shabbos* 133b, *Nazir* 2b, *Sukkah* 11b, *Mechilta d'Rabi Yishmael*, *Masechta d'Shirah* 3, as well as Rambam, *Hilchos Isurei Mizbe'ach* 7:11 that this applies to all *avodas HaShem*. I hope to elaborate on this more deeply *bs"d*.

*pasuk*, "...the world will be filled with consciousness of *HaShem*, like water pervading the ocean."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> *Yeshayah* 11:9

## **The Truth of Creation**

## Yichud HaShem

We usually focus on art and beauty in the realm of subjectivity (e.g. “It looks pretty/feels good”). It may seem strange to begin a discussion of these topics with the *ikarei ha’emunah*. However, as will become evident, the answers to our personal questions are often right in front of us, if only we are willing to take a step back. When thinking about the Torah’s perspective on anything, we must first remember the basics.

We declare at least twice a day that *HaShem* is “*Echad*”. This word means that He is singular, unique, and absolute. It means that any way we describe His creations is inapplicable to Him. Existence as we know it is limited; He is infinite in every way. Everything in existence depends on something else for definition and continuity; He is entirely independent. The very fact that He is the Creator means that He both transcends His Creation and pervades it. Since He is singular, there is no other to be separate from Him. As the Rambam says, there is no reality or truth other than His. This absoluteness of *HaShem*’s objectivity is all-encompassing.<sup>3</sup>

What is relevant to us here is how well we internalize this Oneness and ultimate truth when we live our lives. We are expected to know this fact as well as we possibly can, and to apply it to every aspect of our existence through Torah and *mitzvos*. *Yichud HaShem*, the fundamental principle of everything, is impossible to truly grasp. We are creations within Creation, and cannot perceive of the

---

<sup>3</sup> This is an obscenely dense, oversimplified summary of the topic. *Yichud HaShem* is written about nearly everywhere, and can be found perhaps most succinctly in the first chapter of the Rambam’s *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*.

unknowable beyond it. Even if we can only understand this intellectually, we should, theoretically, be able to approach aesthetics with this in mind. Any creative act is an expansion of something, an expression that was previously unexpressed. Creation is the ultimate expression of every-thing from no-thing. So where does “everything” begin?

## The Dialectic

The opposite of Oneness is multiplicity. A duality or dialectic is therefore the most essential way we can define our reality in terms we relate to. In this context, a dialectic is a pair of opposite concepts that become unified. In a less abstract sense, we can relate to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* in a spectrum of ways. The extremes of this spectrum in the Torah's terms are *ahavah* (similarity or love) and *yirah* (otherness or veneration). These categories ultimately stem from the same awareness, and are both true. When we recognize *HaShem* as transcendent, we experience contrast between ourselves and Him. We experience something vastly beyond anything we can fathom. When we recognize *HaShem* as immanent, we experience oneness with Him. We experience something intimately and deeply close to us. *Yirah* is even understood to be a more mature way of reaching true *ahavah*, thus creating a unified synthesis of the two.

The entire world is made of pairs and opposites: light and darkness, Heaven and Earth, life and death, past and future, left and right, etc. If we think about it, what defines each of these opposites is really the same. For example, matter and energy may be entirely different, but at the quantum level they are essentially the same (hence Einstein's equation for conversion of matter to energy). Happiness and sadness are two sides of the same abstract emotional connection to something, and ultimately lead to a unified wholeness of human experience. This is true of every object and concept. Since *HaShem* is the Creator of this basic dialectic, it follows that He is expressing Himself in it. Oneness can be expressed most maturely through the perceived multiplicity that ultimately reveals that oneness. Only by

introducing an antithesis to a thesis can there be synthesis. It is an inherent paradox, and one that we embrace wholeheartedly. We are given a knowable existence so we can reach the Unknowable.<sup>4, 5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Epistemologically, the *Rishonim* seem to view knowledge the same way. As the dictum goes, “*Tachlis ha'yedyah asher lo neida*” (The ultimate knowledge is that we don't know). The same *Rishonim* advocate for a comprehensive, sometimes philosophical, understanding of the truth. The better we are able to define reality, the closer we get to the Ultimate, Infinite, Unknowable Reality.

<sup>5</sup> This is also the way the Ramchal explains the need for free will, death, and *Hastaras Panim*, all within the same, seamless framework of parallels and *Yichud HaShem*. This is much of the focus in *Da'as Tevunos*.

## Midos and Metaphor

We discussed how the universe is made of dialectics at its most basic level. If we left it at that, though, we would be ignoring what the universe is really like. If life were only a waltz of opposites, it wouldn't be so intricate and complicated. We know intuitively that there is a spectrum of categories and details, an enormous superstructure of ideas and things interconnected with other ideas and things. Our reality is more like a giant brain or a colossal tree, a network of infinite detail perfectly interwoven.

If I asked you who you are, you might point to a number of characteristics that *describe* you. Since you are the being *behind* all those characteristics, it would be more accurate to ask how you think, feel, speak, or act. In the same way, all we understand about reality is how *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* appears to relate to us from our perspective.<sup>6</sup> These characteristics are given many names, including *kochos*, *midos* ("measures"), and *deios* ("personas", found in the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*<sup>7</sup>). These all refer to modes of expression, be they human personality traits, perceptions of *HaShem's* actions, or the many dimensions of the world and Torah (e.g. the 13 *midos* of Halachic deduction from the Torah).

The *Chovos HaLevavos* (2<sup>nd</sup> *sha'ar*), in beginning his discussion of the requirement to contemplate Creation, uses the analogy of colored glass and sunlight. Everything is a lens through which we see the same light, but each lens has a different color,

---

<sup>6</sup> This is also the meaning of *midah k'neged midah*: we and *HaShem* mirror each other as manifest in the very fabric of reality.

<sup>7</sup> *Hilchos Deios*, the Rambam's laws of character and psychology.



creating a spectrum of colored light. The appearance has changed because its qualities have become more nuanced, but the light itself has not. Similarly, if one plants a garden, the diverse array of flowers will all live from the same, clear water. In reality, Creation is not divided or separate from its Creator. If we want to see this reality, we must look through the lenses we are given. The closer we look and the cleaner our lenses, the better we will see *Yichud HaShem*. This journey is endless by definition.<sup>8</sup>

If we must use our reality to see a greater reality, those realities need to be parallel. If the pattern is the same on all levels, we can actually be familiar with that greater perspective, based on our current perspectives. One could say that the world is made of metaphors. It is a great, multidimensional tapestry of characteristics and expressions that enable us to climb. Everything we sense and know is a bridge to greater, more expansive truths. Refining our knowledge and experience provides us with ways of practically navigating this world of bridges. But the world is nuanced beyond anything we could comprehend. What kind of all-encompassing map could guide us?

---

<sup>8</sup> A note about metaphors and *aggad'ta* in general: although there are different kinds of *midrashim*, some of which are not meant to be theological, metaphors are supposed to lead you to some intrinsic understanding. In other words, the greatest level of meaning lies in the very purpose of the thing that is being used as a metaphor. One may be able to make parallels between the properties of two things, but this is external. The most essential metaphor is one that conveys the nature of reality of both the *mashal* and the *nimshal*. Then, the relationship between these entities can be unlocked.

# The Torah Universe

The Torah may seem like a book, a body of literature, or even a legal code. It is all the above, but it is also much more. The Torah is the blueprint of reality, the tool by which existence is defined and crafted.<sup>9</sup> The *mitzvos* of the Torah are the practical applications of its ideal. The stories in the Torah reveal the “spiritual DNA” of *Klal Yisrael*, the intended recipient and representative of the Torah. Through the methodology and profundity of *Torah she'b'al peh*, the fundamental elements of the Torah become clarified. As we have said, we need a code, an all-encompassing legend to navigate existence and bring it to Oneness. As Ben Bag-Bag said, “Turn it over and over; all is in it. See with it, grow old and weary with it, and don’t move away from it; there is no more perfect *midah*.”<sup>10</sup> All knowledge, all reality is contained in the infinite, unfurling petals of the Torah.<sup>11</sup>

Through learning Torah, all of this becomes apparent. It can be visualized as a massive multiplayer Role-Playing Game in which certain objectives are to be accomplished and innumerable elements can interact via complex algorithms, driven by innumerable consoles, joined by a single server. If you were to navigate within this generated world, you would need to know where you’re aiming to go and how you will get there. You would also require the instruments and methods to reach that destination. You must have mathematics and logic.

