

## WISDOM OF THE JEWISH MYSTICS



It is not true, as is generally assumed, that stories are to help people fall asleep. In fact, stories help people who sleep away their lives to wake up to the deeper realities of existence. Among the mystical stories a certain mystic told is this: Once a King said to his good friend, the Statesman, that he had looked into the astrological constellations and foreseen that all the wheat that would grow in the coming year would make anyone who ate of it mad. So now we have to put our heads together and devise a plan, he said. The Statesman suggested that the best thing to do would be to set aside some wheat now, from last year's harvest so that they, at least, would not need to eat of the diseased wheat crop. But the King answered: If so, then we alone will not be mad, for it is impossible to set aside enough wheat now for everyone, and the rest of the world will be mad. If we are the only sane ones in a mad world then it will really be we who are mad. There is only one alternative. We too must eat of the wheat, but let us make a sign on our foreheads to indicate to us that we are mad. When we look upon each other's forehead we shall see the sign and know that we are mad.

Why is it that sometimes when a man cleaves to the Creator, in the very middle of his cleaving he finds himself suddenly very distant from God? Here is a parable: When a father wants to teach his son to walk, what does he do? He takes his son and stands him on the ground in front of him, puts his hands out on either side so that the child does not fall, and the child walks between his father's hands. When the child comes close to where his father is standing, the father withdraws a little so that the child will come further and further. Thus the child learns how to walk. So it is with God. When a man burns with religious fervor and cleaves to God, he withdraws from him, so that a man learns how to strengthen himself more and more in his cleaving to the divine.

In all of one's sufferings, be they physical or spiritual, one should think that God himself is also found in them, only they are like a set of clothing for God. When one realizes this, the clothing is removed and the suffering disappears. If a man accepts everything that happens to him in this world with love, then he will have both this physical world and also the higher world of the soul.

We should try and understand the Great Spirit of life which fills all existence, all creation. Let us elevate our ideas to contemplate this great bright light

with its whole infinity of riches and beauty. We can perceive that despite its great power this light is reflected even by the limitations and contradictions of our world. We should also appreciate that the holy and awesome source of this light, in the totality of its glorious perfection, is infinitely beyond the spirit of life as it manifests itself in the small worlds of our experience. We begin to absorb traces of holiness little by little. One point of light after another flashes on us, like falling drops of rain. These heaven-sent elements, as they gather within us, become a great flaming torch. They concentrate their foundation within our souls, and the paths they carve pierce through to the essence of our being. A person should know that God's glory fills the whole earth, and there is no place empty of him. For he fills all worlds, surrounds all worlds, and even a man who must engage in business dealings with heathens cannot excuse himself saying: It is impossible to serve God because of the grossness and coarseness which I meet all the time. No, because a man can find aspects of divinity in all physical matters and in the language of heathens as well. Without this divinity, they would have no vitality and existence at all, but this divinity is greatly contracted and present in just sufficient an amount to give vitality, and no more. The lower the level of emanation, the greater the contraction, the more the divine light is clothed in many garments.

To emphasize the wonderful nature of God, know that the greatness of God is without measure, and marvelous things are done in the world all the time. But they are so awesome that we simply have no conception of them. It is wisest to cast oneself on God, in total reliance. As each day begins, give over all your movements to God, in order that they should all be according to His will; then you will have no worries about whether things are turning out right or not, since you rely upon Him. If you knew that you were now on the same spiritual level as yesterday, would you really want to be yourself at all?

