

Parashat Kitisa

What is the Difference between Spirituality and Holiness?

Attributing Power to Nothing but G-d – A Fine Line Distinction

There are numerous spiritual directions in the world that attract so many of us who seek expanded consciousness and a connection with the higher realms. There are also numerous definitions of spirituality. Here are a few examples: “The search for meaning in life events and a yearning for connectedness to the universe” (Coles 1990). “...The search for transcendent meaning – can be expressed in religious practice or ...expressed exclusively in the relationship to nature, music, the arts, a set of philosophical beliefs, or relationships with friends and family” (Astrow et al. 2001). “A person’s experience of, or a belief in, a power apart from his or her own existence” (Mohr 2006). Since spirituality is an uplifted goal for those who seek purpose and meaning in life, some people may be surprised to learn that spirituality in certain cases can be not only undesirable, but actually liable for the death penalty in the Torah. That is because a Jew should rather give his or her life than participate in any kind of idol-worship. And guess what? Idolatry has always been one of the most spiritual of practices. I sometimes get glimpses of understanding the attraction to idolatry, when, for example, I wear a citrine gemstone necklace on my annual tours, in order to attract donations to Midreshet B’erot Bat Ayin. This crystal is well known as a prosperity stone that promotes and manifests success and abundance. I need to make sure to keep the fine line of distinction between attributing power to the citrine stone and realizing deeply how all power belongs to the One and only Hashem Who endows His creation with certain abilities emanating from His undivided Divine Supremacy. Just as herbs have various healing qualities; gemstones also channel certain spiritual properties from Hashem, while having absolutely no power on their own. Some people say that we do not have idol-worship today, since we no longer bow down to idols and images. However, any time we separate ourselves from the undivided Oneness of G-d and attribute power to anything less than this Oneness, we fall prey to at least a tinge of idolatry. This can take the form of feeding our egos, idolizing modern science, worshipping material wealth and indulging in any physical desire.

Remaining Pure with Hashem Our G-d

I recently discussed the difference between spirituality and *kedusha* (holiness) with my students. We were learning about the mitzvah to be *תמים*/*tamim* – pure or wholehearted with Hashem:

פֶּרַק דְּבָרִים פֶּרַק יח פֶּסוּק יג תְּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

“You shall be pure with Hashem your G-d” (*Devarim* 18:13).

This prohibits sharing our belief in the One and Only G-d by attributing power to anything but Him. That includes, contacting angels, using astrology, tealeaves and Tarot cards to find answers for our future. “We must unify our hearts to G-d alone, and believe that only He is in charge. We will ask only Hashem about the future, or His prophets and sages who use the *Urim* and *Tumim*. We will not seek answers from any other spiritual beings; for He is the G-d of the gods and uplifted above all, ruling over all the astrological constellations that He may nullify

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according to His will. After warning us not to ask magicians, cloud gazers, witches and those who ask the dead about the future, Hashem commanded us to be pure with Hashem in all this and only believe in Him and his prophets. We need to be wholehearted with Hashem and not share our reverence of Hashem with any other power” (Ramban, *Devarim* 18:13). In line with keeping this mitzvah to be *tamim* with Hashem, we should question ourselves whether we ever cross the line when we revere a certain Rabbi exclusively and have only his picture on our wall. I, personally, make a point of having pictures of many different *tzaddikim* (righteous people) on my walls, to make clear that the reverence of Hashem is shared with no other being.

Taking the Fruit While Forgetting the Tree

A recent Shabbat guest, who had become recently involved with a Messianic Cult in Haifa, helped clarify for my husband and I, why Christianity is idol- worship. Although she was born Jewish, she enthusiastically described her new belief that for her, ‘Yeshua’ is not merely a messenger of G-d, but actually ‘the lord.’ She described her ‘Yeshua’ as “the suffering servant” who embodies divinity (G-d forbid). This is the very same mistake of the Generation of Enosh when they “began to call on the name of G-d” (*Bereishit* 4:26). “During the times of Enosh, people made a great mistake, and the wise men of that generation gave thoughtless counsel. Enosh himself was one of those who erred. Their mistake was as follows: They said G-d created stars and spheres with which to control the world. He placed them on high and treated them with honor, as they are servants who minister before Him. Accordingly, it is fitting to praise and glorify them and to treat them with honor... They began to construct temples to the stars and offer sacrifices to them. They would praise and glorify them with words, and prostrate themselves before them, because by doing so, they would – according to their false conception - be fulfilling the will of G-d. This was the essence of the worship of false gods, and this was the rationale of those who worshiped them. They would not say that there is no other god except for this star.” (Rambam, *Laws of Idolatry* 1).

