**Blossom – ה HEI and *Parshat Terumah***

וְאַל תְּהִי רָשָׁע בִּפְנֵי עַצְמְךָ

…*and do not consider yourself to be wicked.*

* *Pirkei Avot* 2:13

This aphorism reminds us not to hold negative narratives about ourselves – rather, we should know that our essence is Divine, no matter what mistakes we make and no matter what thoughts and feelings arise.

The Hasidic rebbe, Rabbi Barukh of Medzebozh, taught a novel twist on this *mishna.* The idiom for “consider yourself” is בִּפְנֵי עַצְמְךָ *bifnei atzmekha –* literally, “facing oneself.” With this literal meaning, Rabbi Barukh translates it this way:

וְאַל תְּהִי רָשָׁע בִּפְנֵי עַצְמְךָ

*Don’t be wicked by facing yourself!*

In other words, don’t shut yourself up too much in solitude; every person has a unique constellation of qualities that exist for the purpose of contributing something unique to the world. Not only must we not think of ourselves in a negative way, we must know that we possess an inherent and unique value that must be shared in a positive way.

Similarly, a disciple of Rabbi Yekhiel Mikhel, the Maggid of Zlotchov, once asked him:

“How are we to understand the teaching that we are duty bound to ask ourselves, ‘When will our actions approach those of our ancestors?’ How could be possibly compare ourselves to our forefathers and foremothers?”

The Maggid explained:

“Just as our ancestors embodied unique paths of service – one with love, one with discipline, another with beauty – so too each person has unique qualities, and we should use our uniqueness to create a new path of service, and do what has not yet been done.”

This recognition and embracing of our inherent uniqueness is the Fifteenth Path of Presence, the Hebrew letter ה *hei.* Unlike the first four letters, which point to universal aspects of transcendent awareness, *hei* points to the unique ways that consciousness manifests for each of us on the levels of thought, feeling and form, and also hints at our potential for creating something new in the world. This individualistic nature of *hei* manifests both as our uniquely created selves and also as that which our “selves” create.

Our uniqueness as created beings is expressed in the Torah which frames humans as expressions of the Infinite; the One who is beyond all limited, specific form, manifests in the infinite number of possible human forms:

וַיִּבְרָ֨א אֱלֹהִ֤ים אֶת־הָֽאָדָם֙ בְּצַלְמ֔וֹ בְּצֶ֥לֶם אֱלֹהִ֖ים בָּרָ֣א אֹת֑וֹ זָכָ֥ר וּנְקֵבָ֖ה בָּרָ֥א אֹתָֽם׃

*And Elohim created human in Its image, in the image of Elohim It created him; male and female It created them.*

* *Bereisheet* (Genesis) 1:27 (*Parshat Bereisheet*)

Furthermore, our ability to also become creators ourselves is expressed in the very next verse:

וַיְבָ֣רֶךְ אֹתָם֮ אֱלֹהִים֒ וַיֹּ֨אמֶר לָהֶ֜ם אֱלֹהִ֗ים פְּר֥וּ וּרְב֛וּ וּמִלְא֥וּ אֶת־הָאָ֖רֶץ וְכִבְשֻׁ֑הָ וּרְד֞וּ בִּדְגַ֤ת הַיָּם֙ וּבְע֣וֹף הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּ֖ה הָֽרֹמֶ֥שֶׂת עַל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃

*Elohim blessed them and Elohim said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply – fill the earth and master it, and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”*

* 1:28

Traditionally, the commandment of *p’ru ur’vu,* “be fruitful and multiply,” is seen as the first *mitzvah* of the Torah; it is incumbent upon us to insure that humanity continues to survive through procreation. But on a deeper level, this *mitzvah* expands to include creativity in general; human life is a creative process through which new “fruits” constantly come into being.

For many, our situation as creators can give us a sense of purpose and reason for living. And yet, when the suffering of life becomes overwhelming (God forbid), all of our efforts can feel like they are for naught, nothing but “vanity and striving after wind,” as *Kohelet* puts it (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

What is the remedy?

