



What is the Spiritual Meaning of Metals?

Golden Earrings and Elevating the Material

I always seem to be losing my earrings. Perhaps, it's because my movements are brisk at times: as when I run down the hill to teach, bend down to weed, crouch between the trees and part of my head-covering gets stuck in the branches or when I swing on the hammock. My favorite gold earrings, that my husband gave me for one of our anniversaries, are currently in repair for the third time. At least they are not lost, but I miss them! Something is definitely missing – not just the appearance of the material earrings, but mainly their spiritual energy. I prefer gold over silver- not because of its value and status but because I'm an 'autumn' type and warm colors such as teal and gold match my complexion better. I wonder about the spiritual energy of gold, silver and copper, as I'm sure there must be a deeper spiritual reason for the use of these metals in the Mishkan and Temple. When contemplating about gold in the Torah, two opposite matters come to mind: The Golden Calf and the Golden Cherubs adorning the lid of the Ark in the Holy of Holies. Whereas, the Golden Calf was a symbol of materialism, the Cherubs are a spiritual symbol of the dwelling of the Divine Presence. Actually, Hashem commanded the Israelites to construct the Cherubim in the Mishkan as a rectification for the Golden Calf. Worshipping the Golden Calf – 'with its face in the grass' (*Tehillim* 106:20) – can be compared to allowing materialism and money to run our lives. However, the Cherubs with their wings – "facing upward" (*Shemot* 37:9) – represent spiritual aspirations. So, it seems that the energy of 'gold' is about elevating the material.

Spiritual Wings of Gold and Silver

Just as a bird needs two wings to fly, love and fear of G-d are the two wings that make our mitzvot soar and ascend to the upper Worlds (*Tanya* part 1, chapter 40). In *Parashat Lech Lecha*, we learn how "Avraham rose from Egypt, he and his wife, all his belongings, and Lot went with him, to the south. Then Avraham was very heavy with cattle, with silver and with gold" (*Bereishit* 13:1-2). It is interesting to note, that although Lot also became exceedingly wealthy in Egypt, it doesn't state that Lot had gold and silver. He only had "flocks, cattle and tents" (*ibid.* 5). Silver and gold represent אהבה/ahavah – 'love of G-d' and יראת/yrayah – 'awe of G-d,' respectively. In order to elevate the fallen sparks, we need both awe and love of Hashem, presented by the gold and silver that Avraham brought up with him. However, Lot was not on the level of Avraham to raise holy sparks from the depths of decadent Egypt (*S'fat Emet*). Since Lot was unable to raise the fallen sparks, they instead brought him down, making him stoop to lowly materialism and allowing his flock to graze on his neighbors' grass. The separation process between Avraham and Lot thus stemmed from Lot's inability to bring gold and silver up from Egypt. Without awe and love of G-d, Lot was therefore unable to keep up with Avraham's spiritual path but instead became preoccupied with amassing wealth.

Awe and Love Through Indulgence in Worldly Pleasures

If we want to be affluent without letting wealth cause our detriment, we need to develop awe and love of Hashem. The more awe and love we have, the more we will be able to elevate the material. This explains the extravagant Tabernacle with its gold and silver. By donating our gold and silver to the Mishkan our hearts became imbued with the awe and love of Hashem. The Mishkan was erected on Yom Kippur, as a rectification for the Golden Calf, which symbolizes materialism. On Yom Kippur, we leave all worldly pursuits behind in order to dedicate

ourselves to the awe and love of G-d. In contrast, on Purim, we indulge in eating and drinking. Yet, Yom Kippur is compared to Purim as hinted in the similarities of their names. Actually, יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים / *Yom Hakipurim* means ‘a day like Purim.’ Perhaps, these two holidays complement each other while teaching us that we can express awe and love of Hashem not only through abstinence and self-abnegation but also through indulgence in worldly pleasures, as long as it is for the sake of a mitzvah. This encapsulates the distinction between the Golden Calf and the Golden Cherubs, their only difference being that the Cherubs were constructed for the mitzvah of Hashem.

