

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE TENTH FACE

PLAY AND LISHMAH

The next quality of love and Eros modeled by the sexual is play. Play is close in meaning to what the Hebrew mystics called *lishmah*, which is usually translated as “for its own sake.” We are engaged in the erotic when we do something simply for its own sake—when we stop networking and let go of goal-oriented thinking, when the activity itself is the end and not the means. This is the Eros of self-evident meaning. *Lishmah* is when loving is the motive, for the only ulterior motive of Eros is love. Indeed, the litmus test of true love is that it has no ulterior motive. It stands and endures for its own sake. *Lishmah!*

THE SEXUAL MODELS THE EROTIC: LISHMAH, PLAY FOR ITS OWN SAKE

The overwhelming majority of our sexing is for its own sake. We even call it sexual play, because play, like sex, is an end unto itself. It is not a means to another end. Classical religion failed in its concerted attempt to reduce sex to a means for having children. Of course, sex accomplishes procreation; that is part of its radical wonder. But the allurements to sexual play is for its own sake. Sexual play is self-justifying just like the play of a child is.

Essayist and poet e. e. Cummings captures in the first stanzas of his famous poem “may I feel said he” the sense of play or fun—for its own sake—that is the erotic quality of the sexual.

*may i feel said he
(i'll squeal said she
just once said he)
it's fun said she*

*(may I touch said he
how much said she
a lot said he)
why not said she*

In this precise sense, the sexual models the erotic. That which is erotic is not merely instrumental even if accomplishes a goal. The erotic act is playful. It is the play of Eros that liberates life from its boredom, pressing us into the fullness of our being and becoming.

THE EROS OF PLAY: FOR ITS OWN SAKE

To be erotically engaged means to be on the inside, totally filled and satisfied by the activity itself rather than using it as a way of getting

somewhere or doing something else. The model for this kind of radical “in and of itself” engagement is the sexual. The sexual invites us inside to its fullness, promising at its highest not a networking opportunity but the richness of the experience itself. Advancement is not the issue; *lishmah* is not goal-oriented. Once you are in the erotic, you have arrived; you are already there. This is the endpoint. There is nowhere else to go. The process itself is the goal. It is this sense that *lishmah* engenders ecstasy. Past and future melt away as the present swells to infinite proportions.

The sexual models *lishmah* and teaches us how to be lovers, living erotically in all facets of existence. Loving either a person or an activity is an end in itself and not a means. There is no expectation other than what is. There is a deep appreciation of the inherent value, wonder, and truth of each moment. The litmus test of *lishmah* for an interpersonal relationship is when the person you are with becomes more important than the activity you are doing. The process becomes the result.

Beauty is *lishmah*. A breathtaking vista, a rainbow, a sunset—they need no excuse for existing. They just are. They are beautiful and need not serve any other purpose. A perfect expression of this *lishmah* quality is the female breast. The rapture that the female breast has provoked in poets, painters, and biblical writers throughout the ages is fully self-validating. It is not because of infantile memories of nourishment or because of the fascination with taboo, it is just because. God is called Shaddai, a Hebrew wordplay on the word for “breasts,” *shaddayim*. The point is not only that God nourishes, but that the essence of the Divine also lies in its being enough; it is self-validating.

Art is *lishmah*. It is the end itself and requires no external justification. So while we valorize the commercial businessman who is driven by profit, we tend to frown upon an artist who shares the same quality. We expect him to carry the torch of *lishmah* for society. The same is true of a spiritual teacher who seems driven by commercial motivation. Yes, the teacher has a right to be compensated for his efforts. But somehow we expect him not to violate the quality of *lishmah*, which is so essential to endeavors of the spirit.

If we expect an activity to model *lishmah*, we are collectively horrified when it does not. This is precisely why society never fully accepted

prostitution. On a moral plane, there are certainly more ethically serious issues to engage—slander, corporate corruption, manipulative advertising, to name a few. Yet we hold prostitution to a different standard not because it is a violation of any overriding moral principle. Rather, it contravenes, paradoxically, an erotic principle; sex for commercial profit violates the erotic quality of *lishmah*.

ENDS AND MEANS

It would not be incorrect to say that *lishmah* is an animal-like quality. Human beings are the only animals that are both blessed and cursed by their awareness of life and death. Awareness brings in its wake the potential of consciousness. Its shadow, however, is the non-*lishmah* qualities of past and future anxiety, obsessive planning, and fear. By contrast, an animal lives not for the sake of past or future but for its own sake—*lishmah*. It is this contented *lishmah* quality of the animal that made Walt Whitman write, “Turn and live with animals . . . they do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins . . . not one is dissatisfied.”

