

Supplemental Material: (2)

*Reflections on the Indian Jewish Fairy Tale, The Golden Tree**

(Schwartz, H (1983) *Elijah's violin and other Jewish Fairy Tales*. New York: Harper Colophon books, 127-136

This material was omitted for space reasons from the article Shapiro, DH. and Shapiro, J. (1992) *Couples and Spirituality: A Jewish Perspective on Exile, Yearning, and Return*. *Journal of Couples Therapy*, 3(1),77-96. It is a beautiful fairy tale which we highly recommend to anyone interested. Our thoughts on it are presented here, reflecting the themes of the article

Exile and Yearning

At the beginning of the Jewish fairy tale, "The Golden Tree," we meet a "middle-age" Emperor of India, who has five wives, four of whom have provided him with children. The Emperor finally gives in to the pressure and constant harping from four of his wives and agrees to banish his fifth and heretofore childless wife. He "sent her from the palace alone, without providing her with any silver or gold or the least amount of food or water" (Schwartz, 1983, p.127). The fifth wife immediately feels the pain of her exile, and is filled with tears of shame and fear. The Emperor, however, at first does

not realize that he is also in exile until one night he dreams of a golden tree

and there in the golden trunk he saw the reflection of the queen whom he had banished from his sight. Then he was filled with remorse at having sent her away, for he understood that she had been precious to him, and he tried to take hold of the trunk. But as soon as he touched it, it disappeared and he awoke (Schwartz, 1983, p. 130)

YEARNING

The Emperor is filled with grief, great longing and shame, both for the loss of his queen, and the loss of the golden tree. His dream interpreters offer him three views: he longs only for his wife and so should send messengers to seek her; he longs only for the golden tree, so should have one of his prized goldsmiths re-create the tree of his dreams; and, most complex and demanding of all, the Emperor "must set out alone in search of the golden tree and find it for himself" (Schwartz, 1983, p. 130).

The Emperor initially tries everything but going himself. First, he sends messengers to find the queen, but they return empty-handed. Next, he has all the gold brought to the master goldsmith from his treasury (plus the gold of his four wives at whom he is angry for "having convinced him to expel the youngest queen"). But the goldsmith cannot duplicate the tree of his dream, and his "nightmares" continue. The Emperor then announces he will give up half his kingdom to whomever can help him find the golden tree. But no one knows of such a tree, and the Emperor remains in a state of yearning. He becomes "ill because of his bitterness" (Schwartz, p. 131). At last, he "finally concluded that he must undertake the quest to find the golden tree himself" (Schwartz, p. 131).

What is the Emperor searching for? On the one hand, it is his

relationship with the lost queen, whom he himself banished (line 2b Figure One). At the same time, it is the golden tree, which is a tree of life (line 1b, Figure One). Judaism is often referred to as the tree of life (Werblonsky and Wigoder, 1986; Proverbs 3:17-18) (etz hayyim) for "those who hold fast to it." The tree of life may be understood, in the mystical tradition of Judaism, as representing the transpersonal, the spiritual dimension of life. Finally, the Emperor is also searching for himself, to learn to re-claim responsibility for his own decisions, actions, and life. As part of his internal exile and bondage, he has blamed his other wives; he has tried to get messengers and goldsmiths to accomplish the search for him; he has offered possessions in exchange for this tree. He even allows himself to become sick rather than seek personally to redress the exile he has brought on himself. In the end, however, he realizes he himself must begin the search for the golden tree, in whom his youngest queen is reflected. There is no magical solution, no longer any hope of others to do it for him. And there is also the realization that that which is most important to him has been lost.

Ironically, it is often precisely this confrontation with secularism, this loss of magic in our lives, which can prompt a yearning to recommit to, return to and deepen one's own spirituality and connection with the Source. As a further irony, the Emperor is only able to recognize the slumber of his devotion during sleep! Individuals may begin to realize that, like the Jews in Egypt, they are in bondage, bound by the "narrow places" of their own choice and creation. What follows is a calling out to the Universe, a yearning

for the deepest source of harmony, understanding, and purpose possible, a seeking for help in our struggles to break free from exile. At this time of the "rungless ladder" of middle life, there is often a strong need for tradition and roots, some sense of grounding and meaning. The Emperor "knew he would have no peace until he had seen the golden tree for himself, and held it in his grasp" (Schwartz, 1983, p. 131). Yet precisely at this time when the yearning is strongest, the goal seems most distant. One feels totally alone in the search. The magic of youth is gone. "So it was that the

Emperor traveled throughout the kingdom, and everywhere he went he asked if anyone knew of such a tree. But... all his efforts were in vain. After many months had passed, he despaired of ever finding the golden tree, and thought of returning home, resigned to being cursed with the recurring dream until the end of his days. (Schwartz, 1983, p. 132).

