"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"

בס"ד

# Wonders

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of HaRav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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*In a letter to students the Lubavitcher Rebbe related three arguments for God's existence. These form a ladder to faith, which falls away once we reach it.*

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*The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741*

*"…It would be proper to publish your classes in book form. With blessings for success…"*



# Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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# BEYOND PROOF: EXPLORING THREE ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

In the spring of 1959, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, received a letter from a group of high school students. They asked him a question: As skeptics, could they be shown irrefutable proof of God's existence?

By this time, the Rebbe was widely recognized and respected by many, devoting significant time each week to responding to hundreds of letters sent to him from all over the world. Notably, before becoming the Rebbe, he had studied philosophy and mathematics at the University of Berlin and later engineering in Paris, including auditing lectures at the Sorbonne. His background in both science and broader fields meant that people often reached out to him with questions about the intersection of science and faith, which likely explains why these young people chose to write specifically to him.

The Rebbe opened his response by addressing the complexity and relativity of terms like "proof" and "existence," and noted that the letter did not specify what kind of proof would satisfy the writers. He then went on to present three different arguments for the existence of God. More precisely, he offered two arguments as "proofs" and a third, which challenged the very notion of needing proof.

We will summarize these three points and then attempt to uncover the underlying thought process within them. The order in which the Rebbe presented the arguments, as we'll show, hints at a mental journey—a ladder of reasoning that leads the mind to a state higher than argumentation. Finally, we'll take this process one step further, to a concept implicit in the Rebbe's words, but not explicitly articulated.

## THREE ARGUMENTS

The first argument is a classic one from Jewish sources. It states that the fact that the *story of the God's revelation to the Israelites at Mount Sinai was the collective experience of an entire nation, and was passed down as such through the generations, is itself a proof of its truth.*

The reasoning states that a single individual might imagine or fabricate a revelation, and rumors about miracles or revelations happening elsewhere could be easily invented. But how could an entire nation, millions of families, one day begin to lie to their children that their ancestors witnessed something like this, and repeat the lie every Passover? The only way that generations across the globe would consistently pass on this same testimony is if at some point a whole generation had actually witnessed it.

Thus goes the first argument. You may be, and probably are, unconvinced by

this. We understand this but ask that you suspend your judgment for now and read on.

The second argument is also well-known, and this time can be found outside the Jewish tradition too. It posits that the *existence of a complex, fine-tuned universe with an incomprehensibly large number of components operating in harmony, points to a designer*.

If we stumbled upon a factory filled with robots operating automatically and in sync, we would have no doubt that an engineer had designed and built the robots. Indeed, the more self-sufficient and harmonious their operation would be, the more impressed we would be with the engineer's intellect. Likewise, the universe, even down to the level of physical matter, is such an intricate system, with countless particles working in harmony and obeying delicate, precise laws, that this serves as proof of an intelligent Designer behind it. This is the second argument, also known as the "argument from design."

The third and final argument is the most intriguing and appears to be an original argument formulated by the Rebbe himself. After politely presenting the students with the two classic arguments, the Rebbe allowed himself to question the very premise behind their request. Those asking for proof of God's existence, he wrote, assume that the reality of Creation itself is beyond doubt, and they base their question on the existence of a hidden Creator behind it. *But this very assumption is, itself, questionable*. According to the latest scientific findings, he wrote (referring to Relativity theory and quantum physics), the nature of reality itself is far from certain: the matter that seems solid has been revealed to be composed of intangible energy fields; time that seemed absolute is now seen as relative; causality, once thought mechanical, is now understood as probabilistic; and our ability to perceive reality is fundamentally clouded by uncertainty.

In fact, long before these scientific developments, philosophers such as Descartes, Hume, and Kant had grappled with a basic problem: the reliability of our senses. How do we know that what our senses show us truly exists? Given this, the Rebbe wrote, it is actually simpler or easier to believe in the existence of a Creator than it is to take reality as an unquestionable given. It makes more sense to think there is a guiding reason behind the mystery of this uncertain existence than to cling to a reality that may be virtual.

