

“The Two Sides of Spiritual Life”

As souls, the very core of our being is our spiritual essence, the divine spark of infinite light that is who we truly are as reflections of God. From that holy place, all the manifestations of self emerge and are sustained.

In the view of the Kabbalah, all levels of consciousness are interrelated and all emerge from the exact same source, namely from the soul. So, everything that expresses who we are is actually an extension of our essence. Our minds, our emotions and our bodies are all projected realities revealing different dimensions of the soul. Our mental, emotional and physical lives are all derivatives of the spirit seeking to express itself fully.

It is not at all difficult for us to understand experience as what is happening to us, what is transpiring in our lives and how we are relating to it. After all, our physical experience and our emotional responses to it constitute life as we are living it.

What is somewhat more difficult to grasp is the realization that our thoughts, reflections and perceptual patterns also constitute experience. A direct and abiding connection exists between what is transpiring in our lives, what we are feeling about it and what we believe. It is the mind that constructs the context of our reality. It is our thoughts and our beliefs that impart order and give meaning to life.

The decisions we make that direct our lives and that have such impact on us and on everyone around us are all predicated on the conceptual framework that we hold internally. So, our minds are intimately tied to our emotions and our external reality as an integral part of our overall life experience. We live our lives consciously through the interplay of physical stimulus and interaction with the world, through emotional response and through the learning process. This triad of experiential realities forms the very basis of life as we know and understand it.

The question then arises; if the events in our lives, our emotional responses to them and what we conclude from them constitute our life experience, then what exactly is spiritual experience per se? the answer to this question is straightforward in statement, yet complex in its implications.

In Kabbalist teaching, the soul is the origin of mind, emotion and physical being in the world. Soul itself is hidden. Yet, it is knowable through its extension of these three capacities. The realm of spirit with all its inner dynamics is hidden within, just as a tree's roots are buried in the earth. From the roots, a tree's trunk, branches and leaves

emerge and interact with the world around it. The same process holds true for mental, emotional and physical consciousness. They emanate as extensions of the soul.

A tree standing tall in the external world is effected directly by its environment and by what is happening in the natural world surrounding it. Though not necessarily openly exposed, the roots of the tree are just as heavily impacted. The roots are not only part of the tree, they are the foundational level.

On the same token, since the soul is the root of all consciousness in the world, everything we experience in our lives impacts us spiritually. We live from the soul and our overall life experience reflects back the spiritual energy being put forth and played out. So, it can be said that spiritual experience is essentially the effect that life experience has on the soul.

Spiritual consciousness emanates out into the world as mental, emotional and physical process. This process, we refer to as life. We live life through these dimensions of soul.

Through the process of living, we give conscious expression to the soul, which in turn absorbs and assimilates the energy. As the soul takes in the experience of our lives, it transforms it into spiritual experience. It translates and reformulates what we have experienced cognitively and emotionally into essential knowledge of self. the soul absorbs what is of essence and important to it as pure spiritual content.

This level of spiritual experience is primal and central to the very mystery of life itself. The process of transforming life experience into spiritual essence occurs at the deepest levels of consciousness, totally and completely hidden from our view and our awareness.

There is, however, another aspect to spiritual experience that not only can we access, but we are actually meant to connect with and be deeply effected by it. This dimension of spiritual experience has multiple facets and its purpose is to specifically expand and elevate consciousness.

The entire process of life transpires within the framework of the seven lower sefirot of the Kabbalist Tree of Life, from Hesed to Malkhut. What we are cognizant of occurs at the mental plane of Hesed, Gevurah and Tiferet. What we feel operates within the realm of Netzakh, Hod and Yesod and what we work with and experience is taking place physically in the Sefirah of Malkhut.

The physical and psycho-emotional activity that occur within the structure of these

three levels of the Tree of Life effect the spiritual plane of Keter, Hokhmah and Binah in two distinct ways. Firstly, as already discussed, the life experience taking place below on the mental, emotional and physical levels is translated by the the upper sefirot, the spiritual forces guided by the soul, into meaningful spiritual essence. It is the sefirah of Binah that takes in that essence, which is the transformed energy of life experience. Subsequently, it is assimilated into the soul as holy energy at the Keter level through the intervention of the sefirah of Hokhmah.

In other words, one process that takes place as spiritual experience is the conversion of life experience into pure, spiritual energy so that it can be absorbed by the soul. The other process that occurs, which is also spiritual experience, involves direct awareness of spirit and the resulting elevation of consciousness. here, the quality of our life experience when taken into Binah, can be transferred to the innermost depths of of pure consciousness so as to add its light to the light of being, thereby enriching the soul.

When the restructured energy of our life experience is pure enough and strong enough to add increased vibrancy to the hidden light of our innermost consciousness, the result is soul growth. When soul growth occurs, the effects are profound and they become perceptible.

The ensuing effects of this level of spiritual awareness are truly transformative, altering one's entire perception of self and relationship to the world. One experiences a heightened sense of the holy, which translates into a far greater sense of the sacredness of self and the soul's relationship to God. Between oneself, the universe and the divine there is a very tangible sense of interrelationship and connectedness.

When spiritual experience becomes spiritual awareness, our cognitive focus shifts from "Mokhin de Katnut", limited, restricted consciousness centered on personal and worldly concerns to "Mokhin de Gadlut", expanded consciousness that elevates us. In this state, we come to understand more deeply our neshamah, our very essence and at the same time we become intensively aware intuitively of our abiding relationship to God.

In this context, our consciousness ascends and suddenly we are in touch with the level of Hokhmah and Binah. In the vast quietude of spirit, we experience a true sense of self, one that is not referenced to nor dependent on persona, process or relationship to other.

At this level, we glimpse the totality of self and engage with an all encompassing sense of our being. From the sefirah of Binah, we experience profound awe and deep reverence for God, creation and self. From Hokhmah, we feel infinite possibility and a tremendous depth of clarity. Through Binah and Hokhmah, we are brought to a contact point with soul. Emanating from the supernal hiddenness of Keter, the level of essence itself, we come to experience the ultimate spiritual reality, peace.

Such palpable, core spiritual experience happens often as an intensified moment of timelessness. It is not a constant state on the cognitive level. It is, however, the catalyst and the subsequent foundation for spiritual evolution. Its effect is enduring on the subliminal level. For true spiritual experience alters the very nature and structure of our inner world. The value of such penetrating change and internal transformation is immeasurable. Every such shift of internal reality, based on the work we are doing through our life experience moves us spiritually to the next level of becoming, to the next plane of soul evolution. Achieving soul growth and spiritual redefinition is an absolutely vital element of one's life work. It is simply not optional.