There is a story of Reb Levi Yitzhak, that whenever he would celebrate the Passover Seder and come to the passage about the Four Sons, he would stop at the son who doesn’t know how to ask. “That’s me, Levi Yitzhak – *I* am the son who doesn’t know how to ask! I don’t know how to ask what this is all for, why we are here, what is the purpose of it all. And even if I did, how could I bear the answer? I do not want to know *why* I suffer as I do; I want to know that *my suffering is for You.* And just as it says, ‘you shall answer your son, saying…’ so You, my Father, must answer!”

In this story, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak gets to the root of the issue: the meaning of life is not a matter of the mind, but a matter of the heart:

*“I do not want to know why I suffer as I do; I want to know that my suffering is for You!”*

In other words – our actions, our creative fruits we bring into the world amid sometimes unbearable suffering – *are worth it when they are done with love.* Offering ourselves up in love is, in the paradigm of the Torah, the way the world becomes a “home” for the Divine Presence, as it says in this *parshah:*

וְיִקְחוּ־לִ֖י תְּרוּמָ֑ה מֵאֵ֤ת כָּל־אִישׁ֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר יִדְּבֶ֣נּוּ לִבּ֔וֹ...  וְעָ֥שׂוּ לִ֖י מִקְדָּ֑שׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּ֖י בְּתוֹכָֽם

*Take for Me an offering from every person whose heart moves them… and they shall make for me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within them…*

* *Shemot* (Exodus) 25:2, 8 (*Parshat Terumah*)

That which we call “Divine,” the Presence of Being in all beings, is always already the Root of who we are; It is the consciousness that reads these words right now. But in order for consciousness to become aware of its Root as the Divine, in order for the Divine to truly “dwell” as the Presence that we are, we must “build the Sanctuary;” that is, we must offer of ourselves in the way our hearts are spontaneously moved to offer. In other words, do what you love – make your passion into your practice, and build your life as a “sanctuary” of Presence – this is the Path of ה *Hei.*

***More on Terumah...***

[**Silent Burst – Parshat Terumah**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/silent-burst-parshat-terumah)2/24/2020 [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/silent-burst-parshat-terumah#comments)

יהוה מָגֵן בַּעֲדִי כְּבוֹדִי וּמֵרִים רֹאשִׁי – Hashem magein ba'adi, kevodi umeirim roshi!
Hashem, You are a shield for me – You are the Presence within, transcending my mind…
(Psalm 3:4)

A hassid once came to Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotsk in search of a blessing for his poverty and troubles. “Don’t worry,” the rabbi tried to comfort him, “Pray with all your heart, and surely HaRakhaman – the Merciful One – will have rakhmanus on you.”

“But I don’t know how to pray,” said the hassid.

“Well then,” replied the rabbi, “you indeed have much to worry about.”

The art of prayer lies in the bringing together of two polar opposite qualities. On one hand, prayer is a stripping away – an uncovering of the raw, naked reality of the heart. This is umeirim roshi – “lifting my head” – meaning, getting out of our heads and feeling the fullness of longing within our hearts. Then, from this longing, contemplating that the object of our longing is the closest thing to us; the Divine is ever-present, the inner Reality of all things. This in turn awakens our own Divine essence, and this is kevodi – “my presence” or “my glory” – meaning, the recognition of our own awareness as Divine.

On the other hand, prayer is also an embodying of that Reality in the palace of words, an expression of the ineffable in the holy sounds of language. This is magein ba'adi – a “shield for me.” Our patterns of thought, feeling, and language tend to conceal the Divine essence; no matter how much we uncover It, it is doomed to fall into hiddenness again and again, unless we can craft a form that reveals It as well as conceals It. This is the role of prayer and words of Torah in general – to give form to the Formless, to “shield” us against the spirit-deadening powers of the mundane.

Up until this parshah, the Exodus from Egypt has been an uncovering, a going forth from the familiar and habitual, into the freedom and discomfort of the unknown. Moses has been receiving the Divine revelations outdoors, up on the mountaintop, far above the throng of human life. But the content of the revelation always points back to life; it doesn’t emphasize transcendence, but rather the expressing the transcendent in the imminent. This movement is embodied symbolically as the building of the Mikdash:

וְעָ֥שׂוּ לִ֖י מִקְדָּ֑שׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּ֖י בְּתוֹכָֽם׃
Make for me a Mikdash – a Sanctuary – and I will dwell within them.

