

The Wisdom of Imperfection



The Healing Medicine of
Pnimityus HaTorah

— R' JOEY ROSENFELD —

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Pnimiyus HaTorah is what I understand as the wisdom of imperfection.

Kabbalah as a whole, Chassidus, the Zohar, the Arizal, the Baal Shem Tov, the Gra, the Ramchal, the Rashash—all of it can be gathered under one heading: the light of imperfection. Not light that apologizes for imperfection. Not light that says, “You fell, now behave yourself.” But light that teaches us something far more radical: we were never perfect. It was never possible to be perfect.

Hashem does not expect perfection from us.

Before we accept that imperfection is intrinsic, every failure becomes an accusation. Every struggle becomes proof that something is wrong with us. Pnimiyus HaTorah removes that poison. It teaches us that struggle is not evidence of distance, it is the very place where closeness is forged.

This is why, when Rav Pinchas ben Yair sees Rabbi Shimon’s body bruised and torn after years in the cave, he cries out in pain. He mourns the sight of a tzaddik who looks broken. But Rabbi Shimon corrects him. Had you not seen me in this state of suffering, you would never have known my greatness.

Greatness does not exist in spite of struggle. It exists because of it.

The same truth appears in the life of the Arizal.

Born in Yerushalayim, a place of light, he descends to Mitzrayim—the land of exile, concealment, and false perfection. He meditates not in a beis medrash, but on the banks of the Nile, the very symbol of human arrogance and denial of dependence. And it is there, in the lowest place, that he receives prophetic vision.

The Arizal does not begin by teaching about divine illumination. He begins with Tzimtzum—divine concealment. And then Sheviras HaKelim—cosmic trauma, breakage, debris. The inner Torah opens not with harmony, but with fracture.

Not because the world is broken by accident, but because brokenness is the medium through which light is revealed.

The urgency of needing this medicine to function in avodas Hashem. We are not coming to be mekubalim. We are not coming to do magic or to master the kavanot of the tzaddikim, even though this path is the gateway to that as well. But first and foremost, when a person enters Pnimiyus HaTorah, it has to be with the posture: I need this as medicine for my soul.

And when a person has that urgency—needing to be healed, needing light to enter darker places so we can see Hashem and live with Hashem—something opens. A locked gate opens. It says: okay, you are also worthy of Pnimiyus HaTorah.

And that's typically the posture that I am trying to share torah from. The reason we are zocheh to have so much Pnimiyus HaTorah revealed in such clarified form is because we are more in need of it.

To be human is to live in process. To work. To refine. To struggle. Any spiritual system that promises arrival, finality, total resolution, the end of effort—is either false or idolatrous.

Pnimiyus HaTorah teaches us how to live inside the process without shame. This is why Pnimiyus HaTorah is not meant to be information. It is meant to be medicine. A person can know the terminology of Kabbalah and remain unchanged. The goal is not to be a mekubal who knows words. The goal is to be healed.

When a person comes to the words of the tzaddikim, not looking for a nice vort, not looking for novelty, but coming with ache, with fear, with worry, with pain, then the words land differently. They descend inwards. The urgency with which we come determines how deeply the words enter.

Without Pnimiyus HaTorah, Hashem exists only in moments of success. In mitzvos. In learning. In boxes we can check. The rest of life—the traffic jam, the frustration, the anxiety, the fear—feels outside of avodah. Pnimiyus HaTorah says otherwise.

If I'm stuck in traffic and I'm late, without inner Torah the world is simply cruel. With Pnimiyus HaTorah, I can pause and say: this is how Hashem is running the world.

This does not deny pain. It transforms it. This is the revolution of the Baal Shem Tov.

Before him, the work was to climb from earth to heaven. The Baal Shem Tov said that is too hard for most people. We need a ladder that allows heaven to descend into earth. Eating, walking, working, breathing, parenting—these become sites of avodas Hashem. Not escapes from it.

Hashem is not waiting for us only in the beis medrash. He is waiting for us in the body, in the struggle, in the ordinary moments of life.

The Rebbe Rashab teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu saw all generations. When he reached the generation of Ikvosa d'Meshicha, he could not bear to look. Not out of disdain, but out of awe.

If Torah can be lived here, it can be lived anywhere. Our generation does not need Pnimiyyus HaTorah because we are deserving. We need it because it is urgent. Because we are fragmented. Because we are anxious. Because we are overwhelmed.

And if this light can heal us, it can heal the world.

This is the final frontier: to live with Hashem here, now, without waiting to be fixed. To realize that this very moment—this consciousness, this struggle—is already a doorway into the Kodesh HaKodashim.

Rav Chaim Vital, the main student of the Arizal, asked his Rebbe: how is it possible that we, a lower generation, can do what you, a higher generation, were incapable of doing? If you, the tzaddik, could not bring redemption, how could it be that me, the talmid, will have the capacity to bring redemption?

And the Arizal answered him with a principle that is foundational for how we have to approach Pnimiyyus HaTorah.

In spite of diminishment of mindfulness and heartfulness, in accordance with the intensity and the struggle, the slightest effort that you put in, the slightest effort that we put in, is more valuable and more beautiful in the eyes of God than the great work of previous generations.

Rav Tzadok HaKohen miLublin repeats a very similar teaching again and again. It is specifically because of the smallness, the constriction, the overwhelmingness—the anxiety, the concern, the fear, the stuckness our generation is exposed to—that we have more susceptibility to benefiting from these teachings. It's not a contradiction.

The lower we are, the more necessary these teachings become. The more necessary it is that we do this work. Because as the final generation, the only way we are going to move through the darkness is with the loftiest levels of light.

Previous generations weren't stuck in so much darkness. So the basic dosages of light were enough to keep a person connected. But as the darkness grows thicker in exile, we need stronger and stronger medicines to pull us out of stuckness.

And it's for that reason that we have the right and the ability to study Pnimiyyus HaTorah. To come to Pnimiyyus HaTorah from a perspective of deservedness is very difficult. Rav Chaim Vital writes thirty principles that must be adhered to prior to entering into the inner teachings—especially Kabbalah—and much of it is centralized around kedushah and taharah, self-refinement, refinement of middos.

And so a person gets stuck. We want Pnimiyyus HaTorah, but we feel undeserving of it. What the tzaddikim revealed is another path. Not deserving-but needing.

The urgency of needing this medicine to function in avodas Hashem. We are not coming to be mekubalim. We are not coming to do magic or to master the kavanot of the tzaddikim, even though this path is the gateway to that as well. But first and foremost, when a person enters Pnimiyyus HaTorah, it has to be with the posture: I need this as medicine for my soul.

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