

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

The Path to Spiritual Enlightenment



Growing up in the Sixties I experienced the hippy movement and participated in the search for peace and spiritual enlightenment. One individual tried to convince me to accept Christianity and promised that if I did so, I would “find peace in my heart.” His arguments were unconvincing.

I kept searching. Although it took some time, I finally found what I was yearning for.

In 1973, while attending college, I encountered a Chassidic Jew who impressed me with his knowledge, sincerity, and love for God.

Although my family traces its lineage to one of the students of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement, this was the first time I had philosophical discussions with someone like this. I felt my soul being drawn to my Chassidic roots, and with each conversation, my understanding and appreciation for Judaism’s spiritual dimension grew.

Before long, I had an epiphany about God’s existence and experienced incidences of Divine Providence. Known in Hebrew as [השגחה פרטית] *Hashgochah Protis*, Judaism believes that nothing happens by coincidence, as it says, “*God directs the footstep of man*” (Psalm 37:23).

As I furthered my in-depth studies of Judaism, a verse I studied from this week’s Torah portion Va’etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23–7:11), provided me with a profound appreciation of God’s essence.

In Deuteronomy 4:35, we are taught that there is “*nothing else besides God.*” Together with the verse, “*I am the first and I am the last; besides me, there is no god*” (Isaiah 44:6), I learned that Judaism not only believes in one God and that “*there are no other Gods*” (Exodus 20:3; Deut. 5:7), but we also believe that God transcends the limitations of time and space.

This belief is significant because an infinite God who is beyond limitations cannot be described as having parts or divisions. I often raise this point as a powerful refutation of the Christian belief in the trinity.

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Although God is also described with a variety of attributes, these do not constitute the essence of God. Attributes are ways with which God chooses to interact with His creation. Only within God's creation of a finite world do we experience separation and division.

The Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, explains that creation is the result of concealing Godliness. Interestingly, this process is alluded to in the root of the Hebrew word for "world" [עולם-olam] that can also mean "hidden" or "concealed" [נעלם] as we see in Deuteronomy 22:1.

Think of it this way: You are on a ski slope on a bright sunny day and the snow reflects so much light it is impossible to see. Putting on dark sunglasses makes it possible to function in this bright environment by concealing and limiting the amount of light you perceive.

Although it is still light outside, the concealment gives the opposite impression that it is dark. So too, when God conceals His unlimited, infinite essence, we perceive the opposite in the form of a finite limited world, even though this is not the true reality.

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Understandably, the Shema passage, "*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one* [אחד-echad]" (Deuteronomy 6:4), is a command to the people of Israel to believe in God's absolute oneness.

Some missionaries argue that if the Shema was intended to teach the indivisible nature of God it would have said that God is "singular" [יחיד-yachid] rather than "echad-one." This argument is incorrect because the use of the word "echad" teaches that God is One even within a world of apparent plurality.

This idea would have been lost had the Shema used the word "yachid" which is only applicable to God as He transcends creation. Despite the illusion of a physical world, we are commanded to recognize and believe in God's absolute unlimited essence.

As mentioned above, these biblical truths concerning God's indivisible essence are the reason pagan and Christian beliefs in a trinity are considered idolatrous for Jews.

I meditate daily on God's absolute oneness, and this spiritual enlightenment brings peace, meaning, and balance to my life. May this Shabbat provide you with opportunities to meditate on this fundamental principle of Judaism and experience spiritual enlightenment as well.

Shabbat Shalom,

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