The Rebbe closed his letter with a remark that human nature is such that when we are presented with simple proofs, we often resist them precisely because of their simplicity. But he expressed hope that this would not be the case with these young people and that their preconceptions would not prevent them from considering the arguments thoughtfully. He invited them to respond and share their thoughts, even if they did not agree at all.

## THE SEQUENCE OF ARGUMENTS

Let us focus our attention on the *order* in which the Lubavitcher Rebbe presented these three arguments. The sequence does not appear to be arbitrary. But what exactly was the rationale behind it, and what does it teach us?

The first thing we can note is that the three proofs seem to gradually advance from concepts that reflect the spirit of past generations, to those that are more aligned with the mindset of our own era.

The first argument, that which asserts that testimony passed down by an entire nation has undeniable validity, seems to lack the persuasive force it once had. While it remains quite difficult to refute and therefore carries a certain undeniable weight, it is unlikely to convince many educated people in our time (those it does convince are likely already believers, or on their way to becoming ones). In fact, they are more likely to sneer at it than regard it as a necessary conclusion. This lack of acceptance does not necessarily indicate a flaw in the argument; rather, it reflects a broad modernist resistance toward such "medieval" sounding arguments (a fact the Rebbe himself hinted at this in the end).

The second argument, the argument from design, has a somewhat stronger foothold today and is indeed still the subject of widespread discussion. Modern science continues to uncover additional layers of complexity in nature, intricately woven into the most fundamental physical levels, defying any simple reduction. Empirical evidence has accumulated in support of what is called the "anthropic principle," which suggests that the universe is fine-tuned to allow for life, especially intelligent life. For these reasons, some scientists accept a version of the argument from design as a basis for believing in some kind of intelligence behind the universe, even if not the personal God of the Bible. Still, the argument does not enjoy widespread support. A great many intellectuals are skeptical of it and invest effort in trying to refute it on biological and physical grounds. Despite the evidence in its favor, this argument also struggles to gain traction among the educated, who still find it somewhat contrived and anachronistic.

The third argument, however, concerning the inherent uncertainty of reality, belongs to an entirely different category than the previous two. Ironically, despite challenging the apparent solidity of scientific knowledge, it actually resonates far more with the spirit of the times than the first two. If any idea might strike a chord with sophisticated thinkers today, it is this one. Though it, too, is constructed somewhat like a proof and seeks to bring one closer to belief in a Creator, it does so not by instilling certainty but by *sowing doubt*—first in the certainty that we place in the existence of reality, and then in the denial of it having a creator. In offering this line of reasoning, the Rebbe is making a kind of "quantum leap" into a new intellectual space, where the starting point is not reality, but the Divine.[1]

Another thing to note is that as the arguments approach our era's mentality, they cover less religious ground. The first argument, if accepted, proves not only the existence of a Creator but also the truth of the Torah, the Exodus from Egypt,

1. In Chassidic terminology, this describes a transition from the mindset of "reality is a given, God's existence is doubtful," to its opposite, "God is a given, the existence of reality is doubtful."

and the 613 commandments. The second argument, by contrast, only purports to prove the existence of an intelligent designer, possibly a benevolent one (as the laws of nature are conducive to life), but certainly not the God of Israel who gave the Torah. Finally, the third argument is not a proof at all but a challenge to the very existence of reality, thus indirectly opening a pathway to belief in a Creator.

The more we approach the modern mindset, the less can be said with certainty.

## FOUR ARGUMENTS, FOUR WORLDS

To go deeper into the underlying pattern of the sequence of proofs we shall now enlist some Kabbalistic concepts.