To fabricate an object from the web of elements, you would need to see its patterns and connections: which vertex could act as a

---

<sup>9</sup> *B’reishis Rabbah 1:1*

<sup>10</sup> *Mishnah Avos 5:22*

<sup>11</sup> See the Ramban’s introduction to *Sefer B’reishis*

substratum, and in what manner compatibility and functionality could be achieved. You would need a rigorous science and a meaningful aesthetic.

Say you wanted to communicate information across this conglomerate. You would probably need to encrypt the information with a code, then to utilize this language to activate the nodes of the system. The recipient of your language could interpret the information only if he or she were fluent in that language (which includes its phonetics, etymology, lexicon, syntax, and all other nuances).

Such a civilization requires an effective economy and government, and demands proper civil engineering. Our simplistic matrix has grown to become a living organism, a harmonious super-galactic symphony that is fractal both inwardly and outwardly. Of course, you want to know where it starts and where it ends, what gives it existence and life.

We call it the Torah ("The Teaching"), which as a name is reminiscent of everything in human history from meditative disciplines to utopian constitutions. It is the ultimate field guide, the ancient ontological parable (and is actually described this way)<sup>12</sup>. It can be accessed by all because it is all, but its concentric spheres are maneuvered with discipline and order. Once the universal nature of the Torah becomes obvious, one begins to realize how similarly it and the universe are patterned. If *Klal Yisrael* is the sanctified, distinguished core of humanity (e.g. "*Kedoshim tihyu*", "*goy kadosh*", etc.) and man is a microcosm of the universe,<sup>13</sup> then in a profound sense, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, the Torah, and *Klal Yisrael* are unified. We have *mitzvos*

---

<sup>12</sup> See Rashi on *Shmuel* I:24:14 and *Gemara Makkos* 10b

<sup>13</sup> Rabbeinu Bechaye on *B'reishis* 1:27, see *Moreh Nevuchim* I:72, *Avos d'Rabi Nasan* 31, *Midrash HaGadol* on *Sh'mos* 21:30

to create sanctuaries in space-time, to make sanctuaries of ourselves, to draw all the elements of existence into a great, endless helix toward perfection and Oneness. Now that we have reached an infinitesimal understanding of these enormous foundations, we can begin to see the peaks of what a Torah Aesthetic would mean. Let us bring it into the human realm.

## **Reality As the Aesthetic**

## Prophecy & Imagination

Like everything, all our faculties of thought are created by *HaShem*. The same is true of our personalities, talents, interests, and challenges. Each person is created with a unique set of tools, and each person's life is defined by his role in the grand scheme. This role is so intrinsic that we are born with an affinity for fulfilling that role.<sup>14</sup>

The most essential faculty we have is our will, our very being. After that, the will must be actualized somehow. Ideally, we use our *sekhel*, our intellect, to process and analyze whatever *HaShem* reveals to us. We have plenty of cognitive powers in our brains, but there are also a set of association areas that create connections between ideas and even connect ideas and the senses. In other words, the imagination draws on whatever information it has, objective or subjective, and creates vivid pictures in the mind's eye. While some of our imagination is useful for memory, emotion, creativity, and the like, a large portion of it seems to be nonsense. Dreams usually show us all the ridiculous combinations and associations that have been made throughout the day. The imagination is not usually logical or real, and for most of us is much closer to our senses. Rarely do we *experience* truth.

There was, however, a class of people for whom this was not the case. These people were hyper-intelligent masters of themselves. They had complete control over their emotions and desires, achieved the greatest wholeness that man can achieve in their intellects, *midos*,

---

<sup>14</sup> *Gemara B'rachos 43b*: "Mar Zutra bar Tuviah said: 'He made everything proper in its time'; this teaches that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* made each person's profession/craft attractive to him".

and bodies, and had all-encompassing perspectives of existence. They separated themselves from the cultures and societies around them, and led strictly purposeful lives of meditation, *avodas HaShem*, and equanimity. The imaginations of these perfected people flowed from their knowledge of truth, not from the base stimulation and nonsense of earthly life. When *HaShem* would convey His transcendent inspiration to them, they would become purified by the revelation, like new people entirely, and for all purposes were like *malachei ha'shareis*.

This is how the Rambam describes *nevi'im*.<sup>15</sup> They were not merely “spiritual people” who heard voices, but intensely disciplined individuals, the crème de la crème of humanity. Since the *navi*'s entire being was subsumed in realization of *Yichud HaShem*, his/her *guf* and *neshamah* were in harmony. The truth filled them, consumed them, and engraved itself in their consciousness. If one uses only his intellect, he will be a scholar. If he uses only his imagination, he will be an escapist and an occultist. But if he develops both in a unified dialectic, the truth will be grasped through his intellect and metaphorized into experience. The abstract potential of *gilui Shechinah* can become a literal reality through him.<sup>16</sup>

For us, who don't have *nevuah* (at least until a certain stage of the *Geulah*<sup>17</sup>), we can still glean insight from this portrait of the *navi*. We strive for objectivity, for wholeness, and for perfection. Since we know that everything is meant to be used for the service of *HaShem*, we are obligated to try to use (or not use) each creation in the

---

<sup>15</sup> *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 7

<sup>16</sup> See *Moreh Nevuchim* II:36-37

<sup>17</sup> See *Yoel* 3:1-2

appropriate way.<sup>18</sup> Part of our perfection lies in refining the imagination, getting to the root of our preconceived interests and ideas, and re-associating each one with the reality of the Torah. A “Jewish culture” is one that comes purely from the Torah and the lifestyle or perspectives it facilitates.

We have spoken up until this point in ideal terms of true knowledge and perfection. What happens when we factor in the imperfect and the subjective?

---

<sup>18</sup> See *Mishlei* 3:6, *Avos* 2:12, and *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chayim* 231



## Idolatry & Fantasy

If prophecy is the zenith of human perfection and the transformation of the imagination into a conduit of Oneness, then *avodah zarah* is its antithesis. The essence of *avodah zarah* is “foreignness”, a distorted worldview that created things or people are in some way independent of their Creator. This eventually degrades into a delusion that an object or force is totally separate, powerful, and worthy of worship. If we are speaking of *Yichud HaShem* as the ultimate reality, *avodah zarah* is the ultimate fantasy. Anytime we ascribe independence or freedom to something, we are including an element of separation and relativism that does not actually exist.<sup>19</sup> In general, fantasy would logically be detrimental if ultimate reality is our goal. Imagining something that doesn’t exist would be empty, wasteful, or even unhealthy. On the other hand, we seem to be implying that man is meant to emulate his Creator and act creatively. After all, creativity is expansive, expressive, and revelatory. Related to this is the difference between sorcery and miracles. So where is the line between escapist fantasy and lofty creativity? Isn’t it all the same imagination? What separates the prophets and sages from the idolaters and wizards in this regard?

We need only to return to the simplest truth to realize the distinction here. Since *Yichud HaShem* is the underlying reality and its expression is a revelation of truth, the opposite of this reality is not an alternative one, but the absence of reality. The best example of this is probably the way sorcerers and fortune tellers would create their

---

<sup>19</sup> Though the *issur* and punishment of *avodah zarah* involves worship and declaration of faith in a created entity, its concept and origin lie in this fundamental lie. See Rambam, *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1.

illusions by using some kind of mesmerizing object or action (e.g. screaming or looking in a mirror) to clear their minds of any active thought.<sup>20</sup> With no profound intellect or Divine inspiration to fill the emptiness, they were able to speak vague nonsense uninhibited, marketing themselves as mystics or monks to take advantage of the masses.<sup>21</sup> While clearing the conscious mind is a legitimate form of meditation and can be useful for stress relief, better concentration, and self-mastery, if the meditator is not saturated with *chochmah*, he will not have anything productive or enriching to replace the emptiness, and the mind will be filled with meaningless images and thoughts.

It is possible for someone truly in touch with reality to alter nature when necessary (more on this later *iy"H*). It is also possible that someone be so persistently out of touch that he does the same thing. The difference is that the *tzadik*, the realist, taps into *Yichud HaShem* and the ways it is harmoniously channeled into the universe in order to perfect it, while the *rasha*, the occultist, taps into externality and chaos to accomplish his own, separate agenda.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, the fantastical imagination can provide so much beauty if it is healthy and sophisticated. Our dreams and art can be so powerful that they open our eyes to something beyond what we see with our physical eyes.<sup>23</sup> When we create art, what are we expressing? Where does this aesthetic come from and where does it

---

<sup>20</sup> Rambam, *ibid.* 11. It should be noted that the Rambam explicitly discounts the possibility that any of this was real. See, however, an astonishing comment of the Radbaz in his *Sh'eilos u'Teshuvos* Vol. V:1695.

