

The Ayin (עין) of Ayin (אין): The Healing Gaze of עתיקא קדישא

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In the beginning of the *Idra Rabba*, the *Havrayya* find themselves in a state that feels very similar to our own today. Existence is threatened due to a tear and instability in the very fabric of being. The foundations upon which society relies are unstable and volatile. Those in power are displaying dangerous levels of reactivity in which punitive harsh judgement overshadows compassion and threatens to destroy everything. Both the *Idra Rabba* and *Idra Zuta* offer a beautiful possibility of healing of this crisis through the image of the divine gaze within the Godhead itself- the boundless, eternal *Ein Sof* coming face to face with the wrathful God of the Torah. In this paper I will explore the nature and cause of the divine crisis, the quality of the healing gaze, and how the *Havrayya* (and thus humanity) can play an essential role in stimulating the process of healing that is so needed in our own time.

Perhaps the core of the problem today and in the *Idra* is the same- the delicate balance between *Chesed* and *Din* that is essential for our survival is askew because the underlying unity that animates and permeates our dualistic world is inaccessible. It is the role of *Tiferet* to mediate between Judgement and Lovingkindness in a balanced way that ensures harmony in the divine and human realms. *Tiferet*, along with the surrounding *sefirot*, is also the conduit between the aspect of the divine that is wholly One (*Atika Kadisha*), and that which is most accessible to the world of duality.¹ When functioning well, *Ze'eir Anpin* (comprised of the *sefirot* from *Chochmah* to *Yesod* with *Tiferet* at its core)² engages in the world of duality and supervises it, but does so informed by a non-dual perspective. Perhaps it is precisely this liminal position that leaves *Ze'eir Anpin* vulnerable to frustration and impatience, exposed to the world of duality³ but with limited, impermanent access to the perspective that it's truly all one.

Another central function of *Tiferet* and the surrounding *sefirot* is relevant to our inquiry and to understanding the crisis depicted in the *Idra Rabba*. When humanity engages in *mitzvot* and Torah study, they adorn *Shechina* and stimulate the arousal from below (*hitorreruta delatata*). *Tiferet*, or YHVH, responds by meeting his beloved and thus ensuring the flow of *shefa* (divine blessing) into this world. When *Shechina* is attractive (adorned by human deeds), it is easy for *Tiferet* to come to her even if he is operating in a dualistic framework. But within that dualistic construct of attraction and aversion, he is unable to reach her when human action has, as it were, covered her in muck. It is in this moment that he must overcome his aversion by accessing a lens of oneness, a lens of compassion through which there actually is no distance to traverse between *Ze'eir Anpin* and his beloved. This is the perspective transmitted by the gaze of *Atika Kadisha*, or *Arikh Anpin*.

¹ See Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience*, 343.

² The exact *sefirot* that correspond with *Ze'eir Anpin* varies

³ Including the problem of evil and the experience of a separate self

Atika Kadisha is “[t]he primordial manifestation of *Ein Sof* through *Keter*..”⁴ From *Atika Kadisha*’s undifferentiated⁵ reality, all is one. *Atika* is “Not engaged in the human drama. The consciousness that flows from him precedes divine and human plots. The concealed brain of *Atika* is referred to as “Eden above,”⁶ reminding us of the moment before humanity acquired knowledge of dualism (*tov v’ra*,) when Adam and Eve were “naked and not afraid,” (i.e., undifferentiated,) before Adam hid from God. The image of Eden is also our first clue to an important motif in the *Idrot*, that of the Source of Being, the Primordial Mother. In this paper, I will explore how the notion of *Atika Kadisha* as Mother informs our understanding of the nature of the crisis presented in the *Idra Rabba*, and what the *Havrayya* (and we) can do to heal the face of *Ze’eir Anpin*.

Consider the following Zoharic text: “Eyebrows is the name of the place that conveys supervision to all those colors, masters of supervision. These eyebrows, downward, are eyebrows of supervision from that flowing gushing river- a place drawing from that river, to bathe in the whiteness of the Ancient One, from the milk flowing from Mother. For when Gevurah extends and eyes flash in red, the Holy Ancient One shines its whiteness and kindles Mother⁷, who is filled with milk and suckles all, and all the eyes bathe in that mother’s milk, flowing forth constantly, as is written: “bathing in milk (*Shir Hashirim* 5:12) in Mother’s milk, flowing constantly, ceaselessly.”⁸

Like the gaze and like speaking words of Torah, breastfeeding traverses the divide between self and other. As any mother of a crying infant knows, mother’s milk has a remarkable ability to soothe a red- eyed, tearful infant. But the face and the gaze of the mother are also central to the process of soothing, as is supported by psychologists and is clear in the divine Zoharic drama.⁹

“The eyes of the head [of *Ze’eir Anpin*]. The eye of *Atik Yomin*¹⁰ watches over them. And when the covers [eyelids] are raised, he looks like one who is arising from his sleep; and his eyes are opened and they bathe in the one whiteness of the good eye, as it written, “Bathed in milk”(*Shir Hashirim* 5:12) What is *in milk*? In the primal, supernal whiteness; and at that time, the gaze and guidance of love and mercy is found.”¹¹

According to Melila Hellner-Eshed, “ “This white light is not the light that shines within human reality in the ordinary course of the world. This is the primal light; it lies at the very origin of

⁴ Daniel Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, Vol 8, 326, note 20

⁵ Matt, *Zohar*, vol 9, 775, note 24

⁶ Zohar 3:129b

⁷ Bina

⁸ Zohar 2:122b

⁹ Hellner-Eshed, מבקשי הפנים מסודות האדרא רבא שבספר הזוהר, p68

¹⁰ The Ancient of Days, *Atika Kadisha*

¹¹ Zohar 3:136b

reality.¹² The capacity of this white to overpower red is key to the process of healing in the gaze of *Atika* and *Ze'eir Anpin*.