Kabbalah speaks of four "worlds" that form reality, each one residing above the other: *Assiyah* (action), *Yetzirah* (formation), *Beri'ah* (creation), and *Atzilut* (emanation). The term "worlds" doesn't necessarily refer to separate metaphysical realms. It could also be construed as referring to *distinct levels of perceiving reality*. Each of the four "worlds" constitutes a world*view*—a picture of reality as seen from a higher perspective than its predecessor.

Among these worlds, *Atzilut* or Emanation represents a sublime level of awareness where there is no separation between the Creator and creation, whereas the three lower worlds do experience such separation. In this context, a demand for proof of the Creator's existence could only come from the three lower worlds. Indeed, we can draw a detailed parallel between the Rebbe's three arguments and the lower worlds, in ascending order:

The first argument aligns with the world of *Assiyah*, action, the lowest and most earthly level. This is a world of concrete facts and gradual, uninterrupted causality. Accordingly, the first argument, based on testimony, relies on the existence of a causal chain of transmission, one embedded within reality and history.

The second argument corresponds to the world of *Yetzirah*, formation, a more spiritual realm characterized by harmonious and perfect order (akin to the Platonic world of "forms") as well as strong emotional experiences. Likewise, the second argument exists in a plane of thought that contemplates the perfect order and purposefulness of the world, and the emotional awe that it inspires.

Finally, the third argument belongs to the world of *Beri'ah*, creation, which is even loftier than the previous two and requires a leap to a new level of consciousness. This world embodies the act of *creatio ex nihilo* (creating something from nothing) and is thus characterized by an awareness that the world's existence is contingent upon a higher will. These characteristics accurately reflect the third argument, which goes beyond the laws of nature to question the very existence of the world, and probes the boundaries between it and what lies beyond.

This correspondence also explains why each of the arguments the Rebbe listed proves less than the one before. The lower the world, the more concrete and detailed

its view of reality, while the higher worlds perceive reality in a broader and more abstract way. Similarly, the sequence of arguments moves from specific, well-defined proofs to broader, more open-ended ideas, granting the individual greater freedom to believe in certain things while rejecting others.

## THE ARGUMENTS AND THE SOUL

The correspondence between the arguments and the four Kabbalistic worlds also illuminates a shift in human consciousness on the path to modern awareness. It suggests that the evolution of our consciousness is significantly ascending. We have moved from a mindset of *action* to one of *formation*, and finally to *creation*. The fact that today we resonate most strongly with the third argument indicates that something within us no longer draws from the lower worlds but does instead find inspiration from the supernal world of *creation*. Recognizing this ascent is important, as it prevents us from misinterpreting our reluctance to accept traditional arguments as simply a "decline of the generations."

But let us pause. Before we congratulate ourselves on the high level we've attained and dismiss the perspectives of past generations (and their contemporary adherents), we should consider a crucial principle in the development of consciousness. A healthy growth from one stage of awareness to a higher one does not mean *abandoning* the insights of the lower stage. Rather, the new awareness should be able to *include* those insights and build upon them.

What value do the simpler, "childish" insights hold, you may ask, now that we've attained a more mature one? The answer is that *these simpler insights continue to nourish the more basic levels within us*, levels which serve as the subconscious foundations of our mature psyche.

This principle suggests that while we may identify most with the third argument and less with the first two, each of the three arguments has value for us on different levels. Even if the first two arguments seem somewhat outdated, certain levels within us still need them and can accept their validity straightforwardly, even if the higher levels of our minds are more skeptical.

More specifically, the three arguments correspond to the three fundamental levels of the soul in Kabbalah: *nefesh* ("anima," the instinctual level), *ru'ach* ("spirit," the emotional level), and "*neshamah*" ("soul," the intellectual level). Each argument provides an important, even crucial contribution to the proper functioning of its corresponding level.

The first argument, based on the continuity of the nation's testimony, speaks to the *nefesh* level, our most basic and "childlike" layer, responsible for our actions and behavior. At this level, the argument can support our acceptance of the practical yoke of Torah and commandments, integrating us into the chain of Jewish tradition and practices.

