

The Daily Portion

- Sivan Rahav Meir

Five things about the Ari Hakadosh

Translated by Janine Muller Sherr

1) This week was the *yahrzeit* of the Arizal – Rabbi Yitzchak Luria– who passed away 454 years ago on the fifth of Av at age 38. He was a great Kabbalist who delved into the esoteric dimension of the Torah which later influenced the development of Chasidic thought. On that day, many people have the custom to light a candle in his memory, study his teachings, and visit his grave in Tzfat.

2) He explained that everything he was able to achieve was due to his joyful observance of the mitzvot. In other words, he didn't perform the mitzvot out of a sense of obligation but from his strong desire to connect to the Infinite Light.

3) His students related that he could have relied on heavenly guidance to explain the holy Zohar – the foundational text of Jewish mysticism that has traditionally been attributed to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Instead, he told them that he chose to toil and study with devotion in order to achieve the deepest mastery of this holy text on his own.

4) He lived in Tzfat for only two years but it was there that he initiated a revolutionary approach to Judaism. On Friday evening – toward sunset – he and his peers would dress in their Shabbat finery and walk into the fields to welcome the Shabbat Queen with joy. The prayers he composed for this occasion laid the foundation for the Kabbalat Shabbat service that we continue to recite on Friday night to this day.

5) He modified the traditional prayer book by integrating deep Kabbalistic meditations and kavanot (intentions), but one line that appears in his siddur and is also engraved on his tombstone – can be adopted by everyone. He requested that we should recite the following verse before our morning prayers: “Behold, I take upon myself the commandment of ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

May his memory be a blessing.

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