Matt points out¹³ that in Daniel 7:9 we find “..the Ancient of Days sat- His garment like white snow, the hair of his head like clean fleece, His throne flames of fire, its wheels blazing fire.” In Daniel, the fire is not problematic or in need of *tikkun*. In the parallel Zoharic text, the red fire is now something that needs to be overpowered by the white of compassion: “Master of white- His garment and sparkling countenance. Seated on a throne of flames, to subdue them.”¹⁴

The following text is even more clear that this white is not only an abstract compassion or a visually accessible light- it is tangible and deeply nourishing like the milk of the mother. “Come and see: Every single day dew trickles from the Holy Ancient One to the Short-Tempered One, and the whole Orchard of Holy Apples is blessed. Some of that dew is drawn to those below, and holy angels are nourished by it... as it is written: ‘Man ate the bread of the mighty’ (Psalm 78:25), for of that food Israel ate in the wilderness...”¹⁵ The white dew¹⁶ that drips from the skull of *Atika* is the *manna* that nourishes the people in the desert. The passage goes on to explain that when the *Havrayya* study Torah, they are nourished by *manna*, or a heavenly, finer version of *manna*.

In *Mevakshei Hapanim*, Hellner-Eshed points out that the connection between *Arikh Anpin* and *Ze'eir Anpin* is the “eros of the face of the old and the face of the younger”¹⁷ rather than the sexual union of male and female, as is the case with *Tiferet* and *Shechina*. Like the Mother, The Ancient One, or the Ancient of Days, is eternal, constant, and tranquil. *Atika Kadisha* is the source of eternal life.¹⁸

“This brain, which is concealed Wisdom, is tranquil and quiescent in its place, like fine wine upon its lees. This accords with what they say :’An old man’s mind is concealed, his brain concealed and tranquil.”¹⁹ Citing the work of Eric Neumann on the Uroboric Great Mother, Hellner points out that at the undifferentiated realm of *Atika* the Mother is not necessarily solely female.²⁰

Like the idealized Mother, *Atika* offers a compassionate (associated with the right side), steady, open gaze. *Atika*’s eye is so steady and unchanging that it requires no eyelid.²¹ “The eye is not closed, and they are two, turning into one. All is right, there is no left. It neither slumbers nor sleeps, needs no protection. No one protects it; it protects all, watches over all. From the

¹² Hellner, *River*, 272

¹³ Matt, Zohar, vol 8, 327, note 23

¹⁴ Zohar 3:128b

¹⁵ Zohar 2:61b

¹⁶ Zohar 3:128b

¹⁷ Hellner, *Mevakshei*, 71

¹⁸ Zohar 3:135b

¹⁹ Zohar 3:128b

²⁰ Hellner, *Mevakshei*, 70

²¹ In contrast to the instability suggested by the image of the single based pillar in the beginning of the *Idra Rabba*

watching of this eye, all are nourished..”²². Note that in the unifying realm of *Atika*, even the two eyes turn into one.²³ ²⁴The text also suggests that *Atika* is completely open, unguarded and vulnerable.

Just as the connotation of the *Atika Kadisha* is important to our exploration of its nature, so too the name *Arikh Anpin* by which this *partzuf* is also called is significant to our inquiry on several levels. First is the association with the word *aroch* (long). The ancient *Atika* has a long face, perhaps alluding to the beard that is so central to the *Idra Rabba*. However, the conflation of the Mother’s face and breast could also contribute to the sense of the face as elongated.

“From this the length of His face extends through 3,700,000 worlds, and that is called *Erech Apayim*, Elongated Countenance, referring to the length of the face This Ancient of Ancients is called *Arik Anpin*, Elongated Countenance, and the exterior one, *Ze'eir Anpin*, Small countenance, compared to the Ancient One, the Elder, Holy of Holies of Holies. When Ze'eir Anpin gazes at this one, all below is restored and His face expands and lengthens at that time- but not constantly like the Ancient One.”²⁵ Like the mother- infant relationship, the process of rupture and repair is an ongoing one, beginning with the moment of birth, ideally followed by the newborn miraculously finding its way to the mother’s breast and gaze, temporarily restoring oneness . From that moment, the relationship will be dynamic, between separation and connection, upset and soothing. The dynamic nature of the relationship is present in the subtle movements of the face.

Hellner suggests that the gaze of the ancient, tranquil *Atika* is dynamic and complex:

..”there are countless movements and micro- movements pass constantly between the faces and indicate to the observer what is happening in the interior of the person who is facing them. In this way, the gaze is a type of connection that is immeasurably more complex than verbal connection.”²⁶ Words of Torah have the capacity to bridge the distance between self and other. Yet facial movements are far more subtle. Thus I would suggest that for Rabbi Shimon as the isolated, single- based pillar²⁷ to move to come to a place of connection where he can declare, “We are the sum of the whole. Now the pillars have been firmly established.”²⁸, the Havrayya have to do more than speak words of Torah. They must experience and engage in the gaze itself, as we will see below. Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk takes us back to the mother- child dynamic. He suggests that when the message that we receive from these subtle facial clues is that we are safe, we relax. “If we’re lucky in our relationships, we also feel nourished, supported

²² Zohar 3:129b-130a

²³ Matt, Zohar, vol 8, 338, note 50

²⁴ If we think about the infant’s dual experience of mother’s breast and eyes (see Mevakshei Hapanim p 70), the two eyes turning into one takes on new meaning. As the infant approaches the mother, there are two (two breasts and two sets of objects, eyes and breasts). But there are moments during nursing that the tactile and visual experience is of one all encompassing, nourishing eye/breast.

