

Talya Birkhahn

A Symphony of Light

My Journeys Within the Tree of Life

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To my father and mother, who have given me the
privilege of abundance.

"And I'll be purified with heavenly sanctity, and by that,
a great abundance shall be about in all of the worlds."

(Counting of the Omer)

Prologue



Who are we in the world? What is the world for us? What are we in the universe? What is the delicate balance between our existence and what the universe offers us?

Have you stopped lately and asked yourself if your life could be any better?

How do you feel about the level of intimacy you have with your friends?

When did you last have a real conversation with your children or your parents?

Do you carry a longing for the romance between nature and human beings?

This book engages in the most simple and essential questions of our lives concerning society. Reading this book will enable you to reexamine your life and to raise questions and issues that will lead you toward new insights. In this way, you will elevate your level of awareness in your life, get to know your unique essence, and learn how to manage your life in a better way.

Introduction



"What I like in a good author isn't what he says, but what he whispers."

(Logan Pearsall Smith)

I wrote this book from an internal place. I was thinking about the poetry of the experience when I told my story. I wanted to hear the sound of the infinite silence, the peacefulness that spreads over any available space, that which is vexing to me as it peeks and disappears while I try to grab it by the end of its tail.

Being a human being nowadays is a challenge . . .

Being a parent nowadays is . . .

Being a teacher nowadays is . . .

Being a child is . . .

Many people look for a key to find meaning to their life story, and a spark of hope. In recent years, more people are seeking this yearned-for truth, asking to cross the narrow bridge between the darkness and the horizon of the wholeness, the promising light.

A professor of history of the People of Israel, Mrs. Anita Shapira, strengthened this description in her speech at the 2008 Israeli Prize ceremony, saying: "It seems as if our society carries longings for substance beyond the here and now . . . we need to discover a new direction in a world that has lost its

milestones . . . there's a longing towards a renewed idealism. . . we must find good theories that are not a one-time adventure, that will lead us on roads that are not yet paved, towards a compelling way of life."

With that in mind, I ask the question of how we can change our points of view so that we will look at our lives as an intriguing maze that will have wonderful surprises ahead of us. I often wander into visions of a beautiful world, and tell my 4-½-year-old daughter, Danielle, that I would like all of life to be soft. She, with the great sobriety that she's been endowed with, helps me come to my senses, saying, "It's possible for me to be soft, as well as the baby in your belly, but not all human beings.

Some say that there's a secret that exists beyond our ordinary, day-to-day consciousness, a secret that is capable of enabling us to become more whole. When we discover it, we will be able to move towards personal and social redemption.

An opportunity is offered here to embark on a different journey, one that has the ability to elevate us to great heights. We will be able to fly higher to less crowded places. When the heart and mind are silenced, we will move towards the abundance that exists everywhere for those who dare to fly high enough. On this journey, we can acquire tools and arrive back at the gates of the land with different, lighter attire.

In writing this book, I've met with many types of people: secular, and ultra-orthodox, academics and people of practice, men of faith and men of doubt. The challenge I took upon myself was to present the various voices in the book together as an interesting fabric of thoughts and images, inviting everyone to join in. In this book, you will find materials that will remind you of various life experiences and that may resonate with things that you may have put aside for a while. Like the fortunate fisherman who spreads his net in the great sea with

the chance of having a net full of fish at the end of the day, so exists the possibility that you will pull a variety of pearls from this book.

This book, *A Symphony of Light: My Journeys Within the Tree of Life*, has been written in a poetic and philosophical manner based on my daily experiences, and anchored by my internal logic and intuition. Throughout the book, relevant segments are interspersed with conversations I've had over the past several years as a single mother with my children. (Today, Danielle is 12 years old, and Michael is almost eight years old.)

I have incorporated a conceptual and an empirical approach together with a rational analysis. This book is full of suggested activities related to the subjects presented. The more personal parts of the book include passages that range from reality to fantasy and utopia, moving towards a possible vision. Though the book offers unique diagnoses and theories, I hold no pretense of taking part in the academic discourse that surrounds the subjects discussed, or presenting them as an academic would.

This book is based on the ten enumerations (Sefirot) in the Kabbalah as a key model of accepting the abundance in our world. In order to assist you in your study, the chapters are divided up according to the ten gates, and their corresponding enumerations. Your personal insights will create the called-for connections.

As I was writing the book, I had to revive moments of human light and other truths, memorize, and restore them. We must enlarge the light that is inside of us in order to open up to the universe and win the love that is reserved for us all.



Welcome to the Gates (Abundance) of Light

Awaken – light

Where am I in the world? Where do I stand?
Who am I, and what is my essence as a human being?
For what purpose did I come here?
Where am I heading?
What is the meaning of my existence?
What is my role in the world?

(Inspired by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto)

These basic and fundamental questions resonate in my mind, and in the minds of many others, because we are spiritual beings who seek to understand what makes our lives significant, or what is, in fact, the meaning of our lives.

In order to discover that purpose, we must use our spiritual intelligence; that is, we must be able to place our lives into a broader context in order to look at them and examine their meaning in our day-to-day lives.

The yearning for deep, internal meaning expresses the soul's longing for a more beautiful world. It is possible to recognize the soul when we hear a description from a religious person about his encounter with something that lies beyond him, or when we meet a mystic who has had the pleasure of experiencing a spiritual, yet very real, experience. I am reminded of the story of the female singer Achinoam Nini, about her experience singing at the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem. The way in which she described the spiritual experience that was borne of the acoustics, the echo, her quiet mind, and the perfect singing,