

The Indwelling And The Encompassing Light

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Abstract:

In this brief essay, I outline the difference between the indwelling and transcendent or encompassing light. I define each and then discuss the harmony between them and try to make sure the vessel does not obscure, distort or even attempt to annihilate that Light. It was described that the educational system should be geared to teaching wonder at the universe and nature and that one day the Light shall triumph, where God transcendent and God immanent (in history) find accord and all vessels shall express the L(l)ight.

Keywords: *indwelling Light; encompassing Light; harmony; messianic concept; God*

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I. Introduction: Defining Our Terms

Perhaps the most fitting analogy for the concept of the Ein Sof, the infinite is the words “Light” (henceforth Light) which both gives a quantitative and qualitative set of properties. These include illumination, insight, warmth, sight, clarity, vision, beauty, penetration, focus, a wave and particle and so on. However, according to kabbalah, the order of descent whereby the less material becomes more material, and even that aspect “before” the less material, explained with reference to zimzum (Luria, 2008) and the ungraspable notion of “something from nothing”, “L(l)ight” indicates the Light as it becomes denser and the Light is fractured into many L(l) or sparks (henceforth L(l)ight). Finally, “light” is as the Light becomes limited to the capacity of the vessel (henceforth light). (Luria, 2008).

As the descent of the Light becomes more course it separates into lights and vessels (Scholem, 1941). To the extent that the vessel can contain some light, it expresses the Light. To the extent that it hides the light, the Light becomes all but perceptible. Yet beyond all the manifold vessels all vessels, regardless of opacity or transparency are embraced by the very same Light – equally. This is the encompassing light in contradistinction to the indwelling L(l)ight, whose light is contained according to the limiting capacities of the vessel, even though the vessel itself is also Light (Luria, 2008).

In this brief essay, I will outline this differentiation of light toward finding a harmony, a dialectic between the surrounding Light and the inner limitation of the indwelling light or rather being conscious of the indwelling light and so embrace more of the surrounding Light.

II. The Capacity And Quality Of The Vessel

In general, there are four orders of existence: inanimate; growing; living and speaking. This translates to the inanimate worlds of earth, water, fire and air; the plant world; the animal world and the human world. Each of these domains of being have certain capacities and limits and the Light adapts to that, expressing but bits of light to varying degrees and so Light becomes L(l)ight. In the mind of man, this may even descend to the point where only vessels are perceived (Buber, 1970). This lack of any spiritual sentiment has led to the unabated tumult of wars throughout history. This is why I have been careful not to equate Light and the proper expression thereof as simply religious. This does not solve the problem: how to see beyond simply vessels? (Buber, 1970).

One route to opening the doors of perception is to facilitate awareness exercises such as focusing on the amazing power of each of our senses (Heschel, 1955), our capacity for language and art and cultures and recognizing that as light. Again, one has to be careful. High culture is not always the mark of civilization. We need to cultivate more than culture but rather one that motivates treating each other better. However, there is terrible breakdown in society in general. Much of it has to do with nihilism, a lack of purpose and absolute rejection of Light.

And yet matter sings of tremendous design and beauty. The vessel itself is light as well as the life that pulses through, and even stones emit light or are components of massive mountains and just like every droplet forms the cascading water. The presence of the One that creates is present in each thing or else it could not be in existence. And yet the vessels display very often discord and a lack of harmony, infinite degrees of differences and capacities, fighting just like the tale of the broken vessels (Scholem, 1941).

III. All Is Equal And One

Yet for all the hierarchical distinction and continuous change, creation and processes of living and dying, the Light is never fully contained by the vessels but rather encompassing each thing equally without any distinction or difference. The Light is equally distant from all things and yet equally intimate with all things.

The question is: do the creations know and feel this infinite Light. Is the vessel too constricting that this should fill one's consciousness? Is the world itself too dark with the smear of violence and falsehood? To the extent that this Light is encompassing, the creations do not feel it even if it is the very essence of that which gives whatever form at whatever level of being, its very essence or existence.

If psychology, art, science, even religion and politics, were to mean anything it would be about raising the individual's consciousness to the Light and making the world a better place. Unfortunately, the fairy tale is not to be. As much as there is a force of attraction, there is a force of repulsion and expansion, a life instinct and a death instinct. The Light becomes the L(l)ight which devolves into light eventually all but perceptible in the garb of mechanistic nature. The route then is to win back nature as an instance of the Light.

This is where education ought to begin at the wonders of nature rather than releasing students who think human beings are a clump of cells on an accidental planet somewhere in space in a cold, meaningless and random universe. This narrative is not only incorrect (consider the great ingenuity that goes into as a single ant) it is also against the presence of Light in the form of life, where the act of creation was not simply a singular Cause at the very beginning that set in motion a domino effect, but rather an ongoing immanent creation.

Tiferet is beauty or harmony. The vessel expresses the Light, its L(l)ight manifesting so that body and soul are in harmony (Kook, 2009). A world like this is made up of individuals who do not see the destruction of others as their purpose in life. A world like this sees the end of all wars. Is this possible? The Torah says it is. For Jews the Light is manifest in the universe as a creative force as well as it is manifest in human history, both individual and collective (Kook, 2009). The end of history is precisely a Messianic promise. When that might be it is a moot point, but at the maximum it is two hundred and fifteen years, though the process unfolds and is probably not instantaneous.

IV. Conclusion: Living With God Consciousness

In the meantime, living with God consciousness is knowing that all emanates from and as the Light, that one can be happy just by focusing on the body-mind that has all these human capacities, and that in the long run the Light will overpower the seeming hiddenness and mechanical, cold necessity of nature. Instead as the psalmist says, I will know God from my very bones. While the scepter of death is near it seems like the Light has met its match, but all is illusion and passage because the Light can never be vanquished. Living with God consciousness is having faith in the Creator of all and trusting that this force will bring the redemption whereby peace triumphs over those bent of war and death. In historical moments marked by extreme violence and ideological absolutism, the hiddenness of the Light appears most severe. Yet within the framework of Jewish metaphysics, such darkness does not negate redemption but intensifies the ethical demand placed upon human vessels. This may be the pathway to eventual peace and harmony.

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