The second argument, the argument from design, appeals to the *ru'ach* level, the intermediate realm of emotional experience. This argument can deepen our emotional awe of creation, reinforce the sense that it has a Creator and Guide,

and help awaken a desire to connect with and live in accordance with that Creator.

Finally, the third argument, which questions the certainty of reality as opposed to God's existence, speaks to the *neshamah* level, the highest of the three, where intellectual processes unfold. Here, the idea that reality is merely "possible" rather than "necessary" strengthens faith in the eternal wisdom of the Torah and enhances contemplation of its mysteries.

## BEYOND THE ARGUMENTS

Since the complete system of worlds in Kabbalah includes a fourth world, the world of *Atzilut* or emanation, we may garner that there the separation between the human and the Divine dissolves. *Atzilut* thus hints to an additional level of development to which we can aspire. At this level, there is no need for arguments, not even the subtle arguments of *Beri'ah*. From this perspective, the choice to serve God arises purely from free will—a desire to be close to God, to be "with" (*etzel*, same root as *atzilut*) God, without the need for anyone to "prove" He exists.

This level corresponds to the super-conscious level of the human soul, which lies above the intellectual level. When our super-consciousness is aligned with the three levels below it, it sheds new light on them. This illumination doesn't make the arguments associated with the lower levels redundant, but it does weaken our need for them. It suffuses them with a simple, unshakeable faith that stands tall without any need for proof.

STORY

# REBBE AVRAHAM DOV OF AVRITCH: STAND BY ME

*Rabbi Avraham Dov of Avritch, author of the book Bat Ayin, was born in 5520 (1760) to his father Rabbi David, a maggid in Khmilnyk. He married the daughter of Rabbi Nasan Neta of Avritch, a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and was a student of Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, Rabbi Mordechai of Chernobyl, and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He served as rabbi in Zhitomir and Avritch, and in 5591 (1831) he made aliyah to the Land of Israel, his love for which is strongly reflected in his book. However, he did not allow his love for the Land to influence his perspectives: when Sir Moses Montefiore approached him with a request "to encourage the building of the Land according to the spirit of the times," he responded sharply: "The spirit of the times is heresy!" Upon arriving in the Land, Rabbi Avraham Dov settled in Tzfat, where he was accepted as the rabbi of the Chasidic community. He remained in Tzfat for the rest of his life, even in the face of enormous difficulties such as the Fellaheen riots in 5594 (1834), the earthquake in 5597 (1837), and the Druze riots in 5598 (1838). On the 12th of Kislev 5601 (1840), Rabbi Avraham Dov passed away and was buried in his city, Tzfat.*

Rabbi Avraham Dov, whose reputation as a genius and holy man preceded him, was the first rebbe to settle in Tzfat after the Rebbes Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Avraham of Kalisk, founded the *chasidic* settlement in the Land of Israel and lived in Tzfat for a time, about sixty years before him. He was received with royal honor and holy awe by the *chasidic* community in Tzfat, who were enchanted by his great and distinguished personality. They crowned him as the rabbi and leader of the community, head of the *chasidic kollel* of Poland, and cleaved to him with love and admiration.

Rabbi Shmuel Heller, the rabbi of Tzfat, found in him a teacher and guide and connected to him with heart and soul. Rabbi Avraham Dov also related to his student Rabbi Shmuel with special love and would call him, not in his presence, "my Rabbi Shmuel." He influenced him to stop the fasting that he had taken upon himself. Whenever Rabbi Shmuel initiated a new fast, Rabbi Avraham Dov would sense it and invite him over, honoring him with a cup of coffee.

Once, Rabbi Shmuel immersed in the *mikveh* to mark the beginning of a fast of three consecutive days. Rabbi Avraham Dov met him on his way home from his immersion and said to him: "Shmuel, stop mortifying yourself with fasts, for fasts

and mortifications arouse harsh judgments!" His rabbi's words were sacred to him, and he followed them without hesitation.