Extending the Golden Scepter through Awe of G-d

In ‘new age spirituality,’ gold is described as a bright glittering metal of imperishable nature, unaffected by fire. It is compared to the immortal, imperishable and permanent part of spiritual man. Similarly, in the Torah, awe of G-d is the quality that eternalizes our good characteristics, as its states, “...fear of Hashem is its treasure” (*Yesha’yahu* 33:6); (*Babylonian Talmud Berachot* 33b). In the Purim story, gold plays an important role in Esther’s ability to save the Jewish people from imminent annihilation. When she entered the inner courtyard of the King which can also refer to Hashem, He extended His golden scepter to Esther (*Esther* 5:2). This symbolizes her awe of G-d, which comprises the outer key, by which we can enter the inner dimension (Imrei Emet, *Shushan Purim*). The Ba’al Teshuvah (returnee to Judaism) needs to remember Hashem constantly, in order not to slip from continuously acting for the sake of Heaven. When we have gold which represents awe, we will find favor and become beautiful like Esther. Yet, even when we purify ourselves from the lowly lusts of this world, by means of acquiring awe of G-d, we still need love of G-d in order that divine holiness can enter our heart (Imrei Emet, *Motzei Yom Kippur*).

Elevating Our Desires through Silvery Love of G-d

In new age spirituality silver is associated with intuition, self-reflection, and inner wisdom. It is a symbol of purity and is connected to vision, clarity, awareness, healing, protection, emotion and love. Silver is a pure white metal with a brilliant luster, representing the nutritive functions of the human body. Both in society and in the life of the individual, gold supplies the vitality, while silver furnishes the food for subsistence. It is the medium of exchange through which homes are supplied with food and the wheels of industry are kept turning. Silver excels all other metals as a conductor of electricity and heat. The Hebrew word קֶסֶף/*kesef* – ‘silver’ is related to the word כִּסּוּפִים/*kisufim* – ‘longing’ and love. The treasure hidden in Israel is the yearning to serve Hashem. Conversely, the longing and love of the Egyptians and Canaanites – the fathers of impurity – were to gratify their impure lusts. Therefore, “Yosef collected all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan by the sale of grain, and Yosef brought קֶסֶף/*hakesef* – ‘the silver’ into Pharaoh's house” (*Bereishit* 47:14). This verse hints that Yosef collected all the evil longings and desires of Egypt and Canaan through their payment, which represented the holy sparks that had fallen there (Degel Machane Efraim, *Vayigash*). Through his awe of G-d, Yosef overcame the love and desire for fallen pleasures and transformed them into the love of Hashem. Therefore, he was able to elevate all these fallen sparks.

Contemplating Copper

ספר שמות פרק לה פסוק ה קחו מאתכם תרומה להשם כל נדיב לבו יביאה את תרומת השם זהב וסף ונחשת:

“Take from yourselves an offering for Hashem; every generous hearted person shall bring it, [namely] Hashem’s offering: gold, silver, and copper (*Shemot* 35:5).

The metals used in the Mishkan were gold silver and copper. We have discussed the former at length but what about the copper? Contemplating on copper brings to mind the נחש הנחשת / *nashash hanechoshet* – ‘copper serpent’ that the Israelites gazed at, it in order to be healed from the bite of the serpent (*Bamidbar* 21:9). Since then, copper has become a symbol of healing. Why did Hashem command Moshe to construct a serpent specifically out of copper? Why not gold or silver? Copper is a strong energy conductor that encourages emotional alignment, by sending and amplifying thoughts and healing energy into our energy field. Wearing copper may facilitate the release of the ‘excess charge’ of anger and resentment. Consequently, copper, engenders clearer thinking and calmer behavior, which enabled the Israelites to gain perspective. When they were lost in the narrowness of fear and despair, the copper snake shook them into heightened consciousness, reminding them to move out of the narrow place of fear and to lift their eyes upward into the expanded awareness of their Creator. Just as Ya’acov overcame Esav’s impure forces, associated with the seven-headed serpent, in the future, Mashiach will transform the venom of the serpent. This is alluded to in the equal numerical value of both נחש / *nachash* – ‘serpent’ and משיח / Mashiach which is 358. Ultimately, the ‘holy serpent’ (Mashiach) will destroy all negativity, represented by the ‘evil serpent.’

