

The Golden Thread¹

A Kabbalistic Tale That Tells All

חטה
Wheat

The king and queen² had beautiful twins, a boy child and a girl child, who spent their carefree days roaming the vast acreage of their palace grounds.³ They never tired of exploring its endless stretches of rolling gardens with brooks and fields and enchanted forests in all directions.

Their palace abode was a magical land. Wherever the children looked, wherever they set their gaze, that thing would sing a sweet, ballad that told the story of its name and its ancestry and all that it knew about the world.⁴

שעורה
Barley

Though vast, with varied landscapes, the palace grounds were surrounded by a moat that protected their garden from intruders. The children had never even seen it themselves.⁵ They had never wandered that far, but their father, the king, had warned them about it on several occasions:

“My children, listen well. If you should ever come to the moat, don’t even gaze at the other side.⁶ Turn immediately around and walk far enough away that it completely recedes from your sight. Whoever disobeys these instructions will cause death⁷ to themselves and perhaps even death to the whole kingdom.” Not that the children understood what it meant to die, but they knew it was something very bad, and they promised to obey their father’s command.

On the other side of the moat, they were told, was an upside down world where everyone told lies.⁸ The worst kind of lies, the ones that contain a kernel of truth.⁹ Then, you never know what’s true and what’s false. You never know what to accept and what to reject. At least if someone lies *all* the time, then you *know* that everything they say is wrong.

And so the children learned all about the world without ever having to leave their garden paradise. They didn’t need tutors for all their questions were answered by the songs that were sung by the creatures (and even the rocks and plants) of their world.¹⁰ This was their education,

¹ Deut 32:10 – חלק ה' עמו יעקוב חבל נחלתו – See R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Igeret HaTeshuva, Chapter 5. Tsidkat HaTsadik, 161.

² In the kabbalistic scheme of the ten sefirot, chokmah and binah are also called the Father and Mother who give birth to man and woman. Woman, the lower shekhinah, who goes into exile, is the protagonist of this story. She herself has a masculine and feminine aspect, and her masculine aspect remains in the garden.

³ The final ה' of HaShem’s name is built from a ו' and a ד'. The ו' is the letter that represents malchut, Shekhina, and moon that fell into the lower worlds at various catastrophic points in history. According to the Ari, the ו' stayed above in Atzilut and never fell, while the ד' descended into the lower worlds.

⁴ Everything was made of shimmering letters of light (i.e. consciousness). Light bodies are transparent, there are no secrets.

⁵ Surrounding Gan Eden was a 10 sefirot wide “moat” (חלל) separating it from the realm of klipot.

⁶ Command not to eat from Tree included three levels of meaning: 1) Don’t look, (you are what you eat, intellectually); 2) Don’t eat literally; 3) Don’t have sexual relations until Shabbat.

⁷ Death is the separation of soul from body. Consequently sleep is 1/60th of death, and any fall in level is a kind of death.

⁸ This world is called the עולמא דשקרא (the world of lies) throughout Chassidic writings and is called עולם הפוך (the upside down world) in the Talmud, Pesachim 50a.

⁹ Rashi on spies.

¹⁰ Leshem on animals.

and there was nothing they couldn't learn this way. The deeper their questions, the deeper the teachings conveyed by these songs.

And then, one day, of a sudden, they found themselves at the moat's edge. This was quite unexpected. They had glimpsed a beautiful flower from afar, one they had never seen before, and they hurried toward it. They didn't realize they were also approaching the moat's edge until it was too late.

And when they looked up and glanced across to the other side, they saw a sparkling, shimmering, miniature world. The little boy quickly turned and ran away, but the little girl couldn't break her gaze.¹¹¹² She was transfixed by the sight of another tiny girl who looked exactly like her, standing on the other side.

And the more she looked, the bigger the other girl became.¹³ And the bigger she became the more impossible it was for her to turn away. And so the princess stood there frozen in rapt attention, watching this little girl on the other side, who looked just like her, getting bigger and bigger and bigger, until she reached right over the moat and snatched the little princess from her palace grounds and brought her to the other side.