²⁵ Zohar 3:128b

²⁶ Hellner, Mevakshei,75

²⁷ See Liebes, *Studies*

²⁸ Zohar 3:128a

and restored as we look into the face and eyes of the other.”²⁹ This is the promise of the gaze of *Atika*.

Like the maternal gaze, *Atika*'s gaze communicates safety and caring. “The gaze of *Arikh Anpin* is described as wide and peripheral, like a gaze that is not controlled, not invasive and not engaged in the matter of individual contemplation...The gaze is not invasive or particular, but with this, it's absolutely not apathetic. He receives, repairs, and enlivens all who turn to him.”³⁰ Many years ago in a workshop on Spiritual Direction, Rabbi Nancy Flam invited a group of rabbis to get into pairs and practice seeing the other “through the eyes of God.”³¹ The description of the gaze in this passage may elucidate the caring but not invasive presence to which the Spiritual Director might aspire. It may also inform the perception of the “witness” in a meditative practice- the lens through which a meditator encounters their direct sensory experience, a caring gaze that receives all moments equally, without getting wrapped up in story.

In the *Idra* we find that “..the eye of watchfulness is constantly open, constantly smiling, constantly joyous.”³² This idea of positive, loving emotion is supported by the use of verses from *Shir Hashirim* throughout the *Idrot*. According to the text, “the matter depends on love.”³³ The crisis in the *Idra* reminds me of that in *Masechet Taanit*. There, too, the flow from above has stopped, represented by a drought, and God has hidden God's face. In the end of the *masechet*, healing comes with the promise of weddings and white³⁴ dresses. In the *Idra*, too, love is central to the turning of the faces. As I mentioned earlier, however, this is not the love of marriage, but that of older and younger, Source and Created, Mother and Child.

“That which is written: My love shall never depart from you- this is love of the Ancient of Days.”³⁵ The love of *Atika* is an eternal, inner love that is the source and foundation of the world.” Matt explains that the Zohar reads “*Olam chesed yibaneh*” as: (the inner) hesed (*Atika*) will build “*Olam*” which is associated with *Ze'eir Anpin*.³⁶ In the *Idra Zuta* we read that “before the world was created, they did not gaze face to face; and therefore primordial worlds were destroyed, and primordial worlds were fashioned in disarray.”³⁷ On this passage Matt notes that “without this harmony, nothing could endure.”³⁸

²⁹ Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, 80

³⁰ Hellner, Mevakshei, 69

³¹ Institute for Jewish Spirituality retreat

³² Zohar 3:130a

³³ Zohar 3:128a, although this use of love is clearly not romantic as in *Shir Hashirim*

³⁴ In *Taanit*, white is not specifically associated with chesed, but the image adds one more layer to our understanding of white as compassion/ untainted love.

³⁵ Zohar 3:133b

³⁶ Matt, Zohar, vol 8, 367-8 note 168

³⁷ Zohar 3:292b

³⁸ Matt, Zohar, vol 9, 809 note 127

Yehuda Liebes suggests that the love among the Havrayya is also foundational to their existence. Further, it grants them access to the secrets of Torah. He cites the following passage (Zohar 2:190b): “When the Companions came before R. Shimon, he saw a sign in their faces [that there was love among them], and he said: Come my holy children, come beloved of the King, come my cherished ones who love one another. For as R. Abba once said: All those companions who do not love one another pass from the world before their time. All the Companions in the days of R. Shimon loved one another in soul and spirit. That is why [the secrets of the Torah] were disclosed in R. Shimon’s generation. As R. Shimon was wont to say: all the Companions who do not love one another divert from the straight path, and cause blemish to the Torah...”³⁹

The notion of *Atika* as the healing, sustaining Mother, may give us deeper insight into the crisis depicted in the *Idra*. As the previous passage suggests, absence of bonding love “causes a blemish to the Torah” and may be the violation that is discussed in the opening passage of the *Idra Rabba*. The call to *Havrayya* who are seated is to rise and “act for YHVH- .” “*Et l’aasot l’Adonai...for they have violated your Torah.*”⁴⁰ There has been a violation of Torah, which is equated with YHVH and *Ze’eir Anpin*, that is central to the crisis. No longer is it sufficient to act *lishmah*⁴¹- for *Shechina*, adorning her to stimulate the divine union.

“Rabbi Shimon said to the Companions, ‘How long will we sit on a single- based pillar?’ ”⁴² While the precise meaning of this term may be unclear⁴³ , I would suggest that the qualities of isolation and instability are clearly present in the image. *Ze’eir Anpin* is no longer the responsive, open, mediating partzuf that is so central to the functioning of the entire Godhead and thus to the well being of humanity.