<sup>21</sup> This is incredibly similar to both Eastern spirituality and the European paganism that inspires the fantasy genre and culture.

<sup>22</sup> *Gemara Shabbos 75b: kishuf* is an affront to the metaphysical order of forces. The same *gemara*, after discussing the levels of prohibition of *kishuf*, tells the stories of Tannaim and Amoraim who created animals with names of *HaShem* (see Rashi).

<sup>23</sup> See *B'reishis Rabbah* 17:5: sleep is a fallen form of death, dreams are fallen forms of prophecy, and Shabbos is a fallen form of *Olam Haba*.

take us? For this, we must first understand what nature is and how we are inspired by it.

## Nature is Supernatural

To clarify, the error of *avodah zarah* is not in its attachment of supernatural forces to limited creations. It is in the attribution of multiplicity to that supernatural force. The energy that forms and gives existence to a tree is not a mythological spirit; it is *HaShem*, the Life of Worlds. It is infinite oneness being revealed within certain aspects of human perception as a tree. The error of *kishuf* is in its misdirection. There is, of course, reality beyond our own senses, but if you forget the Source of Reality, you're going to have a lot of problems. The point of this world is not to escape, and on the other hand, not to ignore. The point is to see that which holds endless possibilities and pure life within the beautiful architecture of an incubating sanctuary. The root of an urge for escapist *kishuf* is the genuine and transcendent *kisuf* (yearning).

If we think about how we know information or why we assume that there are “laws” of nature, it comes down to *hergel*, becoming used to a routine pattern. The pattern of physics seems to run by itself, life seems to happen, and some things seem “good” because they look, feel, or taste that way. We erroneously assume that “nature” is an entity, separated by an invisible barrier from the supernatural. “The world” is obvious to us because we use our senses to recognize it. But who says our senses are accurate? Why should we assume that physicality is real and anything beyond what we usually experience is less real? From the perspective we have been building until this point, it is just as natural for a sea to split as it is for a bird to fly. Since everything is a calculated consequence of *HaShem* creating existence, and since everything depends constantly and solely on His

will, everything is the same in this regard. The difference between the natural and the supernatural is that the supernatural is more abstract, hidden behind a perception of reality as physical. If we would contemplate the world down to the subatomic and up to the supergalactic, we would realize that even that which we thought was an object is not, and that physical reality is made up of qualities (or properties) and empty space. Taken all together, when we subtract assumptions and add some thought, nature itself is supernatural. We must refine our definitions of reality to see what it really is, and it will act in accordance with those definitions. In fact, the words for miracles are usually “*nisim*” and “*nifla’os*”. A “*nes*” is literally a flag, a noticeable reminder to pay attention, and “*nifla*” means something is astonishing or perplexing because it is profound. This is how we view the world, and this is why we have miracles like *Yetziyas Mitzrayim*.<sup>24</sup>

If this is the case, much of the esoteric becomes quite logical. Just as understanding culinary arts will allow you to prepare food in ways others cannot dream, and just as mastering an instrument will allow you to create music that is almost ethereal, plumbing the depths of truth and reality will allow you to bring them into the physical in prescribed ways beyond the mundane. For those of us who haven’t mastered the Torah and are unfit for such a practice, this is entirely theoretical. However, in *tefillah*, *berachos*, and all the other *mitzvos*, this perspective is essential. By contemplating how *HaShem* interacts with the world, we literally bring the ideal into our reality. Going back to a previous point, this is the function of the Torah, and this is why it is described as primordial; its truth precedes and defines existence itself.

---

<sup>24</sup> See Ramban, end of *Parshas Bo*, where he says that representing this perspective is the goal of Creation.

After clarifying *Yichud HaShem*, the Rambam says that the way to acquire *ahavah* and *yirah* (which are *mitzvos*) is by thinking about Creation. He describes the obsessive desire to know *HaShem* and the disquieting existential epiphany that comes from this experience, as one realizes how infinitesimal he is compared to the Omniscient and how infinitely profound reality is.<sup>25</sup>

This is what we see in the natural world. The universe is not only beautiful or wondrous; it is breathtaking. It brings us instantaneously to a place beyond description, to a level of thought that seems entirely supernatural. If all we see is pretty colors and all we feel is a breeze, our aesthetic is narrow and superficial. If we sense the Infinite within the finite and allow ourselves to meditate on that, to mentally deconstruct what lies before us and integrate all the knowledge we have into that experience, then nature has become a womb of prayer, a vehicle of the truth.

We spoke of a “code” in the Torah itself that would define its aesthetic and its view of reality. What is this intriguing secret?

---

<sup>25</sup> Rambam, *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:1-2

## Language of the Orchard

There is a fairly well-known concept that the Torah is divided into four general degrees of depth. *P'shat* is that which is the most readily understandable, contextually obvious interpretation. *Remez* is the symbolic level where the words become layered. *D'rash* is where we begin to derive the underlying concept. *Sod* is the most essential and real, and is probably the most literal. The acronym of these categories is PaRDeS, meaning an orchard (related to the word "paradise"). The Torah is thus a living orchard, a systematic garden that can be appreciated at the simplest level and a source of ontological euphoria at its most profound. It is important to realize that all understanding of the Torah is intrinsically encoded in its language. To truly grasp what the Torah says, one must know what the words can and do mean, what the letters and grammar signify, how concepts are related, and all the other elements of the language. It was with the essence of this language that Creation was expressed, the *Mishkan* was built<sup>26</sup>, and the greatest people accomplished what they did. In *Lashon HaKodesh*, the letters *are* the values. In the most literal sense, language is the quantization of meaning. When you remove all the symbols and representations of math, you're left with the actual reality. *Gematria* is not "numerology" or even "math"; "numbers" are irrelevant as far as the bigger picture is concerned. We often relate to math as a symbolic system of Arabic numerals, Latin and Greek letters, and other somewhat strange pictures and arrangements that have developed over history. The values and relationships, though- the logic of math - is often esoteric and a feat to master. What we call math is actually a

---

<sup>26</sup> *Gemara B'rachos 55a*

step removed from its essence. *Gematria* is how our language becomes our science. (After all, the Greek *geometria* (known in English as “geometry”) is the “measure of the earth”.<sup>27</sup>) We can only dream of imagining what advanced mathematics looks and feels like in *HaShem*’s language of choice (especially since there are potentially tens or hundreds of ciphers).

Infused with sensitivity for subtlety and an encyclopedic knowledge-base, the Torah can be properly decoded on every level. As we have been saying, the definition of something is how we come to see it for what it is. If we define it by the true definition encoded in the corpus of Torah, we will experience it just as truly.

On the surface, aesthetic appreciation seems to be an end unto itself. When you think about it, though, there must be something beyond the beauty. If all we are doing is consuming beauty to feed our need for pleasure, we are just aesthetic animals. It is becoming clear that true fulfillment, and indeed, true aesthetic appreciation, comes from what the beauty bespeaks. All of existence sings a symphony. To hear it, we must be fluent in its music. This requires work on many levels, but it certainly is most direct through an in-depth study of the original ideal of Creation, the Torah.

We can thus escape into reality if we speak the language of that reality on the plane of the mundane. *Olam HaBa* in *Olam HaZeh*. Do we speak *Lashon HaKodesh*? Is that what we crave, what settles us in this world and yet brings us to another?

---

<sup>27</sup> To be fair, Jastrow says it’s a transposition) of *grammateion*, meaning accounts or calculations, which is plausible but not as close to the Aramaic version.



## Nostalgia & Hiddur Mitzvah

At *Kriyas Yam Suf*, we sang our first prophetic song together. At one point, we were so enthused that we declared “*Zeh Keili v’anveihu!*” We saw everything so clearly that we could readily identify *HaShem*’s immanence the way Yechezkel did. According to Chazal, the word “אנוהו” means four things: emulating Him (אני והוא), building Him a *Beis HaMikdash* (נוה), praising Him (נינו), and to create beauty through *mitzvos* (התנאה לפניו במצוות).