RETURN: Reconciliation of Efforts toward Return: Self and Other. This interweaving of personal efforts (self-control) and efforts by others, both human (benevolent other control) and divine (the purposiveness and compassion of God) is also illustrated in the story of "The Golden Tree." As noted, the exiled queen must learn, using her own skills, to survive in the forest; while the Emperor must put aside his pride and his power and seek her alone, on foot. But both receive the help of a benevolent other, an old man who at various times cares for both Emperor and queen, and in one way or another, guides each of them to the golden tree. In Jewish tradition, this old man probably represents the prophet Elijah, God's emissary on earth who often appears in dark times to help individuals in distress. He also may symbolize the important intergenerational linkages uniting middle to old age, the transformative to the transcendent.

The golden tree, symbolic of God's word, or help from the highest Source, is also available to nurture and support the efforts of both exiled queen and Emperor. It is the knowledge of the existence of

the golden tree which gives both queen and Emperor hope. The old man gives the queen an amulet in the shape of the tree which she wears for protection. The Emperor, for his part, is drawn effortlessly down a current toward the golden tree. Even in exile, God, or God's sign, is there, for those who open their hearts to search for it and accept it. Finally, the Emperor must return to the world to express this encounter with the transpersonal in everyday life. Carrying a piece of the golden tree, he makes his way to the old man's hut to return a pair of shoes. As we learn, this task is not a simple one, for "it required all of his strength to carry the golden tree back to the old man's hut." Thus, in effecting the Return, both individual efforts, in relation to him or herself and to others, and the efforts of benevolent others (human and divine) have a part to play.

In contemplating the possibility of Return, we may ask, who is in control of this process? This fairy tale, as well as other Jewish sources, suggest that it requires the efforts of all of us, including God. But for the individual at middle life, these are no longer the confident, even arrogant efforts of youth. They are efforts tempered by suffering and much self-doubt, a keen sense of one's own unworthiness for the task. Having discovered significant limits to one's ability to control either oneself or the world, there is a concomitant willingness to yearn with all one's heart, to cry out for help. It is precisely this yearning, this cry, this acknowledgment of one's own inadequacy, this state of openness and broken-heartedness which allow the efforts of the benevolent other to be accepted, and concepts of God as master, God as protector, God as

priced with gratitude and relief. "You are the
the vessel. Mold me according to thy will" (Gates
) becomes a reassuring, rather than a restricting
comes possible to rely not only on oneself, but also
of God's will in the universe.

tude does not imply a passive acceptance.
Abbi Nachman of Bratslau (1980) observed,

er to live simply we must have
that everything is in our hands,
the same time believe that everything
t to us only through God. It may be
ible to do this. But through living this
x in practice, you will never be far from
or will you ever fall. Certainly we must
God with all our strength, as if everything
s on us.

Emperor is unable to perceive the ways in which,
uler, he is in bondage (to his other wives, to his
wer, to his desire to have his last queen bear him
ng his kingdom and commencing to wander in search
he Emperor experiences the seeking "in the
leaves the "narrow places" of his kingdom, but
y free, for it is unclear where his freedom is
to the story, the Emperor uses his freedom to
ing and, eventually, to yoke himself back to the
Golden Tree

~ MALE AND FEMALE QUALITIES

Traditionally, God's attributes of compassion and mercy are identified as feminine, while His attribute of justice is regarded as masculine. Thus, the unity of God implies not only God the Father, but God the Mother; God's truth and justice must be framed by God's love and mercy. God judges, but also enfolds and nurtures.

Further, we as humans are created "in the image of God." According to the first Genesis myth of creation (Genesis 1:27), both men and women have qualities of the male and female within them, and our completeness requires reassessing and reintegrating both. Our understanding of the transpersonal suggests that we must right the balance to find the same complementarity reflected in the male and female within us.

In "The Golden Tree," the Emperor shows several signs of such a transformation -- based on his search for and encounter with the transpersonal. As Chinen notes, the golden tree represents "the inner resources to which individuals must return for renewal at midlife." But these inner resources need to be transformed to meet the demands of a new developmental stage. The golden tree "melts down old manifestations to forge new ones...the golden tree is constantly in flux, symbolizing the process of pure transformation (Chinen, 1987, p. 122). Many of the transformations the Emperor undergoes have traditionally been associated with the stereotypic "feminine" sex-role: increased generativity, nurturance, intuition. For example, in the presence of the golden tree, the Emperor reaches out and grasps a branch because of "an intuition that came to him

the song of Songs and other sources teach that the Shechinah is often in exile, separated from her Beloved, and longing for return. It is believed that the Shechinah will be permanently reunited only when the world itself is restored to a state of perfect wholeness. Relationally, we can hope that, just as there is the promise of the masculine and feminine being reconciled in God, so they can achieve unity in men and women as well. In "The Golden Tree," this is represented symbolically at first by the queen developing survival skills; and the Emperor learning more expressive qualities of humility and helpfulness. But in the end, Emperor and queen, masculine and feminine, are reunited.

another year --
FORGIVENESS

In the fairy tale of the Golden Tree, although the Emperor has encountered the golden tree and possesses a golden branch, he still has not been reunited with his wife. A transcendent, transpersonal encounter is not sufficient. It is only when he decides to return a pair of shoes which the old man lent him to walk across the scalding waters boiling about the golden tree that he has an opportunity for reconciliation.

