

I spent my first six months living in Israel on a kibbutz that directly faced the Jordanian border near Beit Shean. The area was gorgeous, being located in “Emek HaMayanot”, the valley of springs, but my favorite feature wasn’t the springs, it was the mountains.

Specifically the mountain peak on the Jordanian side. At sunset it would turn pink and once it was dark out, the lights from its villages made it appear as if the mountain were full of stars.

Public transportation in this rural area was limited, to put it mildly, so to get around I typically would hitchhike, getting rides from people coming to or from the neighboring kibbutzim.

One time I got a ride back from a man who lived on Kibbutz Tirat Tzvi, which you may know for its supremely average kosher lunch meats. Although they sell hot dogs on the premises that are incredible... I digress.

We struck up a conversation and I learned he’d lived there his whole life. I remarked on how beautiful I thought the mountain looked at night with the village lights.

He told me it wasn’t always that way. Before Israel and Jordan made peace, the villagers on the Jordanian side would keep their lights off at night, for fear of Israeli air raids.

Every time he saw the lights on at night it was a literal sign before his eyes of peace, of the world growing a bit brighter.

This anonymous Kibbutznik was tapping into one of my favorite stories from the Zohar.

Four rabbis were walking on the open road in the Land of Israel when they came across an old man holding the hand of a young boy. They struck up a conversation and learned the Old Man was a wandering Torah scholar, so they asked him to teach them some Torah.

The Old Man told them that when Jews blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, it cracks through every boundary between ourselves and Heaven, connecting them to the ultimate source of light.

Conversely, on Yom Kippur the light of Heaven shines upon the Jews stronger than at any other day, reaching out to them with greatest intensity.

On Rosh Hashanah, we reach out to God, to God’s light with the greatest intensity, and on Yom Kippur this light reaches back to us most strongly. That is why we are mostly strongly connected to God’s light from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur.

But what about the rest of the year? Where do we find that light?

In the wilderness, the Old Man taught, because light can only emerge from darkness.

Go to the darkest place you can, a place where you see no light and there the greatest light can emerge.

The Pri Tzaddik teaches from this story that we can only get the good in life by virtue of the bad, that even the bad we experience has the potential to be good. Even those qualities within ourselves which we might wish to improve or refine, those are actually good things.

Because the foundational qualities that make up the fabric of our existence only exist by virtue of their opposite:

Light emerges from dark. Warmth from the cold.

In Genesis, what was the world prior to creation?

Dark, void, cold... but then God fills it with light! Everything else follows from that first illumination, that first burst of warmth... but light doesn't just bring warmth, it makes things visible.

So *v'yaehi or!* Let there be light, let the world know God's warm embrace.

And... *v'yaehi or!*, let all of our wickedness from this first day until the last be known and be seen.

Seeing all that warmth and wickedness, what does God say?

Six whole days pass, God looks upon creation and declares it to be what?

*Tov Me'od*, God sees this mix of infinite good and evil and says that all of it is not just good, but *Tov Me'od*, very good.

Seeing all the darkness, all the evil that will ever be mixed in with everything else, it is still "all good."

Because light can only emerge from darkness. Warmth can only come from cold.

The beauty of those Jordanian village lights are only visible in the nighttime wilderness, they only stand out because they exist amidst an absence of light.

Now you and I walk by artificial light at night all the time, but rarely are we struck by any sort of spiritually profound insights from that.

That light meant something to that Kibbutznik because of what it represented.

The beauty of peace with his neighbors isn't something he takes for granted because he knows the darkness of its absence. He knows the darkness of living at war's doorstep.

The beauty of light doesn't diminish the pain of darkness, nor vice versa. The good and the bad can exist alongside one another, beauty and pain shape one another and I don't know if one is really possible without the other.

You can't have the beauty and peace of Olam HaBa, the World to Come, without the flawed and broken Olam HaZeh we live in now.

The potential for this march towards great light and beauty depends upon all of us. To adapt a

teaching on this section of Zohar from another great Hasid, the Sod Yesharim, we each make up an essential garment, a layer of fabric that brings God's warmth and light into this world.

I imagine that when that kibbutznik I spoke of at the start looked across at the darkness enveloping those Jordanian villages, the light of peace seemed a remote possibility, but time marches forward. God marches forward, God's light marches forward.

We are each a part of spreading that light, each of us, our whole selves, are part of bringing that light forward.

Because that light can only emerge from darkness, we must have faith that the darkness of the world we live in now, all of its hate, all of its violence, we will bring forward God's light and shine it all away.

In the words of the prophet Daniel:

וְהַמְשָׁכִלִים יִזְהָרוּ כְּזֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ וּמִצְדֵּיקֵי הָרַבִּים כְּכֹכְבֵּים לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

The radiance of the illuminated among us will be like the bright expanse of sky, and those who lead the many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.

*Bimhayra b'yameinu.* Speedily in our day, we pray.

G'mar Chatimah Tovah