Three additional hints to this divine and human state in the opening passage are worth noting. First, in the phrase “*yomin ze’irin*” (literally, “days are few”), we might be reminded of one of the names of *Atika Kadisha*, *Atika Yomin*, (the Ancient of Days). In fact, Matt points to several Zoharic manuscripts in which the name “*Ze’eir Yomin*” is found in another passage.⁴⁴ What would happen if we read “*yomin ze’irin*” as an appositive, or as a consequence of the violation of Torah? Thus we may read: “They have violated your Torah, the Youthful of Days,” or “They have violated your Torah, *Tiferet* (or the *sefirot*)⁴⁵ has become “Ze’eir”- constricted, isolated, unstable.

³⁹ Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 37

⁴⁰ Zohar 3:127b

⁴¹Think of Torah *lishmah*, as Matt describes ‘a single based pillar’ as ‘having an inadequate, unstable understanding, in which the divine structure is not yet fully comprehended or not yet balanced.’(Matt, Zohar, p 318 note 2)) Thus the Havrayya must engage in the dangerous, intimate work of *Torah l’adonai* in contrast to *Torah lishma*- an understanding of the *Sod* of Torah (see connection to the story of the four who entered the PaRDeS below.

⁴² Zohar 3:127b

⁴³ Matt, Zohar, v8 318 note 2; see also Yehuda Liebes, *The Messiah of the Zohar*

⁴⁴ Matt, Zohar v8 390 note 249; see Zohar 3:136b below

⁴⁵ The word day is often associated with *Tiferet* and sometimes with the *sefirot* in general 202, אליהו חיים, כלפון, מילון עברי קבלי

“ Second, “the Reapers of the Field,” described by Matt as “those who harvest secrets of Torah,”⁴⁶ are also described as “*ze’irin*,” strengthening the parallel between *Ze’eir Anpin* and the *Havrayya*- perhaps they too are feeling isolated and violated, or simply that their fate is bound with the capacity of *Ze’eir* to act from a mature, stable, soothed state. Third, *Et laasot l’Adonai* stands in stark contrast to the description of “*et ratzon*” in which the people can surrender and receive the flow of nourishment:

“When the blessed Holy One is aroused to delight with the righteous, the face of the Ancient of Days shines upon the face of the Youthful of Days, and His forehead is revealed and illumines this forehead. Then it is called a time of favor (*et ratzon*⁴⁷). Whenever Judgment looms, and this forehead of *Ze’eir Anpin* is revealed, the forehead of the Ancient of Ancients is revealed, and Judgment is soothed and not enacted”⁴⁸, This time, *et laasot l’Adonai*, is a time for human action, to heal the broken face of God, the Torah that has been violated.

The term “*heferu*”- for they have violated” may refer to the violation of a covenant.⁴⁹ The term may mean “to break” as in the breaking of the brotherhood of Judah and Israel,⁵⁰ or “to neglect.”⁵¹ These connotations would give us the sense that there has been a severing of the bond between Israel and *Tiferet* (know as Torah) that has been initiated by Israel. We could certainly understand the sins of the people as constituting this break, causing *Ze’eir Anpin* to move from a place of connection and unity to a place of isolation and dualism. Having been spurned by the people and losing his connection to his source in *Atika Kadisha*, *Ze’eir Anpin* is a “single based pillar” instead of resting on the tripod required for stability. At one level, a stable pillar that rests on three legs would refer to *Tiferet’s* capacity to mediate between *Chesed* and *Gevurah* in a balanced way. At another level, it points to *Ze’eir Anpin’s* mediative function between the oneness of *Atika* and the dualism of the world below.

It is upon this unstable pillar that the *Havrayya* sit, as humanity is under the supervision of *Ze’eir Anpin*. It is interesting to note that the model of a stable triad is found in the image of Rabbi Shimon, R. Elazar, and Rabbi Abba, held together by the love that they share⁵² This triad is also constructed by the placement of the *Idra Rabba* itself, between the *Nazir*, who separates himself from Judgment,⁵³ and a discussion of *Parashat Naso*, in which the *Kohanim* are instructed to bless the people with awe and humility. The content of the three-part Priestly blessing evokes the image of a protecting, radiant divine face that brings its recipient peace.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Matt, *Zohar*,v8, 319, note 3

⁴⁷ See Ps 69:14

⁴⁸ *Zohar* 3:136b, also see *Zohar* 3:287b

⁴⁹ see Zechariah 11:10

⁵⁰ see Zechariah 11:14

⁵¹ see *Brachot* 63a

⁵² Rabbi Shimon sits in a stable triad with R. Elazar in front of him and R Abba on the other side when he says, “We are the sum of the whole. Now the pillars have been firmly established.” 3:128a

⁵³ “He is called a Nazirite of Elohim (Judges 13:5), not a Nazirite of YHVH- separated from Judgment entirely” *Zohar* 3:127a

⁵⁴ *Zohar* 3:146a

Coming back to *Atika* as mother and *Ze'eir Anpin* as infant offers another lens on the nature and impact of the violation. Psychiatrist Marylene Cloitre argues that when repeated trauma or neglect is experienced at a young age, symptoms include both post traumatic stress and “also other symptoms reflecting disturbances predominantly in affective and interpersonal self-regulatory capacities such as difficulties with anxious arousal, anger management, dissociative symptoms, and aggressive or socially avoidant behaviors.”⁵⁵ This sounds like the isolated, wrathful *Ze'eir Anpin* when he has been violated. A few points about these findings: First, symptoms are present whether there is an active violation or merely neglect. Thus the precise definition of “*heferu*” becomes less important- neglect and desecration are both experienced as a threat to survival, whether for the young child or the Torah. Second, we are not talking about a single instance of sin (or the inevitable separation of *Shechina* and *Tiferet*, or mother and newborn) from which *teshuva* and reconnection are easily attained. Rather, the emergency that the *Idra* describes is an ongoing pattern of neglect or abuse. At a communal level, this is a society in which values and perspective have been askew for a significant period of time. Third, Cloitre makes the point that the impact of trauma on children is qualitatively different and more severe than on adults. The trauma is particularly impactful on the youthful *Ze'eir Anpin*.

