**[Oneness – Parshat Matot](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/oneness-parshat-matot)**

The Baal Shem Tov once told of a vision he had:

“I was traveling to paradise, and great throngs of people went with me. But the closer got closer to *Gan Eden* (the Garden of Eden), the more of them disappeared. When I entered and walked through the Garden, there were only a few people left. Finally, I came to the Tree of Life, and as I stood beside Her and looked around, I seemed to be alone…”

The mystical journey is a return to Oneness, to a fundamental shift in our relationship to Reality through which we can see that there is, in fact, only One Thing. While this realization may be accompanied by all sorts of perceptual upheaval, radical overthrowing of conceptual maps, and even paranormal experience, it need not be. The ultimate Oneness is, in fact, not remote or inaccessible; it is the simple fact of this moment, grasped in its Unity:

וְיָדַעְתָּ הַיּום וַהֲשֵׁבתָ אֶל לְבָבֶךָ כִּי יהוה הוּא הָאֱלהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת אֵין עוד

*Know today (be present) and return to your heart (offer your attentiveness), that* Hashem Hu HaElohim *– Existence Itself is the Divine – in the heavens above and on the earth below,* Ayn Od *– there is nothing else.*

-       Deuteronomy 4:39

There is nothing but the Divine, which is to say, Reality or Existence Itself is already One; all that is necessary is *yadata hayom – know today –* meaning, bring your awareness into connection with the present. Give your attention heartfully to Reality as it appears. For just as a movie screen seems invisible when the mind is absorbed in the drama of the projected movie, but becomes completely visible simply by shifting our attention toward it, so too the Oneness of everything that is appearing right now may seem invisible, but only because we have not yet found the path to focus upon it. But…

 כִּֽי־קָר֥וֹב אֵלֶ֛יךָ הַדָּבָ֖ר מְאֹ֑ד
*Ki karov elekha hadavar me’od – for this Thing is very close to you!*
-       Deuteronomy 30:14

​The moment we call to mind Its Presence, It appears. Everything we perceive already exists in Its “Light.”

This “Light,” this Oneness of Being in which everything participates, is *Keter,* the first*sefirah* on the Tree of Life. It is the highest, yet also the simplest level of perception there is, wholly accessible right now.

And yet, because of its simplicity and constancy, it can be difficult to grasp… not really difficult to know it, but difficult to *know* that you know it.

The Integral Kabbalah Tree of Life glyph can be helpful in defining a path toward bringing the Reality of the One out of the background and into lived experience:



In this version, the *sefirah* of *Keter* is on top, with five lines proceeding from it and connecting it with five other *sefirot.* These five lines represent the five *otyot:* א ט ח ז כ – *kaf, zayin, het, tet,* and *aleph.* These letters offer five pathways into the unitive consciousness of*Keter* that can be tread either separately or in sequence. In sequence, they progress like this:

*KAF*
*K’vod/Kavanah –* Majesty/Intentionality
“Shining Presence”

כ

*Kaf* is the power of decision to be fully with this moment as it is. It is the actualization of consciousness to shine unflinchingly into the truth of however Reality appears, whatever form It might take. This wakefulness is accomplished in an instant, but once it is accomplished, it is easily thwarted by the constant stream of thoughts that blossom forth in the mind. This brings is to the second step:

*ZAYIN*
*Zekher –* Remembrance
“Cutting Away Distraction”

ז

*Zayin,* which means “weapon” or “sword” means “cutting through” the dramatic pull of thought to the underlying Being-ness. Since thought is an unceasing stream, this requires a constant re-membering, a refusal to be lulled into the dream world of the mind and to shine awareness into the space of the moment. But, this vigilance easily devolves into an aggressive attempt to control the mind, which is the opposite of Presence and Oneness; to remedy this tendency, we come to the next letter:

*HET*
*Hanun –* Compassionate
“Presence With”

ח

While *zayin* is the vigilance necessary to pierce through the dream-world of the mind, *het*is the inner feel of Presence once the dream world has been pierced. *Het* is the soft quality of listening, of patience, of “presence-with” whatever arises, even paradoxically the presence of thought. It is the expression of “I am here with you” – it is the inner “I” that can truly be “here.” Through the deliberate expression of compassion through “presence-with,” we can come to know the inherent quality of awareness itself, which brings us to the next letter:

*TET*
*Tov, Ta’am –* Goodness, Taste
“The Taste of Being”