The place where human beings are most instinctive and animal-like is the sexual. In its ideal expression, the sexual exists only for its own sake. The sexual, therefore, models the quality of *lishmah*.*

* In human beings, *lishmah* is manifested in both higher and lower expressions of consciousness. We call these lower *lishmah* and higher *lishmah*. A core principle of reality is that consciousness unfolds in triads from simple to complex to a higher simplicity. Even though level one and level three look the same on the outside, they each represent a very different interior experience. Levels one and three are worlds apart in their erotic quality. The classic expression of level one, lower *lishmah*, is sex when it is “merely animal-like.” Level one is characterized by a lack or loss of awareness. The second level is normal human awareness—in all of its negative and positive manifestations. This is the great evolutionary breakthrough of the human neocortex. It allows us to hold all of the complexity of human life. Because the human being thinks, virtually all activity becomes a means of accomplishing a goal. Much of our sexual engagement, both satisfying and unsatisfying, takes place on this level. The third level is higher *lishmah*. This is not first but second simplicity. One expression of higher *lishmah* is manifested by human beings when we reclaim our animal nature but at a higher level of consciousness. We engage in sex for its

THE TASTE OF THE TREE

The goal of the erotic life is to engage every area of our lives with the mantra of *lishmah* beating in our breasts. This means being fully present for each thing itself without needing always to justify our activity by recourse to some external gain. In the poetry of Hebrew mysticism, this is referred to as *taam haetz ketaam haperi*, meaning “the taste of the tree is as the taste of the fruit.” This phrase has its source in the delightful biblical creation myth where God commands the trees to be “trees of fruit which bear fruit.” The stunning implication of a precise reading of the divine instruction is that the tree itself, the bark, should also have the taste of the fruit. The point is, there should be no distinction between means and ends. A coarse tree that brought the fruit into being should share the very taste of its succulent fruit.

In a similar metaphor, Schneur Zalman of Liadi talks about how “the source of the vessels is higher than the source of the lights.” Just as a tree holds and sustains the fruit, the vessel holds and sustains the light. The usual distinction is that the vessel is the means to hold the light, which is the end. Schneur Zalman suggests that this distinction is nonerotic and not reflective of the fullness of reality. The vessels themselves, teaches Schneur Zalman, are no more than “congealed” light.

The essence of *lishmah* collapses the distinction between fruit and bark, vessel and light, means and end. The idea that “the ends justify the means” is therefore not only unethical but also nonerotic.

SACRED PLAY, SACRED WORKPLACE

An open portal to the experience of *lishmah* is play. Play is very much for its own sake. If you play to win, you lose. Very often a game is defined

own sake—*lishmah*. But sex at this higher level of *lishmah* is characterized not by a lack or loss of awareness but by the *transcending* of awareness into a higher level of being. At this level, the human being reclaims their animal nature not through a regression to level one simplicity but through evolving to the higher simplicity of level three. Level one is regressive. Level three is transcendent.

by purely arbitrary rules governing purely trivial actions. The goal lies in doing the activity itself.

There are few better spiritual lessons than watching the enraptured play of two toddlers. Children are the archetypes of *lishmah*. Yet the same quality of *lishmah* should hold true for adult play. One of the tragedies of the institutionalization of play is that it has lost its very playful, and therefore erotic, character. Sports play is often bound up with intense competition and betting. It has become a bottom-line, win-lose proposition. Competition always drives us harder. Where competition asks, “Couldn’t you try just a little bit harder?” play says, “Couldn’t you try just a little bit softer?” *Lishmah* invites us to play more softly and gently.

In Hebrew, there are whole sets of words that feature the repetition of one syllable. The repetition expresses a particular intensity. One of the more powerful examples of this intensity through repetition is the word *sha’a shu’ah*, which is translated as the “delight of erotic play.” The word is taken in Hebrew mysticism to refer to erotic delight in both its sexual and its mystical forms. *Sha sha* forms the core of the word. In Hebrew, the word *sha* means “turning toward.” *Sha sha* is thus explained by the mystics to mean “turning toward for the sake of turning toward.” The same formula follows for the Hebrew word *ga’a gu’ah*, which means “yearning,” again with both sexually and mystically erotic implications. *Ga ga* is thus understood as “yearning for the sake of yearning.” The subtle wisdom of language reminds us that the erotic is *lishmah*—that is, for its own sake. Its goal is to take us to itself, to remind us that we are already there.

One of the central areas of our lives that has been most painfully de-eroticized is work. The Western world has greatly succeeded in reducing the length of the workday. Yet we have failed terribly to erase the dichotomy between work and pleasure. It is clear that such a division can only make our lives miserable. No matter how wonderful it may be, the weekend is still far shorter than the workweek. If we do not transform our work into *lishmah*—that which we do for its own sake—then we are destined for depression.

In Hebrew, the word for “work” is *avodah*. Wonderfully, though, in Hebrew the first connotation of *avodah* is “service in the Temple in Jerusalem.” The subtle linguistic association shows up in English as well. The

words *work* and *worship* come from common roots in Old English. The implication is clear: all work—like the work in the temple—should be erotic. That is to say, *lishmah*, for its own sake.

At the site of the ancient Sumerian city of Ur, archaeologists were surprised to find a golden harp buried together with a set of golden working tools. It would appear that the Sumerians, like the Hebrews, understood that there can be no division between Eros and work.

