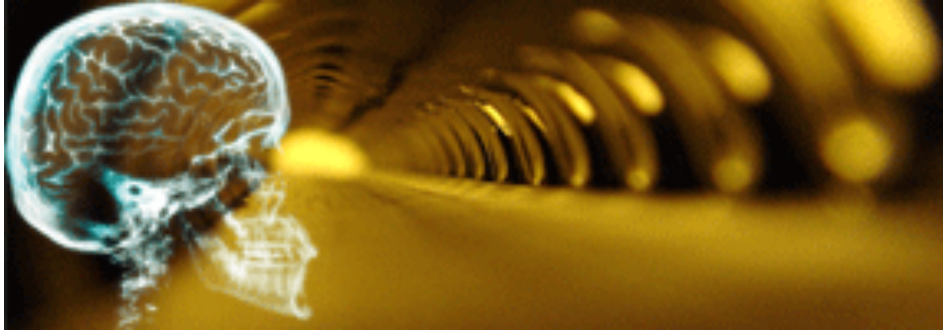


Gulgota: between thought and silence



Religions are poems. They concert our daylight and dreaming mind, our emotions, instinct, breath and native gesture into the only whole thinking: poetry.¹⁴

Les Murray¹

i. "Conceal shall I conceal My face on that day" ([Deuteronomy 31:18](#)). *Galut* (the Exile) is a twofold concealment, wherein the concealment itself is concealed. So great is this concealment, that one is not even aware of the concealment; one may even come to think of the darkness as light.

Baal Shem Tov

Those stars we thought
The black space between them
I mean we thought
Was empty (after all we could not see anything except blackness for millenia)
Until recently...

The interstellar medium is the stuff between the stars. Made up mostly of hydrogen and helium gas – plus trace amounts of ices, silicate grains, and all the other elements – it contains all the material needed to make stars and planets

So all this blackness, this nothingness, this space between turns out to be the very substrate of or between the white stars we peer at.

My brain is a cosmic round space within my *gulgota*
Inside are the stars, my thoughts,

¹ Les Murray, 'Poetry and Religion,' in *Collected Poems: 1961–2002* (Potts Point: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2002), 265.

I always thought they were the only thing running around,
That chattering monkey
The holy thoughts...
The naughty thoughts..
Unending noise.
Disturbing thoughts
Heretical thoughts
The prickly conscience thoughts
The thoughts that will not leave at night
The brooding ones
The obsessive ones
Especially the resentment ones..

But between them
Nothing.

However, recently
“I thought” (!) to myself
What if the space between the thoughts was not empty?
What if the darkness in the night of the soul was full of “stuff”
The very stuff that created the thoughts like the stars,

How does one “see them” the way
Scientists see “dark matter”?

But modern astronomy teaches that the stuff that can be seen with the naked eye isn't even the half of it. The matter that can be seen spread across the sky as planets, comets, stars, nebulae, galaxies and the rest make up just under 15% of the total.

Astronomers have dubbed the remaining 85% “dark matter”, because it neither absorbs nor gives off light.

Well they don't after all “see” the space between the stars do they!

There seems to be too much gravity in the universe. The amount of matter that scientists can see through their telescopes is far too small to explain things like the structure of galaxies and the way in which stars within them move.

Extending my metaphor then,
Between my thoughts is not emptiness nor the lack of thought
But a matrix of sorts
I cannot think this
I cannot measure this

I'm not even aware of it

In particular, galaxies appear to be spinning too fast to hold themselves together, at least judging by the amount of visible matter they contain. The gravitational attraction of unseen dark matter may be providing the necessary cosmic glue instead.

Yet

There are moments of clarity
As if I feel the presence
When not thinking
When the monkey sleeps
This gravitas, the glue that holds it all together
Beyond mere consciousness
A sense
Of space between
The thoughts
And the skull

In this space
I need to explore..
A mystical journey
Not beyond self
But into self
A technique to measure the gravitas
For the spinning thoughts are too fast
To hold themselves together-
Like those stars

What is the cosmic glue?
That attraction of the dark matter of the soul
Keeping it all together?
Is this what the Baal Shem Tov meant?
The Black Fire on White Fire...
The space between the letters of Torah?
Seemingly not ink, seemingly the absence of letters and words
Yet the very necessary pauses that allow for the musical notes to sing
Otherwise mere noise...