The violation of Torah/ YHVH results in the sefirah of *Tiferet* and *Ze'eir Anpin* as a whole closing in on itself, a resulting lack of responsiveness to stimulation from the outside, and imbalanced reactivity and anger. In this moment there is a rigidity that prevents the flow from above to below that is the foundation of existence.⁵⁶

In his important book on trauma, *The Body Keeps the Score*, Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk points to Porges's Polyvagal Theory, which suggests that we read the subtle emotions of another through their face. “Our mirror neurons register their inner experience, and our own bodies make internal adjustments to whatever we notice.”⁵⁷ “Children are exquisitely sensitive to facial expression.”⁵⁸ Thus the quality (positive or negative) of the parental presence can be central to the construction and healing of trauma.

Van der Kolk suggests that a common effect of trauma is “depersonalization”- losing your sense of self⁵⁹ Hellner draws on the work of Winnicott, Eigen and others to explore the experience of the infant in the gaze of the mother. She suggests that it is in the maternal gaze that the infant

⁵⁵ “A Developmental Approach to Complex PTSD: Childhood and Adult Cumulative Trauma as Predictors of Symptom Complexity “ *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, Vol. 22, No. 5, October 2009, pp. 399–408 (C 2009)

⁵⁶ The sense of the Torah retreating into itself in response to violation or neglect is indicated in Talmud Berachot 63a, “And if you see a generation for whom Torah is beloved, disseminate... However, if you see a generation for whom Torah is not beloved, gather; do not cause the Torah to be disgraced, as it is stated: “It is time to work for the Lord; they have violated Your Torah.”

⁵⁷ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 80

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 112, based on work of John Bowlby

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 101

organizes its emotional world and constructs its sense of self.⁶⁰ Going back to the notion of the violation of Torah as a traumatic experience, there is a need to reconstruct the self after a traumatic event. Perhaps *Ze'eir Anpin* has lost his sense of identity and mission (to mediate oneness and duality, chesed and gevurah) and needs to reestablish his identity in the loving gaze of *Atika*.

Emanuel Levinas takes this concept one step further. In his essay, *On the Significance of the Face*, Eigen writes that "For Levinas, the human face gives rise to a sense of the Infinite in relation which one can become inexhaustibly real."⁶¹ Here we see that the face and eye(s) are not only the mirror to the soul, but to *Ein Sof*, and that there is an establishment of self that takes place in this experience. Perhaps it is precisely the construction of self in response to the face that is the healing process in which *Ze'eir Anpin* must engage.

Eigen's summary of clinical vignettes regarding the therapeutic effect of the face to face encounter with the therapist is evocative of *Ze'eir Anpin's* experience of *Atika*: "I see you but not just you. I am experiencing a more real, perfect version of you, a glowing light you, inexpressibly radiant and fluid. I can go in and through you yet feel more myself than ever. It is as if I entered and passed through a highly charged yet resistanceless medium and feel newly conscious and restored."⁶²

Central to the face to face encounter in Eigen's work is "a dual unity in which both areas of distinction and union bring each other into existence."⁶³ To be whole, *Ze'eir Anpin* must be able to experience dualism and oneness simultaneously as discussed above. This is achieved in the moment of *panim el panim*. Both mother and child have the possibility of experiencing themselves more fully and achieving profound sense of connection, particularly in the act of nursing.

Eigen writes that "the experience of the other's face carries with it a sense of goodness that becomes a... home base of the human self. Chronic deviations from this sense of intrinsic goodness are ultimately... deforming and alienating."⁶⁴ On one level, in *Ze'eir Anpin's* moment of isolation and instability in response to the human evil he encounters, it is goodness that restores a sense of stability, alignment, and connection.

In the Idrot we find that when a non-dual perspective is employed, compassion, healing and connection are possible:

"There is no left in this Ancient One; all is right [compassion]. He is seen and not seen, concealed and not concealed. This pertains to His enhancements, all the more so to Him."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Hellner, Mevakshei, 68

⁶¹ Michael Eigen, *On the Significance of the Face*, (1980-81). *Psychoanalytic Review*, 67:425-439.

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ Zohar 3:129a

Not only is it possible to experience *Atika Kadisha* through the flow of compassion into the lower *sephiroth* and into this world (his enhancements), but his very self is described in this passage as not entirely concealed and hidden.