Balanced, Purifying, Protective Copper

Copper is universally known to work wonders in balancing the physical body as a whole. For example, it is common knowledge that those suffering from arthritis can alleviate their symptoms by wearing a copper bracelet against their skin. Copper is also believed to strengthen the red blood cells, support blood circulation, make bones healthy, improve metabolism, detoxify, alleviate rheumatism, anemia, viral and bacterial infection, exhaustion, infertility, and more. However, care should be taken, as it can be poisonous and sometimes even fatal in excessive amounts – just as the bite of the serpent. In the Mishkan and Temple, the copper laver by which the kohanim ceremoniously washed their hands, enacted purification from fears, despair, anger and resentment etc. enabling the kohanim to eliminate any trace of negativity in preparation for their holy service. It is interesting to note that also the enclosure of the courtyard was made of copper, reflecting its spiritual protective energy.

Elevating Reality through Gold, Silver and Copper

According to the Midrash, gold, silver and copper correspond respectively to the three archetypal exiles, Babylon, Persia/Media and Greece. Each of these kingdoms will be elevated in the future through the materials of the Temple. However, the cruelty of the Roman kingdom, represented by iron, can never be elevated. Therefore, there was no iron in the Mishkan and Temple (*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 35:5). Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’acov also corresponded to the elevation of these three Temple metals. Although Avraham is known to represent kindness and love, he corresponds to the awe of G-d, which is represented by gold, because this was the area of his rectification. His test when thrown into the burning furnace, represents gold which is purified through the heat of a furnace. Yitzchak is compared to the purity of silver, as he had to balance his inborn awe with the love of Hashem, when he gave

himself over to G-d at the Akeidah. Ya'acov corresponds to Tiferet – the perfect balance represented by copper. The donations of the Israelites to the Mishkan were according to the level of each person's soul. Those whose souls were connected to gevurah would desire to give gold. People whose soul were of chesed, yearned to donate silver. By donating from the essence of their soul, they were able to elevate their spirit. Due to Hashem's love of Israel, He desired that His abode in the Mishkan would be made by the sparks of all of the Jewish souls. This way the souls of Israel would rise to cleave to the Eternal (Sefer Bikurei Aviv, *Parashat Terumah*).

זָהָב/zahav – 'gold'	כֶּסֶף/kesef – 'silver'	נְחֹשֶׁת/nechoshet – 'copper'
גְּבוּרָה/gevurah – 'severity'	חֶסֶד/chesed – 'kindness'	תִּפְאֶרֶת/Tiferet – 'balanced beauty'
יִרְאָה/yirah – 'awe'	אַהֲבָה/ahavah – 'love'	רַחֲמִים/rachamim – 'compassion'
Avraham's rectification	Yitzchak's rectification	Ya'acov's rectification
שִׁנְבַּחַן בְּכַבֵּשׁן הָאֵשׁ כְּזָהָב – He was tested through the burning furnace which is like gold	שִׁנְצָרַף כְּכֶסֶף עַל גְּבִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ – He was purified like silver on the altar	נְחֹשֶׁתִי וַיְבָרַכְנִי ה' בְּגִלְגָלָה Lavan said to Ya'acov, "I have divined, and G-d has blessed me for your sake" (<i>Bereishit</i> 30:27).
בָּבֶל Babylon	פָּרַס וּמְדִי Persia and Media	יֵוֹן Greece