In these innocent spaces
These breathing spaces
Between the stars
Between the letters
Between the musical notes

Lies the immanent divine
The Schechina

Skulls

ב שְׂאוּ, אֶת-רֹאשׁ כָּל-עֵדוּת בְּנֵי-
יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם, לְבֵית אָבוֹתָם--
בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת, כָּל-זָכָר לְגִלְגִּילֹתָם.

2 'Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male, by their polls;

Num 1:2

*And G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai desert, in the meeting tent... "Raise the heads [of the Jewish people] to their skulls [in Hebrew, "ligulgilotam"]..."*²

The properties of the physical body mirror those of the soul. The physical head, for example, parallels the spiritual head, the "head" of the soul.

A "skull", "*gulgolet*" in Hebrew, surrounds the physical head, or brain. Correspondingly, a "skull" surrounds the head/brain of the soul, made up of the three intellectual faculties, *chochma*, *bina* and *daat*. The soul's "skull" is "*Ratzon*" - desire. Just as the physical skull *surrounds* and envelops the physical head and brain, so the desire of the soul "surrounds," i.e. transcends, the intellectual aspect of the soul.

More specifically, there are two levels of desire: one that precedes and transcends intellect, and another that is beneath intellect and proceeds from it.

Lower Desire

When a person uses the three faculties of his brain to contemplate and ponder the awesomeness of the divine reality, he comes to recognize **G-d** in his heart and a desire to cleave to Him. **It is man's entire purpose to contemplate G-d's greatness...**

² From a discourse of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi; adapted by Yosef Marcus
https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/379539/jewish/Heads-and-Skulls.htm

Although it is said that "no thought can grasp Him" - this is true only of G-d's essence. One can grasp, however, G-d's radiance. Indeed, it is man's entire purpose to contemplate G-d's greatness - that He created an infinite number of supernal and lower worlds, that He sustains them and brings them out of nothingness every moment.

This meditation varies according to the individual. But each person can use his capacity for meditation to expand his mind, to ignite his heart and soul, to tie his soul to G-d and cleave to Him - all according to the depth of his intelligence, his wisdom, and diligence.

This meditation leads to a desire to do that which brings one closer to G-d and to shun that which achieves the opposite. This level of desire is beneath the brain, meaning that it proceeds from the brain's meditation and will vary in intensity according to the measure of the meditation.

Higher Desire

There is, however, a higher level of desire, one that is quite beyond the sort born of the intellect. This desire stems from the nothingness of his perception (and that of all creatures) in the face of the divine essence and His infinite exaltedness. Here we can say that no thought grasps Him at all. He is beyond the category of being known. The terms divine immanence and divine transcendence (in Hebrew, "*memalei*" and "*sovev*") are meaningful only in the context of divine radiance. But He Himself is beyond such categories. The soul is thus stirred to escape from its sheath with a desire and yearning to pour herself into the bosom of her Father, the divine essence before Whom all is naught.

"Raise the heads...to their skulls..."

G-d commands Moses to take the soul's lower desire - which is born of the soul's head and brain, and which is clothed in human consciousness - and tie it, elevate it to the greatest heights, to its source and root: the soul's essence which hovers above, transcendent. Otherwise, the soul does not illuminate the body because of misdeeds that separate the person from divinity. The body is severed from the head.

Moses is to raise the "head" of man - the source for lower desire - and unite it with its "skull" - the essence of the soul, a level at which the essence of G-d is fully revealed.