Moses leaves the world of form to connect with the transcendent, but it is through the building of sacred form that the transcendent becomes part of communal life.

For us, the act of prayer must contain both of these poles as well. It doesn’t matter so much which pole comes first, as long as the other follows. Our awareness may begin to glow and swell in the silence, overflowing into the vessels of words of prayer, or we may begin with chanting the words, allowing them to draw us back into the silence. Either way, it is through the interplay of silence and sound, of ayin and yesh, that the transformational power of prayer works its magic; prayer and meditation are the tones and rhythm of the music of the soul…

[**Love is the Reason – Parshat Terumah**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/love-is-the-reason-parshat-terumah)
2/7/2019 [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/love-is-the-reason-parshat-terumah#comments)

Last Shabbat, after I taught in our Berkeley synagogue, I walked through town with a rabbi friend of mine. He told me that when he was younger, he used to attend meditation retreats and seek out teachings on spiritual awakening. But over time he moved away from those things because they seemed too abstract. It seemed to him that such teachings aimed at awakening an experience of the transcendent, but they didn’t address his fundamental question: why are we here in this life? If it’s all about transcending the world, what’s the meaning of living in the world?

Recently, I was listening to a talk by the outspoken intellectual Jordan Peterson in which he said that, to any thinking person, it should be obvious that the meaning of existence must be grounded in the fact of unbearable human suffering.

Hassidic teaching says something similar:

There is a story of Reb Levi Yitzhak, that whenever he would celebrate the Passover Seder and come to the passage about the Four Sons, he would stop at the son who doesn’t know how to ask. “That’s me, Levi Yitzhak – I am the son who doesn’t know how to ask! I don’t know how to ask what this is all for, why we are here, what is the purpose of it all. And even if I did, how could I bear the answer? I do not want to know why I suffer as I do; I want to know that my suffering is for You. And just as it says, ‘you shall answer your son, saying…’ so You, my Father, must answer!”

In this Hassidic understanding, suffering is not the meaning of existence, but it is the thing that causes us to ask the meaning of existence. And further: it is not the philosophical question of why that is of ultimate concern, but for Whom. In other words, it is a question not of the mind, but of the heart.

This points to a central truth: the question of meaning is fulfilled only through love. That is the only reason to endure all the suffering, because love is the ultimate joy – shining even at the very depths of suffering.

The mind searches for the question of meaning, but it can never really be satisfied with any conceptual answer, no matter how convincing. Trying to find meaning through the mind is like trying to taste food with your hands; no matter how much food you smear on your hands, you will never be satisfied. Only actual eating can satisfy hunger; only actual love can satisfy the hunger for meaning.

וְיִקְחוּ־לִ֖י תְּרוּמָ֑ה מֵאֵ֤ת כָּל־אִישׁ֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר יִדְּבֶ֣נּוּ לִבּ֔וֹ...  וְעָ֥שׂוּ לִ֖י מִקְדָּ֑שׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּ֖י בְּתוֹכָֽם
Take for Me an offering from every person whose heart moves them… and they shall make for me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within them.

It is only through the life of the heart that Sanctuary is built – a life in which, since the loving heart desires to give, giving is actually a form of receiving.

And, since everything we receive is taken as an expression of the Divine love for us, receiving is also a form of giving – barukh Hashem!

 זָהָ֥ב וָכֶ֖סֶף וּנְחֹֽשֶׁת
 gold, silver and copper…

See – there are three levels to experience right now: thought, feeling and sensory experience. The feeling level determines the quality of experience – its mood – attraction and revulsion, adoration and anger, curiosity and boredom. This is the level of the heart from which love arises, and hence from which the meaning of existence is fulfilled. We might think, then, that the heart is the level of “gold” – but it is not.

Why?

Notice: your feelings, as primary as they are, are ultimately determined by your thoughts – by how you interpret your experience. Think good, feel good; think bad, feel bad.

Most of us assume the opposite: we start to feel bad, and so we start thinking in a negative way. But wake up out of the seductiveness of your feelings by being present with them and accepting them, and you can realize: you can actually decide which thoughts to nurture and which thoughts to dismiss. That decision is itself a thought, arising from a deep wisdom beyond the gravity of feeling and the seductiveness of thought. ­That wisdom is awareness itself – hokhmah – beyond both thought and feeling. That is why the mind, though it cannot ultimately bring us real fulfillment, is the "gold" and the heart is the "silver" – because the mind rules the heart.