Now the flower that was the cause of this calamity had a prickly stem. And when the princess was snatched, her skirt swept against its thorns and a golden thread that had adorned the princess' dress was snagged by one of the thorns. And so, as the princess departed, the thread unraveled from her dress and became a golden strand that connected her back to her home and its magical world inside the moat.

The princess didn't know this though, for on the other side she was never allowed to look back.¹⁴ Not that she knew where "back" was, for she was so disoriented by her abduction, she lost all her directions. But "they" knew, and made sure that she never looked back.

Her brother hadn't realized what was happening until it was too late. When he turned to run, he thought his sister was following right behind. When he turned back to check, he was horrified to see her snatched by a giant look-alike from across the moat, which took her to the other side. It all happened in an instant.

Yet for the princess, it took thousands of years to pass from one side of the moat to the other.¹⁵ As soon as she was touched by her look-alike captor,¹⁶ she swooned and her whole life passed before her eyes. Not just her own twelve tender years, but the history of her whole family lineage that was locked inside her cells. And even the history of the universe that was the story of the atoms and molecules that comprised her body. It all passed though her awareness. She relived all this as though it were really happening. Now she understood: This is what it means to die.

גפן
Grapes
Wine

¹¹ Her sight gave energy to the other side.

¹² Alter ego of Adam "looked" just like him but lacked a keter plugged into and submitted to the will of HaShem.

¹³ Her gaze transferred energy.

¹⁴ I.e., do teshuva – the literal definition of teshuva is to return back to one's roots.

¹⁵ Really the entire course of history happens in the crack before Shabbat.

¹⁶ Hechal HaBrocha on Moses being touched by Bitya.

Only later did she realize what was going on. Her body was shrinking which meant that most of her soul could no longer fit inside.¹⁷ There wasn't enough room for it anymore. And so it was being squeezed out. Each piece, as it left, passed through her awareness and showed her all that it knew and then departed, leaving a memory trace, like a dream, in the princess' mind.

She relived the history of the universe up to the present, and when her dream reached the present she popped awake, and found herself in a palace that looked like her own, with servants and grounds and many rooms.¹⁸ At first she thought she really was at home and that this was all a dream. Slowly she realized that it wasn't her home at all, mostly because the music was very different. The creatures here didn't sing those sweet melodies that exposed the truth of their souls. Instead they made noise that sounded harmonious but when you listened in, it took you away from yourself and focused you outward instead of in. The princess knew she wasn't at home, though they tried their best to make her forget this fact.

They kept her constantly entertained. There were always musicians playing songs and an endless schedule of tea parties and meals where everyone talked about nonsense. There were games and plays and carnivals. There was never a moment of silence. At night she was so exhausted that as soon as her maidservants put her to bed, in that very next breath, she would fall asleep. And then, in the morning, she'd be woken by musicians and the whole cacophony would begin again.

Sleep was her only refuge. In sleep she would sometimes contact her real family, her father, mother and brother, and they would tell her things. Most times it was just to tell her much they loved her and missed her, but sometimes they would guide her. Her father would always say:

“I miss you so much my precious daughter, but remember, If this is happening there must be a purpose. There must be something you have to do or learn, not just for yourself but for all of us. I can't tell you what that is, because it's something that only your eyes can see.” She would hear this message at least once a week in her sleep. Finally it took root like a seed in her soul, so that even while the musicians were blaring away, she found the space inside to ponder its query. And the more she wondered the more it didn't make sense. Why was she there? These people of the other side asked nothing of her. They treated her like royalty and demanded nothing in return. What purpose was she serving for them? That was the most obvious question. The deeper question of what she had to gain for herself in this ordeal, that question had not yet crossed her mind.

Now there was one musician who was not like the others.¹⁹ His songs really did remind her of home. When he played, she recalled those bygone days when she would wander through the woods with her brother, and the trees and flowers would sing their sweet songs. This musician's ballads revived her. They pushed her to look inside. Everyone else tried to keep her from doing exactly that. His melodies reminded her of the teaching songs that everyone (and everything) sang in her garden paradise before she crossed to the other side.

