



The
Imperfect Lamp

an olde allegorical tale of Kabbalah

The Imperfect Lamp

an old allegorical tale of Kabbalah



Copyright 2018, Paramita Press
El Cerrito CA ParamitaPress.com

THE IMPERFECT LAMP

Once there was a merchant whose young son was philosophically inclined and imagined himself as a scholar and seeker of truth. But as the boy grew older, the merchant insisted that he should take up an occupation of useful substance. An occupation that could support a family. Perhaps some kind of skilled craft. Or maybe, following his father, the boy should take up the bartering of merchandise from town to town. This is an allegorical story about bartering.

Because the economy was weak, and the expensive iron shoes on the merchant's horse were so well worn, he bargained with the local blacksmith to take his son on as an apprentice.

After a period of time, the son had mastered the craft of iron-working, and moved back to his father's house. And on his first day back he heated and hammered, and fitted the merchant's horse with four beautiful new finely-shaped, but sturdy, iron shoes.

In the succeeding days, the father made his regular rounds with an extra enthusiasm, proudly showing off the new horseshoes to all of his customers and clients. The son, however, was not satisfied, and complained to his father that he was discovering a more refined side of himself. And so he was wishing for a more refined and rewarding occupation. One that would involve more vision and fine craftsmanship; rather than mostly just the smashing of red-hot iron into new forms.

Since the boy had already acquired some metalworking skills, the merchant was able to apprentice him this time to a coppersmith. Again, the young man studied for a period of time, and became adept at working with copper and brass. When he returned to his father's house, he set to work and made three beautifully crafted copper cooking pots of different sizes, with special brass handles for efficient usage.

The proud merchant of course showed his friends and clients the son's newly-crafted copperware. They each admired the functionality and the fine finish of the well-made vessels. And they complimented the merchant on his

son's achievements. For a week, the merchant returned home each night with glowing compliments for his son's skill.

But the son was still unsatisfied. He now perceived that coppersmithing, though an honorable craft, was a pragmatic and pedestrian trade. A trade that doesn't lend itself to expressing the perspectives, insights, and inner truths that he hoped to be the focus of his life's work. He wanted his work to be a perimetric reflection, projecting an understanding of his personal truths and his yet-abstract and uncoagulated inner meanings.

He told his father he had begun to understand the importance of the media and materials involved in a person's occupation. Metallurgy per se is a craft requiring skill, but there's a big difference between working with base metals like iron and copper, versus working with a noble metal such as silver. One has the opportunity to express so much more of what matters if they involve themselves with ideas and materials of noble character, rather than base. "So I've made arrangements to apprentice myself to the silversmith in the next town over," he said. And his father agreed.

The son worked for a time with the silversmith, and learned his trade. Returning home to his father, he secluded himself in a corner of the barn behind the house. And for the entire week he worked two ingots of silver into a richly-ornamented double-sided mirror, which he then presented to his father.

The father was astounded at the incredible craftsmanship of the mirror. Rarely had he ever seen such a beautiful piece of work; it was completely entrancing. He stared into the mirror at every opportunity, admiring the noble qualities of his own visage. They were so much the more obvious, in this exquisite context. Indeed, as he stared into the mirror's reflection, he could clearly see lofty and noble qualities in his own face, which he had never before recognized or even dared to suspect himself of possessing. He could see a reflection of himself as what he hoped to someday achieve.

During the next week, the father's customers were all equally amazed; and each night he brought home great praise for the perfection of his son's art. As the days passed, the merchant's acquaintances all praised the mirror and how it seemed so strangely to burnish the character of whomever it reflected. It seemed to reflect the unexpected possibilities in each face. More than one of his friends suggested to the merchant that his son might be dabbling in a bit of alchemy or other occult art as well as the sophisticated metallurgy.

The son though, was dismayed at how often accumulating tarnish needed to be polished off the mirror's reflective silver surfaces. And he noticed how

nobility and other high characteristics of personhood seem to be by nature temporary and corruptible; and how they're especially likely to be tarnished by paradox or difficult situations where a person is forced to choose one bad option over another.

I'm searching for truth on a deeper level, he told his father. I'm hoping to express immutable truth, but neither my craftsmanship, my understanding, nor tarnished silver are adequate for that. So the two of them discussed the difficult situation, and in the end were able to arrange for the son to apprentice with a famous master goldsmith in a distant city.

As time passed the son's skills developed, and were widely praised throughout the region. One day he appeared unannounced at his father's door, with an unusually-beautiful golden lamp.

The merchant was so anxious to show off his son's skill, that he took the lamp straightaway to his neighbor, without really looking at it closely himself. The neighbor admired the golden lamp and the skill of the workmanship. But then, on closer inspection, he noticed a small flaw at the base of the lamp. Once the neighbor had pointed it out, the flaw was painfully obvious to the father, who then covered the imperfect spot with his hand, as he showed it to the next of his many friends. The very next friend, however, noticed another flaw. It was very small, but again obvious, once it had been pointed out.

The proud father took the marvelous lamp to each of his many friends and customers in turn. Everyone was completely fascinated with it; it was almost as though the lamp was bewitching any person who viewed it. But although each person seemed somehow entranced by the magic of the lamp, the father grew increasingly disheartened at every stop - because even though no one ever noticed any of the flaws previously discovered, each person found a new flaw, which had not been noticed by any of the other observers before. At the end of all this, the father could count several tiny flaws in any given part of the lamp.

Returning home one evening, he confronted his son with the fact that that the golden lamp had as many flaws as the friends he had shown it to; and indeed, as he was speaking, he noticed even another small imperfection, somewhat uglier than the rest, which had not been noticed before.

"Then at last, I am satisfied," the son replied. "My apprenticeships are complete. And my lamp, as you have may have guessed by now, is a mirror of human consciousness, of basic personal character, composition, mission and position."

The same lamp seems different to each different person because each person has a unique inherent understanding of one special particular part of creation. My golden lamp is a work of illustrated allegories and each person sees it differently because each person has a different origin.

The sages tell us that at the beginning of existence, at the time when there was no time, there were only two active urges: *Chesed* (love or generosity), and *Gevurah* (severity or discipline).

Discipline by nature is a vessel, and doesn't exist at all, except by containing and restricting some independent thing. At the beginning of existence, when those two urges first encountered each other, there was great hope that chesed, or non-specific love and generosity, could be contained and regulated within restrictive vessels of discipline.

Love which is contained, or shaped and directed, can be individualized and even personalized, as opposed to unfettered, nebulous, non-specific love. Unfortunately there was a mismatch for some reason and love proved stronger than discipline. Chesed overpowered gevurah in the time before time; so they say.

As the generous waters of chesed were allegorically poured into the constraining vessels of gevurah the vessels were not strong enough and were instantly shattered into myriads of broken shards. Mismatched broken pieces of love mixed with discipline were scattered everywhere. This was the allegorical state of the universe back at the beginning of time and consciousness.

Tradition tells us, he said, that for the universe to become whole and right again, as it was originally intended, all the broken shards (or sparks as they are often called) must be redeemed or repaired. And it was for this reason that humans were created. From each spark or shard one human soul was created, whose task it is during their life to understand that broken shard, and through a complete experienced understanding of that specific fault, to redeem it, allegorically.

“Each soul is vitalized by one small fault,” the son explained. “Life in the human soul, like fire in the opal, exists only when light refracts through a small and unique internal defect. Thus it is, that the divine spark which first draws you to a person will eventually reveal a hidden and integral fault, without which the spark could not exist. The golden lamp I have made is complete, but imperfect. In it each person sees the reflection of their own unique fault; and thus the spark of their own imperfect soul.”