These are all related, but the last one is most often quoted in discussions of beauty in the Torah. However, this principle does not say to merely make *mitzvos* attractive (in some cases of *hiddur mitzvah*, the *hiddur* is not more attractive or is secondary to the *mitzvah* itself); it says to make *oneself* beautiful, to define one’s aesthetic by *mitzvos*.<sup>28</sup> If so, this is the climax of our search. We are given a clear imperative (on a *d’oraisa* level): get to know our own, subjective sense of meaning and beauty, and to let the objectivity of the Torah transform that sense. *HaShem* created man knowing he would become subjective, with the intention that man truly appreciate the objective from his subjective perspective.<sup>29</sup> (This is a profound dialectic: the subjective and objective are unified in unfathomable perfection.) Be

---

<sup>28</sup> See Note 1, as well as Ramban and Ritva on *Gemara Sh’vuos* 15a: the purpose of adding subjective importance to *mitzvos* is to make the *mitzvos* natural and a privilege in the eyes of each individual. See also *Gemara Shabbos* 21b (in the context of Chanukah), where *mehadrin* means to maximize or accentuate the *mitzvah*. Also, see Gra on *Mishlei* 5:9 and *Divrei Hayamim* I:16:27, that *hod* is intrinsic, true beauty, and *hadar* is extrinsic, reflected beauty that comes from *hod*, like the sun is to the moon.

<sup>29</sup> *B’reishis Rabbah* 8:5

proud that you've been given exactly the tools you need to grow your own Divine aesthetic in a broad way.

It does not matter who you are or what your background; you have unique interests and talents, dreams and loves and stories, that you are meant to acknowledge. You have an imagination composed of your experiences, combined and formed into new creations and endless possibilities. You have so much potential with that imagination. *HaShem* wants you to make good use of what He gives you. His world is so immeasurably beautiful in even the most unexpected places and times, and it's you He wants to embrace with it.

When we remember things, we consider this useful in some pragmatic way (e.g. remembering your phone, the material you studied, or the pie in the oven). This allows us to be productive. Emotional memories provide an emotional stimulation that makes us feel a certain way. Sensory memory is almost instinctual, were it not for our ability to think about our associations and make choices. And yet, with all the marvelous feats that memory displays (which have certainly not been summarized adequately here), we find it hard to relate to our own memories. When we remember childhood interests, we may have sensory and emotional memory, but no usefulness, no concept is attached to this, because we have changed since the time of the experience. When we get an ice cream craving, it's a distraction, albeit a vivid and forceful one. When we daydream, we go nowhere other than into the messy recesses of the mind. When we speak of "remembering" our history, it seems impossible to take literally. Perhaps what we ought to do, what the masters have been pleading from us, is to spend some time inside and go on a little hike of

transcendence. To stop running and yelling, and instead to sit in tranquil thoughtfulness with past experience laid bare and unfurled.

The word “nostalgia” was first coined to mean “acute homesickness”, and that describes exactly what I believe memory to be (it is now used to signify yearning for a past experience). Memory is not superficial; memory is a longing for something that has become detached from our self-definition. When it hurts, it demands a solution. When it enthuses, it brings healing. Memory is inherently nostalgic: you don’t only think about something; you live it again; you return home. Memory can be the source of realization for the present. Every detail of your life has contributed to your current persona. We have an entire web of associations based on past experiences. That web tends to be misleading and terribly distorted. But with memory, we are given the challenge to re-synchronize, re-align, and place ideas in their proper places. By re-associating (e.g. the ice cream is flavored, sweetened milk that has been aerated and frozen, rather than “the best thing ever/the epitome of happiness”), we can redeem ourselves in a pre-emptive *Yom HaDin*. Man is a universe, and his history is no accident. The ghostly candle of each person’s past can be a beacon to illuminate the path ahead.

When we say *HaShem* “remembers”, it is perhaps the same idea. Of course, He doesn’t need to remember because He doesn’t forget. But when we align ourselves with the events of our collective consciousness, we relive them. In doing so, the event comes to life, *HaShem*’s reward and punishment are effected, and the great light of that moment shines again. It is a return home, a nostalgic, tender gift to us that transcends time itself.

Even when we miss someone very dear to us, it is as if we are part of the same entity. As confusing as missing others can sometimes

feel, we can be comforted that even over such a great distance, we are still united with those people. Once again, the longing of the mind itself becomes a portal. Whatever we yearn for, as lost as we may be, we are always yearning for the Oneness of the Creator.

## **TorahCraft**

## Uncommon Senses

When *Adam HaRishon* was created, he was perfect, the unification of *guf* and *neshamah*. He was the crowning jewel of Creation, the microcosm of existence, an archetype of objectivity so great that *malachim* paled in comparison. He had no desire, no sensory cravings, and essentially no independent will. When reality is clear as day, there are no choices to make, no doubt to be had, nothing to want. When he and *Chava* ate from the *Eitz HaDa'as Tov va'Ra*, they became tainted with subjectivity, creating the possibility of detrimental behavior, desire for the material, and the possibility of death (separation of *guf* and *neshamah*).<sup>30</sup>

It is because of this imperfection that we struggle with our senses. We began with absolute clarity, but we are now in a haze of nebulosity. The nerves in our bodies communicate excitement to the brain when we see, smell, hear, taste, or feel something, but we interpret that excitement as *tov* or *ra*. *HaShem* is the only judge of what is good, purposeful, and perfect, but we tend to make the mistake of judging that with physicality.

Without repeating too much of what we've said, our challenge is to immerse ourselves so deeply in the waters of true *da'as* that all we sense around us is the Torah aesthetic, the profoundest beauty imaginable. By reassessing what our senses mean to us, if we should follow them, and why we get so excited about them, we free ourselves of their narrowness and disperse the clouds from our consciousness.

---

<sup>30</sup> Ramban on *B'reishis* 2:9, Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* I:2

## Human Creation

While it may be easier to accept that *HaShem* wants us to appreciate the pristine and breathtaking Creation *He* makes, it seems harder to feel that He wants what we make. Sure, Creation is for man to conquer<sup>31</sup> and utilize for the fulfillment of *K'vod Shamayim*, but is it really so important what man produces from his labor, what poetry, paintings, and piano concertos he crafts, or the civilization he builds?

Human creation is a mirror of Divine Creation. *HaShem* willed the specific existence we know out of infinite possibilities, and we express our dynamic, ever-expanding will by forming something that had not previously existed in physical form. In one sense, just as Creation was *yesh me'ayin* (limited thingness out of unlimited nothingness), our creation is also new, unexpected, and previously non-existent. On the other hand, our physical and psychological creation is like a different stage of Divine Creation, *yesh mi'yesh* (limited thingness resulting from combination of other limited things). And as *Shlomo HaMelech* said several times, “*ein chadash tachas ha'shemesh*”; *HaShem* transcends time, and thus all is already created in reality. (That, by the way, has much to do with why we don't create on Shabbos. In reality, everything has been completed perfectly from the beginning.)

It was only after *cheit Eitz HaDa'as* that man needed to work to make a living. Chazal recognized the value of labor in earning an honest living, to the extent that a father is obligated to teach his son a trade or craft of some kind.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, though, the ideal would

---

<sup>31</sup> *B'reishis* 1:28, see Ramban ad loc.

<sup>32</sup> *Gemara Kiddushin* 29a

seem to be *Toraso Umanuso*, someone whose craft or profession is learning Torah. In other words, if someone is so intimately connected to the Torah that he cannot part with it for even a second, *it* is his craft. We have plenty of reason to think that it is acceptable or healthy to work and create physically, but is it really worth something beyond the money that comes from it?

In fact, we have *halachos* that prohibit certain forms in art. Sculptures of humans or celestial bodies, painting and drawing, and even looking at art are all discussed and called into question. This can potentially cause problems for freedom of expression. Perhaps one reason to admire such *halachos* is that they place a healthy limit on the kind of wild (sometimes inappropriate) art found in the non-Jewish world. This enables us to appreciate the inherent beauty in those things we cannot otherwise depict. In other words, taking pictures may capture the general visual frame of a moment, but they do not capture the precious thoughts, feelings, and other nuances of experience and sensation that were contained in it. To a certain degree, then, we are encouraged to see how fantastical the world itself is, how authentic and extraordinary the mundane should be. The truest and most free aesthetic is one that acts as an expression of the ideal. The openness and aesthetic sensibility of *Yefes* must find its home in the truth and absoluteness of *Shem* if humanity is to actualize the highest reality in this one.<sup>33</sup>

We can appreciate the aesthetic man has fashioned with his hands, but we must ask again: is it in any way profound when man creates?