“Six days a week you shall work, and on the seventh day you shall rest on the Sabbath,” reads the biblical text. We naturally assume that the sacred imperative is to rest on the Sabbath. The wisdom masters read it differently. “Six days you shall work—this is a positive commandment.” The sacred imperative is not just to rest on the seventh day, but also to work for the other six!

No matter how noble a goal we claim as the purpose of our work, it is insufficient. We must search for the meaning intrinsic to the work itself. Only then can we have the erotic workplaces envisioned by biblical myth.

Here’s a story of yearning for a sacred workplace:

The great master Levi Isaac of Berditchev was walking his usual route in the marketplace. Along came a man rushing madly to somewhere and bowled the master over.

“Why are you running so fast?” asked Levi Isaac as he got up.

“Well,” said the man, “I need to make a living.”

Levi Isaac asked, “Why are you working so hard to make a living?”

Well, no one had ever asked our mad dashing friend such a question, and he was at a loss as to how to respond. “Well,” he stuttered—and then a light bulb went on in his head. “I am working so hard in order to make a living for my children.”

It seemed to be a fine answer, and the master wished him good day.

Twenty-five years went by. Again, the master was walking the same path in the marketplace. Again, he was bowled over by a rushing passerby. Masters are consistent, so the same

conversation ensued. And again it concluded with the man saying, confidently, “I am rushing so much in order to make a living for my children.”

Levi Isaac looked deeply into the man’s face. He realized that this was the son of the man who had bowled him over twenty-five years ago. Turning his eyes heavenward, he asked God, “When will I finally meet that one child for whom all the generations labor so mightily?”

These gentlemen running through the market each justified their labor in terms of their children. Though supporting children is a very good reason, it is still insufficient. Every “reason” is ultimately an excuse. Even kids may be used as excuses, a violation of the erotic quality of *lishmah*. It is only truthful to respond, “I am running for the sake of running, working for the sake of working!”

The most common expansion of *lishmah* beyond the sexual to the erotic is in the arena of study. Remember that for the Hebrew mystic, study is an erotic encounter. It is a flirtation with text, a wooing of wisdom that leads to the final full embrace of life-giving learning. A core requirement of Hebrew law is that the study of Torah (sacred wisdom) be *lishmah*. That means the Torah must be studied not for the sake of honor or prestige, but for the sake of the spirit. According to a second school of thought, studying even for the sake of the spirit is not *lishmah*. Study of the Torah must be totally self-validating—Torah purely for its own sake.

LISHMAH: FOR THE SAKE OF THE NAME

The erotic quality of *lishmah* has a second layer of meaning, which takes us even deeper. *Lishmah* derives from the Hebrew letters spelling *sham*, meaning “there.” In the first understanding of *lishmah* (acting for its own sake), when you give up getting there, you realize you are already there.

However, *sham*, pronounced “shem,” has a second meaning: “name.” In this layer of understanding, *lishmah* means “for the sake of

the name.” In the ultimate expression of *lishmah*, as we will see in a few pages, this quality of *lishmah* is also modeled in the sexual. But before we get there, let’s take a look at what “for the sake of the name” actually means. Your name is the face of God that is you and you alone. *Lishmah* means living for the sake of the unique God expression that is you in the world: your name!

In the deepest sense, this second meaning of *lishmah*, “for the sake of the name,” is but a facet of the first meaning, “for its own sake.” There are two steps here. First, for the sake of the name is the most profound expression of Unique Self, the fifth face of Eros. Here is the second step. This dimension of Unique Self is not so much focused on your unique gift or mission; rather, it is focused on living your name in the world. You live for the sake of your name, because that is who you are. This sense of “being yourself” or living for your name is the quality of doing things “just because.” That is what it means to act for its own sake. I act just because, for the sake of my name.

This is not merely a psychological idea but a life-transforming mystical realization. “For the sake of the name” refers to your own name and to the name of God. In this realization of *lishmah*, you understand clearly that both names, your name and the name of God, are one. It is this sense that one lives for the sake of the name. One’s actions are self-justifying and not merely instrumental.

It is this identity between your name and the name of God that we will unfold in the rest of the chapter. As we will see below, in this second quality of *lishmah*, the sexual models the erotic.

The second book of the Torah is called the book of Names—*Shemot*. (In English, it is poorly mistranslated as the book of Exodus.) The book of Names opens with a description of the Hebrew people during their prosperous early days of sojourning in Egypt; at the time, they were still free men and women. One major characteristic stands out in the description. The text here, like the genealogies in the book of Genesis, takes great pains to record for us individual names. A name is a symbol of personal identity. Unique among ancient chronicles, the Bible thinks individuals count. This fact expresses itself later in the biblical narrative, which tells of the great census in which people are individually counted.

The crescendo of this description of freedom is the seemingly superfluous last verse of the section “Joseph was in Egypt.” Remember, Joseph, the son of Jacob, has risen to greatness as the viceroy of Egypt. He has an Egyptian name—Tzafnat Paneach—and yet the text tells us “Joseph was in Egypt.” Joseph, not Tzafnat Paneach. This deliberate use of his Hebrew name suggests that Joseph has retained his authentic identity, his name, and his roots.