The third level is sensory experience, corresponding to action. Action is an expression of the heart, which is in turn ruled by the mind. We don’t act unless we are motivated to act; we have to first want on the level of heart, and that determines our action. Thus, action is the level of copper.

Take for Me an offering from every person whose heart moves them…

Without the awareness of what we really are, beneath our thoughts, feelings and sensory experience, our thoughts tend to be ruled by the unconscious impulses of our hearts, leading ultimately to unconscious and reactive actions. But being aware that we are the awareness behind all experience, we can choose our thoughts, and thus open our hearts, and act from the radiant love that shines through that openness.

Then, all of life becomes a sanctuary for the Presence that dwells within us, as us…

 [**​Offering Whatever – Parshat Terumah**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/offering-whatever-parshat-terumah)
2/15/2018

​​**Exodus 25:1, 2**

וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהוָ֖ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֥ה לֵּאמֹֽר׃
The Divine spoke to Moses, saying:
​
דַּבֵּר֙ אֶל־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וְיִקְחוּ־לִ֖י תְּרוּמָ֑ה מֵאֵ֤ת כָּל־אִישׁ֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר יִדְּבֶ֣נּוּ לִבּ֔וֹ תִּקְח֖וּ אֶת־תְּרוּמָתִֽי׃
Tell the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart motivates them.

Once a hassid came to the rebbe and asked, "Why is it that the rabbis praise Avraham for being willing to offer his son Yitzhak? For most people this would be a severe test, but how could it be a test for Avraham, who was a great prophet?"

The rebbe answered, "When a person is tested, all their spiritual attainment is taken away from them, and they are face to face with the test. All your depth of realization is out the window, and you must gather all your strength to not be seduced by your ego..."

Living in awakened life, in which every word and action overflows an offering from the heart, can seem easy when you're in the experience of blissful oneness. But these experiences become a complete reality only when you face situations that trigger you and threaten to seduce you back into an egoic state, and you manage to actually pass the test.

But, no matter how many times you may "fail" your tests, don't worry! That's totally natural. If fact, if you can let your heart break in humility when you "fail" your tests, that in itself helps to break the bonds of ego. In this way, both "failing" and "passing" can aide you in becoming  true sanctuary of Presence in which your whole life is an "offering."

[**"Staying Present in Action" Parshat Terumah**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/saying-present-in-action-parshat-terumah)3/2/2017  [2 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/saying-present-in-action-parshat-terumah%22%20%5Cl%20%22comments)

This week’s Torah reading is Parshat Terumah. Terumah means an offering, or a contribution. It begins with God telling Moses to say to the children of Israel:

“Yik’khu li trumah me’eit kol ish asher yidveinu libo-"Take for me an offering from every person whose heart is motivated to give…”

The offerings that they’re talking about range from precious metals, to animal skins, to incense spices, to pieces of wood- all things that will be used to build the mishkan- the portable temple that the Israelites carried with them as they travelled through the wilderness. The word mishkancomes from the root which means to dwell or be present, as in the word Shekhinah which means, Divine Presence. So in the opening of this parshah, we’re hearing about all the different ways the Israelites contribute toward the Sanctuary of Presence. But if we look more deeply, this opening verse gives us **three hints** about how we can be more present in our own actions.

The first and most important hint is in the name of the parshah- Terumah, which means, “offering.” If you want to be present in the busyness of daily life and overcome that tendency to see this moment merely as a means to get to some future moment, then let your actions be offerings. Whenever you do something, and you can do this many times a day, bring to mind that your actions are for the sake of serving something. Since most of what we do is often serving some purpose for others, this isn’t so difficult. But even when you do things for yourself like eating or resting, you can still offer it as a gift, because of course you have to keep yourself healthy in order to be of service to others.

And, the more you think of your actions as offerings, you might even get inspired to change the way you do things for the better, or even take on some new positive actions, or get rid of some not so positive ones. The point here to bring more consciousness into whatever you’re doing by acting with a loving spirit.