---

<sup>33</sup> Rav Hirsch on *B'reishis* 9:27



## The Great Machine

If we think for a moment about the role of technology, we often associate it with phones and computers. But technology really signifies anything man-made. The Greek word “tekhnos” actually means a craft, something created with skill for a purpose. Isn’t this exactly how we describe *HaShem’s* Creation? Man is also a creator, albeit an imperfect one. By being created *B’tzelem Elokim*, he was given the ability to create and alter existence with his thoughts, speech, and behavior.<sup>34</sup> Logically, emulating *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* involves developing the world, building and perfecting it, and actualizing the ideal. Being constructive or creative is not only part of intellectual discourse; the most obvious application is to literally expand and build the world. Man is expected to settle the world. *Klal Yisrael* is even given instructions for building an ideal civilization. In our prime, we are required to maintain a kingdom, a judicial system, a multi-level calendar, a just and efficient economy, city structure and social services, an army (when necessary), families, agriculture, *taharah*, and the *avodas HaMikdash*. These are the focus of the six sections of *Torah she’b’al peh* that we still probe today and will ultimately be able to apply completely.

The world, history, life, and the individual are great machines. The systematic, ever-evolving nature of these dimensions makes them parallel and gives them purpose. Just like any technology, they each need a source of power. At every level, there is a force driving them, and ultimately these forces lead back to the Source of all energy and change. *HaShem* provides the living essence of all things, and

---

<sup>34</sup> See *Nefesh HaChaim*, *sha’ar* 1

sometimes He deems it necessary to light up the power grid a little more than usual to show His infinity by way of His immanence. This is an interesting way to understand the purpose of *Midas HaRachamim*: *HaShem* creates a mechanical framework (*Midas HaDin*), a tool for His existential craft, and overrides that framework. When He does, the system may change drastically and even collapse, but ultimately it is irradiated with Divine energy. This allows the rebuilding of a more mature existence, a Oneness that is fully realized.

If humanity and its creations seem mundane, it is because your aesthetic is too small. *HaShem* is the Creator of everything; therefore, humanity's creations are His creations, too. How do we create a true aesthetic? We look not to aestheticize *mitzvos*, but rather to “*mitzvatize*” aesthetics. From that perspective, beauty is everywhere, waiting for our electrified brush to reveal it, transforming ourselves in the process. Before we go into practical applications of these ideas, I'd like to add one that is very personal.

## Simplicity in Suburbia

In Jewish circles, there is a huge upper-middle-class contingent (if not the majority) that resides in suburban America (like many other Americans). Despite being incomparable to the European *shtetl*, suburbia still manages to give the exilic Jewish psyche room to wander while providing communal insulation. In America, those features act in very different ways than they might have in Europe. The openness and breadth of possibility, combined with cozy separation, has well-nourished the communities that settle there. I thought I would take a methodological stab at finding the redemptive qualities of suburbia (mainly in order to empower those of us who were born into the suburban mindset and have moved in one direction or another ideologically or communally).

It is interesting that the Modern Hebrew word for suburb is *parvar*. I had no idea where this word came from, until I looked up the *pasuk* in Bamidbar 35:2, the mitzvah to create a *migrash* around (at least) Levite cities. The *migrash* is a green-belt, a wide area of 1,000 *amos* (according to most Rishonim; 500 radial *amos* according to the Ramban) permanently reserved as public parkland. “*Migrash*” is a strange word; Onkelos translates *migrash* as “*revach*” (space), but Targum Yonasan and Targum Yerushalmi have “*parvil*”, a word interchangeable with “*parva*”. Essentially, to whoever came up with the Modern Hebrew word, suburbia is a sort of open space on the outskirts of the metropolis. Neither the city nor surrounding fields and vineyards may be expanded into this common area, which was used for animals, amenities, and moveable possessions. This prevented unhealthy urban sprawl and preserved the pulchritude and rural

character of the land, but also allowed for an established, urban culture to develop within cities (since houses in walled cities can be sold permanently, while open cities and fields remain inheritance-bound by the laws of *Yovel*).<sup>35</sup> The *migrash* was never residential like suburbia, but suburbia retains some of the freedom of a *migrash*, little shards of wildness. The agrarian elements of our Torah life that would otherwise be missing at least show themselves in suburban neighborhoods. We can be reminded that our accomplishments and products are contained within the Creation of *HaShem* and have some sense of the immense depth and geometry of His expression. With this, we can yet salvage the association Chazal made between the agricultural tractates of *Seder Z'ra'im* and the super-perspective of *Emunah*.<sup>36</sup> “*Migrash*” might even mean “a place of escape” (from *l'garesh*, to divorce or expel, in the same form as *midrash* (the act/quality of analysis) and *mirmas* (the act of trampling)).

On the other hand, suburbia is not a public park. It is a place designed with impeccable organization. The goal of suburbia is not to live on the Great Plains; it is to comfortably squeeze as many housing units and local services as possible into a non-urban piece of land. In this way, it is conservatively urban beyond the definition of a rural village. It should also be realized that it was after World War II that Americans felt prosperous and confident, leading the American Dream of consumerism, self-made success, and home/auto-ownership to explode via the expansion of suburbia. Although Americans now tend to be less trailblazing than their ancestors were, it should be memorialized that social mobility and innovation were the signature of this country and its people.

---

<sup>35</sup> *Vayikra* 25:34 and Rav Hirsch ad loc.

<sup>36</sup> *Gemara Shabbos* 31a

When I'm away from the city in which I was raised, I think about the place itself perhaps more than anything else. I think about the clean, gentle air, the mesmerizing greenery and dreamy blue sky. I imagine animals and Neo-eclectic architecture and quiet ponds and friendly main streets. I feel the day shifting colors palpably, each time with its own wisdom to tell. It is a place where peace and productivity can be in harmony. Even the names of the villages, hamlets, towns, and cities of Westchester ring poetic to my ear: New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, White Plains, Sleepy Hollow; all with the nostalgia for simplicity and sanity.

It would be at the very least ungrateful and, at the worst, blasphemy, to deny these gifts: our homesteads, our families, our tribes, and our cradles. *HaShem* is the Creator; let's not forget that. Thank Him profusely for holding you lovingly at every moment and bundling you in innumerable concentric worlds so that you might enter this reality as a pure *Ben/Bas Melech* and accomplish the cosmic task ahead.

At the very least, this realm has given us an imagination that contains both static Divine Creation and dynamic human creation (a dichotomy that has been impressively harmonious), and a quiet homestead where one may find a moment of transcendence and possibility if he/she pays attention. Silence and simplicity lead us right back to the beginning: there is no noise in absoluteness, no complication in Oneness.

## **The Quest**

## P'rishus, Kedushah, and Taharah

Now that we're attempting to get a bit more practical, it is extremely important to emphasize a few healthy attitudes about approaching beauty and the very pleasure of experience itself. There is a clear warning in the Torah not to follow one's eyes and mind in the wrong direction.<sup>37</sup> We shouldn't forget the meaning of "*Sheker ha'chen v'hevel ha'yofi*"<sup>38</sup>: affinity is subjective and beauty is transient. We would also be wise to remember the *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* that states "Rabi Shimon said: One who is traveling and [reviewing his] learning and stops to say 'What a beautiful tree!' or 'What a nice furrow!' is considered by the Torah to be liable for his life."<sup>39</sup> With great yearning comes the need for boundaries and priorities. Since we don't want to be intellectually dishonest, we should be cognizant of 3 basic levels regarding pleasure and limits:<sup>40</sup>

1. That which is *assur*; in other words, something entirely "bound" (literally) to destruction or emptiness from an objective perspective. For example, if a food is *treif*, no matter how much you may be drawn to it, it is objectively impossible for you to be permitted to eat it. Not only will you have gained nothing; you will have detracted from yourself and everything else.

2. That which may technically be *mutar* but is ill-advised for bigger reasons. This category may be hard to grasp if you see Torah as something to legitimize preconceived notions or hormones etc., but with contemplation, honest self-assessment, and the right background, life takes on a healthier and more accurate light when this is utilized.

---

<sup>37</sup> *Bamidbar* 15:39

<sup>38</sup> *Mishlei* 31:30

<sup>39</sup> 3:7, see commentaries ad loc.

<sup>40</sup> Roughly corresponding to those mentioned in *Mesilas Yeshtarim*

For example, it may be *mutar* (unclear, ask a *posek*) to eat non-Jewish holiday foods on days other than the holiday, but the inherent association makes this an undesirable way to conduct one's life.