In the very next verse, however, the shift begins. Individual names blur into anonymous pronouns. The text begins to swell with anonymity. Describing the Hebrews, it reads, “They multiplied, they increased, they became strong . . . the land was full of them.” This is followed by the chilling announcement: “A new king arose who did not know Joseph.” The name, with all its erotic implications, has been forgotten. From this point until the birth of Moses, the text speaks almost exclusively in pronouns. The children of Israel are repeatedly identified as “they” and “them.” “A man from the house of Levi marries the daughter of Levi.” Names are effaced. Slavery is on the rise. “And they made their lives bitter with bondage, in mortar and in brick, and in all the work of the field . . . they enslaved them with brutality.”

The essence of being a slave is the deconstruction of identity and intimacy. Intimacy is dependent on identity. Intimacy, as we have already seen, is not the giving up of self for another but rather merging in a “shared identity.” Undermine the name—the symbol of identity—and there is no possibility for intimacy. Slavery in biblical myth is the symbol of nonerotic living. A slave does not make independent decisions. His evaluation of reality, his testimony, is considered inadmissible in a court of law; most critically, he may not initiate his own marriage.

Slavery at its core is nonerotic and therefore an affront to human dignity and holiness. The shift in the biblical story toward transformation and redemption is signaled by the name. A new child is born. “His name is called Moses.” A name breaks through the darkness of slavery with the intimacy of personal identity. The Kabbalists point out that Moses’ Hebrew name spelled backward is *hashem*: “the name.” Slavery still rules—the name is still backward—but freedom is in the air. The name, a glimpse of godliness, has reappeared.

SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE, SPIRITUAL DIVORCE

The essential requirement in Hebrew law for marriage and divorce is that it be done *lishmah*, for the sake of the name. This is an affirmation that the full uniqueness of the other is being engaged in the marital relationship. If this is not so, if the name is somehow effaced, then no relationship can be established or terminated. Changes in personal status must be *lishmah*; that is, they require the full erotic engagement and presence of all the parties involved.

All of this is expressed by the almost exaggerated emphasis that is placed on the correctness of the name in marriage documents. Great ritual care is taken in researching the precise Hebrew spelling of the name as well as in the listing of any nicknames. The point is that marriage must be an affirmation on both sides of the unique soul root of the other, which makes the beloved an end and not a means. Marriage is a commitment to the name of the beloved.

Not just marriage but also divorce needs to be an erotic process. How many divorces are done with radical violations of name, of intimacy? What is petty “name-calling” other than slinging “names” at a person other than her true, soul-printed name? During the divorce process, how many couples refuse even to use each other’s names . . . calling their former spouse “him” or “her” in a tone of disgust? Biblical wisdom attempts to assuage the bitter namelessness of divorce by inviting us to a ritual of spiritual divorce. Its essence is the requirement of *lishmah*, for the sake of the name.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

A name is an expression of relationship, of intimacy. “What’s in a name?” asks Shakespeare. “Everything!” answers the Hebrew mystic. Many of the most common Hebrew mystical sayings reveal the magic, power, and invitation of the name. “For the sake of the great name”; “May his name be blessed”; “May his name be blotted out”; “He is as his name”; “Name is primal cause.”

In biblical writings, there are two names for the book incorrectly called “Exodus,” which tells the story of physical and spiritual emancipation. One of the names, which we mentioned, is *Sefer Shemot*, “The Book of Names.” The other name is *Sefer HaGeulah*, “The Book of Emancipation.” Why? To remind us that finding our name is the beginning of becoming free. To be a lover is to know the power of the name. A slave has no name, which is why slavery is such a brutal violation of the spirit of biblical myth. And by this we mean slavery of any kind—not only legal juridical slavery but also typological slavery.

Anyplace where you are regarded only as a function, where your name is not known and honored, you are a slave. Anytime you regard another as a mere instrument in your design, you become a slave master and an oppressor. To be a lover is to know the name. It can be the name of the waiter, of the taxi driver, of your accountant’s son, or of the mailman’s wife. By remembering the name, you become a lover.

This is why the pet names we have for our beloved are the stuff of beauty in our lives. The more you love someone, the more you accumulate pet names. Pet names come from our child selves reaching out to make authentic contact with the delight of innocence that we have a hard time accessing in our more adult persona. The point is that names matter. The more intimate we are, the more unique our names are for each other. The more alienated we are, the more the name fades away.

Remember the scene in that great old movie *The Graduate*, where Dustin Hoffman’s character explains to Mrs. Robinson, who is a generation older than he is, why he can’t go on with their affair?

“Why not?” asks Mrs. Robinson. “I love you,” she says with little conviction.

“I cannot go on,” repeats the young man.

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t even know your first name, Mrs. Robinson,” he says.