Woe to those people who maintain that God's Scripture only comes to show us stories and everyday matters. If this were so, even in our day we could create our own Scripture of such ordinary matters, and a better one at that. If Scripture were there to tell us of historical events, then in the court records of the kings of this world there are finer things. So one is forced to say that God's Scripture is of a high level of spirituality and contains profound mysteries. The stories of Scripture are the garments in which the real Word of God is clothed. It is like a man's garments which everybody sees. Fools think that when they

have seen a man's clothes they have seen the real man and do not need to look any further. They take the clothing to be the body of the man. There are those who think when they have seen the body itself they are acquainted with the man's soul. So it is with the Word of God. It has a body which is made up out of the commandments of Scripture; this body is clothed in clothes which are mundane stories. Fools of this world only look at the clothes, which are the stories in Scripture, and they know nothing more, nor do they look at what is underneath the clothes. Those who are better informed do not look at the clothes but at the body which is under the clothes. However, the wisest mystics, servants of the Supreme King who have stood at "Mount Sinai", only look at the soul within the Scriptures, which is the essence of everything, the real Word of God.

The essential purpose of knowledge is not that people should know the greatness of God from authors and from books. The essence is to deepen man's awareness of God's greatness, and fix his thoughts on God with the strength and power of the heart and mind. Thus man's thoughts will be bound up with God, with a strong and powerful bond, as they are bound with the physical things that men see with their own eyes. Just as when people are happy and dance, they snatch up those who are standing at the side, feeling low in spirits and depressed, and force them into the whirl of the dance. So it is with joy itself. For when a man rejoices, then depression and suffering stand at the side. A man should try and chase after his depression and force it into rejoicing, so that melancholy itself is turned into joy.

Here is a parable: Once there was a man who could play a musical instrument with great skill and sweetness. All those who heard him play were unable to resist the music, and they broke into dance with spontaneous joy. A deaf man chanced by and he could only see people jumping around and he thought they were demented. He asked himself: What manner of joy is this? In truth if this deaf man could experience the great pleasure and sweetness of the music he too would join the dance.

In the service of God, a man should learn three things from a child and seven things from a thief. From a child he should learn 1. always to be happy; 2. never to sit idle; 3. to cry for everything he wants. From a thief he should learn 1. to work at night; 2. if he cannot gain what he wants in one night, to try again the next night; 3. to love his co-workers just as thieves love each other; 4. to be willing to risk his life even for little things; 5. not to attach too much

value to things, even though he has risked his life for them, just as a thief will resell a stolen article at a small fraction of its real value; 6. to withstand all kinds of beatings and tortures but to remain what he is; 7. to believe that his work is worthwhile, and not be willing to change it despite all criticism.

Love those who are known to be sinners and anti-religious, for it is surely better to err on the side of causeless love than on the side of causeless hatred. The Messiah will plead even on behalf of the wicked, claiming that they are righteous underneath. Because of this they too will repent and so they too will be saved. A minor believer loves little sinners, a great mystic loves great sinners as well, but the Messiah will love and plead for even the utterly wicked. Everyman who empathizes with the good in all creatures has within him an aspect of the Messiah.

All worldly desires are like beams of light which enter a house from the sun's rays. They seem to the senses to be solid, but when someone tries to take hold of such a sunbeam there is nothing in his hand at all. Such are the desires of this world. And the evil inclination in man is like a trickster who runs amongst people with his hand closed; nobody knows what is in it. The trickster asks each man: What am I holding? And each man assumes that the trickster's closed hand holds something he desires very much, so everyman runs after him. Eventually the trickster opens his hand and there is nothing there at all.

From a government official came a bothersome question for a wrongly-imprisoned mystic: What does it mean when it says in the Bible that God called Adam and asked him: Where are you? How could God not have known where Adam was? The mystic explained: In every age God calls to each man and says to him, Where are you? Where are you in the world? God's Word is of eternal validity, and it exists for each age, each generation, and each man.

Every lock has a key which fits it exactly, according to the shape of the lock so is the shape of the key. But there are thieves who are able to open the lock without a key by breaking it open. So for every hidden mystical matter there is a key, namely the mystical state of consciousness directed at that matter. But the real key is to be like a thief who breaks through all locks, and the way this is done is by breaking one's own ego, in great humility. In this way, the barrier which locks the man in, dividing him from the higher dimensions of the divine, is broken down. In life a man must pass over the narrowest of bridges, but man should know this: It is vitally important that he should not be afraid – at all.