But when *Ze'eir Anpin* has lost the perspective of oneness, it is not easy for him to see that connection with *Atika* is possible. *Atika* is described as concealed:

“In the hollow of the skull, a membrane of air of concealed supernal Wisdom, uninterrupted, and this is not to be found or opened. This membrane envelops the brain of supernal wisdom, so this Wisdom is covered, not opened, by that membrane.”⁶⁶

Of the tranquil brain of *Atika*, the *Idra* writes: “no one knows it except itself”⁶⁷

The impenetrable nature of that which is, in fact, penetrated, is described well in this passage on the beard of *Atika*, which is described as “issuing from the concealed brain, as from behind a wall...”⁶⁸

There is a sense of *Atika* as wholly other. From a dualistic lens, *Ze'eir Anpin* perceives an impenetrable, unbridgeable distance - longing to return to “Eden above” but feeling as if he has been permanently exiled from the Garden. It's in this context that the gaze has potential to wield its power- to bridge that which is unbridgeable, to make connection where none is possible, between the world of oneness to the world of dualism, to create one from two.

Atika gazes at all who turn to him⁶⁹, but here we return to the fundamental problem with which the *Idra Rabba* began- *Ze'eir Anpin* has been violated, closed in on himself, looking only from a perspective of dualism. The challenge presented in much of the *Idra* is that unlike the mother who will come searching for infant when he is in distress, *Ze'eir Anpin* must actively turn toward the gaze of *Atika Kadisha*. In this rigid state, how can he turn his head and soften enough to receive the healing, softening gaze? I would suggest that he is stiff-necked, unable to turn his head to gaze above. Another way to look at it is that he has overly identified with the stiff-necked Israelites,⁷⁰ and has become too much like them in their rigidity and inability to look up to the higher realms.

Melila suggests that, “The task of the *Idra* participants can be described as an attempt to facilitate the movement of the head so that he can turn his gaze toward the face of *Arieh Anpin*”⁷¹ This seemingly impossible task reminds me of the Talmudic story of Rabbi Yohanan and his student, Rabbi Hiyya. Here, too, “A prisoner cannot generally free himself from prison, but depends on others to release him from his shackles.⁷²” and here, too, the simple act of caring presence is central to the act of healing. According to Van der Kolk, “traumatized human beings

⁶⁶ Zohar 3:128b

⁶⁷ Zohar 3:288b

⁶⁸ Zohar 3:129a

⁶⁹ Hellner, *Mevakshei*, 69

⁷⁰ See Exodus 32:9. In Exodus 34:9-11, the concepts of *רחם* and appealing to God's face for mercy are notable.

⁷¹ Hellner, *Mevakshei*, 71

⁷² Berachot 5b

recover in the context of relationships. “⁷³ In the case of the *Idra*, the righteous join *Ze'eir Anpin* and from that place “desire...to see and cleave to the arrayal of the Ancient One, concealed of all”⁷⁴ They are present with *Ze'eir Anpin*⁷⁵, but their stance is one of joy and turning to *Atika* (or at least the belief that access is possible). They are the “supremely righteous,” who “are destined to see this [bathing of Ze'eir in white light] through wisdom.”⁷⁶

Rabbi Shimon is in a unique position to understand the experience of *Ze'eir Anpin* in his crisis. As Rabbi Dorothy Richman pointed out,⁷⁷ he knows what it is like to feel isolated and to have a judgmental gaze that is destructive, and to acquire a gaze of compassion and healing.⁷⁸ Like Moses, Rabbi Shimon sees through a “speculum that shines”⁷⁹, which is identified in the Zohar as *Tiferet*⁸⁰. Thus he understands Ze'eir's experience both through empathy and his own lived experience. It is with this confidence that he is able to say to both *Ze'eir Anpin* and the rest of the *Havrayya*, “How fine! The Ancient of Days will open his eye upon you.”⁸¹

I imagine the *Havrayya* sitting with a frightened *Ze'eir Anpin*, describing to him the beautiful images of the gaze found in the *Idrot*, hoping to spark his imagination and belief in the possibility of connection. However, they may also call on *Atika*'s presence to accomplish their goal:

“When Israel encamped by the sea, they saw many troops from above to below- all assembled against Israel. In their distress, they began praying. At that moment, the Holy Ancient One appeared and favor became manifest in all those upper worlds, Then radiance of all lustered.”⁸²

According to this passage, it is possible to reach *Atika* through prayer. Similarly in the following passage, Israel's prayer initiates the healing from the forehead, the source of *ratzon* (favor) to soothe *Ze'eir Anpin*.⁸³ The previous discussion of mirror neurons is helpful to us here, as the forehead of *Ze'eir Anpin* reflects the forehead of *Atika*.

“When this forehead is revealed all the prosecutors are aroused, and the whole world is given over to judgement. But when the prayers of Israel rise up before the Ancient of Days, and he

⁷³ Van der Kolk, *Body*, 212

⁷⁴ 3:129a

⁷⁵ as was the doctor who got under the table with the turkey prince in Reb Nachman's tale

⁷⁶ Zohar 3:130a

⁷⁷ In *hevruta*

⁷⁸ BT Shabbat 33b-34a

⁷⁹ BT Sukkah 45b

⁸⁰ Hellner, *River*, 37

⁸¹ Zohar 3:130a

⁸² Zohar 2:52b

⁸³ If we are concerned that this is contradictory to the notion that *Atika* is constantly beaming, and *Ze'eir* must turn his own head to initiate the healing process, we have only to remember that the capacity to hold two mutually exclusive notions is central to the zohar, and *kal v'chomer* to the *Idra*.

wishes to have mercy upon his children, he reveals the forehead of the Will of wills, and it illumines [the forehead of] *Ze'eir Anpin*, and judgment is quieted.”⁸⁴

In both of these cases, prayer comes in a moment of urgency and distress. Rabbi Dorothy Richman⁸⁵ points to Zohar 3:195a, in which the prayer of the poor person is the most esteemed, “Because a poor person is brokenhearted, and it is written: YHVH is near to the brokenhearted...” In our context, I would suggest that that prayer of the distressed (Israel who is in a state of “*Ze'eir*” as seen in the opening passage of the *Idra*) reaches *Atika* (as in the previous texts), *Atika* heals *Ze'eir Anpin*, and then “YHVH is near to the brokenhearted.” That is, *Ze'eir Anpin* is then able to come to Israel and the Shechina is mercy and love.