¹⁷ Ari Shaar HaGilgulim, Adam's body shrinking and souls being sloughed off.

¹⁸ This opposite this HaShem created the world.

¹⁹ Messianic figure.

And it was through the words of his songs that she learned why she was there. He would tell stories in his ballads that made her think. He'd repeat the themes in different ways until she finally understood. In this way he let her know what purpose she was serving for this upside down world. She couldn't believe it at first, and then she saw that it was really true...she was their sun.²⁰ She had never looked into a mirror, and so she had no idea how brightly her face shone, and how different she looked from the rest of the people there.

It was only through his song that she came to understand this amazing fact that she was their sun. They were totally dependent upon her. When she was up and about, it was day in their kingdom. When she retired to sleep it was night. Now she understood why they wanted her around so badly and yet asked nothing more from her than to rise each day and retire each night.

Each evening her maidservants would escort her to her bedchambers, which was an elegantly decorated room without windows. Two women would play lullabies at her bedside until she slept, and then they would leave. This was the only time that she was ever alone. But she never had the energy to use this solitude for anything but sleep.

Each morning, when her day began, she looked forward to that one musician. He wasn't there every day. She never knew when he would appear. He played with the same two accompanists, but they did not seem to notice that there was something very different about his songs.

One day he started singing a song about a secret passage beneath a carpet beneath a bed, a passageway that led beyond the palace walls.²¹ For weeks this theme weaved through all his ballads but only slowly did she realize that he was giving her real instructions.

So one night she decided to look and see if perhaps there really was a passageway that began beneath her bed. She feigned sleep. It took all her strength to not succumb to the intoxicating lullabies. When the musicians left, she moved the carpet and sure enough, she found a trap door, with a staircase that led to a long passageway that would have been pitch black except that her face turned darkness into light.

The first night she just peeked and closed it up right away and went to sleep.²² The second night she descended the steps and peered into the tunnel, but there was no end in sight, and so she quickly returned. The third night she walked in the passageway for at least fifteen minutes but then tired and returned to her room to sleep. Each night she went further and returned and in this way she built her strength and her courage. Something drove her forward. She had the distinct feeling she was coming home even though she knew that she was walking in the opposite direction from her family home and was, for sure, still on the wrong side of the moat. Despite all this, she could not wait to discover where it led.

Then, one night she smelled fresh air and sensed that she was approaching the tunnel's end where it would finally open to another world. Sure enough she arrived at a closed doorway

²⁰ The shekhina is that aspect of the Infinite Light that descended into the lower worlds and is the source for all its spiritual light. Circle world level of light that provides sustenance even without merit.

²¹ HaShem tunnels beneath his throne to contact us and pull us up even if we haven't generated the prerequisite amount of merit.

²² Alternations of *hitpashtut* and *histalkut*, extension and withdrawal that are the secret of light creating vessels and descending into the lower worlds.

but a gatekeeper blocked the way. In fear and excitement she approached the guard, trusting that if the musician led her here, she would not come to harm. He welcomed the princess, said he was expecting her, but explained that he could not let her pass that evening. It was night in the world on the other side of this gate, and if she entered straight away, her face would light up the night like day. He told her to come back the next evening with her face veiled and wearing the dress she had worn the day she was snatched from her parent's home.

And so she obeyed and returned the following night. This time the gatekeeper had a carriage waiting with the musician and his accompanists seated inside who were now dressed as dignitaries of the highest rank. They took her on a guided tour of their province. Although it was night there was activity happening as if it was day. The musician explained that although all the official citizens of this upside down world were asleep, the working class slave laborers were active as though it was day. "In the daytime we are slaves, by night we are free." She couldn't understand how they managed to work so hard all day and then be alive and alert at night. She asked to know their secret.