3. *Kadesh atzm'cha b'mutar lach*. This one is really very individualized, but should be upheld to the best of one's ability. Although most of us do not practice asceticism, the idea that separation creates transcendence is firmly rooted in the mitzvah of "*kedoshim tih'yu*" and plenty of others. For example, if you want to be free of your meat craving, try diverting that craving sometimes and you'll see how your world changes. Again, sometimes pleasure is necessary or obligated, so be gradual and seek advice for this one.

One of the greatest tests of true appreciation is the ability to give that which you appreciate. It is eminently clear that the Torah includes property ownership because one is meant to do something meaningful with his/her property. The only reason anything exists is to facilitate purpose, and certainly that which is in the hands of man should require higher standards in this regard. The *mitzvos* concerning mandatory *tzedakah*, gifts to the poor (e.g. *leket*, *shich'chah*, and *pe'ah*), *Kohanim*, and *Levi'im*, as well as the institution of *hekdesch*, the *shemitah/yovel* cycle, etc. are all perfect examples of this. Even that which we are made to own and transact is intended for purpose. We are given the responsibility of *parnassah* as a way of involving us in the process and as a metaphor for human purpose in general.

If you really like something, ask yourself: would I be just as happy or even happier to give this to someone else without expecting anything in return? Can I experience enjoyment without the sensation of my body but instead with a supernal fulfillment of existence and emulation of the Infinite? Can I be a transcendent creator, be selfless and loving, and do something meaningful with what I appreciate?



The universe and its every detail belong to *HaShem* because He is the Creator. Only by following a regimen of realizations (the *mitzvos*, and particularly *tefillah* and *b'rachos*<sup>41</sup> in our day and age) can we avoid misappropriating the world. Everything is created pure and holy until it is misused, and even that which is naturally *tamei* (e.g. a dead body) is a result of *Chet Adam HaRishon*. Without acting in an unhealthy or arrogant manner, we are encouraged to find ways to purify ourselves in thought, speech, and behavior.

We are privileged to know what Shabbos is. Many assume that it is some kind of "day of rest", a time to catch up and fill your stomach with chulent until you fall asleep on the couch around a board game.

Shabbos is literally everything. Meditation on the perfection of life, the fact that existence is constantly *yesh me'ayin*, the *kedushah* and *taharah* that flow freely from Shabbos and wait for us to open our arms; all of this is available every week. Shabbos is one of the few things described by the *midrash* as a valuable treasure hidden in the upper echelons of reality<sup>42</sup>, and it is granted only to *Klal Yisrael*. It is the knot of time and space all spun together, the infinite particle wherein *hilchos Shabbos* are the modest doors to Gan Eden, and the pleasures of Shabbos diffuse the gentle aromatic breeze of its blooms ("We have a spice called Shabbos...only those who preserve it can taste it"<sup>43</sup>).

Shabbos needs no speech except that which is sublime and pure, no running save that which is meaningful. It reframes the world as one which is untouchable without recognition of its inherent transcendence. It calls for the clothing of emperors ("All Jews are

---

<sup>41</sup> See *Sefer HaChinuch* 430

<sup>42</sup> *Gemara Shabbos 10a*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 119a

royalty"<sup>44</sup>) and the accoutrements of Heavenly monarchy. Its peace is profound and its intellect immortal. You do not merely keep Shabbos, you become it.

We speak of nature as pristine and pure. It is as if we sense this, although we cannot seem to pinpoint how. Concurrently, it is hard for us to want to strive for purity. A *mikveh* or other body of water is *tahor* because it is "connected" to the ground. Objects and plants cannot contract *tumah* or become primed for *tumah* (*hechsher*) if they are attached to or planted in the ground (even by a single root). This has applications for *trumah* and *maaser* as well. Live animals are *tahor*. Rain only becomes *tamei* if someone is around to want it and claim it. Objects only become *tamei* if they are complete and useful for somebody in an intended way.<sup>45</sup> In other words, everything is pure unless you defile it. Yes, purity of thought, speech, and behavior is a lofty goal that only a few reach. However, we can use the beauty of nature to give ourselves a trajectory.

These approaches help us maintain a healthy outlook by distinguishing us as people free of impulses and passing societal trends. Creativity can be a humble pursuit with transcendent meaning if we achieve balance and nurture that creativity within certain boundaries.

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 128a

<sup>45</sup> As a disclaimer, these are independent *sugyos* and may not be technically related, but the effects of these Halachic concepts are related and form a broadly-applicable worldview. One may be tempted to infer that humanity interferes in nature and defiles it, but since we are supposed to ideally maintain a pure environment and state of being, it is entirely possible to do so without compromising human civilization or industry. *Taharah* is not naturalism but purism and perfection.

## Beauty in Paradox

We've talked a lot about the kind of interests that can be directed relatively well toward *avodas HaShem*, and even a little about recognizing what is a psychotic and destructive distortion of our imaginations. What happens when we see paradoxical beauty in the world? Darkness can be beautiful. Rust and slime molds and withering leaves could make your soul cry with yearning for *d'veikus*. I believe we are not misguided by such things, but in fact see the purity of purpose that lies deep within the very existence of death and darkness. The fact that dangerous, irrational, or even unpleasant phenomena can be thought of as beautiful means that we have intuitively sensed the goodness inherent in them. The task becomes filling this perception with knowledge and understanding, and then bringing it into our emotions and behaviors. In other words, can you see the paradoxical beauty in other people, even when they are lost, even when they reject you? Can you approach your own challenges with an eye for beauty? Does the *emunah* whisper *me'achorei HaPargod* that all is the way it's supposed to be? Can we be *ovdei HaShem b'lemess* and shed the bonds of *galus*?

Daydreaming is incredible. Nostalgia is profound. Homesickness is ethereal. These things press upon us, plague us, traumatize us, and ultimately transport us. These phenomena of longing are vivid, hypnotic, even addictive. Although not fantasy, they are escapes and defenses for stress in the present. The storm of the present is taunting us, tossing us, and tormenting us, and we beg to be saved. But by whom? Who do you cry to in your time of need? Dreams? Visions? Apparitions of the past?

We understand the difficulty of acquiring such grand ways of life as *emunah*, *bitachon*, or the joy of life. And yet, if we use this power to step outside of space and time the way *Avraham Avinu* did<sup>46</sup>, to hover above our first-person bodies and electrify the present and the rest of the universe with it, we'll be able to live the best of both realities. Daydreaming of dear being, nostalgic for now, homesick for here. With that, *b'ezras HaShem*, everything that truly is will come to fruition.

There is beauty in being receptive to what *HaShem* is trying to show us through the vicissitudes of life and opening our arms with the words "*Kol d'avid Rachmana l'tav avid*" on our lips.<sup>47</sup> Although challenges, suffering, and tragedy are so nuanced, so common, and so profound, one's existence is altered by them in ways one may not be able to appreciate in the moment. It usually takes time, maturity, and healing for their significance to be understood. Often, however, we don't understand, and healing does not come in this life or this era. Nevertheless, the tapestry widens, and eventually every exquisite thread will add its own strange beauty to a truly beautiful reality.

---

<sup>46</sup> *B'reishis* 15:5, see Rashi ad loc.

<sup>47</sup> As said by Rabi Akiva, *Gemara B'rachos* 60b

## Seeing in Color

We are prone to think of color names in Hebrew as very specific and saturated hues of those colors. When you hear “red”, you probably imagine a bright red color like that of a strawberry. In Hebrew, the word *adom* is usually translated as “red”. When we look at instances like *parah adumah* or *admoni*, however, we see the same word being used to describe an orange color (as in the parallel English “redhead”). In fact, the word *adom* is also used to describe the reddish-purple color of wine and the orange color of red lentil soup. The modified word *adamdam* is an interesting contrast, meaning either “reddish” or “very red”. *Adamah* implies something closer to brown.

The same is true of the word *yarok*. Besides green, *yarok* also denotes greenish gold, yellow, and pale yellow (as in *yerakon*, the effect of drought on crops and plants). Again, the word *yerakrak* is “greenish” or “very green”. (This and *adamdam* appear to be the two examples of this doubling in color names, and appear together in the parashah of *tzara’as*.) *Yerek* is broadly “vegetable”. I’m not sure about *techeles* (which obviously has immediate Halachic implications), but I suspect there is a similar spectrum there as well. After all, *techeles* is reminiscent of the sea and sky, yet imitated by plant-based indigo. Its appearance is subject to *machlokes*, ranging approximately from turquoise to navy.

The colors *afor*, *katom*, *segol*, etc. in Modern Hebrew are likely borrowed from objects or phenomena displaying those frequencies (e.g. *afor* from *efer*, ashes). In the Torah, though, there are three main colors (excluding white). Hebrew has a few defining categories for the

entire spectrum of visible light, and these categories ultimately correspond to categories of existence as manifest in these colors.