וּכְשֶׁתִּשְׁמַר אֶת מַחְדָּ מִבְּחִינַת חֲמִץ, שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה אָטוּם, אֲזִי יִפְגַּע קוֹלְדִּי
בְּגִלְגֻלְתּוֹ, וַיִּתְעַבֵּד רַעַם, וַיִּתְפָּשֵׁט עַקְמִימִיּוֹת שְׁבֻלְבָדָּ, וְאִזְ תִּזְכָּה
לְשִׁמְחָה, כְּמוֹ שְׁכַתּוּב: וּלְיִשְׂרָי לֵב שְׁמֻחָה, וְזֶה פְרוּשׁ (תהלים פא):
אֶעֱנֶה בְּסִתְרֵי רַעַם, אֲבַחֲנֶה עַל מִי מְרִיבָה סָלָה, מִי מְרִיבָה זֶה בְּחִינַת
מַצָּה, בְּחִינַת מַחֲיוֹ, עַל־יְדֵי־זֶה נַעֲשֶׂה רַעְמִים:

But when you guard your mind from the aspect of chametz, so that it does not become clogged, then your voice will strike your skull and be converted into thunder, and the heart's crookedness will be made straight. Then, you will merit joy, as in, "and joy for the straight of heart."

This is the meaning of

"When you called in secret, I answered you thunderously; I tested you at the Waters of Conflict, Selah ."

Psalm 81:8

The Waters of Conflict are an aspect of matzah, of mentalities, through which thunder is generated.

Likutei Mehoran 5:4



THE DEGEL ON THE INTEGRATION OF THE ORAL LAW

Death is our eternal companion. It is always to our left, at an arm's length... It has always been watching you. It always will until the day it taps you.

How can anyone feel so important when we know that death is stalking us?

The thing to do when you're impatient is to turn to your left and ask advice from your death. An immense amount of pettiness is dropped if your death makes a gesture to you, or if you catch a glimpse of it, or if you just have the feeling that your companion is there watching you.

Death is the only wise adviser that we have. Whenever you feel, as you always do, that everything is going wrong and you're about to be annihilated, turn to your death and ask if that is so. Your death will tell you that you're wrong; that nothing really matters outside its touch. Your death will tell you, 'I haven't touched you yet.'

**Abstracts of Carlos Castaneda's JOURNEY TO IXTLAN
(Vol. 3)**

Based on the prooftext: LEV 10:16

טז וְאֵת שְׂעִיר הַחַטָּאת, דָּרַשׁ דָּרַשׁ מֹשֶׁה--וְהָגַה שְׂרָף; וַיִּקְצַף עַל-אֶלְעָזָר וְעַל-אִיתָמָר, בְּנֵי אֶהֱרֹן, הַגּוֹתְרִים, לֵאמֹר.

16 And Moses diligently inquired for the goat of sin offering, and Eleazar and Ithamar were angry with Eleazar and with Ithamar.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 30a) discusses various halfway points in the Torah, and lists the vav in the word gachon as the middle letter:

Because of this reason, the early sages were called soferim, “those who count,” for they counted all the letters of the Torah scroll.

They used to say: The letter vav of the word gachon represents the midpoint of the letters of the Torah scroll.

The words darosh darash (from Leviticus 10:16) represent the midpoint of the words of the Torah.

The very license of the rabbis to interpret the laws of mourning are all served from this verse:

תורה תמימה על התורה, בראשית נ"י:ה'
גמורה מדאורייתא, רק אסמכתא בעלמא, דלדעת רוב הפוסקים הוי ענין אבילות מדרבנן, ואפילו אבילות יום ראשון, ורק אנינות הוי מדאורייתא, כמש"כ הרא"ש פ"ג דברכות ופ"ג דמו"ק, ולפנינו יתבאר זה אי"ה בפ' שמיני בפסוק דרש...דרש משה, ואפילו הרי"ף ורמב"ם דס"ל דאבילות מדאורייתא גם הם מודו דרק יום ראשון הוי מדאורייתא, וגם זה רק ביום המיתה, אבל אבילות שבעה לכי"ע הוי מדרבנן, ורק סמכו זה אלשון התורה..

The *Torah T'mima* connects the words of this verse with the intriguing Halacha as to whether mourning is derived from a biblical source or rabbinic.

אבל שבעת ימים. א"ר חסדא, נפשו של אדם מתאבלת עליו כל שבעה, שנאמר (איוב י"ד) ונפשו עליו תאבל, וכתוב ויעש לאביו אבל שבעת ימים.

