



Mem

“Flooding with Consciousness”

Invocation Verse:

מְלִכּוּתְךָ מְלִכּוּת כָּל עוֹלָמִים. וּמִשְׁלֹתְךָ בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר
Malkhut'kha Malkhut kol Olamim Umemshalt'kha B'khol Dor Vador
Your Kingdom is a Kingdom of all Worlds,
and Your Dominion is through all generations!
(Psalm 145:13)

Meaning and Mystical Associations:

Mem is related both to water (*mayim*), as well as wisdom and consciousness, which are symbolized by water. In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, *mem* is one of the three “mother letters,” and represents water, the astrological planet of Earth, the belly in the human body, and the cold season in time.

Text

אַרְבַּע מְדוּת בְּיוֹשְׁבֵימָה לְפָנֵי חֲכָמִים. סְפוּגָה, וּמְשַׁפָּה, מְשַׁמֵּר, וְנֹפֶה. סְפוּגָה, שֶׁהוּא סוֹפֵג אֶת הַכֹּל. מְשַׁפָּה, שֶׁמְכַנֵּס בָּזוּ וּמוֹצִיא בָּזוּ. מְשַׁמֵּר, שֶׁמּוֹצִיא אֶת הַיַּיִן וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַשְּׂמֵרִים. וְנֹפֶה, שֶׁמּוֹצִיא אֶת הַקֶּמַח וְקוֹלֶטֶת אֶת הַסֵּלֶת:

There are four temperaments among those who sit before the sages: the sponge, the funnel, the strainer, and the sieve. The sponge – because it absorbs everything. The funnel – because it lets in at [one end] and lets out at [the other]. The strainer – because it lets the wine out and retains the sediment. The sieve – because it lets out the [inferior] flour and retains the fine flour.

Pirkei Avot 5:15

Kabbalah Commentary

Water is a wonderful metaphor for consciousness. Just as water takes the shape of whatever it's poured into, so consciousness takes the shape of whatever it perceives. Just as water descends from above and sinks to the lowest level it can, so too Presence involves bringing awareness down from the mind and into the body, to the “lowest” level of physicality. And when that happens, paradoxically, consciousness increases, which is represented by springs of water which well up from the deep.

In the above text, the four metaphors are describing different ways of learning. However, the same can be applied to Presence: the “sponge” is the danger of becoming overwhelmed by the super-significance of everything. In this case, the increased

sensitivity brought on by Presence is coopted by the connection-making brain, and one sees conspiracies and urgency everywhere. People in this state are called “crazy.”

The “funnel” is the opposite: the ability to surrender and “let things go” is coopted by the unconscious desire to avoid Reality, creating an attitude that “nothing matters.” People in this state are called “apathetic.”

The “strainer” is the danger of getting overwhelmed by the negative aspect of experience. In this case, the increased sensitivity brought on by Presence is coopted by the tendency to see the “bad” side of things. Psychologically, we are wired to see the bad so that we can avoid danger, and so a good part of the spiritual work is to notice this and take the reins of one’s own mind and heart so as to not be taken over by negative thinking. The “strainer” is one whose negative seeing becomes more neurotic as a result of incorrect practice of Presence.

These three examples are different aspects of the “flood” in the Torah: being flooded with significance, washing everything away into insignificance, and dwelling on the destructive side of things.

The “sieve” is the ideal: letting go of the useless, retaining the useful. The implication is that we must retain a wise relationship with duality, even as we enter the non-dual dimension. Not every thought, feeling and perception are useful; some things are best dismissed as quickly as possible. But not everything should be dismissed! There are gifts to be gleaned. If we relate this to the *lamed* text which talked about being הַלּוֹמֵד מִכָּל אָדָם, learning from every person, we can understand that sometimes “learning” means absorbing some content, and sometimes it means learning how to ignore content.

Being the sieve, however, doesn’t mean approaching things from the point of view of the mind, looking at things from a judgmental angel right away. The lesson of *mem* is to be in full intimate connection with Reality, allowing awareness to “take the shape” of this moment. From this connection, we can then respond like the sieve – with *hokhmah* (wisdom), taking some and leaving some, according to what is needed...

Practice

Mem Meditation and Chant

Notice the full spectrum experience of this moment, and bring to mind the *kavanah* to be open to what this moment offers that might be important to take in, and what should be simply let go. You don’t have to see this differentiation in anything in particular, the idea is just to hold yourself in readiness to take in and let go, while being alert and noticing of whatever is present. Know that your consciousness is sovereign in all the worlds of experience; you need not be concerned and you need not run away from what is of concern – it’s up to you to see and decide. Then, anchor this awareness with the chant:

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