



## Zot Chanukka—A Tribute to the Shekhina

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It can happen that when something is deeply true, it transcends itself and enters the category of archetype. Its lessons then apply to things that have nothing (apparently) to do with its story, yet *it* provides the template for making sense of those other things because, beneath the surface, they actually do share a common root.

So it goes for Chanukka which celebrates our Maccabean victory and the miracle of oil that enshrined our reclamation of the Temple. This eight-day festival of lights is so profound (says the Maharshal), that it (along with Purim) are the only two holidays that will remain significant in post-messianic times when “knowledge of G-d fills the earth like the sea fills the ocean bed.”<sup>1,2</sup> In that future era, we will be so enlightened, that the *devekut* produced by a festival will be like a candle in broad daylight. The (metaphoric) water level of ordinary consciousness will rise to a point that the peaks of awareness represented by the *chagim* will remain submerged and insignificant. The only summits still poking above the water line—still contributing *chidushim*—are Chanukka and Purim.

Beit Ganzee explains that all the (Torah-prescribed) festivals draw their bounty (*shefa*) from the past—from our birthday *chag*—i.e., from Pesach. At the *kiddush* commencing each holiday, we connect ourselves *back* to that formative event by “remembering our Exodus from Egypt.” Conversely, the rabbinic holidays of Chanukka and Purim reference toward the future and draw their bounty from there—from the messianic transformations ahead.<sup>3</sup>

The kabbalists read into Chanukka’s eight days, a journey of progressive *tikun* down through the sefirot from Binah to Malchut. Curiously, Binah associates with the higher Shekhina called *Ima* (literally, *Mother*) and Malchut associates with the lower Shekhina called *Nukba* (literally, *Woman*). Chanukka thus begins and ends on a feminine note. The first candle (of Binah) accompanies all the subsequent lights, and its last candle (of Malchut) gets honored with a name of its own—*Zot Chanukka*—(in part) because it enacts the last frame of the Shekhina’s moonlike odyssey (as we shall see).

*Zot* is the feminine form of the Hebrew word for, “this.” It associates with the cosmic feminine (called *parzuf Nukba*, aka the lower Shekhina) because the first place that word appears in the Torah is in the verse where Adam designates Chava as *woman*. And in that verse the word *zot* actually appears three times.

וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱדָם זֹאת הַפֶּעַם עָצָם מֵעַצְמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ-זֹאת.

Then the man said, “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called *Woman*, for from man was she taken.” [Gen. 2:23]

This teaching is dedicated to the complete and speedy healing of **Haya bat Sara Devorsha**. May the Chanukka lights be healing lights for all those who need. ~Jenny Hanna Gross

Dedicated to **Liba bas Moshe**, who brought light and love to so many. May the light of this Chanukah teaching illuminate the root *neshamos of Am Yisroel*.

Dedicated with immense gratitude for the incredible **gift that Hashem has bestowed by leading me to the land of Israel as my new home**. I thank Sarah Yehudit for always taking me under her wing as a friend and holy teacher in the holy land. ~Mateh Esther Brownstein

To understand the mystery of *Zot Chanukka* we need to examine a teaching by the master kabbalist, R. Shlomo Elyashiv (the *Leshem*). He comments on a verse from Isaiah:

אָנִי רִאשׁוֹן וְאָנִי אַחֲרוֹן וּמִבְּלִעְדֵי אֵין אֲלֵקִים:  
I am the first and I am the last. Besides me there is no G-d. [Isaiah 44:6]

The Leshem asserts that this is spoken by the Shekhina, the cosmic feminine: “*She* is the first and *She* is the last...”<sup>4</sup> This verse captures the existential mystery of the feminine—that two opposite and paradoxical truths jostle at her core, though one is evident, and one more hidden.

Her more visible archetype (at least historically) is as Malchut, the moonlike feminine that wanes and waxes and has no light except what she receives from her sun, ie her spouse (the *partzuf* called *man*) who incorporates the upper sefirot from Chesed through Yesod. (Remember, we are speaking about archetypes; real people always include a full set of sefirot and something of both genders within them). As Malchut she is the lowest point of the system—its footstool—utterly dependent upon the sefirot above that are functioning as her (metaphoric) sun, providing her with light, bounty and provisions. The Shekhina, in her moonlike archetype, is the enabler whose merit comes (not from her own accomplishments) but from enabling others to thrive. As the Talmud bluntly states... “a woman earns her *olam haba* by taking her children to school and supporting her husband’s spiritual ambitions.”<sup>5</sup> That, says the Leshem, is the Shekhina’s *Nukba* mode where she embodies the pole of “...*I am the last.*”

But there is another, hidden face of the feminine that is equally true but (even in our modern times) not equally visible. That is her “*I am the first...*” expression. In this mode she occupies the highest sefira of Keter (or Crown). As Keter, says the Leshem, she births the entire world into existence and nurtures it constantly. Whatever anyone has they have drawn it from her and are beholden to her. She is actually the (hidden) source, wellspring and *mashpia* to all those that she “serves” in her Malchut/*Nukba* role. Everything (including her sun) are (secretly) utterly dependent upon her. This is the hidden truth of the cosmic feminine, that: “*She is the first...*”<sup>5</sup>

The Leshem’s teaching applies to the feminine archetype on all scales, whether as Shekhina in relation to *HaKadosh Boruch Hu*, Israel in relation to HaShem, women in relation to men, or *anima* (the inner feminine) within every human being. One thing they all share is that wholeness requires them to incorporate both extremes, even if only in the quiet of their mind. One approach is to dance back and forth between them...between Keter *and* Malchut, first *and* last, hidden *and* revealed, *mashpia and mushpa* (without any “shoulds’ regarding the length of time spent in each.) Finding one’s pace in this regard is the challenge (and art) of womanhood.