The Zohar makes a link between the name *Arikh Anpin* and *Erech Apaim*:

“When His [*Ze'eir Anpin*’s] face gazes upon the face of the Holy Ancient One, all is called *Erekh Appin*. Long- suffering. Vast countenance. What is meant by *Erekh Appin*? Healing Countenance. For there is no healing in the world except when they gaze face to face.”⁸⁶ Matt explains that the text is drawing on another meaning of the word *erech* here. In Isaiah 58:8, the term means “your healing”⁸⁷ This chapter of Isaiah depicts God as a vindicator and protector, appropriate for one who is violated and in need of healing. The chapter discusses seeking God in *teshuva* and turning to right action, bringing us back both to the sins that caused the rupture in the beginning of the *Idra* and to our own use of the 13 middot in our *teshuva* process.

The clearest connection here is to the 13 middot, the verse that we chant in our deepest appeal to *midat harachamim* in the selichot prayers. But it is also worth examining another appearance of the phrase *erech apaim*, in Psalm 103. In this psalm, God is described as having “steadfast *chesed*” , and as a father full of *rachamim*. It is interesting to note that in verse 5 of the psalm, “He satisfies you with good things in the prime of life, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s,” invoking the dynamic between young and old.

Perhaps it is the urgency or surrender that accompanies the prayer of the distressed that makes it so effective in calling forth *Atika*. But in prayer and song, as in meditation, there is a softening and lengthening of the breath that may be central to its power. Hellner suggests that “the divine reality of *Ze'eir Anpin*, and from this also of the people fashioned in the divine image, is dependent on the quality of the breath⁸⁸- in the ability to breathe, to relax, to be filled with spirit, patience, and forgiveness.” *Ze'eir Anpin*, The Impatient One, is one who is literally, “taking a short time for one’s nostrils to flare”⁸⁹ Not only does the “stiff-neck” of *Ze'eir* need to soften, but the “shortness of breath” (*kotzer ruach*), also needs to widen and become more spacious. I would suggest that both of these conditions - *kotzer ruach* and *kshei oref*- are the product of an oppressive, violating experience in which ease and connection are lost, both biblically and

⁸⁴ Zohar 3:288b

⁸⁵ In hevruta

⁸⁶ Zohar 3:292b

⁸⁷ Matt, Zohar Vol 8, 811-12 note 136 “R. Shimon associates *erech* with “to heal” as in Isaiah 58:8

⁸⁸ Or spirit (*ruach*)

⁸⁹ Hellner, *Mevakshei*, 129

zoharically. In this state of *kotzer ruach*, *Ze'eir* is unable to listen (like the enslaved Israelites in Exodus 6:9), to receive and to connect with compassion.

According to Hellner, The task of the *hevraya* from this lens is to completely cover the rageful face of *Ze'eir Anpin* and to “fill it with healing spacious breath from *Arikh Anpin* and to fill it with tenderness and compassion.”⁹⁰

I imagine *Atika Kadisha* sitting in tranquil, quiet contemplation. With this in mind, perhaps the Elongated Countenance of *Arikh Anpin* that we discussed above is also facilitated by the dropping of the jaw that naturally occurs in meditation. The image of meditation is supported in this passage by the reference to *Ze'eir Anpin* as the “exterior one.” From the perspective of the Mother-infant, the interior-exterior relationship switches at birth. The mother who has been surrounding the infant in utero is now on the inside, and has to find a way to nevertheless contain, protect, and nurture. The infant, who is now on the exterior, needs to find a way to feel safe and held. Typically we imagine the sephirot arranged vertically, with *Keter* or *Atika* far above us as we are positioned underneath the *Shechina*. But as Arthur Green has suggested,⁹¹ it is also possible to think of the sephirot as concentric circles in which *Atika Kadisha* lies at the very heart of reality, with the material world at the most external level. Elsewhere the *Idra* discusses three levels of the brain of *Atika*, one inside the other. From this construct, perhaps we may access *Atika* by turning inward rather than upward, as we might in meditation. If *Ze'eir Anpin* is “quick to flare his nostrils’ and impatient,⁹² *Arikh Anpin* may be seen as the patient one who is able to take long, spacious breaths as might be achieved in meditation.

