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

נט"ד

Wonders

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of HaRav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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שַׁבָּת חַיֵּי שָׂרָה ❁ כג-כד חֶשְׁוָן תשפ"ו



"How can this be? A Jewish town without a mikveh?!" The locals explained that the village was built on a high mountain, and to reach the groundwater, they would need to dig very deep. Such digging would cost a great deal of money, which they couldn't afford. Rebbe Nachum called out: "Whoever donates the required amount, I promise him my entire share in the World to Come!"

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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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A NEW (POLITICAL) ORDER

Two months ago, HaRav Ginsburgh dedicated his annual 18th of Elul farbrengen, commemorating the birth of the two great leaders the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe to speaking about the concept of an "order," as hinted to by Rebbe Isaac of Homil, one of the greatest Chasidic intellectuals.

In this deep class, the Rav presented a vision of how we might merit to usher in the Days of Mashiach through the current political apparatus used in the State of Israel. Join us to find out how the ideal Prime Minister of Israel might be considered a king leading an entire generation every term in office and which of three areas in the life of the Jewish people he should focus on during each term.

This class was particularly important because the Lubavitcher Rebbe was often heard speaking of three areas of Jewish life that require absolute integrity: integrity of the Land of Israel, integrity of the Jewish people, and the integrity of Torah. Politically, the Rebbe encouraged us to vote for the party that best fights to uphold these three areas. However, it was not necessarily clear, what happens when there is no single political party that fights for all three areas. What is their order of precedence? In this farbrengen, HaRav Ginsburgh provides an in-depth answer to this conundrum, which many face when going to vote.

Rabbi Isaac of Homil is considered one of the greatest intellectual minds in Chabad, a movement known for the intellectual demand it requires of its followers. Rabbi Isaac was a *chasid* of the Alter Rebbe, the *Ba'al HaTanya*, Rebbe Schneur Zalman of Liadi. Because of his unique mind, Rabbi Isaac wrote his own interpretations of the Alter Rebbe's teachings in a series of deep works known by the collective name, Channah Ariel. After the Alter Rebbe's passing, Rabbi Isaac continued as a *chasid* of his son, the Mittler Rebbe, and subsequently devoted himself to the Alter Rebbe's grandson, the Tzemach Tzedek, even though the latter was many years his junior.

Apart from his written works, there are many oral traditions that were passed down from him, bits of wisdom and insight that were heard from him over the years. One of these goes as follows:

> Reb Isaac said before his passing: The world is falling, and we will need to have in this world once again the Rebbe (meaning the Alter Rebbe, of blessed memory). After a while, he said: The world is falling greatly, so there will be a need for an order, that is, the Baal Shem Tov, the Maggid of Mezritch, and the Alter Rebbe.[1]

Meaning that before the Mashiach can come, we need three individuals who will

1. *Leshema Ozen*, Duchman, Rabbi Isaac of Homil, 5.

like the first three leaders of the Chasidic movement, lift the world up from where it has fallen to. They themselves are not the Mashiach, but they will pave the way for him

Order is needed after there is a downfall, after the situation falls apart. Rabbi Isaac saw that because the world was falling, what the first three generations achieved—the three *tzaddikim*: the Ba'al Shem Tov, the Magid of Mezritch, and the Alter Rebbe—was not enough to keep things on track. A new order would be needed. Because of the terrible turmoil that we the Jewish people would go through before the coming of Mashiach, the pogroms, the terrible Holocaust, the enlightenment and the distancing of Jews from their heritage, from Torah and mitzvot, even from the faith taught by the Ba'al Shem Tov, a new order would be needed to lift the spirit of the Jewish people once again. We will need another Ba'al Shem Tov, another Maggid, another Alter Rebbe, and they will need to succeed even more than the original three generations did.

When we consider Rebbe Isaac's statement with a bit more perspective, we see that the order of the first three leaders of the Chasidic movement was an order of *tzaddikim*. Chasidut set out to create a different kind of relationship between the leadership—the tzaddikim—and the lay people—the *chasidim*. *Tikkunei Zohar* begins[2] with an enumeration of seven types of leaders that correspond to the seven lower *sefirot*: men of kindness, men of might (who control their inclinations), masters of Torah, prophets, visionaries, *tzaddikim*, and kings. The Tanya, based on the Torah, enumerates three types of leaders: heads, sages, and men of discernment.[3] These correspond to the three higher intellectual *sefirot*: wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. What we learn from this is that the leadership of the *tzaddikim* is in fact the ninth form of leadership in Jewish history (and it follows that the *tzaddikim* are leading up to the return of the kings, specifically, the Mashiach who is a king like David). In other words, the Ba'al Shem Tov, the Maggid, and the Alter Rebbe constitute the ninth order of leadership, the order of *tzaddikim*.