It was ten, eleven years ago, and I (Marc) was giving a lecture in a rented hall on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The topic was exciting, and so the hall was full, far too full for me to speak without a microphone. And as Lady Fate would have it, in the first two minutes of the talk, the sound system went out. The host of the event went running to

find the custodian, who, it was hoped, would be able to fix the microphone. The host came back some seven long minutes later and whispered to me, "I'm really sorry, Rabbi. I found the custodian, but he's a really nasty guy and refuses to help."

I was blessed with one of those moments of grace that allows us sometimes to ask the right question. "What's the custodian's name?" I asked.

Flustered, nervous, and impatient, the host blurted out, "Rabbi, we've got five hundred people in here. How do I know what the blank his name is?"

"Ah," I responded, "perhaps that's the problem." Asking the audience to wait a moment, I went out myself and found the custodian glaring in his office, apparently still smarting from his encounter with the evening's chairman.

I walked in and said, "Hi. I'm Marc. What's your name?"

Taken aback, he said, "George." George knew exactly how to fix the microphone and did so graciously and immediately.

The power of the name.

THE NAME OF GOD

Lishmah, "for the sake of the name," is a core feature of the erotic. A name is a symbol of identity, intimacy, and freedom. But a name is all of these in a way far more powerful than one might initially imagine. When we talk about acting "for the sake of the name," we refer to something far deeper than the technical name that we use to identify a human personality. Name is, as we said earlier, the face of God that is you and you alone. Here is where we touch the deepest erotic core of *lishmah*. Your name is not just a reflection of God's face; it is also actually part and parcel of what the mystics called God's great name. In the deepest level of human identity, the distinction between human being and God collapses. It is here that we realize that each of us is part of God.

As with all good biblical wisdom . . . we begin with a question.

In the Hebrew tradition, the prayer that is recited when someone dies is the *Kaddish*. It opens with the words *Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei*

raba—“Magnified and exalted be God’s great name.” Why, you may ask, is the central prayer of mourning so preoccupied with God’s name? Why does God need us to magnify his great name? If his name is so great, why can’t it take care of magnifying itself? Even more important, is this the best prayer we can say in the face of the open grave? Someone has died—we are sad. Sometimes we are truly broken. We then say *Kaddish*, “Magnified and exalted be the great name.” Is this the most profound response we have, standing before death? Would not words of comfort and an embrace be more appropriate? The answer to this quandary holds one of the most sacred mysteries of love, which is rooted in the heart of the cherub mysteries.

There is a story told about Israel ben Eliezer—also known as Baal Shem Tov, “Master of the Good Name.” The appellation was a title given to only the holiest adepts of an eighteenth-century secret mystical tradition. This honored appellation suggests that the master had connected to the root of his name, to his unique divinity.

When Master Isaac heard of the marvelous effect of Master Israel’s holy healing amulets, he was angry. He thought that surely amulets could only have such power if they use the holy name of God, but since this would constitute improper use of God’s name, Master Isaac decreed, “Because of improper use of God’s name, the power of the amulets must pass away.” And so it was.

When Master Israel realized that his amulets were no longer healing, he sought the reason. Eventually, it was revealed to him from on high that Isaac’s decree was blocking their efficacy. Israel confronted Isaac. “Why do you stop my amulets, which are used only to heal?” Israel demanded.

“Because you have not the right to use God’s name in this way,” retorted Isaac.

“But I do not use God’s name in my amulets,” Israel replied.

“You must, or they could not have such power.”

“I insist: I do not use God’s name,” persisted Israel.

So all the amulets of Master Israel were gathered and brought before a tribunal. When the first one was opened, there was an audible gasp. Then the second, the third, and the fourth.

Master Isaac was in shock. For the name of God indeed was not used in any of the amulets.

Instead, in every amulet, in the place where God's name could have been, it read, "Israel ben Eliezer." It was Israel's own name and not the name of God that gave the amulets their special power. Awed at this great wonder, Master Isaac restored the power of Israel's amulets. Some say that after this incident Israel ben Eliezer became the last and greatest master to hold the title Baal Shem Tov, Master of the Good Name.

In this story we sense a potent enmeshing of the name of God and the name of the person. Are they indeed separate names? Or perhaps in some mysterious way, the name of the individual and the name of God are one.

THE SEXUAL MODELS THE EROTIC: FOR THE SAKE OF THE NAME

The Three Texts of Orgasm

This second meaning is one in which we will see very clearly that the second quality of *lishmah*—for the sake of the name—is modeled most powerfully in the sexual. The importance of the name becomes obvious in sex. What do we call out at the moment of sexual climax? Three common possibilities: the first is that we cry out "Oh, God," or its equivalent in whatever the lingua franca happens to be: Elohim, mon Dieu, etc. The second possibility is that we call out the name of the beloved. The third is that we call out, "Yes." At this moment of ultimate vulnerability—and thus authenticity—there is a blurring of names. The name of the other and the name of God become almost interchangeable. Here again the sexual models the erotic, this time in the most dramatic of ways, bringing us to the heart of the cherubs' secret.