One of the miracles which took place in the Temple at Jerusalem was that when the worshippers stood together in the courtyard they were terribly crowded, yet when they bowed down during the service there was always enough room for their bodies to do so. This is because when they stood upright – proud and full of their own egos – they became crowded; but bowing down, they humbled themselves before God and had plenty of room.

Just a little coin, when held up in front of the eyes, can prevent one from seeing a great mountain (even though the mountain is thousands of times bigger than the coin). Likewise, our little world prevents men from seeing the great light of the God's Word, because the world stands in front of men's eyes and masks their sight. But just as it is easy to remove the coin from before a man's eyes, and he will immediately see the great mountain, so simply by removing the world from a man's eyes, he is able to perceive the great light of God's Word.

The whole earth is full of God's glory, but to be enlightened a man must nullify his own personal traits, becoming completely nothing before God. The more he nullifies himself, the more God's light is revealed to him. This is because when a man places a physical object in front of light a shadow is produced. The greater the object, the greater the shadow, and the shadow masks the light and hides it.

When a certain mystic leader came to be appointed for bishop of a certain town, all the townsfolk came out to greet him. He asked them to allow him an hour to himself before the official reception, and he was shown into a private room. One of the more inquisitive townspeople wanted to find out what the new bishop would be doing by himself during this hour, so he hid close to the door and listened in to what was going on. To his utter surprise, he heard the man saying over and over to himself, 'How do you do good Father, How do you do learned Teacher' and such like greetings. When the mystic left his private room at the end of the hour, the man could not refrain from asking him what the point of his remarks had been. The mystic replied: I was afraid that when the people greeted me at the reception I would feel pride at the respect they were showing me. So I addressed myself over and over with those same titles of honor until I realized how ridiculous they all were.

There once was an illiterate cowherd who did not know how to pray, so instead he would say to God: Master of the Universe, you know that if you had cows and you gave them to me to look after I

would do it for nothing, even though I take wages from everyone else. Yes, Lord. I would do it for nothing, because I love you. A certain sage chanced upon the cowherd and heard him praying in this manner. The sage said to him: You fool, you must not pray like that. The cowherd asked him how he should pray, and the sage set about teaching him the order of prayers as they appeared in a certain prayer book. After the sage went away, the cowherd soon forgot what he had been taught and so he did not pray at all. He was afraid to say his usual prayers about God's cows, because the sage had told him that it was wrong to say such things. On the other hand, he could not say what the sage had told him, because it was all jumbled up in his mind. That night the sage was reprimanded in a dream and told that, unless the cowherd returned to his spontaneous prayer, terrible harm would befall the sage because he had stolen something very precious away from God. Upon awakening the sage hurried back to the cowherd and asked him what he was praying. The cowherd told him that he was not praying anything since he had forgotten the prayers the sage had taught him, and he had been forbidden to tell God how we would look after his cows for nothing. The sage begged him to forget what he had told him and to go back to his real prayers that he had said before he had ever met him.

Those inclined toward the life of the spirit should be warned to take extra care. A man's spiritual contemplations about elevated matters may draw him away from clearly perceiving important physical considerations. This is one of the defects at the base of prophecy. Because of it, darkness clouds those who attain spiritual heights. This allows wicked people, to whom holy ideas are totally alien, control over our world. Thus the glory of holiness is turned into sorrow. Every wise man, therefore, should try to prevent this happening. He should use spiritual insight and understanding to increase the clarity of his perception of the world in which he lives, in all of its aspects. Furthermore, each man needs to develop his own individuality. It is not the purpose of our many external influences, be they holy or profane, to silence a man's spirit and eliminate his own personal way of seeing things. Their purpose is to pour over him an abundance of lights which he may take into his innermost self, and through them his own insight grows and increases.

He who learns from everyman is truly wise. He who conquers his evil inclination is truly mighty. He who rejoices in his own portion is truly rich. And he who honors all of his fellows is truly honorable.