They explained that they had perfected the skill of only seeing truth. This changes the whole rhythm of life in this upside down world. If one only lets truth in, then really, there is not much happening in the day, when the upside-down-nikim run the show. For them the surface is all that matters. They don't know about souls, so it is possible to obey their orders and function on their terms and still rest in a spiritual sense. The secret is to train one's taste buds to hold out for the sweet flavor of truth. Sometimes it's right there on the surface, but sometimes you have to dive deep to find the cache of soul food that lies within that moment. You can always tell when you got it, for the soul enjoys a timeless calm.²³ This spiritual rest restores the spirit the very same as a good night's sleep.

She began to practice this secret in her own life and everything started to change. The more expert she became in deflecting lie and only seeing truth, the more relaxing her days became. She found there was actually a lot of solitude in her life, for most of the time there was nothing on the surface to engage her. Instead her attention wafted from layer to layer, and settled wherever truth could be found. The more skilled she became the less effort this entailed. Like a seasoned connoisseur, her taste buds sifted through the tiers until they found what they sought. When she learned to filter out falsehood, the noise and fanfare nearly disappeared.

Shortly after her first visit to the outer province her father, the king, appeared in a dream and instructed her as follows: "My precious daughter, the dress you wear for your night excursions to the outer province, wear it now during your days as well. The golden thread attached to its hem will make it easier for us to communicate with you, both in the day and in the night.

In the course of her visits to his province the musician revealed more and more of the secrets of their right-side-up-night-time world. And during the day, he would include these themes in the ballads he sang. In this way she learned and absorbed all that she saw.

Eventually the musician explained, "At night, when the upside-down-nikim sleep, we wake up refreshed from our day's rest and have a whole fellowship that is dedicated to turning the world right side up. But the truth is, something isn't working and that's the problem we're

²³ Esther sending *shade* to Achashverosh.

hoping you can help us solve, for you and we are kindred souls...literally.” He paused to let his words sink in.

“Do you remember what happened when you crossed the moat from your garden paradise to the other side? Do you remember your body shrinking and your soul being squeezed out?”

The princess nodded.

“Did you ever wonder what happened to your soul when it left you that day? Now I’m going to fill in some details. Your soul fell into the upside down world where it shattered into many thousands of pieces, and each piece grew into a whole person with a personality unto itself. As you might now guess...we are they. Each one of us working class laborers carries a piece of *your* lost soul in our hearts. We are a missing part of you, and you are a missing part of us. Now the reason we are slaves in this world instead of full citizens is because we possess an unconcealable flaw. Whenever we lie, our skin turns white, and everyone knows not to believe what we’ve said. With this flaw, we could never be full-fledged citizens of this upside down world. We could never do business. We would starve.

And so we are the slave class. The upside down government rounded us up when we fell to their world and auctioned us off. Each upside down household acquired a slave. And although we are dependent on them for our physical food, they are also dependent on us in ways that only we know.

That’s enough for tonight. Except for one last word: This *flaw* that we possess, of not being able to lie, is, as you know, really our strength. But, as I will explain next time, it *is* also our flaw. When we meet again I’ll introduce you to the council of elders.”

It took her a while to let all this in. She wasn’t ready to return to the outer province right away. She needed to find the truth of the musician’s words inside herself. In the midst of her teas and carnivals, she spent her solitude absorbing the truth of the story he told. She had to verify it inside herself. And the musician, on his part, helped her along by turning these themes into melodies and weaving them into his ballads.

The princess didn’t realize how much she was changing from her night visits to the outside world. She was learning and growing in leaps and bounds. Each teaching brought new sparks of light into her soul. She didn’t notice that her face was getting brighter. Nor did anyone else, really, for they didn’t have taste buds for light. They always focused on the more material layer of reality, clothes and objects and physical things. Yet, at some point the princess started to notice that the conversation at her tea parties kept cycling back to a new problem in the kingdom. People were developing a physical intolerance to daylight.²⁴ Their skin and internal organs would ache when exposed to the noontide. Doctors could find no cure for this mysterious ailment, that was spreading throughout the populous. Only from the musician’s ballads did the princess realize that she was their cause: The more enlightened she became, the more intense her solar radiance.