Why do God's name and the name of the beloved seem to interchange at the moment when all the outer layers are stripped bare and we call out our highest truth? Because in the deepest place, it is the same name! The

name of God is no less than the name of every being from the beginning to the end of time. The “Yes” is the same “Holy Yes,” which reality cries out at the moment of the original big bang that birthed reality. The “Yes” is the radical affirmation of the unrelenting goodness of life and our place in the universe. The name of God and the name of the beloved are one. Yes!

IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES

Now let’s go one step deeper. The sexual models the erotic. The lover crying out “Oh, God” at the height of sexual rapture models the rapture of the high priest who calls out “Oh, God” in the erotic climax of merging with the Divine, in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple. In the cherub tradition, the priest is the incarnation of the flow of love in the universe. The high priest in the Jerusalem Temple would enter the cherub-crowned Holy of Holies once a year. What would he do there? What was the nature of the mystery rite he performed? This was the only rite that was witnessed by the sexually entwined cherubs. So undoubtedly the mystery rite in the Holy of Holies lies at the very heart of the mystery of love.

As we already know, this day of entering the Holy of Holies is called the Day of Atonement, At-one-ment. It was a time of radical ecstasy, union, and joy. The priest is described in the Zohar as the incarnation of the male organ, while the Holy of Holies is the feminine Divine, the Shechinah. In some Zohar passages, Shechinah is the archetypal expression of the yoni.

So the mystery rite is the priest and the Shechinah merging in erotic union. What did the priest actually do in the Holy of Holies? Tradition answers unequivocally: he called out the name. Not just any name, mind you; but the unpronounceable name of God, the name that was so true and had so much power that it was never said except at this one time of great intimacy. In the ecstasy of the erotic spirit, the priest, the lover par excellence, cried out the name! Mystical orgasm, pure and simple.

In the language of Kabbalah, mystical orgasm brings the priest into the *ayin*—“nothingness,” no-thing-ness. *Ayin* is the bliss of leaving self

behind in the rapture of orgasm. Yet when love is deep, orgasm gives way not to an empty hangover but to a sweet aftertaste. In that aftertaste the self is reborn. In calling out “Oh, God,” the lover also rebirths her own name. In the little death of orgasm, self is reborn. The name of God and the name of the person are one.

In a precisely parallel image, God’s face is the totality of all human faces from the beginning to the end of time. The Zohar teaches that when all the root souls who form God’s will have been born, it will be the dawn of a new age of consciousness. We will have entered the Holy of Holies—otherwise known as the inside of the inside—or in an alternative reading of the same Hebrew phrase, “the face of faces.”

When all human beings who form God’s face have been born, we will be *lifnei Hashem*—“before God.” The deeper translation, however, is on “the inside of God’s face”—or the most fully literal translation: on “the inside of the face of the name.”

A DIMINISHMENT OF THE NAME

Now let’s go one last step before we bring this all together. When a Jewish person dies, the tradition is to say a eulogy and then recite the *Kaddish* meditation. What is the eulogy’s purpose? What is its deep intention? What spiritual service does it render?

When I (Marc) first became a rabbi in my early twenties, I was called to the funeral home all too often. I can still remember today, however, the occasion of my first eulogy. A forty-eight-year-old man named Jerry had passed away while jogging. His wife, Fern, called me to do the eulogy and funeral. I had no idea what to say. So I asked Fern and her kids, Doug and Wendy, to sit with me the day before the funeral.

We sat around Fern’s living room for a few hours, talking about Jerry. At first the talk was just polite. But as time wore on, with a few drinks to help, it got far more honest and real. All the while, I jotted notes, trying to capture their precise phrases. I spent most of that night awake, trying to weave their sentences and words into a eulogy that would honor Jerry.

What is a eulogy? It is the last—and sometimes the first—opportunity to recognize the soul print of the one who has passed. In the eulogy, we try to paint in fine brushstrokes the person's radical uniqueness that was his life. It is the time when we “receive their name.”

The next morning, I shared the eulogy with Fern and her family and friends at the cemetery. It was magic, plain and simple. All of us felt that Jerry had entered the room. Or put better, somehow his presence seemed to surround and encompass us. We were “on the inside.” At that very moment, I asked Fern and her children to rise and recite with me the *Kaddish* meditation: “Magnified and exalted be the great name!” Whose name? Why, God's name . . . and Jerry's, the name of the departed beloved. Of course! For in the deepest place, they are the same name.

Death in the mystical tradition of Ezekiel is called a *hillul Hashem*. Usually translated as “a desecration of God,” it more literally means “an emptying of the name.” Death is a diminishment of divinity. One aspect of God in the world has suddenly disappeared. Death is tragic because a person dies leaving so much of her story untold. Each person is a unique name-face of God. Each death is a dimming of the divine visage.