Once at the hut, the Emperor confesses how he had banished the queen, further evidence of transformation in that he is accepting responsibility, in front of God's representative, and therefore in front of God, for the wrong he has committed. With that confession, the queen, who has been living in the old man's hut, lifts her veil, and reveals her identity. The Emperor asks her forgiveness, and she accepts his apologies. The fairy tale thus emphasizes the equal value of both the asking and the granting of forgiveness. It is this release, on both sides of the relationship, that allows the process of transformation to continue.

For the Emperor, until he can ask for and receive forgiveness from the queen whom he has hurt, the transpersonal is a weight and he is still full of grief. Once he takes responsibility for his past actions, his "narrow places", he is able to recognize that he was in bondage, and seek forgiveness. At this point, the heavy weight of the transpersonal is itself transformed and manifest in the relationship: "And when the Emperor went to pick up the golden tree, he discovered that it had become almost weightless, and that he could carry it without effort" (Schwartz, 1983, p. 135).

FROM FRAGMENTS TO WHOLE: GENERATIVITY

At the start of the fairy tale, the world is in fragments: The Emperor is enslaved by the bondage of his "narrow place," the "evil" in him, that part of him which was wrestling with God, and which banished the queen. The kingdom is in disarray, the messengers are unsuccessful, the craftsmen fail, the Emperor falls sick, the queen is lost and frightened, the golden tree itself is undiscoverable.

Similarly, the teachings of the 16th century Jewish mystic, Rabbi Isaac Luria (Epstein, 1978), based on the Kaballah (Book of Spendor) and the Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation), say that when God created the world, He attempted to fill it with His perfect Light, which was contained in certain vessels. But the Light was so strong that the vessels shattered. Because of this shattering, everything in creation contains a spark of God's light and holiness. However, sometimes these sparks of light are covered and hidden by husks (kelipot). Part of our task is to overcome these obstacles, these husks, through the process of repair (tikkun), to elevate the sparks back to the Source, to their intended state of unity.

The pieces must be put back together, both in the fairy tale of the Golden Tree and in relationship. In fact, by the conclusion of

the fairy tale, this process has occurred. The Emperor is reconciled with the exiled queen, the individual is reconciled to God. Further, evil has been reconciled with good, for it was the act of banishment which led the Emperor to wake from his "slumber of devotion" and, eventually, to yoke himself to God and to his relational other. On one level, the Emperor's evil, his "narrow place" becomes conquered and transformed. This is like the fairy tales of youth, where the demonic is clearly defined as "other." However, here in the midlife fairy tale, the enemy is within (Knowles, 1959). Further, on another level, there is seen here an essential unity and purposiveness in the world which, though not always recognized, transcends the duality of good and evil. The golden tree is an essential unity: that which wrestles with God -- Israel -- is really part of the one God. From a transpersonal perspective, each narrow place -- in oneself and in one's love relationship - can be seen, not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity to remove the husks, to free the sparks of love, and to learn how to grow closer to God, to one's loved one, and to oneself.

... In "The Golden Tree," the current helps the Emperor float both towards the golden tree (in which his relational love was reflected), and away from it (albeit carrying part of its essence), back to his exiled queen. Thus it is that relationship with other and relationship with God may work to enhance each other. Knowledge of the transpersonal can provide a strong and enduring context for relationship; yet the primary relationship also becomes a way of drawing closer to God.

Both the Emperor and queen suffer physical and psychological torment during the exile. In the end, however, the Emperor has learned to cherish and revere his queen; and the queen to accept the Emperor's apology and forgive him. Thus pain and suffering can become the soil for healing, compassion, and wisdom, which then can be turned to sharing with others.

The conclusion of the tale of the Golden Tree emphasizes the potential for generativity inherent in the transformative process. Emperor and queen return home (after all, he still has a kingdom to rule) with the son she bore while in exile, carrying the golden branch with them. Just as the old man shared the transpersonal wisdom with the Emperor and the queen, they in turn feel the responsibility and desire to share that wisdom with each other. "Henceforth he treats the queen with the greatest love and respect."

Emperor and queen both have recognized and returned to their responsibility in midlife to the world. At the same time, they both have been reconciled to the highest Source of wisdom and compassion, and indeed have brought a piece of this back to their lives, thus bringing transpersonal inspiration into secular society (Chinen, 1987). This spiritual wisdom has become a source of nurturance and sustenance for their young child, symbolic of the future generations. "As for the golden tree, he planted it in the royal garden outside the window, where the child often played." As the V'havta, part of the central prayer of Judaism requires, it is not enough to experience the transpersonal oneself: one must teach its precepts "diligently to (one's) children." *And enjoy the dance ---- (5)*