The second hint is implied in the words, kol ish- every person. In other words, every person has their own unique path. If you go around wishing you were someone else, or wishing you were in a different situation, you devalue your own path, and create an inner feeling of separation. But if you constantly take to heart that this moment is the moment to offer what only you can offer, regardless of whether it seems impressive in the external sense, then you can really inhabit your body and inhabit your actions. Furthermore, the words kol ish, every person, can also mean “all of the person.” In other words, put all of yourself into whatever you happen to be doing.

And that brings us to the third hint that’s implied in the words, “…asher yidveinu libo- whose heart is motivated to give…” This means, you can learn how to be present from whatever you’re really motivated to do. Notice how it feels when you’re doing things that you love, how you’re fully engaged and doing for its own sake, and bring that degree of presence to all your actions, even when you’re doing things you don’t necessarily want to do. In that way, everything you do becomes a kind of devotion or prayer.

There’s a story that the Baal Shem Tov was once smoking his pipe by the window, when he was taken aback by the sight of a man walking by, who glowed with the most beautiful holy Presence and joyful radiance. The Baal Shem asked a disciple who the man was, and his disciple told him that the man was a hose-maker.

So, the Baal Shem sent the man a message to please bring four pairs of hose. Soon after, the hose maker appeared before the Baal Shem, displaying his wares, light shining from his face. The hose were well made of good sheep’s wool.

The Baal Shem asked him, “How do you spend your days?” The man answered, “I ply my trade.”

“And how do you ply it?” asked the Baal Shem.

“I work every day until I have forty or fifty pairs of hose, then I put them into a mold with hot water and press them until they’re as they should be.”

“And do you do any special prayers or meditations?” asked the Baal Shem.

“I just recite the psalms that I know by heart, all day long as I work.”

After the Baal Shem had purchased the hose and the man left, the Baal Shem turned to his disciple and said, “Today you have seen the cornerstone which will uphold the temple until the coming of the Messiah.”

So what does the Baal Shem Tov mean when he says that this hose maker is the cornerstone of the temple until the Messiah? The temple, as we’ve seen, represents intensification of Presence. The Messiah means the end of exile, because the traditional belief is that when Moshiakh comes, all the Jews scattered throughout the world will be gathered in, and everyone will commune with the Divine in the temple once again.

But on a deeper level, exile isn’t only about being separated from your native land. Exile is what happens within when you don’t fully inhabit who you are and what you’re doing in the present moment. When that happens, your consciousness pulls away from itself, creating the experience of incompleteness. And in that inner exile, nothing is all that satisfying. But when you’re gathered in, so to speak, when you connect deeply with your actions, there’s a deep satisfaction even if you’re doing things that aren’t particularly exciting.

So as approach Shabbat Terumah, the Sabbath of Offering, let’s practice making all our actions offerings, gathering ourselves back into the fullness of who we are and opening to the healing and wholeness that flows from that.

Good Shabbos!!!
love,
​brian yosef

[**The Floor- Parshat Terumah**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-floor-parshat-teruma)
[​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-floor-parshat-teruma)2/14/2016  [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-floor-parshat-teruma#comments)

Let’s face it- people can be annoying.

Once I was in a workshop at a retreat center. I was in a room full of people, listening to the teacher speak to the class. Next to me there was this guy who happened to be standing on an area of floor that emitted a really loud squeak whenever someone stepped on it.

So what did this guy do?

He stood on that spot and rocked his body back and forth, making a terribly annoying and loud squeak, over and over again. He appeared to be totally unconscious of what he was doing. I was amazed that he either couldn’t hear the loud noise he was making or he just didn’t care.

In that moment, as that relatively trivial annoyance provoked such a strong response within me, I appreciated the difficulty of staying present and free when disturbances are not trivial- when they’re deeply offensive or hurtful.

Have you ever been enraged by someone you love? Have you ever deeply offended someone you would die for? Or have you deeply enraged your beloved?

If you have, than perhaps you know the pain of separation it causes- the sour flavor that permeates life in the wake of such mis-steps.

What’s the remedy? How can the sundered fabric of relationship be healed and closeness be restored?

There’s a word in Hebrew for “holy” or “sacred”- kadosh.