Rabbi Shmuel's younger brother, Moshe Yehudah Leib, the ritual slaughterer of Tiberias, also cleaved with all his soul to the Rebbe of Avritch. He would often visit him in Tzfat. Out of love for the mitzvah, he did not travel by animal, but would walk the entire long way from Tiberias, up the mountain to Tzfat, on foot.

Every Yom Kippur eve, after intense work slaughtering the *kaparot* chickens the night before, Moshe Yehudah Leib would nonetheless maintain his custom and walk on foot from Tiberias to Tzfat to spend the holy day of Yom Kippur with his rebbe. One year, he lost his way and arrived in Tzfat in the late afternoon. When he entered Rabbi Avraham Dov's house, the Rebbe was already finishing the final meal before the fast. "Moshe Leib!" he said to him. "Here, have some leftovers!" And he gave him a few spoonfuls of soup to swallow. Reb Moshe Leib later related that despite his severe exhaustion from his wanderings all that day without food, his physical and spiritual feeling on that Yom Kippur was more elevated than it had ever been before.

Reb Moshe Leib passed away in Tzfat in the year 5630 (1870), on the 13th of Tevet, which fell that year on Shabbat eve. Shortly after his passing, he came to his brother in a dream and told him: "When I ascended to the upper world immediately after my passing, Shabbat was approaching, and because of its holiness, they did not summon me to the heavenly court for that entire 24-hour period. At the end of Shabbat, a messenger from the heavenly court came to me and invited me to come before them to give an account of my deeds in this world. I said to the messenger: 'I never did anything without first consulting my Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Dov of Avritch, and therefore I ask you to bring me to him - to seek his advice.' The messenger granted my request and brought me to him. I entered the Rebbe's presence while the messenger remained outside waiting for me, and I told him about my summons to the heavenly court as mentioned above, and he said to me: 'Stay here with me!' And since then, I have been in his presence..."

***

During the earthquake in Tzfat, Rabbi Avraham Dov was in his study hall, praying the afternoon prayer. When he reached the *Tachanun* part of the prayer, the tremors of the earthquake began. He immediately prostrated himself flat on the floor of the study hall, praying and pleading with God, and called for the worshippers to crowd around him. The tremors intensified, the main dome of the study hall and its walls collapsed, but the small area where the Rebbe and the worshippers had gathered remained unharmed and miraculously stood intact.

Agitated panic gripped the survivors, but Rabbi Avraham Dov did not allow the chaos and helplessness to overtake them. He declared: "This is not a time for weeping and eulogizing! We must quickly provide aid to those in need, and save what we can." Instantly, rescue teams were organized to clear the rubble from above the people buried beneath it. They hurriedly sent messengers to the nearby cities, to inform them of their terrible disaster and request their assistance. Together they labored to save lives and bury the dead. They worked day and night, but the task was beyond their capabilities and continued for many months.

Some of the *chasidim* claimed that Tzfat had no future, and demanded to follow the path of the non-*chasidic* Jews and abandon the city. This was the third earthquake to destroy Tzfat that century. In 1837, the city was destroyed twice by earthquakes. But the Rebbe exerted the full weight of his influence and authority to thwart this hasty counsel. He assured them that this blow would not visit them again in the future, basing this promise on the Talmudic statement: "Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma's students asked him: When will the son of David (Mashiach) come? He said to them: When this gate falls and is rebuilt, and falls and is rebuilt, and falls a third time." Expounding on these wondrous words, he explained that the word "gate" (שַׁעַר) has the same numerical value as "Tzfat" (**צְפַת**), and the letters of the word "gate," when read in reverse order, spell the word for "earthquake" (**רַעַש**). In other words, "the gate", Tzfat, will fall due to earthquake only three times, and no more, until the coming of Mashiach.

