

The Hod Continuum: From Destruction to the Glory of the Temple

This week was the week of Hod in the Counting of the Omer. This article will certainly give you a deeper insight on the compelling potential of this week in our souls.

Spiritual vision is associated with the *sefirah* of *hod* (acknowledgment). This is particularly important in that the appellation “Jew” (*Yehudi*) comes from the name of the tribe of Judah (*Yehudah*), whose word-root is *hod*. *Hod* represents a number of attributes in the soul: Praise and thanksgiving (*hodayah*), acknowledgment (*hoda’ah*), confession (*vidui*), and glory (*hod*)—all having the word *hod* as their root. The characteristic common to them all is the consciousness of surrendering to a higher Divine power in the world and the soul. This property is similar to that of selflessness and making one’s self “small,” following the verse, “for you are the *smallest* of peoples.”

According to Kabbalah, the companion *sefirot* of *netzach* and *hod* correspond to the two kidneys and to the two legs. The kidneys are referred to in the Talmud as the “kidneys of council”¹ and like the image of legs, relate to a deep inner intuition in the soul driving it forward to accomplish its mission. It is this internal power of the soul that allows a Jew, even in the hardest of times, to cling to a vision of redemption.

After the sin of the Golden Calf, one of the lowest points in Jewish history, Moses pleaded to God for forgiveness. When God acceded to his request, Moses, feeling the auspiciousness of the moment, further requests of God to show him His glory. God acquiesced to this appeal as well, but informed him, “You will not be able to see My face, for no human can see My face and live.” God continued, “Behold, there is a place with Me; you may stand on the rock; I will shield you with My hand until I have passed. Then I will remove My hand and you will see my back, but My face may not be seen.”²

Though Moses longed to see God and know His ways directly he was told that he would only be able to see His “back.” This sense of indirect sight is represented by “vision.” In Aramaic, a language considered the “backside” of Hebrew, the word for “sight” (ܩܪܝܢܐ) is translated as “vision” (ܩܘܢܝܢܐ). Until we actually experience the redemption we can only “see” it indirectly in our deeply hidden consciousness of heart and soul.

To see God through “my own flesh” is to see, as it were, the “back side” or impression of God. Being created “in the image of Gd” is analogous to man being the “mirror image” of Divinity. This idea extends to all of Creation as well. The first of the Hebrew

¹. *Shabbat* 33b.

². Exodus 33:20-23.

letters, the *alef*, is symmetrically constructed from a *yud* above and a *yud* below, with the letter *vav*, simultaneously uniting, yet separating the two *yuds*. The dual function of the *vav* signifies both the relationship of unity—“face to face”—and of separation—“face to back.”

The figurative images of “face” and “back” relate to the visionary ability to see the future. Seeing the “face” implies a clear apprehension of the future, while seeing the “back” intimates a vision of the future that is perceived in general terms, but its exact form and details remain unclear and indistinct. Isaiah, referring to the precise description of the anticipated future redemption states: “For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, that a God besides You should do such a thing for him that waits for Him.”³ Though the prophet transmits the word of God to the people, He does so using allegory. Even the prophet who is granted a true “backside” vision of the future cannot clearly see it in all its exact and concrete details until it actually happens.

The “backside” or impression of God in philosophic and Kabbalistic terms implies the possibility of evil, a necessary component in God’s plan for the world, as only this ensures the possibility of free choice through which man strives to reach his potential as a being created in the image of God. According to Kabbalah all forms of evil and destruction suck their life-force from the *sefirah* of *hod*, as alluded to in the verse, “And I Daniel alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. I was left alone and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me, for my comely appearance [literally: my *hod*] was horribly changed and I retained no strength.”⁴ Daniel’s change of appearance (from the root *hod*) and lack of strength alludes to the forces of evil sucking from the *sefirah* of *hod*.

A further allusion to the correlation of destruction to *hod* is found in the incident of the golden calf. Aaron, the High priest, who is always associated with the *sefirah* of *hod*, when trying to delay and divert the people from their destructive idea, became an unwitting participant in the actual making and subsequent worship of the golden calf. In contrast, the Temple, the spiritual domain of Aaron, represents the cardinal attributes and meaning of *hod*—the powers of atonement, of acknowledgment, and of praise—counteracting the destructive forces of the world.

We can infer from this that a Jewish vision of redemption ultimately emanates from the very source from which destruction receives its energy. The Shabbat preceding *Tisha B’av* is known as *Shabbat Chazon*, literally, the Shabbat of Vision. One of the reasons for this connotation is that the vision of a glorious (*hod*) future can combat and neutralize the destructive forces concentrated on this fateful day. A true visionary has the ability to see a good future through even a troubled present.

³. Isaiah 64:3.

⁴. Daniel 8:10.

This idea is embodied in the statement of the sages that the *Mashiach* is born on *Tisha B'Av*. He is conceived in the collective super-consciousness of the Jewish people and his birth is the manifestation of the deep belief in the ultimate redemption of the world. This universal vision, imprinted within the very day of destruction, forms the essential core of the soul of *Mashiach*.

To see the future “face to face” is to experience it as super-temporal, out of the context of time. To see from the “backside” is to experience vision as an organic process of growth, evolving from the present into the future. The Talmudic statement, “Who is wise—he who sees that which is being born,” encourages us to see all the potential in the present moment and how it will actualize in the future. Many of the sages were able to look at young children and proclaim their great potential, “From a little sprout, I can tell what he will turn into.”⁵

Although prophecy no longer fully manifests itself as a regular faculty among the Jewish people, each person retains the potential glimmer of prophecy deep within. Achieving a vision of a rectified future can only be grasped through our present reality. The dynamics of leadership are potent tools for contacting deeply dormant powers of the soul, enabling us to manifest the redemptive process as an essential part of our lives, and in so doing bring the future into the present.

⁵. Rabbah’s saying in *Berachot* 48a (בוצין בוצין מקטפה ידיע).