א ר"ל דהפסוק הזה מגלה על הפסוק ונפשו עליו תאבל ששיעור האבילות שבעת ימים. ועין בירושלמי מ"ק פ"ג ה"ה דתלתא זמן נפשא מטייסא על גופא, סברא דחזרה לגופא, כזון דחמית ליה דאשתני וזו אפיה שבקא ליה ואולא, ואחר תלתא זמן הכרם נבקעת על פני וכו', וצ"ל דמיש כגון מתאבלת כל שבעה הוא מיש בירושלמי מן תלתא זמן ולהלן וכו', אבל על כרזין צ"ל דגם הבבלי ס"ל דיש חילוק בין השלשה ימים הראשונים לארבעה האחרונים, מדמצינו חילוק בגמרא לענין שלשה ימים הראשונים דחמירי מימים האחרונים, כמו לענין מלאכה ושאר דברים, וכ"מ בירושלמי שם, דעל הא דאמר שם אבל ג' ימים אסור במלאכה אפילו בצנעא מביא הא דנפשא מטייסא על גופא. –

ועל יסוד זה הירושלמי שהבאנו קי"ל בבבלי יבמות קכ"א א' אין מעדין על המת אלא עד שלשה ימים, משום דאחר ג' ימים אשתני וזו הפנים, וע' באה"ע ס"י י"ז. –

גם י"ל ע"פ דברי הירושלמי שהבאנו מקור וסמך למשי"כ בידד הלכות מליחה ס"י ס"ט סעף י"ב, הודו האנשים [כך הלשון בטור] בשר ששהה ג' ימים בלא מליחה נתייבש דמו בתוכו ולא יצא עד ע"י מליחה ולכן אין לאכלו מבושל אלא צ"ל וכו', ישיש, וכתבו הפוסקים שאין כל מקור ויסוד להוראה זו, ולפי הירושלמי הגיל י"ל דהטעם שאחר ג' ימים משתני וזו אפיה, הסבירה נוטה שהוא מפני קלקול והצטמקות הדם, ולפי"ז מבואר דאחר ג' ימים מצטמק הדם ואינו ראוי לצאת עד אפילו ע"י מליחה, ודוק. .

(שבת קנ"ב א')

Mourning for seven days – is not a Biblically-mandated practice per se but it does have a precedent in the Torah: Joseph mourned his father Jacob for seven days (see Genesis 50:10 – “...he mourned his father seven days” – and Talmud Yerushalmi Moed Katan 3:5).

מניין לאבל מן התורה שבעה (בראשית נ) ויעש לאביו אבל שבעת ימים.

Where is there a source in the Torah for the 7 days of mourning? (Although this period is Rabbinically required, the Sages would not have decreed it if there was no mention of it in the Torah.) The Pasuk states (Breishis 50, 10) "He (Yosef) made mourning for his father (Yaakov) for seven days."

One might fulfill the Biblical obligation to mourn by doing so for a single day but according to the Talmud Yerushalmi (Kesubos 1:1), it was Moshe who instituted that we should mourn for seven days as Joseph did. (Moshe also institutionalized the week of wedding celebration – “sheva brachos” – which likewise has precedent, in Genesis 29:27.)

We will return to the notion of the rabbinic precedence for mourning seven days after the Degel Machane Efraim’s dazzling torah.

The **Degel Machane Efraim** resolves the two halves of the Torah by insisting on the very split between the two halves meaning something more profound than letter counting...

His dazzling insight allows for a hyper-literal midrashic reading of the text and its shapes and even letter counting, based on the work of the *sopherim*, the scribes, yet grafting onto this a highly spiritualized reading of the very notion of Torah...

Torah becomes an organic living breathing spirituality that unfolds both historically with the advent of the oral law but also synchronically as a complimentary and equally valid tradition.

The radical nature of this exegesis is the equal standing of the oral tradition and further, the dependence of the Witten law upon the oral tradition to reveal its secrets.

