

Image Exegesis of Light



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DMin 748: Image Exegesis

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“And He said, ‘Let there be light;’ and there was light. G-d saw that the light was good, and G-d separated the light from the darkness. G-d called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.”¹

There was nothing. More than nothing, there was an ethereal vacuum. While there was nothing physical, there was everything in the incorporeal. Beyond simple description or explanation, everything just was...and was in constant fluid spark and song. Sound like a muffled rushing wind. Lightning of every color arced throughout. Like the dance of a Friday night at the Kotel² or underwater swimming through a crackling essence of life, all was together in the essence of the Infinite. Suddenly, a change. The Infinite began to restrain itself, to pull back. Darkness, cold, came and enveloped – a physical plane formed. Images began to take shape. Balls, floating orbs...a nondescript one the main focus of the whispers of the Infinite. Suddenly, the light from the Infinite illuminated the ball, the future earth, as the creation of its complexities took place. A command from the Infinite, and a source Light issued from the Infinite, completely encased, served as the source of all light on the planet.

Metaphors are in abundance in Torah. This passage is from the traditional creation event. Torah tells how the world was formed in six days. This particular act of creation is one of the first metaphors found in the Torah and helps show the richness of the Torah. Even in this passage alone one can find numerous metaphors: said, be, light, separated, darkness, etc. Of all of these mentioned metaphors, the general theme in this passage is related to light, the first day of

¹ Genesis 1:3-5, Sefaria English translation.

² Western Wall in Jerusalem.

creation. What is this light? A simple interpretation would present the sun and the difference between night and day, but that is inaccurate. Jewish tradition tells on how the first three days of creation mirror the last three days of creation. The fourth day of creation, as it so happens, is the physical manifestation of the spirituality of the first day: the sun, moon, and stars (also known as the heavens). Thus, light is necessarily a metaphor, since the concept of night and day apparently runs independent of the sun and moon.³

What do the Jewish commentators⁴ have to say about light? Sforno asserts that the light is the light of the seven days, designed for use by those created without seed and to be used again in the future in the World to Come. Is this a spiritual light that is meant for the first humans and spiritual beings? Could this be a spiritual light that represents the creation of the heavenly court? Since the heavenly court isn't mentioned in Torah until the creation of mankind, this is a possibility, and would follow the tradition of mirroring the days. Ramban looks at a Kabbalistic approach, referring to a midrash regarding the "hidden secret" of the light of creation. The six days are viewed as literal real days on earth, composed of hours and minutes. This is the outer explanation. The inner explanation, or a narraphor approach, involves the notion that the sefirot, or spheres, are these days. This is based in the notion that all proclamations that create existence are called days. There are six days but ten proclamations (the name "day" does not apply to the first ones) which give us the ten sefirot found in Kabbalah. Chizkuni mentions that the first day is composed of the creation of three phenomena: heaven, earth, and light. Each one of these contributed to creation in its own time. In this case, the light produced the luminaries of the

³ We nonetheless still count days and nights by the sun and moon, even on the Jewish calendar.

⁴ All of the sources I am citing are traditional Jewish sages. The best approach to locate these sources is to pick up an Artscroll Chumash or visit Sefaria.org.

fourth day. Thus, the original light is the essence of all light which creates future light and removes the metaphysical problems regarding *ex nihilo*. Further, Haamek Davar mentions that the “source light,” as it were, is reserved for the righteous at the end in the World to Come. Ibn Ezra expounds on this to point out that the luminaries on day four were sparked from this source light. This carries similarities with other creation narratives from Ancient Near East traditions, with the concept of a torch that is the source of all light and fire in creation.

Another notable area in Torah regarding light is the pillar of fire by night. The narraphor suggests this would come as a spark from the source light, providing its own dispensation, as it were. Light is a common metaphor found in the visions of the prophets as well. Light typically is correlated to revelation and the glory of G-d, as well as goodness and life. Christians will find their story of the Upper Room to have a familiar connection to this metaphor. Since light and fire go together with this narraphor, Christians identify easily with the “tongues of fire” that fell upon the apostles. There are several New Testament messages that expound on light as well, connecting it to freedom, deliverance, truth, and life. Being a city on a hill and a light under a lampshade, Christians identify light with evangelism, hope, and redemption.

Dr. Leonard Sweet, semiotician and Christian theologian, expands on this notion. He mentions the rainbow, “the rainbow...is nothing but the light refracted into seven colors, all of which together make One Light.”⁵ Sweet asserts we need solidarity of color and solidarity of light. Could it be coincidence, then, that seven days of creation align to seven colors of the rainbow, which further align to the seven Noachide Laws that HaShem gave to all of mankind? Since when was there such a thing as coincidence?

⁵ Leonard Sweet. Personal Communication dated July 10, 2018.

Light is what unites us all. Every Torah metaphor can claim this, but Light came first and Light will be last. Light transcends our limited perspective and gives us a glance of the Infinite incorporeal. A glance, nothing more, since we cannot bear to look longer lest we become blind. This same Light shone on Moses' face and guided not only the Jewish nation, but all of history to a future focal point of completion. This is but a mere refraction or hologram of the command to the Jewish people to be a Light to the nations, a claim made by Christians but originally given to the Hebrew natives.

