



Ayin

“Seeing the Unfolding”

Invocation Verse:

עֵינֵי־כָל אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁבְּרוּ וְאַתָּה נֹתֵנו־לֵהֶם אֶת־אֲכָלָם בְּעֵתוֹ

Einei khol eilekha y'sabeiru, v'Atah notein lahem et akhlam b'ito

The eyes of all are on you with hope, and you give them their food in its time...

(Psalm 145:15)

Meaning and Mystical Associations:

Ayin means “eye” and relates to seeing the unfolding of Reality as a Divine process. In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, *ayin* is one of the twelve “simple letters,” and represents the emotion of anger, the astrological sign of Capricorn, the liver in the human body, and the month of *Tevet* in time.

Text

הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אֵל תְּהִי בּוֹ לְכֹל אָדָם, וְאֵל תְּהִי מִפְּלִיג לְכֹל דְּבָר, שְׂאִין לֹךְ אָדָם שְׂאִין לוֹ שְׂעָה וְאִין לֹךְ דְּבָר שְׂאִין לוֹ מְקוֹם

He used to say, don't be scornful of any person, and don't be disdainful of anything; for you have no person without their hour, and no thing without its place.

Pirkei Avot 4:3

Kabbalah Commentary (Based on The Aleph Beit by Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh)

Both “seeing” and “hearing” are metaphors for awareness, pointing to different aspects. “Hearing” refers to getting a message, understanding the “what” of something, as in the expression, “I hear you.” “Seeing,” on the other hand, is more about comprehending the big picture of something, or understanding the “why” of something, as in the expression, “I see.” In the case of the seeing represented by *ayin*, it is the seeing that everything is unfolding according to an ultimate Divine process. In this seeing, things happen as they do because they have to – also called *hashkacha pratit*, or Divine Providence.

According to the Baal Shem Tov, this seeing of “Divine Providence” has three distinct stages: submission (הכנעה – *hakhna'a*), separation (הבדלה – *havdallah*), and sweetening (המתקה – *hamtaka*).

In my understanding of these stages, “submission” just means the simple seeing of what is. This is plain perception, prior to any response, positive or negative.

“Separation” is the process of discernment which results in some response. This isn't mere emotional judgment, which may or may not be part of this second stage, but is the full process of judging how something fits into the context of one's experience, fully “seeing” it to the best of one's ability, and then consciously deciding on a response.

“Sweetening” is not something we do, but is the receiving of Divine response. Meaning, that when we put forth our full conscious effort at the second stage, we are often met spontaneously with miraculous openings far beyond the effects of our actions. An example of this is the splitting of the sea of reeds. According to the midrash, it was only when the one Israelite took the step of walking into the water all the way up to his neck that the miracle occurred. At this stage, all three stages can be received as a Divine process, beyond the ordinary dualistic categories we tend to create such as the polarity of “Divinely ordained” or “controlled” vs. “random.”

This teaching opens another dimension of the *samekh* teaching. With *samekh* the emphasis was on the first two stages of *hakhna'a* and *havdallah*, with the intention of improving oneself day by day. With *ayin*, we are focusing on the meta-understanding that these first two stages are part of a larger process of the Divine unfolding, the end being *hamtaka* – the “sweet” understanding that we are part of the Divine’s realization in the world. So, with *samekh*, the emphasis was on our own process, and with *ayin* the emphasis is on God’s process...

Practice

Ayin Hakhna'a Meditation and Chant

Bring to mind the level of your awareness which simply perceives. Simply take note of every perception that arises, without responding or commenting. And when thought does arise, simply take note of that too. Be the *ayin* – be the eye that simply sees what is.

Then, anchor this awareness with the chant:

עֵינַיִךְ כָּל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאַתָּה נוֹתֵן לָהֶם אֶת־אֲכָלָם בְּעֵתוֹ
Einei khol eilekha y'sabeiru, v'Atah notein lahem et akhlam b'ito