Although this changes nothing about the way individual colors look, it does change our perception of them. It redefines how we see the interactions between colors. It also changes how we think about color in general. Attempts have been made to establish connections between frequency and gematria, and speculation about color-characteristics (and what art evokes) continues. Synesthesia is always interesting, and light is related to sound and plenty of other metaphors and neuropsychological processes. Aesthetics is a topic in philosophy. In a purely Jewish aesthetic, then, all of the above and more would be addressed, in part by the objectivity of color. Instead of only seeing separate colors, the Torah sees a spectrum that is alive with interaction between hues and shades. The color wheel becomes a turning cycle in a larger mechanism of perception. Indeed, the halachic significance of *yarok* in the arba minim, the meditation involving *techeles* in the *tzitzis*, and the antithesis of Edom to Yisrael all point to a much larger perspective than what modern civilization is accustomed to.

Taking this a step further, we can appreciate the reference to a vision of the *shechinah* (so to speak) as being like a rainbow in a cloud<sup>48</sup> and the rainbow itself being a sign of peace.<sup>49</sup> The concept of a spectrum of *midos* (as discussed earlier) fits perfectly into this symbolism. Peace is not merely compromise; it is the harmonious involvement of all elements in their intended places and roles.

In our long exile, we have undergone many transformations and revolutions, though our essence has remained constant. I need not list all the well-known labels applied to different Jewish

---

<sup>48</sup> *Yechezkel* 1:28

<sup>49</sup> *B'reishis* 9:8-17

communities today. In a nutshell, the factions are just different areas of common interest within Judaism. One community is preoccupied with custom, another with morality, yet others with religious experience, analytic learning, etc. All of the above are quite wonderful things, if not for the fact that each preoccupation tends to neglect the others. Judaism was never only human morality or learning or fervent prayer. It was always everything in its proper place. A few phenomena of my generation of Modern Orthodoxy are: rejection of a “central Orthodoxy” for something more extreme (in either direction), devotion to Enlightenment ideas about Judaism, embrace of Chassidus in its more experiential manifestations, and the ever-elusive motto of “Torah U’Madda”. And while I should assume there is good intention behind it all, I wonder why I haven’t heard more rejections of the labels themselves and embrace of the entire system. Yes, perhaps every group thinks it is the most authentic, but there are also plenty of Jews misunderstanding or lacking exposure to the very “other” they shun. Can you really grasp what *Gemara* is if you haven’t understood it in depth for several years? Do you really get what a heartfelt *niggun* is if you’ve never experienced it? Can you possibly be uninterested in Hebrew grammar, perfection of character, the Torah’s perspective on the arts and sciences, or *dikduk b’mitzvos* if you can’t taste what it means to those who are so passionate about it?

Just as there is beauty in accepting *Yichud HaShem*, there is beauty in accepting the unique blend of colors, strengths and weaknesses, in each person. We must also allow others to teach us when we see any kernel of truth in their words or any virtue in their actions. The Torah is multi-faceted.

## Epic Learning

If anything comes of this, it might as well be a newfound appreciation of Torah, and specifically learning Torah.

Many become turned off from learning by the apparent predominance of certain sections of *Shas*. The "yeshiva cycle" generally consists of *Nashim* and *Nezikin* (with some *Kodshim* in Brisk and *Moed* in YU). These are spoken of as being "more *lomdish*" (analytical). Besides being different than the original program in Volozhin (where they learned from *B'rachos* through *Nidah*) and the recommendations of many *Gedolei Yisrael*, this premise is inherently false.

1. In any analysis of Torah there is a process of question and answer, contradiction and resolution. This is true because the Torah is the singular, perfect entity in which all is interconnected. It is impossible for a monolith to be disproportionate. Every drop of ink in the Torah is mountainous and endless. Every *seder* is intrinsically as endlessly profound as the others.

2. The six *sedarim* of *Torah she'b'al peh* are six modalities of life. Each has its own color, its own flavor and sound. The *tannaim* and *amoraim* themselves had specialties, and there were even separate *batei midrash* for Aggad'ta and Halacha. What we consider obscure topics would merit hundreds or thousands of questions and answers that aren't even recorded. Whatever disposition we may or may not have for *Nashim* and *Nezikin* is a function of familiarity and preference, not one of breadth or completeness. And whatever is deemed too concise for analysis contains the same profundity and requires even more work to be decoded, just as the *Gemara* decodes the *Mishnayos*.



3. It is literally impossible to learn anything without ending up learning something else as well. One can ostensibly study math without studying literature, but one cannot study *Bava Metzia* without *Kinim* or *Sanhedrin* without *Rosh HaShanah*. The Talmud itself, *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* all make that hard to ignore. The conceptual framework derived from Shas is much bigger than the case that is being analyzed, a fact that motivates any case-study incorporated into the Talmud.

So to whomever is dissuaded from learning Torah because they don't yet taste the spiced sweet-cream of *Shor SheNagach es HaParah* and the like: don't give up. Learn everything, give *Shas* a chance, and find your flavor. Become an expert in your topic, and use that appreciation to learn everything else.<sup>50</sup> You build worlds with your learning, universes of symphonic creativity and beautiful truth.

---

<sup>50</sup> It is important to remember that just as Halacha is derived methodologically, Aggad'ta is as well, and many of the rules for doing so are similar to those of Halacha. That is why there were entire *batei midrash* just for Aggad'ta.

## **Appendix**

## Afterword

What emerges from everything we spoke about is that the imagination can and should be used for *avodas HaShem*. Instead of focusing only on art or natural wonders, we tried to expand how we think about aesthetic appreciation, rooting it in a realization of profundity, perfection, purity, transcendence, simplicity, reality, and Oneness. Ideally, we would be *talmidei chachamim*, *tzaddikim*, *nevi'im*; we would master ourselves and be purists of Torah and *mitzvos*. Still, as imperfect people, we can see the world and humanity as works of *HaShem*'s infinite, artistic craft of reality.

Perhaps, *b'ezras HaShem*, we gained some practical inspiration. Maybe we even began building a method for mining the Torah for its meta-perspectives and panoramic knowledge. However, there is still so much to do. Each person has his/her own quest, depending on each person's potential, interests, skills, and circumstances. The Torah is full of meditations, and life is full of opportunity. There are many stages to finding the objective aesthetic, and many *sefarim* I haven't mentioned or don't know of that serve as guides along this path. I have drawn on the Ramchal's *Derech HaShem* and *Da'as Tevunos* the *Meor Einayim*, the writings of Rav Aryeh Kaplan, Rav Hirsch, Rav Kook, and others because I have personally gained immensely from those *sefarim*, but any work of *mussar* or *machshava* would help if one approaches them with this goal. There is nothing new about what we are exploring. *Tanach* is irradiated with these ideas, and *midrashim* help to bring this out. Nearly all mainstream *Rishonim* speak subtly about various uses of the imagination, and this has been revived and preserved in various ways

since then.<sup>51</sup> As we have said, the broader our appreciation, the broader the aesthetic, so even the Talmudic and Halachic aspects of the Torah bespeak the same thing in practical or analytical terms. *Mussar*, often stereotyped as draconian or depressing, could be visualized as embarking on a quest for jewels that provide superpowers or building an intricate castle of *tikkun ha'midos* that one can inhabit. Similarly, *chazarah*, which people often find burdensome, could be thought of as returning to one's own peaceful orchard where concepts are organized and grow, and in which the learner can eat his fruit and enjoy.

We have role models and visionaries among us. Our predecessors yearned for a culture and society defined by the Torah's blueprint. We who have seen the blueprint know that everything is contained within it, even if we do not yet know how to find it all. What we need is infrastructure; an alliance of knowledgeable and thoughtful Jews who stand up for the truth. We need to tap into our Divinely ordained skills and interests and make it our craft to mine the Torah for perspective. We need to learn the expanse and richness of Torah, to intensify our focus on what matters, and to spread to other Jews the ongoing epic of *mesorah*. We are a kingdom of unique representatives; it is together that we will bring Divine transcendence and immanence to the fore.

---

<sup>51</sup> There is a genre of *sefarim* that list concepts and objects along with the aspects of HaShem's *hashgacha* they correspond to and stem from (such as *sheimos* and *midos*), but these are only useful once one has understood both the nature of the "worldly" subject and the meaning of what it corresponds to.

