



*Sponsored in loving memory of Ben Blutstein z"l
by his family who misses him dearly*

Three Divine Echoes: Singularity, Plurality, and Oneness

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1 – There is a tradition from the Baal Shem Tov that after *Tisha B'Av*, the month is referred to as *Menachem Av* – The Consolation of the Father (emphasizing the aspect of God as *Avinu* - our Father, rather than as *Malkeinu* – our King).

One of the sources for this tradition is based on the *Haftarah* that is read on the *Shabbat* after *Tisha B'Av*, from *Sefer Yeshiyahu/Isaiah 40:1-26*. It begins with the words “*nachamu nachamu* – comfort you, comfort you.” Hence the *Shabbat* after *Tisha B'Av* is referred to as *Shabbat Nachamu*, referring to God consoling His people Israel for their suffering.

However, regarding the name of the month transforming from *Av* to *Menachem Av* this is not as clear. Who is consoling whom? What is the consolation? Why is there a consolation – the *nechama*?

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach teaches that there was, and continues to be, a tearing apart – a division – a separation – a conflict of sorts, between the “*aleph*” and the “*bet*” that spell *AV*.

- the *aleph* = the first letter in the first word of the *Aseret HaDibrot* – יְכוּנָא.

- the *bet* = the first letter in the first word in the Torah when the world was created – תִּישָׁאֲרָב.

We struggle, we are torn apart, we are confused between living “Torah” – the *aleph* - and living “in the world” – the *bet*; between being a Jew and being human.

The idea of *חישמה תאיבב*, the coming of the Messiah, individually/nationally/globally is the process by which there is a consolation, a mending, a healing between Torah and the World. THIS is the consolation of the *AV* – the Father. Hence we learn in the *Yerushalmi Berachot* and in *Midrash Eicha Rabba 1:51* that *Mashiach* is born on *Tisha B'Av*. The latter also mentions that his name is *Menachem*.

Hence within *Tisha B'Av* the potential exists for a transformation: from breakage to healing, from *galut* to *geulah*.

The question remains though: Will the *aleph* become absorbed into the *bet* OR will the *bet* become absorbed into the *aleph* OR perhaps neither and rather a harmonious integration?

2a – הלוג - exile, Diaspora, disconnect, fragmentation, according to the Baal Shem Tov: the absence of the knowledge of God, the *da'at HaShem*.

2b – הלואג – redemption from הלוג – unity, harmony, restoring the knowledge of God, the



da'at HaShem.

Question: What is the one letter in the word הלואג that is not found in הלוג?

The *aleph* which equals *echad*. When a Jew's consciousness is not a Godly consciousness the Jew is in spiritual *galut/exile* and senses fragmentation and division in the world.

3 – The name לארשי found in Bereishit 32:29: מכ תירש יכ

For you have struggled (*sareetah*) with God/spirituality and with humankind/the world and you have prevailed (*va'tu'chal*).

4 – Based on the spiritual discourse from Rav Shalom DovBer of Lubavitch, "*Heichaltzu*", 1899; an adaptation by Yanki Tauber. *How does one restore the divine unity to a fragmented world? Where do I fit into all of this?*

We usually think of the cosmic struggle in terms of **good versus evil**. But according to the Kabbalists, good and evil are but spinoffs of **unity and divisiveness**. G-d is the ultimate oneness, and everything G-dly in our world bears the stamp of His unity. Evil, simply stated, is the distortion of this oneness by the veil of divisiveness in which G-d shrouds His creation.

Creation, as described in the teachings of Kabbalah, is an evolution from the utterly singular to the plural and dichotomous. The entirety of existence originates as the divine yen to create—a desire as singular as its Conceiver. But latent in this desire is also another face of the divine—the infinite possibilities implicit in G-d's unlimited potential.

Thus, the singular desire for creation gives birth to our plural world, a world whose immense detail and complexity bespeak the infinite potential of its Creator.

None of this, in and of itself, is the negative phenomenon we call evil. Yet the seeds for evil are here. Plurality begets divisiveness, and divisiveness begets conflict. **As long as a plural reality still echoes its singular source, divisiveness will not take root and spawn strife**; but with the development of each particular entity in the diversity of creation into a self that is distinct from the cosmic whole, divisiveness/strife/evil rears its head.

Dissecting Life

How does one restore the divine unity to a fragmented world? By delving even further into its plurality.

For such is the paradox of life: the more something is broken down to its particulars, the more we uncover opportunities for unity.

Take, for example, two physical substances. Your five senses perceive



them as different and unconnected; but place them under a microscope and you will discover that they are comprised of similar components—they might even share an element or two. The deeper you delve, descending to the molecular, atomic, and subatomic levels, the more unanimity you will find—and the more ways you will discover to harness these diverse substances toward a singular end.

