

Happy Thoughts

The wisdom of Kabbalah unfurls the 'secret map' of the ten *sefirot*—a complex, living structure, like a tree with a multitude of branches. God employs this structure to create and rule the world. Chassidut teaches that this structure is also the secret map of the soul of man, for man was created in God's image.

The system of *sefirot* has three heads in the *sefirah* of crown. Together with the ten *sefirot* (including knowledge, or *da'at*, the *sefirah* considered the conscious counterpart of the superconscious crown), this brings us to the number 13, the numerical value of "one" (יג), which expresses unity. The correspondence that can be drawn between the 13 months (12 in a regular year and 13 in an intercalated year—next year, 5782, will be such a year) is clear. Now we can begin to draw parallels between the two secret maps. This is the expertise of Kabbalah, whose Biblical root (See Exodus 25:6) actually means "parallel" or "correspondence" (הִזְבֵּה). The teachings of Kabbalah are replete with parallels.

From faith to joy

The previous month of Nissan is especially connected to the power of faith in the soul. Is faith a power of the soul? What if a person does not believe? Jewish psychology teaches us that faith is the loftiest and most essential power of the soul—the point where the soul cleaves to its Divine source. The power of faith can be exiled, making us unaware of its existence. To redeem our faith, to reveal it once again, we need to relive the Exodus from Egypt; it was then that we learned to put our faith in God and to follow His servant Moses into the wilderness in order to receive the Torah. Now, as then, we express our faith with our sense of speech, the sense of the month of Nissan. The Seder night—the inception of our Exodus from Egypt—showcases our sense of speech.

After the great leap forward in Nissan, the month of Iyar seems quiet and calm. The sense of this month of Iyar is identified as thought, which is deeper and much more internal than the extroverted sense of speech. In the system of *sefirot*, thought is associated with the *sefirah* of *binah*, or understanding. This is the power of the soul to intellectually grasp ideas, to comprehend them, to develop them and to build them up, using myriad details, until an entire intellectual structure is formed in the mind.

We may think that a person who is often lost in his thoughts is sad. In truth, however, thought done properly is a source of joy. Following on the heels of the faith of Nissan, the thoughts of Iyar are the power of joy in the soul.

Positive thinking

What is the connection between thought and joy? Let us consider what happens when things do not go as planned. This is what happens during the days of the Counting of the Omer, during which time we practice some customs of mourning and sorrow (such as the prohibition to cut hair or to wed). How can we deal with a sad and heavy external reality? With positive thinking.

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that the power of thought is potent: "A person is where his thoughts are." With positive thinking, you can make yourself happy in any situation. The Hebrew word for thought (הַחֲשַׁבָּה), is an anagram of the word, "with joy" (בְּשִׂמְחָה). Furthermore, when we employ positive thinking, our thoughts change reality. Positive thoughts are augmented by our daily act of Counting the Omer during this time period, a fact alluded to by the fact that the word for "counting" (הִסְפֵּי) has the same value as "thought" (הַחֲשַׁבָּה). Every time we count, we are in fact having a happy thought—happiness and joy have the power of expansion and augmentation—as is also evident from the short prayer we say at the conclusion of the count, "By this [counting] there will be added great sustenance throughout all the worlds."

Our world is full of hardship and worries. But with the power of our thoughts, we can live in a world that is permeated with good. In this month of Iyar, we are invited to devote our thoughts to a different reality, one that is spiritual and concealed—the reality of the World to Come. By employing this thinking, we can draw the joy of the World to Come down into this world.

Rectifying the heart with joy

After we recite the daily Counting of the Omer, we say a prayer: "In the merit of the Counting of the Omer that I counted today, may all that I blemished in the *sefirah* of (the *sefirah* of the day) be rectified." The seven attributes from loving-kindness (*chessed*) to kingdom (*malchut*) are inter-included in one another, totaling 49 major attribute/minor attribute pairs reflecting the vast array and detail of the world of our emotional makeup. All the attributes of the heart's emotions are thus rectified with these 49 pairs of inter-included attributes during the 49 days of counting the Omer.

How do we rectify the heart? How do we make peace between our various and sometimes contradictory character traits and between people with different traits and inclinations? And how do we transform our first inclination into a rectified, processed, and distilled response? We do so using our minds, which control and navigate our actions. The *sefirah* of understanding in our souls, the power of contemplation and thought, is likened to "the mother of children" which gives birth to the attributes of the heart. There are 50 Gates of Understanding, which accompany from above the process of rectification during the 49 days of Counting the Omer.

When we recall that death awaits us, our heart is filled with sadness. Knowledge of our inevitable passing can cause every fleeting joy to ultimately end with a sense of dread or depression. But, thanks to the power of understanding, we are filled with true joy, "the mother of children is joyous," like in the World to Come. Even a person who is in a state of depression called melancholy (תַּרְהוּ שְׂחִוְרָה) can change the order of those letters so that they spell, "a joyous thought" (חֲשַׁבָּהוֹרֵי). It is thus with the power of thought, specifically positive thoughts as we look forward to the joyous festival of Shavu'ot, when we celebrate the Giving of the Torah, that has the power to transform all sorrow into a celebration of the future during the month of Iyar.