This truth is not limited to Kabbalistic masters. Walt Whitman understood at least part of it when he wrote in “Song of Myself”:

*In the faces of men and women, I see God, and in my own
face in the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is
sign'd by God's name.*

At a eulogy, we try to trace God's signature in the name of the departed. Someone has died—a potential emptying of the divine name, a diminishment of divinity. Someone could pass on without having his name recognized. To be recognized is the deepest craving of the soul. So we say a eulogy in a last—and, sadly, sometimes a first—attempt to recognize the person. When we succeed, we are able to recite the *Kaddish*, for we have certainly magnified and exalted the great name. Not only the name of God, but also the name of the departed, which is an infinitely unique expression of God's very own face and name.

FIXING THE NAME

In Kabbalistic language, *Kaddish* is a *tikkun Hashem*, a “fixing (or healing) of God’s name.” God’s name is healed when we fully recognize and receive the name of the one just passed, because the name of the departed is no less than the name of God.

In this light we can better understand a wonderful passage from poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*:

A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me thro’ repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, til all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was almost a laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeing no extinction but the only true life.

Tennyson, like the Master of the Good Name before him, understands that it is not the abandonment of individuality but rather its radical embrace that is the portal to the Infinite. This is so because at the deepest level of our individuality, we participate in the name of God. One’s own name is the portal to the name of God. They are the same. It is in this sense that the mystical master Nahum of Chernobyl wrote:

They are called by their names . . . for the name of a person is his soul. For the letters of his name are his soul root and divine flow, and with these he serves, studies, and prays. Therefore a wicked person is one who does not know his name.⁵⁰

Name is intended—in this passage—as the Eros of your story. Your story is your gateway to eternity. The litmus test of your story is

lishmah. Is it for its own sake? For the sake of your name? For the sake of the Name?

For this reason, reciting the *Kaddish* prayer at a funeral and throughout the mourning period was considered in the Hebrew myth tradition such a vital spiritual task. In *Kaddish* we recognize, sometimes for the first time, that the departed did not live to serve us. We affirm the infinite dignity of his or her story.

So often we don't really see those who are closest to us. We somehow view both our partners and our parents as extensions of our story. We are all too often unable to recognize the full and independent dignity of their lives. Often the pain of misrecognition accompanies our closest loved ones to their grave. Yet there is another chance. *Kaddish*! In saying *Kaddish* we declare for all to hear that the beloved who is departed lived not for our sake but for the sake of the Name—theirs and God's. Often this is what opens us up to a deeper love for them and begins the process of healing open wounds.

A KADDISH STORY

In the following tale, it is not the details of the story line that are so important. Rather, it is the full erotic beauty and power of *Kaddish*, where human and God merge into one in the spelling of the name.

There is an old story from the villages of Europe of a woman, Rebecca, who owed rent to her landlord. But owing rent then was not like owing rent today. Back then, the landlord had full right to take your possessions, put you in jail, or even sell you into slavery. Rebecca, her husband, and her beloved children owed thousands of rubles and were about to be sold as slaves to different buyers. Rebecca would never see her husband or children again.

Rebecca was broken. She walked desperately through the town, door to door, begging for help. By the end of the day, she had a meager three rubles to her name. Hopelessly, she headed home, weeping and weeping over her impossible fate.

In her despair a tragic thought arose in her mind: "I won't even be there the day my dear husband passes away. Who will say *Kaddish* for him?" The thought struck her soul with a strange and desperate urgency. She ran over to a beggar on the road. Handing him one of her rubles, she pleaded, "Dear sir, please, say the mourner's *Kaddish* for my husband. Please, it means the world to me." The beggar was baffled but agreed.

Rebecca walked away, but another desperate thought struck her: what of all the anonymous people who die, and nobody says *Kaddish* for them? What about them? She ran back to the same beggar and thrust the second ruble into his hand. "Please, please, also say *Kaddish* for all the unnamed, departed souls for whom no one has ever said *Kaddish*." Again, the beggar, moved by her impassioned request, agreed.

As Rebecca turned to leave, her heart more and more shrouded in grief, another thought arose. She took her last ruble and placed it in the beggar's hand. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she entreated, "Please, sir, when you say *Kaddish* for all those lost souls, please, please, say it with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your might. Hold nothing back!"

As she left, over her shoulder she heard the beggar beginning to pray. He began softly, but then his voice grew more and more powerful, like a trickle that becomes a stream that becomes a flood. He prayed with all of his might, all of his brokenness, all of his pain. Rebecca listened, transfixed. It was as if a fire enveloped her and lifted her to the highest heavens. There she had a vision of the beggar's prayers, ascending and crashing through the celestial gates, releasing the myriad souls of those who had long been awaiting their *Kaddish* to be said, their name to be called. She felt a great surge of flowing energy and relief.

And then it was over. The flood turned back to a stream and then back to trickle. Rebecca felt lighter, her heart more at ease.

As she continued down the road, a beautiful, shining carriage approached her. It stopped, and a well-dressed man

inside asked for directions. Then, quite unexpectedly, he asked if she would like a ride. Rebecca, having never been in such a fine carriage before, declined. But the man insisted. And so she boarded the carriage and there entered into a deep conversation with the gracious man. Her whole story tumbled out effortlessly. How times were so rough with so many children to feed. How a cruel landlord had increased the rent and debt had built up, and all had been lost, and how the whole family was now to be sold into slavery. The man listened thoughtfully, and as Rebecca left the carriage, he did a most incredible thing. He took out of his pocket a check, filled it out for the exact amount of her debt, handed it to her, and before she could protest, sped away.

