

Devekut: God-Consciousness Imbued with Love

Our Yom Kippur liturgy (P.9 of our Machzor) says, *Ki vayom hazeh y'kapayr alaychem l'tahayr etchem mikol chatotaychem lifnay YHVH tit-haru*. For this day of At-One-ment is about purifying us of all our flaws. In the Presence of God we will be cleansed.

The key component of Yom Kippur, from ancient days into the present, is to step into the Radiance of the Divine Presence and be purified by that light.

I believe that the goal and purpose of all Jewish Spiritual practice is to learn how to live every moment in the loving awareness of God's Presence. That constant and devoted awareness transforms the heart and becomes the source of every action, and the fount of every relationship. That love becomes the basis of a worldview that is compassionate, inclusive and radically expansive. That love becomes the blueprint for Justice and the inspiration that fuels our work as healers of the planet.

In our tradition we call that loving awareness *Devekut*, which is literally translated as *cleaving*. (Connecting yourself to the Oneness, to the Infinite).

Hasidism took this idea of *Devekut* and raised it up into a Jewish spiritual lifestyle that allows us to be totally in the world, yet inextricably bound to something much larger. That much larger dimension of Reality holds this world and our life-dramas within it. When I am in *Devekut*, my perspective is enlarged; my source is established; my foundation is made firm; my sense of humor is intact; and Love becomes my guide in all actions.

In understanding how we attain that state of *Devekut*, I turn to Deuteronomy 4:4 which says:

V'Atem Had'vekim baYHVH Elohechem Chayyim Kulchem HaYom

You that cleave to YHVH your God are alive, all of you, today. This verse lays out the 4 essential qualities that the practice of *Devekut* cultivates in us, as well as showing us the pathways for attaining it.

Chayyim, Kulchem, HaYom. Life/ Vitality, Wholeness- consisting of both Integration and Connection, and Presence. I think of each of those qualities as an aspect of the spiritual journey that I'm on, the compass points on that journey, a way to measure my each and every step.

By addressing ourselves to God- not as some guy in the sky that we're trying to please- but rather the most profound and dynamic Mystery who is in every moment, addressing us through this world, we are continually blowing our minds, opening our hearts to the unknown, and being energized on a path of spiritual development.

The Path of Vitality

In my search for Aliveness (*Chayyim*) I become aware of the places in me that have become numb; the ways that I shut down or turn away from the fullness of Life. The Presence of God shows up as that aliveness. Wherever I am blocked in the flow of life-force through me, I am keeping God out. Dipping into moments of ecstasy each day wakes me up, shakes me up, reminds me to play. Aliveness puts a twinkle in my eye. The first line of the Song of Songs, one of Judaism's central mystical texts, says, "He kisses me with the kisses of his mouth." In walking the Path of Vitality, my stance is engagement; Life is kissing me with its passion and I must pucker up to meet that kiss. Choosing life is always a risk, but when I refuse that risk I am slowly dying.

I interpret *Kulchem*(all of you) as both Integration and Connection. The practice of *Devekut* requires that I step onto the Path of Integration. I am continually moving towards wholeness, reclaiming parts of myself that have broken off in trauma; linking left brain with right brain functions- connecting what I think about and know with what I feel and intuit. It means I must accept parts of myself that have been suppressed or repressed or that don't conform to the expectations of normality. And I must expand to embrace the paradox of being a soul with an embodied mission, along with the seeming contradictions of my personality. The path of integration demands that I stop compartmentalizing, which means I must live in a way that is aligned with my ideals. It means walking my talk.

Stepping onto The Path of Connection means moving towards the realization of Oneness. The paradox is that in order to be in true connection with others, I must first be well-differentiated. The more that I can hold on to myself and retain a sense of identity and freedom, the closer I can get to others. From the strength of my well-boundaried self I can feel into the internal world of others without the fear of losing myself. I can relax and open to the truth of another, step through the doors of empathy and compassion, and know my connection. That sense of connectivity and identity with all of Creation expands my heart, and allows God in. The Path of Connection sends me to a life of ever-deepening relationship and ever-expanding circles of relationship.

When our ancestor Jacob woke up from his dream of angels going up and down the ladder connecting Heaven and Earth, the first words from his mouth were, "God was here all along. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of Heaven." In that moment, Jacob was stepping onto the Path of Presence. That awesome place is here and now. It is the house of God- we are invited in to that awesome place of the present moment where the Infinite is

hidden. And it is the Gate of Heaven- the gateway to all realms. Through the gateway of this expanded moment, we are given entrance to all the worlds.

Even though this present moment holds such treasure, the Path of Presence is a path of Teshuvah (Return). For it is the habit of the mind to wander, get caught up in distraction, planning or regret, or search elsewhere, anywhere but here, for the truth. We must return again and again, and slowly condition the mind to dwell in the stillness where God can find us.

Our Torah portion that we will read today says, “It is not too mysterious or remote from you. It is not in Heaven that you might say, ‘Who will go and get this for us?’ It’s not beyond the sea that you might say, ‘Who will go over the sea and bring it back for us?’ It is something so close- in your mouth and in your heart. You can do it!

The practice of *Devekut* arises out of the realization that the Great Mystery we call God is so close. So close that we overlook the miracle in front of us, within us, between us. The practice of *Devekut* establishes in us a steady center from which to address the world, and be addressed.