Next time when the princess visited her soul mates beyond the tunnel they brought her to what seemed to be a ruined palace that was exquisite even in its broken state. The room they

entered was divided in half, with men on one side and women on the other, seventy of each. This was their council of elders. The musician presented their problem:

“As you know, the whole point of our midnight culture is to turn the world right side up. We know that the only way this can happen is by smuggling light down into this lowly world, but we must find a way of accomplishing that feat without causing our plan to backfire by strengthening the very upside down hierarchy we hope to depose.

“Our problem is twofold. If the light comes down too strong and too fast, it will melt down this world and we, who are dependent upon it for our room and board, will also die. But on the other hand, if we let it dribble in, the light, in that form, is as digestible to them as it is to us, and it will only end up strengthening their upside down rule.

“So our solution is to build a spark extractor that can squeeze out the drops of light that are trapped inside the refuse of this world. This liquid light is very concentrated. It’s actually much stronger than its radiant counterpart, and it is easier to control. It can be stored and pressed into cakes and distributed in discreet packets that go straight to the night workers and are only used to empower their efforts to turn the world right side up.

We have all the skills required to build this spark extractor, because in our day jobs we have each perfected a talent that is absolutely necessary for this holy endeavor. We also have the material resources for we have been planning and saving up for this for millenniums. We even have a blueprint. And yet every time we start to build, a conflict erupts and the project freezes and folds. Each person feels that if we’re going to undertake such a major endeavor, then we have to do it RIGHT, otherwise there is no point. The problem is that everyone has a different vision about what’s right, and so every beginning ends with strife and failure.

So you see, our strength has become our fatal flaw. Our commitment to truth is precisely what prevents us from achieving the consensus necessary to accomplish this holy task. We hope and pray that you can guide us through this block.

The veiled princess requested a brief encounter with each of the elders, one by one, and asked them to share with her their name and their vision for the spark extractor. She returned to her palace chambers in the upside down kingdom with much to ponder.

In the days that followed, the princess worked to find each one of these one hundred and forty (70 X 2) perspectives inside herself. She brought each elder up to mind and identified the position where, if you stood there, the spark extractor would look exactly like they described it. Then she imagined all of the visions at once and found their central axis (which was not their middle line). She stood there, in the center, for a very long time.

When the princess next returned to the outer province she only stayed for a brief while. She addressed the council of elders: “You will only be able to make this spark extractor if you first become it. I would be most honored to help you in this task. First you have to learn to work in pairs.”

She then assigned each of the elders to a partner, men with men, women with women. Without having been briefed about the history of their quarrels the princess uncannily paired everyone with their nemesis, the person whose opinions each found most intolerable. The people protested her choices, but she would not hear a word.

“Your first assignment is to sit with your partners and an hour each day. On each day, one person speaks and other is silent. First say a prayer together. Then one speaks and the other is silent. The

דבש
Date Honey

The more deeply the princess bonded with her night laboring soul mates, the more whole she became. The more her heart opened to them the more they lived inside her, and the brighter she shined. The problem of solar sensitivity in the kingdom became so severe that the upside-down-nikim soon became confined to their homes. The solar rays were now lethal to them.

They were forced to delegate more and more high level (and even governmental) responsibilities to their slaves until their roles became reversed. Apparently the very same “defect” in the slaves that made their skin turn white whenever they lied, also contained an unanticipated benefit. They were able to convert solar rays into wisdom.

The brighter the princess became the brighter the kingdom became. The deeper she bonded with her soul-mates who were now running the kingdom, the thinner the boundaries grew between them. These changes built upon each other at a rapidly accelerating rate. With each passing day the princess’ skin grew more and more transparent which caused her to get bigger and bigger, and bigger. Eventually her kingdom-mates fused with her and she fused with them. They didn’t need formal meetings anymore because her thoughts reverberated through their souls. And on a smaller scale the same thing was happening with each slave and his household. They too were bonding and fusing and enlightening in this very same way.