The next day, Rebecca dashed to the bank. When she handed the check to the clerk, he gave her a suspicious glance and asked her to wait a moment as he scurried away. Rebecca became nervous . . . perhaps the check was not real and this was all a cruel joke. Again distraught, she waited. Finally the clerk returned and escorted her to the office of the president of the bank. She entered the plush room and sat before him, a large and forbidding man behind a sprawling desk. "Where did you get this check?" he demanded.

She explained to him the entire story, about the stranger in the carriage, about her debts and her family, and even about the beggar who had prayed so mightily. The president then asked her, pointing to the dozens of pictures hanging on the walls of the room, "Do you recognize anyone in these portraits?"

Rebecca looked and immediately pointed to the large portrait behind the president's desk. "That man there," she said. "He is the man in the carriage who gave me this check!"

The president turned pale. The portrait behind the desk was of his father. And the check bore his father's exact signature. The only thing was that his father had died three years before. And his son, now president of the bank, had never said *Kaddish* for him.

RETURNING TO THE CHERUBS

The way of *lishmah* is rooted in the mystery of the cherubs. The sexual models the erotic and teaches us how to be lovers in the world. The Name—of God and the beloved, fully merged into one—is at the heart of the sexual. The sexual is the most exemplary expression of Eros. For sexuality at its best is *lishmah*, for its own sake, and not to network some other advantage. It is, simply, for the sake of the name.

The cherubs themselves were held by many Kabbalists to be the masculine and feminine names of God. When united in sexual embrace, the cherubs were engaged in a unification of the Name. Exile of the Shechinah and the archetypal loss of the Ark represents the fragmentation of the Name. Whenever the Name is made whole, the Shechinah is redeemed from her exile.

When one reclaims one's name, when one lives *lishmah*—for its own sake—stepping off the wheel of networking and superficiality, then the names of both God and the individual are healed. Whenever the calling out of the name is limited only to the sexual, when the sexual is the extent of the erotic and not the model of the erotic, then the Shechinah is in exile. The erotic—the calling out of the Name—is exiled into the merely sexual. The cherubs are separated from each other, and in the language of the Zohar, “blessing does not flow in the world.”

TO GREET WITH GOD'S NAME

Calling out the name is evoked the world over in greetings. The Spanish hello—*hola*—originated in Arab Spain from the term *O'Allah*—Allah, of course, being the Arab appellation of God. In Austrian German, they say *grias*—which means “God.” In Hebrew, the common response when asked how you are doing is *baruch Hashem*—“Praise God,” or “Thank God.” The Hebrew greeting *shalom* is actually a name of God. In English, we still follow this custom when we part from someone and say, “Good-bye.” That word is a contraction for the centuries-old farewell greeting of “God be with you.”

In a wonderful and mysterious passage, the wisdom masters talk of a special decree made nearly three thousand years ago. It taught that one should greet his friend with the name of God. Although the Third Commandment proscribes such “idle use” of God’s name, this new law legislated special permission to use the divine name in casual greeting. The source for the decree was said to be the verse: “In a time to do for the Name (God), you may override the Torah.”

The idea was that greeting a person using God’s sacred name was not taking God’s name in vain, but rather, recognizing the person as a sacred expression of God. Greeting someone using God’s name meant acknowledging the infinite divine specialness in the other.

There is nothing more painful than anonymity. You come to a party alone. No one recognizes you for several long minutes. You feel forlorn, alienated. Then someone taps you on the shoulder and calls your name in warm welcome. The world is transformed. You have been recognized, perceived. Called by name!

Of course, true recognition is deeper than a mere greeting. It requires a true knowing, receiving, and even merging with the name. This is what happens when the name (God’s and the beloved’s) is called at the height of sexual passion. If the passion is situated in the context of a shared story and commitment, then this calling is the ultimate transcending of loneliness, for both of the lovers.

The wisdom masters wrote that we must greet each other with the name. A simple reading of the text indicates that they were referring to the name of God. But on a deeper level, the name they refer to is that of the person being greeted. In this powerful rereading, the decree is that no person should remain anonymous. Every person should be called by his or her name. Never allow yourself to be served by someone without knowing his name. In knowing the name of the waiter serving you, there is a fixing and healing of God’s name.

It is time to fix divinity, to create God. God is created by revealing the infinite Divine in every person. God’s name is emptied when people live without having their names recognized, without being called by name. So the wisdom masters decree: “Greet every man with the name”—the name

of God and the name of the blessed and beautiful individual before you, for they are one and the same.

In the tradition it is taught that after the temple fell the name was lost. Because the name is erotic, the fall of the temple means the fall of Eros. The exile of the Shechinah is the exile of the name. Shechinah is the sound of your name being called—recognition of who you are. Every time we call a person by name, we redeem the Shechinah and rebuild the temple.