This esoteric wisdom is an Oral Tradition passed down from mother to daughter. The Zohar, describes its transmission as follows:

ואמא אוזיפת לברתא מאנהא וקשיטא לה בקיטוטהא:  
[The cosmic] *Ima* lends her *keylim* [vessels/clothing] to her daughter and bedecks her with jewels.<sup>6</sup>

The Zohar employs symbols to convey the paradoxical wisdom that a mother imparts to a daughter: 1) Her *keylim* (vessels) are her *malchut* mode, the secret of her receptivity, the wisdom of knowing when (and how) to step back and make space for others to shine and feel

their power. 2) Her jewels are her *keter* mode, the art of how to claim her royalty, wield her power and exert her influence with grace, dignity, humility and resilience.

Similarly, on a mini scale, day by day, on Chanukka, the Shekhina's dance of Keter/Malchut drives the chag's tikun. *Ima/Mother/Keter/Crown* births each sefira into the world and then slides down to its lowest edge to become the *makom* (or receptive space, ie Malchut) that draws out the potential of that sefira by encouraging it to do so.

Yet on the eighth day, which is Malchut's turn to shine *Her* truth out into the world, something unexpected occurs. When there are no more sefirot needing to be born, and no more dependents seeking her nurture, there is nothing binding the Shekhina to her *Nukba* role (as footstool, *makom* and enabler) anymore. Her new mission is to integrate the hidden parts of herself and embody them fully. Yet when she does so, says the Leshem, she instantly flips into her position as *First...or Crown* to all the previous sefirot (that she conceived, birthed, midwifed and nurtured) from Chesed to Yesod.<sup>7</sup> Whereas before she was their maidservant, now she is their Crown, as it says, "A woman of valor is a crown to her husband." [Proverbs 12:4]

The 8<sup>th</sup> day of Chanukka corresponds to the 7<sup>th</sup> Millennium (the Cosmic Shabbat or World-to-Come) because we started our candle-count with Binah which is above the Seven Creation Days.<sup>8</sup> *Zot* Chanukka celebrates the hidden truth and future glory of our Diminished Moon (and, by extension, the destiny of all things Feminine). The day will come, blessed and welcomed by all, when *Malchut/Woman/Nukba* will spring up to her root (in Binah) and serve as the Keter or *mashpia* to creation, ushering in the world to come, and using her newfound influence to bring everyone along. The Shekhina's motto is: No spark left behind.

Now...*Zot* Chanukka!!

<sup>1</sup> "כל המועדות יהיו בטלים חוץ מחנוכה ופורים" Text included in source-sheet.

<sup>2</sup> Habbakuk 2:14.

<sup>3</sup> ר' רפאל משה לוריא, בית גנוי-אור יקרות חנוכה ד' לט – הארת חנוכה מלעתיד לבוא. Text included in source-sheet.

<sup>4</sup> ר' שלומה אלישיב, ספר הדעייה, דרוש מיעוט הירח, סימנים ט' וי' Text included in source-sheet.

<sup>5</sup> TB Brachot 17a.

<sup>6</sup> Zohar 2:2a.

<sup>7</sup> ספר לשם שבו ואחלמה - ספר הדעייה חלק ב - דרוש ג ענף ז -- ד"ה אמנם המלכות עצמה כשהיא בלתי הוי"ק ... Text included in source-sheet.

<sup>8</sup> The Seven Creation Days correspond to the seven lower sefirot from Chesed to Malchut as well as to the Seven Millennia of human history. The first Creation Day corresponds to the sefira of Chesed and the first thousand years of the Jewish calendar (from yrs. 0 – 1,000). The second Creation Day corresponds to Gevurah and to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium (yrs. 1,000-2,000). The third Creation Day to Tiferet and the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium (yrs. 2,000 – 3,000). The fourth Creation Day to Netzach and the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium (yrs. 3,000 – 4,000) the fifth Creation Day to Hod and the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium (yrs. 4,000 – 5,000). And the sixth Creation Day corresponds to Yesod and the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium (yr. 5,000 – 6,000). According to the Jewish calendar's count, we are presently in the year 5,779 which places us toward the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium. The 7<sup>th</sup> Millennium, corresponding to Malchut and the Shabbat of Creation, is set to begin around the year 6,000. It corresponds to the era of history called the World-to-Come.

Now, since the first night of Channuka starts with the sefira of Binah, a sefira that is above the lower seven sefirot that are mapped onto the Seven Creation Days, our correspondence between the Chanukka-day and the Creation-Day is skewed by one day. Consequently, it's the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of Chanukka that corresponds to Chesed and the first Creation Day. The 3<sup>rd</sup> day of Channuka corresponds to Gevurah and the second Creation day, etc. And finally then, it is the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Chanukka (*Zot* Chanukka) that corresponds to Malchut and the seventh Creation Day, ie, Shabbat and the World-to-Come.