The princess’ father appeared to her in a dream. Now, my precious daughter, you are ready to come home. And all you have to do is follow the golden thread that is still attached to your dress, and it will lead you right back to your garden abode. That golden thread has linked you to us throughout your ordeal. Through its cord your light and guidance descended. Now it is time to follow it in the other direction and bring yourself and your kingdom and all its inhabitants back home. Yet garden world will be safer now thanks to you. You will see that there is no longer a need for a moat, for there is no longer an *other side*. Because of you everything is dedicated to light.

”ה' ישמור צאתך ובואך מעתה ועד עולם:”

Notes and Brief Commentary on The Story

The Golden Thread – חוט המלכות

Deut 32:10 – חלק ה' עמו יעקוב חבל נחלתו – See R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Igeret HaTeshuva, Chapter 5. Tsidkat HaTsadik, 161.

חטא - Wheat

The king and queen had beautiful twins - In the kabbalistic scheme of the ten *sefirot*, chokmah and binah are also called the Father and Mother who give birth to *man* and *woman*. Woman, the lower shekhinah, who goes into exile, is the protagonist of this story. [She herself has a masculine and feminine aspect, and her masculine aspect remains in the garden.]

That thing would sing a sweet ballad that told the story... - As R. Safrin explains, in Gan Eden everything was made of shimmering letters of light (i.e. consciousness). Light bodies are transparent, there are no secrets, they teach all they know to whomever looks.

שעורה – Barley

The palace gardens were surrounded- Surrounding Gan Eden was a 10 *sefirot* wide “moat” (חלל) separating it from the realm of klipot.

Don't even gaze at the other side - Command not to eat from Tree included three levels of meaning: 1) Don't look, (you are what you eat, intellectually); 2) Don't eat literally; 3) Don't have sexual relations until Shabbat.

Whoever disobeys these instructions will cause death - Death is the separation of soul from body. Consequently, sleep is 1/60th of death, and any fall in level is a kind of death.

Upside down world - This world is called the עלמא דשקרא (the world of lies) throughout Chassidic writings and is called עולם הפוך (the upside down world) in the Talmud, Pesachim 50a.

Kernal of truth - Rashi on spies.

[חטא - Wheat]

Songs that were sung by the creatures (and even the rocks and plants) of their world -
Leshem on animals.

The little girl couldn't break her gaze - Her sight gave energy to the other side.

Tiny girl who looked exactly like her, standing on the other side – It is possible to say that the serpent was the alter ego of Adam “looked just like him” but lacked a *keter* plugged into and submitted to the will of *HaShem*.

Never allowed to look back - i.e., do *teshuva* – the literal definition of *teshuva* is to return back to one's roots.

גפן – Grapes, Wine

It all happened in an instant. Yet for the princess it took thousands of years to pass from one side of the moat to the other - Really the entire course of history happens in the crack before Shabbat. (See diagram).

As soon as she was touched by her look-alike captor - *Hechal HaBrocha* on Moses being touched by Bitya.

Her body was shrinking which meant that most of her soul could no longer fit inside - Ari Shaar *HaGilgulim*, Adam's body shrinking and souls being sloughed off.

In a palace that looked like her own - This opposite this *HaShem* created the world.

Now there was one musician – Messianic figure.

She was their sun - The shekhina is that aspect of the Infinite Light that descended into the lower worlds and is the source for all its spiritual light. Circle world level of light that provides sustenance even without merit.

A secret...passageway that led beyond the palace walls - *HaShem* tunnels beneath his throne to contact us and pull us up even if we haven't generated the prerequisite amount of merit.

Each night she went further and returned - Alternations of *hitpashtut* and *histalkut*, extension and withdrawal that are the secret of light creating vessels and descending into the lower worlds.

תאנה – Figs

In daytime we are slaves, at night we are free – When the body sleeps, the soul is free to ascend to the higher realms and enjoy the lights and teachings that are happening there.

It is possible to obey their orders and function on their terms and still rest in a spiritual sense – Esther sending a *shade* to Achashverosh.

רימון - Pomegranate

People were developing an intolerance to daylight – Malachi 3:19-21

זית שמן - Oily Olives

דבש - Date Honey