The Rabbis refer to this mistaken belief as, “cutting the plants,” because it severs the connection between the created things of the world and their roots in Hashem, the Source of all creation. Hence, the focus is on “the son” who is a convenient and accessible object of worship, rather than Hashem – the King and Creator. In Judaism, the focus is always on the highest source, where all creation is unified. We believe that Hashem manifests through all of creation and reveals His will through the prophets and holy *tzaddikim*. Not a single one of them ever tried to gain attention for himself, but rather gave himself over entirely to arouse devotion to Hashem. We are commanded to serve the Infinite Unknowable *Ein Sof* (Infinite being). Even worshipping one of Hashem’s manifestations, such as the *Sefirot* (Divine Emanations) is considered idolatry. Certainly, subjugation to such a lofty abstraction can be daunting. Not only did the easy concreteness of idolatrous belief appeal to this woman, but also a feeling of love and closeness which she experienced coming to her from ‘Yeshua,’ to the point where she imagined he would call out to her. The *yetzer hara* is very powerful and tries to convince a person to take the fruit and forget about the tree. Enjoy the things of this world with abandon and don’t worry – you are loved and all is forgiven. This is exactly what our sages identified as the character of Esav who scorned the aspect of the *bechor* (first born) because he denied the need to be subjugated to the superiority of the First Cause.

The Spiritual Experience of Drumming and Dancing Around the Golden Calf

In this week's parasha, the Israelites seeking a peek spiritual experience succumbed to the temptation of attributing divinity to a created being – the Golden Calf.

**ספר שמות פרק לב פסוק יט ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחלת ויחר אף משה וישלך
מיטדו את הלחת וישבר אתם תחת החר:**

“It came to pass, as soon as he came close to the camp that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moshe’s anger was kindled, and he threw the Tablets from his hands, and broke them beneath the mount (*Shemot* 32:19).

I can just imagine the spiritual experience of the drumming and dancing around the Golden Calf, and the feeling of ecstatic excitement and connection. Nevertheless, the end-result of such spiritual exultation was the breaking of the Holy Torah Tablets and countless deaths (*ibid.* 27). Our Shabbat guest was a nice spiritual young woman who was obviously misled. Her high level of spirituality, made it hard for me to feel proper contempt for her beliefs and actions. How could I accept that when the real Mashiach reveals himself and the Sanhedrin (Jewish Court) will be reinstated, such a sweet, young woman would be executed, unless she repented from her idolatrous ways. Naturally, I will do what I can to bring her close to the true Torah, remembering that, “A Jew, even when sinning will always be a Jew” (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 44a). Let us pray that this young woman and all the many others like her will discover the real Torah, speedily.

Hanging on to Holiness

The Torah has clear guidelines on how to serve Hashem. We develop our relationship with Hashem by doing His Will as He requested from us in His Torah. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi explains that the difference between the Golden Calf and the Golden Cherubs in the Tabernacle, was only that the latter were directly commanded by G-d, whereas the former was not (*The Kuzari* 1:97). By serving Hashem and doing His will, for the simple purpose of keeping the laws of the Torah whether or not it brings us a feeling of transcendent exultation, we choose holiness over spirituality. Hanging on to Holiness will eventually bear fruit even if it does not always imbue us with instant gratification. The Torah sandwiched the parasha describing the sin of the Golden Calf between four *parshiot* describing Hashem’s tabernacle: Two preceding: *Teruma, Tetzaveh* and two following: *Vayakhel, Pekudei*. The reason given for this sequence is to atone for the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf, by highlighting its rectification: the building of the House of Holiness for Hashem. When we overcome the temptation to attribute Divinity to anything else but Hashem, we come closer to the building of the Final Temple. Through this, we will draw down *chesed* – lovingkindness from Hashem and feel his unconditional love for us. When Hashem’s light will be fully revealed in the world through his holy Temple, we will finally be able to unify the undivided holiness of the mitzvot with the ultimate euphoric spiritual experience.