This solemn promise worked wonders: it breathed new life into the dry bones, magically dispelled the despair that had enveloped them, and encouraged them to begin the work of reconstruction with faith and confidence in their future. Indeed, when the traveler Robinson visited Tzfat in the year after the earthquake, the reconstruction was already in full force, and he writes: "In the Jewish quarter, many houses have been rebuilt and signs of life have begun to reappear much more than could be expected given the terrible disaster."

The recurring theme in the stories about the "Bat Ayin" is the love and veneration with which the members of the Tzfat community regarded him. Particularly striking is the fact that these sentiments were born out of the tzaddik's exceptional self-sacrifice—he passed away without sons but invested his devotion and love in his *chasidim* and the Torah teachings he wrote. Just as in the first story, he saved his *chasid* from the heavenly court, so too in the second story, he saved his students from the earthquake and the panic that followed.

Rabbi Avraham Dov's self-sacrifice continued even after the earthquake: he confronted the pogroms against the Jews (in 1838, for example, the *tzaddik* was captured by Druze assailants and miraculously escaped), and he suffered

through plagues and poverty, as well. In all these cases, he supported the members of the community materially and spiritually, sent requests for aid, and encouraged the survivors. Even his own passing is accompanied by such a story: in the year 5601 (1841), a plague broke out in Tzfat and claimed many victims. Rabbi Avraham Dov promised that he would be the final victim of the plague. And indeed, on the 12th of Kislev 5601 (1841), the *tzaddik* departed from this world due to his illness, and the plague ended.

## PARTZUF

# THE KINGS OF EDOM

*continued from page 16*

is this? How is he different?

We notice that Hadar is the only king whose wife is mentioned by name: Meheitavel. In the World of Chaos, the kings do not wed. To marry is a sign of rectification as forging a covenant between a husband and wife requires a sense of self-nullification, the most important ingredient missing from the World of Chaos.

When a person has no ability to nullify themselves, which means that they feel they deserve all the credit for what they have achieved, they are on a path to self-destruction, on the path to being shattered. The ability to cooperate and self-nullification are two of the traits that make the World of Rectification stable and resilient. When Esau is eventually ready to cooperate and nullify to Jacob, we will see how his chaotically powerful energy is harnessed into the stable and robust vessels of Torah life, bringing about the redemption.

(based on *Chasdei David HaNe'emanim*, vol 8)

1 . Genesis 36:31-43.
2 . *Shabbat* 77b.
3 . Although in the parallel account in Chronicles, he too is reported to have died (see 1 Chronicles 1:43-51, particularly v. 51). This is the subject of an important investigation regarding the differences between Moses (author of the account in Genesis) and Ezra (author of the account in Chronicles).
4 . The holy Name of God shared by these two *sefirot* is "Hosts" (צבאות), which using the Atbash letter transformation becomes, השתפא, another holy Name which suggests "cooperation" (שִׁתּוּף פְּעֻלָּה).

# PARTZUF
# THE KINGS OF EDOM

At the end of *parashat Vayishlach*, the Torah describes the annals of Esau, also known as Edom. In 13 verses,[1] we read of 8 Edomite kings who reigned before the first king of Israel as well as of 11 champions from Esau's lineage.

We may comfortably argue that most of the Arizal's novel understanding of the Torah are concentrated into these 13 verses. This is a "short parashah" into which the Arizal invested all his intellectual effort. He identified these kings of Edom with the so-called World of Chaos (עוֹלָם הַתֹּהוּ) that shattered and fell and the reason he expended so much effort into working out its details is because the Mashiach, i.e., the redemption, will come when we successfully take the lights, or revelations, from the World of Chaos and invest them into the vessels of the World of Rectification (i.e., the world of the Kings of Israel), that was rebuilt from the lost energy of the World of Chaos. The Arizal explains that the light, i.e., the revelation of God, in the World of Chaos was too much for the vessels to contain and that caused them to shatter. In other words, though it seems dark and ominous, the World of Chaos associated with Esau is actually the source of powerful and brazen energy, while the World of Rectification, associated with Jacob contains less intense energy, but has wide and strong vessels that do have the power to contain the bold revelations of Godliness that shattered the World of Chaos.