## Autumn

The following are perspectives on the fall and winter, with some relevant sources.

Autumn, that crisp, golden season of rustic comfort and haunting beauty, has a place in the year. Every season is significant in its own way, and I feel that perhaps the significance of this season is undertreated. Let us first dare to define the aesthetic. Though every individual has his/her own experience of and associations with autumn, I have found the themes of decrease, insulation, and fullness to be most prominent.

Decrease, the reduction of arousal and activity, is also the criterion for what is commonly considered "peace" or "rest". The sentiment "I just want to relax/take a vacation/go to sleep" is very much in line with this need for cessation. The falling of the leaves and herbaceous plants, the tempering of the summer heat and light, and the slowing of agriculture and recreation, all bespeak this.

Insulation, the ingathering of resources and elements or their envelopment, is related to the theme of decrease. The harvest of summer crops, the intake of sugars and moisture into the tree that transforms foliage, and the warm, comfortable clothing that is worn are indicative of this homely character. Activities and attitudes reflect this.

Fullness, the concentration of an experience or its "depth", results from the insulation that comes from decrease. The richness and flavor of food, the warmth (and relaxation) it produces or is paired with, and the intensity of "warm" color are what makes autumn uniquely perceived as profound.

To unite these varied and undoubtedly complex themes, we may contemplate the characterization of *Tekufas Tishrei* with *gevurah*.

If *gevurah* is restriction or limitation, then the slowed pace of change, the collection of energy within boundaries, and the potential of density are aspects of that limitation. The "warm" side of the color spectrum that is so celebrated, juxtaposed with the need to be warmed against the cooling weather and the "warmth" of autumnal pleasures (which is a lasting vestige of an ancient belief in the scientific "warmth" of spice), is associated with *gevurah* as well. It is perhaps the multifaceted *gevurah* of the season that is so well-represented by its holidays; Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkos are all characterized by *din* or *gevurah*.

There is another interesting association of autumn that may explain its ethereal nature and the non-Jewish culture that pervades it. The quality of airiness- the crispness and thinness of the breeze, for example- also stems from the internality that has been discussed. The ubiquitous fading of life and the quieting of the senses that brings in the winter lowers the imagination into a place of breath. One can hear the howling wind and the rustling of leaves, and this can be related to the experience of one's own respiration. The year and the person are easing into a deep sleep. Seeing the calendar as a cycle and a personal reflection of oneself is essential to understanding that "spirituality" or "inspiration" (etymologically meaning "breathing") is always present. Focus opens our hearts and minds to that which is intrinsic.

*B'reishis Rabbah* 17:5: There are 3 *novlos* ("withered/fallen leaves/fruit"): fallen death is sleep, fallen prophecy is dream-state, and fallen *Olam Haba* (the ideal world) is Shabbos. R' Avin adds: fallen supernal light is the sun and fallen supernal knowledge (*chochmah*) is Torah.

See *Tanya, Iggeres HaKodesh* 19.

Sukkos is celebrated from the middle of *Tishrei*, the beginning of the Seeding season (which is the first agricultural season; see *Noach* 8:22), and is called alternatively The Festival of Gathering/Harvest.

*Melachim* 1:6:38: the *Beis HaMikdash* was completed after 7 years in the 8th month (*Marcheshvan*), which is called *Bul*.

*Yerushalmi Rosh HaShanah* 1:2: It is called *Bul* because the leaf withers (*naval*), the earth becomes cloddy (*na'aseis bulos bulos*), and animal fodder is prepared (*bol'lin la'b'heimah*).

*Toras Emes*: The name *Bul* signifies the emptiness that is manifest in the withering and falling of the plants and in the absence of renewed inspiration that would come via seasonal *mitzvos*. The only thing left is the immutable whispering of *kedushah* (*Marcheshvan*=*m'rachashan sif'vasei* (His lips are whispering)) intrinsic to the Jewish soul.

*Bnei Yissachar* (month of *Marcheshvan*): this month signifies several interrelated concepts, including the sense of smell, the inauguration of the 3rd *Beis HaMikdash* in this month, *neshamah*, harmony, etc.

The word *Bul* is formed from the first, middle, and last letter of the Torah.

*Sefer Yetzirah* 3:5-6

*Mishlei* 11:28: One who is confident in his wealth will fall, and *tzaddikim* will flourish like the leaf.

*Gra*: From the right perspective, wealth is as a leaf to its tree; when the leaves fall off in the autumn, it's inconsequential because the tree is the main organism and the leaves will return in the spring.

*Malbim* relates this to the importance of acquiring knowledge over wealth, which merely protects knowledge and *avodas HaShem* like leaves protect the fruit.



# Winter

When we approach the winter as an aesthetic, it is important to distinguish a few chief features. For one, winter is a time of silence, when the snow falls and shrouds the world, muffling sound. Of course, snowfall also freezes the land, sea, and sky, preventing travel and killing life. Whereas fall was the gradual decrease into cessation and allowed for a temperate experience of the ethereal, a crispness paired with warmth, winter is the dark end. The world freezes over, flora dies or becomes dormant, and fauna goes into hibernation or migrates.

And yet, winter is exemplified by the pure, sparkling white of frozen water. Inevitably, the visual beauty of the season and its every hue, tint, and shade is defined by the white snow. While it can be difficult to get rid of the extreme goyishness of the aesthetic, we all know that sparkling snow and twinkling stars dominate it. Even the decorations used during the season focus on plants and animals (and therefore color) that peek out from the flat whiteness. Evergreens are an example of a contrasting element in the color and geometry scheme.

We have identified two traits thus far: silence (cessation) and homogeneity.

If we imagine the tastes of the season, there is, ironically, a preference for mint even in hot food and drink. The menthol that makes mint feel “cool” and airy interacts with receptors for cold on the tongue. One parallel cultural phenomenon is catching snowflakes on one’s tongue; the desire is thus to experience the cold within one’s own warmth.

The final stage is the quality of the home. One is forced to stay inside and warm oneself with fire, bundled in the softness of a quilt. Hibernation is in full effect. The glow one imagines from a remote cabin is warm and gentle. In a world of muted white and blue, there is yet a sanctuary of burning consciousness. In a wooden home, the gentle trees themselves have become the womb of humanity. We appreciate autumn as a flaming spirit that comes from resistance. Once we encounter winter, that resistance has become subdued and we enjoy the season for how we live immersed in it.

It is during *Tekufas Teves* that we have Chanukah and Purim, times that quite obviously revolve around light within darkness and the purity within static nature.

*Tehillim* 68:15: “*B’fares Sha-dai m’lachim bah tashleg b’Tzalmon*”. Rashi ad loc.: The Torah that *HaShem* spread out (revealed/explained) for us allows those who study it (who are “kings”) to be snowed upon (purified/refined) in the darkness of exile.

Cf. *Tanchuma* (*Re’eh* 13): The final stage of the most extreme kind of *Gehinom* is that of “snow”, the “shadow of death”. See also *Pri Tzadik* (*Acharei* 6).

ibid. 147:17: “He (*HaShem*) gives snow like wool, He will scatter frost like ashes. He tosses his ice like crumbs, who can bear his cold?”

*Iyov* 37:6: *HaShem* tells the snow “Become earth!”/“Descend to the ground!”

*Ta’anis* 3b: Rava said: snow is as beneficial in the mountains as 5 rains are to level ground.

*Nidah* 17a: Regarding *tumah*, snow is neither food nor fluid...if a portion of it becomes impure, the rest does not. If a portion of it

becomes pure, all of it is pure (cf. Rashi ad loc.: each snowflake is a separate entity).

*Mikvaos* 7:1: snow can be used for a mikveh, but it is questionable how *lechatchila* this is and in what proportion/state.

*Shmuel* II:23:20: Benayahu Ben Yehoyada, the son of a man of combat (written “son of a living man”), of many accomplishments, from Kav’tz’el, defeated the two Ariel of Moav, and he killed the lion in the pit on the day of snow.

*B’rachos* 18a-b: Some say this (last clause) means he broke through a frozen-over mikvah and immersed himself (Rashi: to cleanse himself of emission to learn Torah; *Tosfos* (*Bava Kama* 82b): in order to eat *chullin* (non-sanctified) food in purity. Some say he taught *Sifra d’Bei Rav* (*Toras Kohanim*, the *midrash Halacha* of *Vayikra*, the middle book (“the pit”) and a heavy work (“the lion”)) on a winter day. See *Ben Yehoyada* ad loc.

See Ramchal’s *Maamar HaGeulah* I:37-38