Thus we introduce a new factor into the cosmic equation: harmony. We evolve from the ultimate singularity to plurality to diversity, but diversity need not disintegrate into strife. Instead, the diversity can be further dissected into the ingredients of harmony—a harmony that mirrors the singularity out of which the entire process was born.

The Investment

A harmonious world, however, does more than reflect the tranquil singularity of its origins; it reaches beyond it to uncover a new, hitherto unexpressed, face of the divine reality. Life on earth is more than the endeavor to come full circle, to undo creation by restoring its primordial unity. The descent from singularity into diversity is an investment, and G-d expects to realize a profit from His outlay. The profit is harmony, which is a deeper, truer expression of the divine unity than the pre-creation singularity.

If there is one phrase that encapsulates the Jewish faith, it is the Shema, the verse recited by the Jew every morning and evening of his life, and the last words to issue from his dying lips: "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one." But why, ask our sages, does the verse employ the Hebrew word *echad* ("one") to connote G-d's unity? As Maimonides states in the opening chapter of his *Mishneh Torah*, would not the Hebrew word *yachid* ("singular," "only one") have been more appropriate?

But singularity is a challengeable oneness, a oneness that may be obscured by the emergence of plurality. As we have seen, when G-d's infinite potential is expressed in the countless particulars of a diverse creation, this results in a concealment of His oneness. **The life-endeavor of the Jew is to effect a truer expression of G-d's oneness—the oneness of *echad*. *Echad* is the oneness of harmony: not a oneness which negates plurality (and which plurality therefore obscures), but a oneness that employs plurality as the implement of unity.**

Three Divine Echoes

Ultimately, the unknowable, indefinable essence of G-d transcends **and embraces both singularity and plurality**. So our reality cannot—indeed, no reality can—express His quintessential truth. But it **can** express



certain elements of it, elements His truth includes by virtue of its non-definitive all-inclusiveness.

Three such elements find expression in the various stages of creation:

- a) **G-d's singularity**—expressed in the featureless, objectless reality that precedes, transcends and pervades creation.
- b) **His infinite potential**—expressed in the vastly particular world He created.
- c) **The divine harmony** we manifest by effecting a synthesis and unanimity of purpose in G-d's diverse creation. Of the three, harmony is the deepest expression of G-d's truth. For its *echad* - oneness - embraces the polar phenomena of singularity and plurality, expressing the truth that the divine reality cannot be confined to either mode of being.

When the human being, confronted with a fragmented and strife-torn world, responds by extracting the potential for harmony implicit therein, that person elevates creation beyond its surface plurality, beyond even its singular origins, fashioning it into a model of the quintessential unity of its Creator.

5 – The *pasuk/verse* עַמֵּשׁ – *Shema* IS the וּקִיָּיתָ/fixing, הַאֲוֹרָה/healing and the מְחַנְּנֵה/comforting for the tearing apart of the מְחַנְּנֵה/*aleph* and the *bet* present within each of us. What Shabbat is to the week, *Kriyat Shema* is to the day. It's important to remember that the *Shema* is found in *Parshat V'etchanan, Dvarim/Deuteronomy 6:4*. This is the *Parsha* always read after *Tisha B'Av*, similar to the *Haftarah* mentioned earlier that is likewise always read after *Tisha B'Av*. So hence we even see a textual connection between the *Shema* in the *Parsha* and the *Nechama/comforting* and consolation in the *Haftarah*.

6 – Now the actual תּוֹנוּבוֹתָה - meditation/self reflection - on the *pasuk/verse Shema*:

עַמֵּשׁ – Hear, Listen, Understand – quietly, mindfully, with intention, being present.

לְאָרְשִׁי – the ego listens/understands the *Yisrael* within me – the struggle within me to bring resolution to the conflict between my spirituality/my Judaism and my being a physical being in the world/my humanness ---- the struggle with God and with humankind. And to trust that I can prevail!

ה' – the transcendent aspect of God, the unknowable, the Infinite, the undefinable, the **singular** point preceding Creation, “*sovev kol almin*.”

וְנִיקְלָא – OURS, possessive, a connection, a relationship, the visceral experience of God, the immanent aspect of God, God as the Creator creating **plurality** including “me.” The finite dimension in the world; “*memaleh kol almin*.”



ה' – the resolution – the higher aspect of God that includes both Infinite and Finite, the ONENess of the transcendent and the immanent that follows after the human being brings **harmony** to the fragmentation by revealing in thought, speech and deed the ONENESS in the world (which is not sameness).

אח – the ultimate expression of who we are, as each one of us testifies as an עד – witness - to this essential truth first understood by Avraham and Sarah.