

## The Need for New Root Metaphors

Reb Zalman suggests that we need to find new root metaphors for our spirituality because some of the key metaphors from the past have run their course. There is no "king" we would want to bow to and be in awe of today, yet our prayers allude to God as *melekh ha-olam*, king of the universe. Anyone who refers to God the father after Freud may be in serious trouble yet our prayers frequently (and almost exclusively) use the father image, such as *avinu malkaynu*, our father, our king.

Many of us are floundering, wanting to find in Judaism a metaphor that works for ourselves. Where can we turn to find new metaphors for our spiritual yearnings? We need ones which fit our developing relationship with God, our real experience with the Higher Power, the yearnings of our hearts, the emerging scientific knowledge that is filtering into worldwide awareness, and the explicit thoughts of our Jewish spiritual ancestors. On *Rosh Hashana* does God really judge our lives based on whether we were good or did *teshuvah*? Does God seal it with a seal on *Yom Kippur*? The old root metaphor is based on God as Judge and King. *Rosh Hashana* is the Day of Judgment (*Yom Hadin*) before the Divine Court. It is also referred to as the coronation day, as we proclaim God *Hamelekh*, King. How can we recontext these metaphors so as to work for us to inspire authentic self-reflection?

Newer metaphors from Jewish mysticism may help. These have to do with the subtle energy changes which happen on the High Holydays. According to the Kabbala, new energy comes to us from the *Ayn Sof* (Infinite) on this day, and yes, it is tied in with how we do *Teshuvah*, and yes, it comes to a certain settling on *Yom Kippur*.

### New Science and Hamshakhot

Traditional Judaism has always known that we come from a common origin. The Kabbala states that the materials of my body and yours are intrinsically related because they come from and are caught up in a single energetic event, the energy flowing from and back to the *Ayn Sof Or*, the infinite light. Nowadays, science is also teaching that our ancestry stretches back through the life forms and the stars into a single beginning. One important detail that science has added to all this is the empirical proof. "We are the first generation to live with an empirical view of the origin of the universe. We are the first humans to look into the night sky and see the birth of stars, galaxies, and the cosmos as a whole." (*The Universe Is A Green Dragon* by Brian Swimme, p. 29.)

The most important shift in metaphors, I propose, is that our universe is not a mechanical collection of objects and material things interacting with each other in empty space, but that all of us participate in a great current as part of a larger energy flow acting on every other part, drawing energy out of the Infinite, and being drawn back to the Infinite. This idea is consonant with ideas appearing from new science. We are all part of a cycle of *hamshakhot*, energy currents, which make up the underlay of what we perceive as time and space.

### High Holydays and Energy Flow

Hassidic teachings based on the Kabbala use the idea of the universe being a spiralling, patterned, series of

energy pulses to explain particular energetic differences between the various Holydays. They claim that our liturgy, life-cycle rituals, and Holyday celebrations are all based on the *hamshakhot* (flow patterns) that is, how the energy flow is changing from time to time.

There is an energy flow which courses from the *Ayn Sof* (the Infinite) through us and pulses back to the *Ayn Sof*. As the *hamshakha* (flow) returns, it takes with it the impressions which are gathered to it. Every moment the pulse is repeated, from the *Ayn Sof* to us and then back. These instantaneous pulses of energy from the Infinite to us and back are the source of time and the essence of change. The quality of each succeeding *hamshakha* depends on how we have used the nourishment, and the next *hamshakha* depends on that. To become aware of this pulse of energy flow is to live at the heart of the world, where every instant has its own flow coming from the *Ayn Sof* and returning to it. It is like sitting in an echo chamber where ripples of sound become more complex as we react and add more sound to the ripples which have come back to us.

Every hour has its *hamshakha* and in a more collective way, every week, on the Shabbat, as well. This way of understanding the flow change is the source of many of our Shabbat customs and prayers. On erev Shabbat the weekday energy rises back to its source, ultimately resulting in a new *hamshakhah*, which comes in after Shabbat has ended. That's why we make certain prayers then, such as the *Lekha Dodi*, Come my Friend to Greet the Shabbat Bride—in other words, come, to meet the new energy as the pulse of the previous six days is transmuted and flows back to the *Ayn Sof* (Infinite One), who sends us back a new energy for the next six days. In Hassidic thought this answers the question, why, after the seventh day, do we not go on to the eighth day? The answer is that this *hamshakha* is brand new and thus not really a continuation of last week's energy. It is a first day of the week again. This pattern is not merely a cycle, but a spiral which continues on upward.

So too with the yearly cycle. Every year as *Rosh Hashana* begins, the energy of the previous year returns to the *Ayn Sof* and causes ripples. Through our celebrations, new energy is stimulated to return to restart the process. This begins at the instant of the *Shofar* blast on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, when the Infinite, hopefully, is elicited by our deep call to return again to the vision for which this world was originally created. The new energy will last the entire year to come. The great annual *hamshakhah* starts to descend to us, finally reaching some clear form at the end of *Yom Kippur*,

In this way, all the metaphors of the past hook into the current ones and we can feel that the Jewish path is both current and ancient. As the collective energy of the previous year folds back into the Infinite, there is an accounting of all the impressions made into it by all the actions of all beings, *Yom Hadin*. By doing *Teshuvah* we can adjust the context for the new energy which begins to come down to us on *Rosh Hashana*. By *Yom Kippur*, the new energy becomes fixed in a decided pattern. May we realize new metaphors that work for us this year.

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