Kadosh actually means “separate,” but not in the ordinary sense. In the case of a wounded relationship, the word “separate” connotes distance, disconnectedness, alienation. But the word kadosh actually means the opposite. In a Jewish wedding ceremony we hear these words spoken between the beloveds-

“At me***kudesh***et li-
      “You are holy to me…”

Your partner or spouse becomes “separate” because they’re your most intimate, and therefore separate from all less intimate relationships. So, the separateness of kadosh points not to something that’s distant, but most central. It points not to alienation, but to the deepest connection.

This week’s reading begins the Divine instructions for building the Mishkan- the portable temple for the wandering Israelites:

“V’asu li Mikdash v’shakhanti mitokham-
“Make for me a Mikdash- a Sanctuary- and I will dwell within you.”

The word Mikdash has the same root as holy- kadosh. In the Torah, the Mikdash is the place that the Divine Presence manifests and communes with the Israelites. The other word for the Sanctuary, Mishkan, implies the Divine Presence- the Shekhina.

And how did the Israelites commune with the sacred? Did they go into the space to just sit and meditate?

No!

They came into the Mikdash to offer presious gifts- first to build the sanctuary, then to make offerings. They brought things that were most precious- first their gold, silver and copper, then their fruit, their wine, grain and animals.

In giving and burning what was most precious, they burned away their own inner obstacles to intimacy; they burned away the alienation caused by their own “clinging.” The word for a sacrificial offering is “korban,” which means not sacrifice, but nearness, intimacy.

Where was this Mikdash erected? Was it separate from the camp, off at a distance, so that you’d have to hike out to it?

No- it was in the center of the camp!

And within the Mikdash was a special place considered the most holy- the Kadosh Kadoshim- the “Holy of Holies.” This most sacred space was the innermost room in the Mikdash- the center of the center.

This representation of the sacred in space and architecture is not mere ritual magic from the past. It’s a pointer to the true sanctuary of Presence within your own life. There can only be one center of your life, and that center is the one place that life is actually being lived- this moment. You’re never separate from this moment, and yet- are you truly dwelling within it?

“Asu li Mikdash v’shakhanti mitokham…”

There’s a Divine call. It calls to us in pain and in joy, in excitement and in boredom. It says, “Come to the center. Build me a sanctuary.”

How do you build it?

The essence of the sanctuary is not the structure, but the space within the structure. The structure is already there as your body, your mind, your heart. They become a sanctuary the moment you allow there to be a space. The space completes the structure.

Come into that space- come into your body, come into this moment. Bring your korban to the altar. Is there pain? Is there fear? Is there regret? Is there embarrassment? Bring it all. Let the fire on the altar of the present moment burn away the separation. If it hurts, let it hurt- your obstacles are being burned away- and the pain is temporary.

In allowing yourself to feel whatever needs to be felt, there’s a transmutation that takes place. The energy of separation and pain burns up and becomes the energy of love. For when the illusion of separation caused by clinging is burned up, every face is a form of the Face; every being is a manifestation of Being.

And when you see every person as nothing less than a Form of God, the Form of God that steps up to you in every encounter, can there be room for negativity? Can there be anything but the fire of love? And in that fire of love, will you hold back your forgiveness, or your asking forgiveness?

A disciple asked Rabbi Shmelke-

“We are taught- ‘Ve’ahavtah lereiakha kamokha- Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ But how can I love my neighbor if he has wronged me?”

“You must understand these words deeply,” replied Rabbi Shmelke. “You must love your neighbor as something that you yourself are, for all souls are one. Each is a spark from the original soul, and this original soul is expressed in all souls, just as your soul is expressed in all the different organs of your body.

“It may happen that your right hand slips with a knife and cuts your left hand. But would you then take a knife with your left hand and start cutting your right hand to punish it?

“It’s the same when your neighbor wrongs you. If you punish him, you punish yourself.”

The disciple wasn’t satisfied-

“But if I see someone who is truly evil, how can I love that person?”

“Don’t you know,” replied Rabbi Shmelke, “that the original soul emerges from the Divine, and in fact is not separate from the Divine at all. So won’t you have mercy on the Divine when you see that one of Its sparks has become lost in a maze is being stifled by the deeds of that person who thinks he’s separate?”

On this Shabbat Terumah, the Sabbath of Giving, may we guard and remember- Shamor V’Zakhor-to make every word a praise of the One, every deed an offering of love, rooted in the Sanctuary of Presence that is our own human body. Amein, Sela! ​