ט

After bringing forth sustained presence through the compassionate quality of *het* by turning attention outward, we can then taste the attention itself – what does it taste like? What is the flavor of our own essence, the consciousness that we are, beneath all the forms? One way to describe it is that it is the *ta’am* of *tov,* the “taste of goodness.” This is*tet* – it is the noticing that beneath the content of experience, there is this basic goodness of simply being. Which brings us to the final (and yet first) letter:

*ALEPH*
*Akhdut* – the Unity of Life
“Will-ingness, Equanimity”
​
א

​When we know, experientially, the underlying goodness with no opposite; when we take refuge not in the world of shifting things and conditions but in the inherent miracle of Being, there then arises the possibility of whole-heartedly saying “Yes” to life. We know that, in the world of experience, bitterness and sweetness form a Whole. We know that joy and pain are inseparable. Ordinarily, a person endures this knowledge through unconscious denial and conscious self-distraction. But in knowing the underlying goodness, this becomes no longer necessary. *Aleph* is being willing to take the basic risk of life every day; it is fully saying “yes” to both bitterness and sweetness, to joy and sorrow, because all opposites appear in the open space of awareness which is its own good, which is truly *lishmah,* for its own sake.
​

But, that is not the end.

A life that comes to know its own Oneness, that is grounded in that Oneness, must then forge that Oneness in the world of multiplicity; the Oneness, if it is to become a way, rather than just an experience, must be embodied. There is a hint in the *parshah:*

אִישׁ֩ כִּֽי־יִדֹּ֨ר נֶ֜דֶר לַֽיהוָ֗ה אֽוֹ־הִשָּׁ֤בַע שְׁבֻעָה֙ לֶאְסֹ֤ר אִסָּר֙ עַל־נַפְשׁ֔וֹ לֹ֥א יַחֵ֖ל דְּבָר֑וֹ כְּכָל־הַיֹּצֵ֥א מִפִּ֖יו יַעֲשֶֽׂה׃

*If a person vows a vow to the Divine or swears an oath to forbid something to one’s soul, they shall not empty their word; everything that comes from their mouth, so shall they do…*

* Numbers 30:3

We can say one thing and do another, and our lack of integrity doesn’t affect the Oneness of Being in any way. But, why would we say one thing and do another? Because we lack confidence in the Oneness; we lack integrity because we don’t trust the inner okay-ness, and so we try to manipulate things.

Whether or not we have integrity doesn’t affect the Oneness, but it does affect our *realization of the Oneness*, and perhaps more importantly, it affects *other people’s* realization of the Oneness.

*Lo yakhel devaro –*Don’t empty your word!

When our words are empty, we also commit *hilul Hashem –*the “emptying” of the Divine Name, because we demonstrate our lack of confidence in the Oneness. But, when we bring together the word and the deed, then that Oneness not only *is,* not only *is realized,* but *is fulfilled.*

In the *Musaf*prayer of *Rosh Hashanah*we find:

עָלָה אֱלֹהִים בִּתְרוּעָה יי בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר
*Alah Elohim Bit’ruah, Adonai B’kol Shofar*
*The Divine is elevated by the blast, Existence with the Sound of the Shofar!*

On *Rosh Hashanah*there is the ritual of sounding the *shofar,*the ram’s horn, one hundred times. Each sounding is preceded by the calling of the particular sound to be made. The *t’ruah,*which means “blast,” is one of these special sounds.

*Elohim*is a plural word for a singular Divinity, hinting that the Divine is the Oneness behind the multiplicity. *Alah*means “elevate,” or “transcend.” So, we can read:

*Alah Elohim Bit’ruah – The Transcendent Unity behind all forms is called forth…*

*Adonai*is the pronounced Name, but the actual written name is י–ה–ו–ה, which means “Being” or “Existence.” The *kol shofar,*the “sound of the ram’s horn,” is the actualization of the Transcendent Unity in the ritual act of “calling” and then “sounding.” In this way, the calling and then sounding of the shofar is an expression of the unified life, of saying what you mean, and doing what you say.

In this first of ten weeks counting down to the *t’ruah*of *Rosh Hashanah,*may we come to recognize the Unity that Is ever more deeply, and may we bring that Unity to fulfilment through integrity in our words and actions…

***More on Matot...***

[**Goof! Parshat Matot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/goof-parshat-matot4484788)
 ***K’khol hayotzei mipiv, ya’aseh –
"As everything that comes from his mouth, he shall do...”
​***
In *Parshat Matot*, it says that if a person makes a vow to do something, or takes an oath not to do something, *“lo yakhel d’varo- his word shall not be desecrated* or *emptied – k’khol hayotzei mipiv, ya’aseh – as everything that comes from his mouth, he shall do.”*

So, on the surface this is talking about keeping your word. You say you’re going to do something, you should do it. But on a deeper level, when we have an intention to do something or not do something, there’s a reason for the intention. The point is not necessarily the act itself, but the result that you intend through the act.