The notion that chaos precedes rectification (and order) is captured in many different statements made by the sages, but its clearest source can be found in the following passage in the Talmud, which describes Creation using the idiom, "first darkness, then light" (בְּרֵישָׁא חֲשׁוֹכָא וַהֲדַר נְהוֹרָא):[2]

Rabbi Zeira found Rav Yehudah who was standing at the entrance of his father-in-law's house and observed that he was in a cheerful mood, and he understood that were he to ask him about anything in the world, he would respond.

He asked him, "why do goats walk in front and ewes follow?" He answered, "Just as when the world was created: First there was darkness, then there was light."

Interestingly, the darkness is likened to the goat (**עֵז**), whose Hebrew name literally means "brazen" (**עֵז**), another allusion to the brazen and intense light found in the World of Chaos. It follows then that the white-colored ewes that follow the goat allude to the softer, calmer spirit of the vessels of the World of Rectification.

Indeed, the ultimate coming together of Esau and Jacob occurs when Esau's chaotic, powerful, and brazen energy finds its way into the calm, stable, and fixed vessels of the vessels made by Jacob and his offspring.

Let's take a moment to consider what we have seen so far. We tend to think of Creation as having started out on a "right foot," with everything running perfectly. How else should it be? God created a

perfect world, which then fell into disarray because of the choices made by Creation. Indeed, the Torah's first verse seems pleasant enough, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." But then, the second verse seems to already describe some shattering, "And the earth was chaotic and a void and darkness over the abyss…." The order thus seems to be first order and then chaos. True, as the Talmud stated, that first there was darkness (in the second verse) and only in the third verse is light created, "God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light." But what do we do about the first verse, which seems to describe a stable state of affairs?

If we carefully read Rashi, we see that he treats the first verse as a type of heading for the account of Creation. In his words, "if you wish to explain it [the first verse] in its plain sense, explain it thus, 'At the beginning of the Creation of heaven and earth, when the earth was chaotic and void and there was darkness, God said, "Let there be light."'" Another way to think about this is to look at the life of a newborn. In the beginning, right after birth, everything seems to be going well, except that the newborn is not yet interacting with reality. The moment he or she begins to interact, the result is a shattering of the pristine state they are in. This is because the newborn's faculties, or vessels, are not yet robust enough to contain the tremendous energy (read: stimuli) its surroundings are bombarding it with.

We can think about a first visit to a new country. From our first visit, we may be very impressed by what we see and hear, but we find it difficult to integrate these sounds and sights into our mind and self exactly because we are so stimulated. Instead, we are left with an impression of what we experienced, which later needs to be processed upon subsequent visits. Likewise, as firstborn, Esau was broken and shattered, unable to contain the tremendous revelations of Godliness that he was privileged to. Eventually, he preferred to sell his firstborn rights to Jacob, who meticulously explored his inheritance and the covenant his grandfather Abraham made with God, creating vessels that could contain the Godliness he was privileged to experience.

In fact, the Kabbalistic take on Jacob sending messengers to Esau at the beginning of this week's parashah is that Jacob was signaling to Esau that he had constructed enough resilient vessels to contain his brother's "chaotic energy" and that together they could bring the redemption. But Esau was still not ready. He was still broken or shattered if you will from his inability to contain the infinite Divine energy cast upon him—he was still in a state of chaos—unable and unwilling to cooperate with Jacob.

Let us now present the *partzuf* of the kings of Edom and note some of its most important properties. To do this we will need to quote the 9 verses describing them:

> These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.
>
> Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah.
>
> Bela died and Jobab son of Zerah, from Bozrah, reigned in his stead.
>
> Jobab died and Husham of the land of the Teimanites reigned in his stead.

