

SHECHINAH THEOLOGY OF THE FUTURE

by Rabbi Leah Novick

For most of our history, the Shekhinah has been our way of embracing the Divine Mother through the filters of our culture, our literature and our religious rituals. All of those have been connected to the survival of our people and the retention of a memory of God the Mother in subtle forms. While we have loved her and protected her as our ethno-particular variation on understanding the Divine Feminine; she is already beyond those conceptualizations. In the present era Shekhinah is clearly planetary Gaia and source of inter-galactic connectedness.

I believe the future Shekhinah is Mother to the entire Cosmos- Eym Kol Ha Olamim. In that scheme of things, what would the simplest Shekhinah theology of the future look like?

- 1) Universal awareness of the divinity in all beings that elicits the tenderness, respect, love and caring that we associate with the Divine Mother.
- 2) Widespread experience of the holiness in all the earth (Gaia) which would make it impossible to pollute, destroy or to exploit this planet or others.
- 3) Universal sharing and teaching of all wisdom traditions

Such a messianic era would involve the unification of consciousness across all boundaries, genders, ethnic identities and religions. That collective awareness, based on the unity of all beings in the Source would foster respect for the beauty of differences; allowing humanity to enjoy real mutual tolerance.

The challenge as I see it is that we are still in the process of developing Gaia consciousness. That process was given a jump start by the moon landing and space program which enabled us to see our planet as a living organism. It has not yet translated into committed protection of the environment, or the election of political leaders with such priorities.

Likewise the accelerated development of the computer and its by-products of the Internet and e-mail have enabled people all over the world to access technology rapidly; and enjoy almost instantaneous contact with each other. Those developments, which have the potential for international networking and the cultivation of greater harmony are already providing a great deal of information; but not necessarily filtered for more enlightened functioning.

So we are still reliant on the writers, the healers, musicians, the poets, the teachers, the spiritual leaders, (all of you) who must provide not only the new thinking, but the capacity for sharing their own experiences of illuminated states to larger numbers of people around the world. That issue of widespread experience of the presence of God on this earth, and in all the beings is the basis of the Shekhinah future.

I also believe there are movements from the higher dimensions in response to our need for help. In my inner vision, I see a parallel scenario in which the great beings of all the religions are

returned together to the planet. This could provide a spiritual epiphany to the earth; a kind of universal and rapid enlightenment process- that would speed-up the ability for all of us to enter the state of harmony we have so long struggled for. (B'yom ha hu yihyeh adonai echad u'sh'mo echad)

Jewish prophetic literature is replete with poetic descriptions of that time in the future when all people will come to worship at God's holy mountain. And our mystical literature is rich with understanding of altered states and human capacity to reach the Divine. In fact, that kabbalistic wisdom of the nature of the universe may well be our main contribution to the future.

To share that knowledge in its crystalline form will require some internal clean up of both language and attitude. (again a job for the more learned) The original literature is burdened with the preoccupation of assuring the Jewish future and the unique place of Klal Yisrael in the redemption. (see Zohar on parshat Va Yechi as an example) It is that xenophobia that needs to be sorted out of our holy literature, if we are to cleanse our collective psyche and pass on our mystical wisdom to future generations.

Relinquishing our favorite child status could also have some liberating effects for Jews. In the old scheme we were responsible for everything (i.e. because of our sins our Mother was exiled) Likewise if the body of the Shekhinah is believed to be comprised of the Jewish souls (as the Baal Shem taught) and she loses limbs when any of us leave the fold, then its all up to us again rather than being a world wide universal human challenge.

To move from the particular to the universal requires a shift in thinking and language not only around the holiness of the people, but the land of Israel. In this time of major challenge to the health of the planet, we need the larger view; of seeing all the earth as holy and all its residents as children of the Shekhinah. As Mother of all she must hover over all places of worship, all study groups, all good deeds; she can not remain the proprietary guardian of minyanim of male Jews.

The other major klipah is the association of the feminine with the demonic. In the progression from gevurah to the sitra achra we see the fear of the female asserting itself and vetoing both spirituality and logic. Shekhinah's penetration by the forces of evil makes her the equivalent of the raped woman who is now defiled and unable to continue in her legitimate role. (the servant women Lilith takes over and cohabits with the king according to Zohar) The demonic which can be seen in terms of the negative components in the human psyche, (rage, violence, rape etc) emerges because we are cut off from the feminine, both Divine and human. We have reversed the sequence; placing the Sitra Achra on the Shekhinah when it is we who hold that energy.

Over and over again in the Zohar, we are confronted with the concept of the Divine Feminine in Malchut, deriving her light and power from her union with her consort Tiferet. (Even though we have examples of her deriving it from the upper Mother, Binah or connecting directly to Keter) While we may appreciate this carry over of the -Hieros Gamos from pre-Judaic times, it places the Shekhinah in a state of perpetual dependency on her relationship with the masculine (or what we might call the ultimate cosmic intercourse) for her health and happiness.

We know that these concepts can be taken to a metaphorical level, we all do it in our teaching. The Divine Union does not have to remain in its heterosexual human model but can become the focus on the union of the disparate parts of the self. That is how I explain that yichud on Friday nights especially for those not in partnership or in same sex relationships.

And what of the guy sitting in the audience, who learns from our sources that his connection to the Divine Presence is based on his sexual relationship with his wife? (Shekhinah is present only where male and female are united) Yes, he can stay in tantric connection with Shekhinah through proper prayer and study, but ultimately it's on to the chupah if he really wants to get it. (talk about real pressure for Jewish guys to get married, here it is!)

Like many of you, I have been charmed by the Zohar for decades, and can never get enough of its colorful interpretations. It is as if I have been dancing with these texts, always telling them *enchantez you are divine*. In that process I look the other way or choose to omit those passages that disturb my world view. And, I take recourse in not knowing enough; and waiting for the experts to do the make over that is really necessary.