“Here is the halfway point of the Torah if counting with letters and so we need to understand what difference does counting make and the significance of this idea.

One could say that both the written and oral law is one whole, and either cannot be separated from the other at all for one cannot be without the other.

For the written law reveals its hiddenness through the agency of the oral law and the written law without the oral law is not a complete (integrated) Torah remaining only half a book until chazal came and interpreted the written law and enlighten us by revealing her mysteries and matters that were hitherto hidden and conflicting.

At times they even uprooted (contradicted) a matter from the written law for instance the law of 40 lashes, ”

“Through the holy spirit that the divine manifested through them to see the root of all matters written in the Torah, to their innermost truth, it gave them the capability to see this. It turns out that the completion (integration) of the written law depends upon the oral law. (Therefore he who says there is no kal v’Chomer in the written law is like he who disbelieves.)

ולכן האומר אין קל וחומר מן התורה, או שחולק על מאמר אחד מחז"ל כאילו כופר בתורה משה רבינו ע"ה
(סנהדרין צט)

Because all depends upon the derushim/interpretations of chazal. And they are therefore the main focus of the completion/integration of the written law.

“And this is what is hinted (remez) by the words darosh/darash being halfway point in the written law, meaning until the repetition of darosh/darash as the halfway point where the Rabbis were able (given the license) to interpret, the Torah prior was only half (not one the letters but also) only partial and not yet whole, but with the interpretations of chazal it was completed and finally become a complete “sefer”.”

The Degel suggests that the very license allowing for Rabbinic law and the oral tradition comes from the brokenness of the written law which hides meanings and mysteries and requires them to be unlocked by the rabbis of the oral tradition. Until then it remains incomplete precisely because the meanings in the literal written law remain opaque.

And where does this license derive from? Precisely the fracture point of the Written Law...that fault line where the two halves of the Torah hinge, at the fulcrum, precisely there is its weakest point, as if it needs the Oral Law to sept in to heal the divide between its parts. Just like conflicts in law between Exodus and Deuteronomy (like the slave law and freeing in the Jubilee vs forever) the Oral Law jumps in to resolve differences, so too the Oral Law comes to compliment the Written Law and heal it from its fracturedness.

Following the mystical notion in the zoharic tradition, the Torah is likened to a princess whose consort alone can open her mysteries. The Degel sees the oral tradition doing the same thing as the lover, opening the hidden secrets within the beloved/written law.

These two words *darosh/darash*, and the space between them, upon which the entire Torah can be seen to "hinge" or the halfway mark...as if were you to weigh the letters on one scale with half the Torah on one side and the other on the opposite, then the fulcrum would be the space between these two identical words...of "*blimah*" (the Greek iota) the space between which is of course empty...allowing us to be *doresh*....allowing us to become *Torah she 'be'al peh*...in this very space where the Torah is fractured in half, broken, there precisely we can make our human moves where she is most vulnerable. Like the princess we have proven ourselves to her, so she is able to reveal her giddiness and mysteries (Zohar) who means her vulnerability, which to us she trusts and confesses.

For the *Torah Temimah*, in this space of *darosh// dorash* we learn that it is *chazal* (the oral law) who authorized all we do for *aveilus*....as if mourning and its laws and customs originate from this lacuna, the broken space between the two halves of Torah, its fault line, its very brokenness and vulnerability, where we stepped in and enacted the laws of mourning based upon the double expression of *darosh*.

The rabbis derived from this very literary literal fractured Torah and brokenness to derive the laws of counting the seven days of mourning.

I am moved by his dazzling reading of the space between, the fulcrum, the openness to interpretation and the validation and supremacy given to those who interpret. And the funerary quality of the oral law stepping in to validate the brokenness as if she remains in mourning for the loss of her original sublime Torah (The Torah of the *atika stima 'ah*)

The divinely given written law is now on par with the human oral law and both are in need of each for exegesis and now for a mystical notion of male/female unification and completion and integration.

Here in the space between the repeated words the words meaning exegesis are the very tools we have to interpret, legally morally and existentially, and it is here precisely in the space between,

the white space between the black letters once again, the location where we breath between the stars.