Husham died and Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, reigned in his stead; the name of his city was Avith.
Hadad died and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead.
Samlah died and Saul of Rehoboth-on-the-river reigned in his stead.
Saul died and Ba'al-hanan son of Achbor reigned in his stead.
Ba'al-hanan son of Achbor died and Hadar reigned in his stead; the name of his city was Pa'u, and his wife's name was Meheitabel daughter of Matred daughter of Mei-zahab.

The first thing to note is the formula, "x reigned… x died" (וַיִּמְלֹךְ... וַיָּמֹת). The understanding is that each of these "kings" represents one of the *sefirot*—the conduits of Divine revelation—in the World of Chaos and that each reigns, i.e., receives the Divine light of revelation, and then dies, i.e., shatters. The only king whose death is not documented[3] is the eighth, Hadar and so he is not counted among the *sefirot* of the World of Chaos. We will return to him later.

Another point that is worth mentioning already is that the word "instead of" (תַּחְתָּיו), describing how each king replaced the previous one, indicates that in the World of Chaos, the *sefirot* are organized one on top of the other. In the World of Rectification, they are organized along three axes. This indicates that the World of Chaos is not balanced as is the World of Rectification. It would therefore follow that in depicting the *partzuf* of the Kings of Edom, we should use a different structure than the one we usually do:

Knowledge-Da'at דַּעַת
Bela

Loving-kindness-Chessed חֶסֶד
Jobab

Might-Gevurah גְּבוּרָה
Husham

Beauty-Tiferet תִּפְאֶרֶת
Hadad son of Bedad

Victory-Netzach and Acknowledgment-hod נֶצַח-הוֹד
Samlah

Foundation-Yesod יְסוֹד
Saul

Kingdom-Malchut מַלְכוּת
Ba'al-hanan

The next thing that we notice is that this *partzuf* begins with the *sefirah* of knowledge (*da'at*), not a very common phenomenon. In other words, even though the World of Chaos contains *sefirot* of crown, wisdom, and understanding, the shattering of the vessels began with the *sefirah* of knowledge. This parallels Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of Knowledge causing the shattering in a sense of their life in the Garden of Eden.

What we can learn from this parallel is that both the World of Chaos and the reality of the Garden of Eden are lost when consciousness begins. In the World of Chaos, this sense of self-consciousness is described as the kingly will to rule alone, captured in the phrase, "I will reign" (אֶגְא אֶמְלוֹךְ) which each of the *sefirot* from knowledge and down is said to have "felt." In the Garden of Eden self-consciousness translated into the hubris of being like God, knowing good and evil. In both accounts, an unrectified state of self-consciousness brought about the shattering of reality.

Another interesting feature of this *partzuf* is that the two *sefirot* victory and acknowledgment are one. These two *sefirot* correspond to the right and left legs in the abstract form of man. In Chasidic thought, these two sefirot's inner experience is described as active confidence (in victory-*netzach*) and passive confidence (in acknowledgment-*hod*). With regard to our trust and confidence in God, active confidence means trusting that God has given me the necessary abilities to solve a problem. Passive confidence means trusting that what I do not have the ability to bring about a certain outcome, God will ensure that what is needed will indeed come about. Active confidence means that God gives me the power to bring about an outcome while passive confidence means placing trust in God, that indeed the outcome will take place.

Normally, in our present reality in the World of Rectification, these two forms of trust, though similar, correspond to two separate body parts, the right leg and the left leg. Both are needed to make progress (i.e., walking requires both feet working together) because in a rectified reality progress depends on achieving cooperation.[4] But in the World of Chaos, both forms of confidence came as one and the all-important lesson of cooperation was lost thus reflecting the sentiment felt by each of the kings/*sefirot* of Edom/chaos, "I will reign." In other words, I will be the sole ruler, not needing anyone else to work and cooperate with. In the World of Rectification, we all learn the most important lesson that "every person is completed or rectified by others."

## MARRIAGE AND RECTIFICATION

Let us return to the last eighth king of Edom, Hadar. Even though he is one of the kings, his death is not related. Why

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