Matt describes the situation in the *Idra Rabba* as follows: there is a “state of emergency, because due to human misconduct the world is vulnerable to divine wrath. The mystical heroes set out on a dangerous mission to restore the balance in the upper worlds. By penetrating the hidden realms and conveying their insights, they seek to enhance God Himself...”⁹³

What specifically is the danger in approaching the higher realms? It may be that *Din* will dominate and they will be in its path,⁹⁴ like getting close to an active volcano. Second, the *Havrayya* will have to move from the world of pure dualism closer to the world of oneness. The ego, or sense of coherent, separate self, becomes threatened. Just as in the journey into the PaRDeS in which three of the four were forever altered or died in their attempt to reach *Sod*⁹⁵, here too three of the *Havrayya* died on this perilous journey of leaving the world of pure dualism and separate self. Reference to this connection is found in “...these Companions revere the

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ Individual conversation many years ago

⁹² Matt, Zohar, v8 323 note 14, see Proverbs 14:17

⁹³ *Ibid*, xii-xiii

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 341 note 64

⁹⁵ Chagigah 14b: “When, upon your arrival in the upper worlds, you reach pure marble stones, do not say: Water, water, although they appear to be water, because it is stated: ‘He who speaks falsehood shall not be established before My eyes’ (Psalms 101:7).” For our purposes, way may read this as a warning of adopting a dualistic perspective (saying ‘water’ twice) when approaching *Ayin*; or perhaps the importance of seeing things for exactly what they are.

blessed Holy One, and they have already entered the Holy Assembly of the Dwelling, some of them entering and emerging.”⁹⁶

As Rabbi Shimon begins, he warns against carved or molten images - that the Havrayya shouldn't take the detailed descriptions too literally.⁹⁷ Yet at some level *Ze'eir* has turned into a molten image in this moment- there is no divinity shining through him, and he is rigid, not able to move freely between *Din* and *Chesed*, oneness and dualism.

According to Eigen, "union and distinction are always found together... a self with no reference point outside it could have no sense of its own existence. It seems fairer to say that a basic ambiguity- a simultaneity of areas of distinctiveness and union- represents an essential structure of human subjectivity... If one tries to push beyond these poles, the sense of self must disappear- to be undifferentiated and exist is not possible." This delicate balance is the *tikkun* that the Havrayya seek for *Ze'eir Anpin* in his unstable state. We seek this balance for ourselves as well- to live in a world of dualism without forgetting the we are all connected and interdependent, as the following passage reminds us:

"The principle of all: The Ancient of Ancients and *Ze'eir Anpin* are all one- He was all, is all, will be all; He did not change, will not change, does not change.... Now you might say, 'What is the difference between one and the other? Well, all is evenly balanced, but by us paths are separated, by us judgment comes into being, and from our perspective they differ from one another. These mysteries are transmitted only to the Reapers of the Field [those who harvest secrets of Torah]."⁹⁸

It is human action that actually initiates the negative cycle of separation and judgment ,but that separation of the paths and of the *partzufim* is only from our dualistic perspective.⁹⁹ It is on us to find the "unifying congruence that permeates everything"^{100 101} It is both particularly difficult and important to do so when we feel like we are sitting on a single-based pillar and that divine wrath is overtaking compassion, or when we feel like *Ze'eir Anpin*, quick to anger, isolated, inflexible.

In a recent interview¹⁰², Tony Schwartz¹⁰³ commented on the situation in which we find ourselves as a country:

⁹⁶ Zohar 3:127b, also see note 7 in Matt, Zohar on this passage

⁹⁷ The reference to the thirteen middot in Exodus that we discussed previously also points to the golden calf.

⁹⁸ Zohar 3:141b

⁹⁹ see Hellner, Mevakshei, 78

¹⁰⁰ Rav Kook

¹⁰¹ Hellner, Mevakshei, 69: "If the flow of shefa doesn't reach us or *Ze'eir anpin*, it's not because the facial expression has changed, rather because his face is hidden from us"

¹⁰² with Ari Melber (The Beat)

¹⁰³ Co-author of *The Art of the Deal* (with Donald Trump) and author of *The Way We Work is Not Working*.

“What binds us together as a civilized society, what civility serves, is the willingness, the capacity to be both truthful and compassionate..and without them [truth and compassion] we lose our sense of safety, our sense of security, our trust in one another. And civilization doesn’t hold together...when you begin to debase the most core values every contemplative tradition has valued, we’re at a point where we sit faced with chaos and uncertainty- at a minimum with fear and anxiety about what’s going to happen next.”

“Honesty without compassion is actually cruelty. You need these entailed values in order to be a whole human being. If you have neither, the result is... chaos in its impact on us. “

As in the *Idra Rabba*, it is now once again time to act for the Force that mediates between Din and Chesed, that brings a perspective of Oneness into our world of dualism.¹⁰⁴ In our society that is out of balance and divided, may we heed the call to bring divine and human faces into loving gaze across difference and fear. When we feel challenged, angry, and afraid, may we be soothed and softened by the gaze of *Atika* so that we may have the wisdom to take a long breath, look into the eyes of the other, and find a way to say,

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:
יְאֵר יְהוָה פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְּךָ:
יֵשָׂא יְהוָה פְּנֵיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:

*Ken y'hi ratzon.*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ In the past two years, there has been an increase in spiritual practice, religious affiliation, and activism in liberal circles in this country, as well as an increase in power among women (i.e., the me too movement, exponential increase in women running for political office).

¹⁰⁵ The Priestly blessing is relevant in several ways: the qualities *Atika Kadisha* include protection, radiance, favor (*ratzon*); the divine gaze effects blessing and shalom for *Ze'eir Anpin* and humanity; and the aspects of the blessing associated with the divine face (*Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha*; *Yisa Adonai panav eilecha*) could describe the gaze itself. Alternatively, *Ya'er Adonai*.. could describe *Atika's* radiance, while *Yisa Adonai*... could describe the lift of *Ze'eir's* face necessary to receive *Atika's* awaiting gaze.