

Rabbi Dr. Yosef Bronstein



# Solidarity and Spirituality

Rav Kook describes Purim as a time for powerful spiritual experiences. Throughout the year, our souls are hidden beneath layers of our shallower, surface personalities. On Purim though, “wine enters, and secrets emerge” (Sanhedrin 38a), which Rav Kook interprets as referring to the revelation of the usually concealed soul. In addition, we don masks and costumes to conceal our surface personalities, creating the space for a focus on our inner and more essential identity – a Divine soul (Ma’amarei HaReiyah, 153).

Generally, we think of soul revelations and spiritual experiences as intensely personal events. Each soul is unique and therefore one person’s experience is incommensurate with anyone else’s. Accordingly, spirituality is often thought of as optimally accessible when set apart from regular society, such as in a monastery or an ashram.

However, Purim, despite its strong spiritual qualities, is celebrated in a communal setting. Large meals, parties and revelry are part and parcel of the day. Similarly, when Rav Kook describes the revelation of the soul which can occur on Purim, he highlights that this can only transpire if one cultivates feelings of community and solidarity with other Jews. It is only through Esther’s dictum of “Go and gather all the Jews” (Esther 4:16) that “the inner Jewish consciousness can break through” from its place of concealment (Ma’amarei HaReiyah, 154). On Purim, our spiritual connection with G-d is dependent upon the extent to which we connect with other people.

This links to a broader theme in Rav Kook’s thought. Throughout his

writings, he argues for the intertwining of the “vertical” line towards G-d with the “horizontal” line towards others. For example, in one passage he writes that “the soul of individuals is drawn from the Source of the Worlds that exists within the collective; the collective gives the soul to the individual” (Orot Yisrael 2:3). In other words, G-d’s presence resides most brightly in the collective of the Jewish people. The only path to access Divinity is through deep and meaningful connections with the Jewish people.

For Rav Kook, this enmeshment of interpersonal unity with our spiritual connection to G-d is part of the eternal message of Purim. It takes on new significance though, as the Jewish people return to the Land of Israel. When we are living an exilic reality dispersed amongst the nations, the notion of Jewish unity can, for the most part, only be realized within the confines of one’s local community. While in theory Jews always espoused a connection to the nation as a whole, this was practically difficult to actualize as they had little or no contact with Jews beyond their land.

In Rav Kook’s time, however, Esther’s call of “Go and gather all of the Jews,” became a literal imperative. Jews left their homes in the Diaspora and returned to the Land of Israel. As Jews from multiple locales and cultures, each with its own unique lifestyle and approach, began to live together once again, the need and importance of Jewish unity became even more central (Ma’amarei HaReiyah, 156).

On the one hand, this new reality creates a very real danger of discontent and disarray. Each group needs to become

accustomed to living alongside Jews of different stripes or risk the escalation of intra-group quarrelling. Simultaneously though, this potential pitfall also presents a tremendous opportunity. The ingathering of the exiles sets the stage for true national unity, the likes of which have not been seen in thousands of years. The creation of the Jewish collective – not just as an abstract theoretical entity but as a real people living side by side – can make the Divine light shine more brightly in this world. In turn, this feeling of “amongst my nation I dwell” can enhance each Jew’s personal spiritual experiences, on Purim and throughout the year.

*Let us reveal this Purim Letter with all its wondrousness, which transcends all our meager [human] knowledge. [Let us] declare the power of a unified Jewish people which brings together all the strands of G-d’s nation. [This unity] is the secret of the eternity of the Jewish people... When wine enters, secrets emerge (Ma’amarei HaReiyah, 155).*

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