

רש"י ויקרא פרק יד  
ועץ ארז - לפי שהנגעים באין על גסות הרוח:  
ושני תולעת ואזב - מה תקנתו ויתרפא, ישפיל עצמו מגאותו, כתולעת וכאזוב:

רש"י במדבר פרק יט פסוק כב  
ושרף את הפרה - כשם ששרף העגל:  
עץ ארז ואזוב ושני תולעת - שלשה מינין הללו כנגד שלשת אלפי איש שנפלו בעגל. וארז הוא הגבוה מכל האילנות  
ואזוב נמוך מכולם, סימן שהגבוה שנתגאה וחסא, ישפיל את עצמו כאזוב ותולעת ויתכפר לו:

שפת אמת פרשת תזריע מצורע תרל"א

ברש"י "עץ ארז" - שנתגאה, "ואזוב" - שישפיל עצמו כו'.  
ולמה עץ ארז אצל הכפרה, שזה הוראה על מה שחטא וקלקל?  
אך כי השפלות צריך להיות עי"ז עצמו שנתגאה, שצריך לידע, אף שיהיה מה שהוא, כשנתגאה ונדמה לו שיש  
לו להתגאות, הרי הוא שפל כתולעת ממש, כי כל הרצון מהש"י להגיע לזה לידע כי הכל ממנו ית', וכשחסר זה  
הכל הבל.

ווא"ז מו"ר זצלה"ה אמר בשם הרב ז"ל מפרשיסחא עמ"ש "מגביה שפלים ומשפיל גאים" - מאחר שמגבי'  
השפל, למה משפיל כדי להגביהם?

אך שמגבי' שפלים שישאר שפל אף שהוא מוגבה. עכ"ד.  
וזה מי שבאמת, אף שיגבי' אותו, ידע כי הוא ממנו ית', הרי הוא מוגבה בידיעתו זאת,  
וכ"כ "אל יתהלל כו' כ"א בזאת כו'"),  
וכן "משפיל גאים" - כי ע"י גאות הוא שפל, כי נכרת משורש החיות, ש"אין אני והוא יכולין לדור וכו'",  
וכן איתא בזה"ק: "מאן דהוא רב הוא זעיר כו'", וכן מי שהוא יודע שהכל מהש"י הוא רב.  
כי בוודאי אין המכוון להיות אדם עניו ע"י דמיון שקר, כי מ"ש במרע"ה "עניו מאד" אף שבוודאי ידע כי הוא  
הדעת של כל ישראל.

א"כ - אף שבוודאי יש בכל עבודה נקודה מן האדם בעצמו, והוא הרצון, מ"מ אין ניכר מזה לאדם כלל לידע  
כמה יש בעבודתו מעצמו, ורק הכל מהש"י, ואיך יוכל להתגאות במה שאינו שלו? והגיאות עצמו הוא הסימן  
שהוא שפל באמת. וזהו הרמז ב"עץ ארז ואזוב".

From the shalosh seudot of Tazria-Metzora 5631

Rashi to Bamidbar 19:22 says that the inclusion of the cedar twig (in the water of the Red Heifer) is because (the person who became tamei met) was self-exalting (and the cedar is a symbol of height) , and so we include the hyssop (which is a symbol of lowness) to teach that he must lower himself. (Sfat Emet seems to transpose Rashi's comments to the metzora, but as cited above, Rashi's comments there are in fact substantively the same.)

Why is the cedar included in the atonement, when it symbolizes the way in which he sinned and became corrupt?

Because the lowliness needs to come via the very means of self-exaltation. He needs to know, even though he may be what he is (i.e, a person of worth or substance), that when he self-exalts and imagines that he has a basis for self-exaltation, he in fact is lowly as an actual worm (the next ingredient in the ritual is wormwood), for the entire Will from the Name may He be blessed is that he reach the understanding that everything is from Him may He be blessed, and when this is lacking all is worthless (cf. Kohelet 1:2).

Now my Father of blessed memory said in the name of the Rabbi of blessed memory of (R. Simkha Bunim of) Prystka regarding the verse "he raises up the lowly and lowers the exalted":

Since He raises up the lowly, why does he lower them, only to raise them up?

Because he "raises up the lowly", meaning that (the one raised up) must remain lowly even though he is raised up.

This refers to someone who truly, even though He raises him up, knows that it is from Him may He be blessed, and this knowledge itself raises him up

(Similarly, Scripture says 'let not the wise praise themselves for their wisdom . . . (rather for this should the praiser praise himself: comprehension and knowledge of Me").

So too "lowers the self-exalting" – because it is the self-exaltation itself that makes him lowly, because he is cut off from the source of animation, as "he and I (a haughty person and G-d – from Sotah 5a) cannot live together",

and similarly the Holy Zohar says: "One who is lordly is diminished etc.", and conversely one who knows that all is from the Name may He be blessed is a lord,

because certainly the intent is not that a person should be humble as the result of a false imagining, because Scripture writes that Moshe Rabbeinu, peace be on him, was "very humble" even though he certainly knew that he was the mind of all Israel.

Therefore, even though every act of Divine service contains a point from the human being independently, namely the Will, but nonetheless it is not possible for a human being to recognize what amount of his service is brought about by himself, rather everything is from the Name may He be blessed, and how can he self-exalt via something which is not his? Indeed the self-exaltation itself is the sign that he is truly lowly, and this is the hint contained in the cedar twig and the hyssop, as written above.

This week I will venture again into the realm of Chassidic commentary, this time that of the Sfat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter, the third Gerrer Rebbe. Sfat Emet's comments are generally explicitly kabbalistic in substance, and therefore beyond my ken, but I think this section is accessible. I should note that Dr. Art Green has translated selections of Sfat Emet but does not include the above. He does, however, talk in his introduction extensively about the use of the word "nekudah", point, or "nekudat hachiyut", in Sfat Emet, which he understands as referring to the spark of G-d that is the source of all existence, or indeed the only true existence. In this section, however, the term seems in my amateur opinion to have a very different implication, namely that the human will has independent existence. I quote here from page xxxii of Green's "The Language of Truth", and welcome comments on this issue.

#### Sefat Emet 5:54

All things are brought into being by Him. But the point is hidden and we have to expand it. This depends upon the point within us, for the more we expand our own souls, the more G-d is revealed to us in every place. This is the meaning of "When Hashem your G-d widens your border" – when the point spreads forth and expands throughout the human soul.

Green

The jump from speaking of Hashem as Creator to "the point" within all things takes place almost too quickly, as the book consists of briefly summarized homilies rather than clearly argued theological discourses. But the "G-d revealed in every place" is clearly identical to the expanded "point".

My interest in this section is primarily for his discussion of humility, however. Sfat Emet, as I understand him, rejects not only the position that one should be unaware or underestimate one's capacity relative to one's fellow human beings, but also the position that humility comes from seeing that the variance in ability among human beings is trivial when placed in context of the difference between human beings and G-d. Instead, humility comes from recognizing that our talents and perhaps even our actions are the result of Divine Will, not caused by ourselves. But he then undermines this by saying that they are in fact partially self-caused, just that the extent to which they are is unknowable. I welcome comments on this issue as well, both as to the accuracy of my reading and as to whether you find this a plausible psychological recipe for humility.

Shabbat Shalom!