For example, let’s say you go to work not because you necessarily like your work, but so you can make money. And you make money not because you like the money, but because you want to use the money to benefit your family. But then let’s say you use the money to buy food for your family, and someone in your family has a terrible allergic reaction to the food and gets really sick, God forbid.

So now there’s a contradiction between your intention and your action; that’s called making a mistake. So, on this level, the Torah is saying that there should be a unity between your intention and your action – *lo yakhel d’varo-* don’t make your intentions mere empty words by doing things or not doing things that bring about the opposite result. Instead, be conscious, be attentive, be careful and do your best to act with wisdom.

But wait a minute, you might say. That’s good and well, but in the example that I just gave, the food allergy isn’t something you could have known about in advance; it was a mistake. That’s the whole nature of mistakes – we don’t intend them. They happen by accident. And while it’s true and good to be as conscious and wise as you can, it’s also true that you’re going to make mistakes, because ultimately, we are not in control of what happens.

So then, the next verse says, that if a child vows to do something or swears not to do something, and her father hears about it and prevents her from fulfilling her oath, *Hashem yislakh lah-* God forgives her, *ki heini aviah otah-* because her father had restrained her; it wasn’t in her control.

So, who is this child the Torah talks about? It’s us. We may act with a certain intention, but the “parent” can prevent that intention from happening. Who is the parent? It’s Reality Itself – it’s the Truth of what is – as it says, *Emet malkeinu efes zulato – Truth is our king and there is nothing else,*meaning, there is nothing but the Truth of what is – there is nothing but God.

And so, this is the paradox: on one hand, yes you should be as conscious and careful as you can with your actions – *k’khol hayotzei mipiv, ya’aseh –* make sure you do your best to bring about the positive result that you intend. But on the other hand, know that you have absolutely no control whatsoever over what happens. So, don’t beat yourself up over your mistakes; that’s just the ego clinging to a self-image of being successful, or good or whatever. Instead, surrender to the Truth and know that *Hashem yislakh lah –*  you are forgiven because you weren’t really in control in the first place, so you must forgive yourself if you want to be free from *hameitzar-* from the separateness and narrowness of ego, and really experience *anani hamerkhav Yah-* the infinitely vast expansiveness of the Divine.

But how do you do that? How do you come to forgive yourself so that you can experience *Hashem yislakh lah –* that you are truly forgiven for all your mistakes? Ultimately there is only one way, and that is that you have to forgive everyone else! As it says in *Vayikra-* Leviticus 10:18, *ve’ahavtah l’reiakha k’mokha ­– love your neighbor as yourself –* and if you’re not sure what it means, that you should love others like you love yourself, then right before that it says, *lo titur et b’nai amekha- don’t bear a grudge against the children of your people.*

So, on this *Shabbat Mattot,* the Sabbath of the Tribes, may we be vigilant against that unconscious tendency that often happens in community, to judge other members of our tribe. Not just because it’s bad for the community and for relationships, but because when your judge others instead of forgiving others, you won’t be able to forgive yourself. The ego that judges others is the same ego that gets you stuck in self judgment. Give permission for others to be as they are, even when you have to correct them. You can accept someone in your heart even as you reprimand them for something; there’s no contradiction there. And in that acceptance, you will be able to truly accept yourself, even as you try to learn from your mistakes. And through this paradox of acceptance and action, of forgiveness and correction, may the *rav tov –* the abundant goodness of Being Itself, of Reality Itself, become ever more apparent, healing all who seek it. Good Shabbos!

**​**[**Don't Blow it Out Your Window- Parshat Mattot**](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/sont-blow-it-out-your-window-parshat-matot)

One summer, my son attended a band camp in Danville, California. Since the drive was 45 minutes each way from our home in Oakland, I just stayed out in Danville all day and worked in my car rather than drive back and forth twice.

Danville is quite a bit hotter than Oakland, and there are fewer trees as well, so it was a challenge to find a shady place to park. The first day, I drove around for long while before finding a tiny tree that could at least partially shade my car. I parked there and rolled down the windows.

That was fine for the first couple hours, but then it started getting really hot. So, I rolled up the windows, turned on the car, put on the air conditioner and continued to work. After some time, I was surprised by how ineffective the air conditioner was.

Then, I was startled by a noise coming from the backseat. I twisted around to see what was going on and realized- I had neglected to roll up the back windows! No wonder it wasn’t getting any cooler. All the cold air was blowing into the car and right back out the window.

Spiritual life can be like that too sometimes.

You might be trying to “cool down” your anger or impulsiveness, or maybe you need to “heat up” your enthusiasm for your daily practice. And yet, even with the best intentions, transformation might elusive. In that case, it is possible that you’ve "left the window open." All your best intentions are “blowing right out the window!”

How do you “roll up the window” and make the most out of the power of your intention without wasting it? This week’s reading begins:

*“Ish ki yidor neder laShem- if a person takes a vow to the Divine, or swears an oath to prohibit something upon oneself…*

*“...k’khol yotzei mipiv ya’aseh- according to everything that comes out of one’s mouth, one shall do…”*

Why would someone want to take a vow or swear an oath?

Because verbally saying your intention- and even repeating it often- is a powerful way to “shut the window.” Just because you have an intention one moment, that doesn’t mean your brain will constantly be connected to that intention, especially if the intention goes *against*your habits. For that, you need to create a new pattern in your nervous system so that the intention doesn’t “fly out the window” as life unfolds in real time. So, if want to transform, put the transformation in your mouth!  And then, repeat it often.

What is it that you desire to bring forth from yourself?

When that becomes clear to you, commit to it. Write it down. Repeat it often. Then, when the flow of life tends to confuse and distract, you will be solid as a rock. If your intention is clear to yourself, nothing can shake you.

But, you might ask, isn’t attaching yourself to some goal a function of ego?

It’s true- if you merely say, “I commit to accomplishing such-and-such,” you can and probably will create ego-identification with the goal. The ego seeks control, and when things don’t go your way, that creates suffering.

That’s why intention and commitment have to be balanced with surrender and trust, and this is the basic function of prayer. The purpose of praying *for*things is not to control God or manifest our desires, but rather to make our desires transparent, not-fixed, not-egoic. When we pray for something, we recognize that we aren’t in control; we don’t even control our own thoughts. We pray only because the words have arisen in our mouths to pray- there is no “me,” there is only God- unfolding in every form and every happening.

At the same time, if your prayer makes you passive so that you simply wait for God to act, you’ve make a false split between you and God. You assume that “God” is one thing and you are another. But there is One Reality. Commit and act, but know that it is not you who acts. Pray, but know that God prays through you.

One Friday afternoon, the Baal Shem Tov traveled with his disciples to a certain far-off village, and led them to a little broken down shack of a house. He knocked, and when a woman opened the door and saw they were travelers, she warmly greeted them:

“Won’t you stay for *Shabbos?”* she asked.

The Baal Shem Tov immediately accepted. The disciples were surprised- why were they bothering this poor family who obviously had hardly enough for themselves?

At *Shabbos* dinner, when they came to the *motzi,*the blessing over the bread, a tiny crust of bread with mold on it was brought out. After the blessing, the Baal Shem grabbed the tiny crust and gobbled it down himself. The disciples were terribly embarrassed.

Next, a little bit of dried fish was brought out for dinner. Again, the Baal Shem grabbed it and gobbled it down, not allowing anyone else even a taste.

For the rest of *Shabbos,* the Baal Shem did similar things, while the disciples endured his actions in silent agony. After *Shabbos* was over and they set off to return home, they could restrain themselves no longer:

“How could you behave that way? What is the matter with you??”

The Baal Shem was just silent.

A year later, the Baal Shem Tov brought those same disciples back to the same little village where they had visited the poor family the year before. But, when they arrived, there was a palatial mansion in the place where the little shack once stood!

The Baal Shem Tov explained:

“The man whose home we visited last year was fully capable of becoming successful in business, but he was so full of faith, that he chose to rely only on God’s grace and wouldn’t do anything to help himself. Yes, he prayed passionately for livelihood, but refused to take any steps toward it.

“When we visited last year, that crust of bread and bit of fish were enough to keep him trapped in his passivity. All I needed to do was take away that last bit of sustenance, so that he’d be pushed over the edge and forced to take some action. That’s what he did, and just look at them now!”

On this *Shabbat Mattot,*the Sabbath of Tribes, may we support each other in manifesting our visions and goals. May we recognize that commitment to action and prayer are two sides of the Whole- the passive and the active, as One. May you have abundant success and blessing in all your ways!

Good Shabbos!