Our main innovation will now be to explore what the new order of leadership needs to be. This will be the order of leadership of kings that will usher in the days of Mashiach. There are rabbinical sources that speak of three generations of Mashiach.[4] What we are saying is that whomever these kings are, they can immediately become the Mashiach through their success. What will these three leaders do? The Lubavitcher Rebbe set the foundation that there are three matters whose perfect integrity we must maintain: the integrity of Torah, the integrity of the Jewish people, and the integrity of the Land of Israel.[5]

2. Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* (1b). See also *Tanya* ch. 14.

3. *Ibid.* ch. 2.

4. *Yalkut Shimoni Nach* 806.

5. The Lubavitcher Rebbe seems to have adopted the same position as Rabbi Isaac, that a new order of leadership was needed to bring Mashiach. He taught that the word "now" (מִיָּד), expressing the urgency with which the Redemption is needed, is an acronym for the names of the

What we want to say is that for three leaders to be kings even before the coming of Mashiach, they must hold the office of the Prime Minister of the State of Israel. Anyone who is familiar with the situation realizes that nothing could be further from a "king of Israel," then those who have held this office until now. However, we have been teaching for years that we are seeking to change the situation from the core. We are looking for someone like the Ba'al Shem Tov to be appointed as the Prime Minister. Since the Prime Minister is elected by the people through elections held every few years,[6] we can argue that a generation in the context of Israeli politics, is one term. The word generation has many different interpretations: it can be 70 years long, 40 years, and it can be a single term of government. So, if we say that three generations of leadership are needed to establish a new order of kings, then these three generations could even be the three terms of a single individual appointed Prime Minister of Israel.

In the first term, he will act like the Ba'al Shem Tov, in the second like the Maggid, and in the third like the Alter Rebbe. Now the Ba'al Shem Tov's main interest was the Jewish people. So, in the first term, our Prime Minister will focus on social issues and ensure the integrity of the Jewish people. He should in fact make this the focus of the platform he runs on because he needs the support of the people who should vote for him, knowing full well what he plans on doing. All the areas that require integrity are essential, but the first order of business, the one that the Ba'al Shem Tov would focus on is the integrity of the Jewish people. It is the area in which we are hurting the most right now and it is what is most preventing us from moving towards the days of Mashiach. This includes the schism between different groups in Jewish society. Restoring our integrity as a people depends on the commandment of Ahavat Yisrael, love of our fellow Jew. We are called upon by the Ba'al Shem Tov to love every Jew without reservation. Our love for our fellow Jews eventually extends to love for all human beings as well as for all creatures. If this succeeds in the Land of Israel, it will quickly spread to Jews everywhere and will influence the entire world.

The second generation, or the second term if it turns out to be the same Prime Minister, will focus on the integrity of the Land of Israel. If our Holyland is viewed as a good place to live, a country that is full of love, friendship, and peace between Jews, it will encourage world Jewry to make Aliyah. To declare our sovereignty over the entire land, we need a consensus. The thought that somehow this can happen without a consensus is foolish. You cannot conquer the Land of Israel by yourself. Once the integrity of the Jewish people is restored, the entire land can be claimed

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leaders of Chabad in the last three generations: Menachem (the Rebbe), Yosef Yitzchak (the previous Rebbe), Shalom Dov Ber (the previous Rebbe's father)— **מ**ְנַחֵם מֶ**ע**ְנֶ**ד**ֶל, **י**וֹסֵף יִצְחָק, שָׁלוֹם **ד**וֹב בָּ**ע**ר. These three leaders would usher in the Messianic days. However, at least externally, these three great leaders were not kings; they are still considered part of the era of leadership by *tzaddikim*.

6. Incidentally, there are many instances in which a Rebbe was elected by majority vote. Case in point is the Lubavitcher Rebbe himself whom after the previous Rebbe's passing was voted to take his place by the overwhelming majority of *chasidim*.

and the borders can be expanded further.

Finally, we come to the third generation, or once again, the third term, when the focus will be on the Torah's integrity. Like Schneur Zalman of Liadi who united the revealed and concealed traditions in Torah—the *nigleh* and the *nistar*—we are tasked with restoring the centrality of Torah to our lives. This is achieved by first and foremost basing our laws and our judiciary on the Torah. This is the true judicial reform we need—not the judicial reform that the present leadership has been trying to carry out for the past few years.

In practical terms, the first term does not require that people become strictly Orthodox in their observance. It is enough for the first term to focus on instilling faith, life with faith, and this includes faith in the sense of what the Ba'al Shem Tov called, having faith in one another. It means that every individual respect others, take an interest in others, and certainly not cheat them or cause them grievance. The Ba'al Shem Tov's followers were all friends: "All of Israel are friends"[7] (כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲבֵרִים). The second term is dedicated to using the consensus that has been created to protect the integrity of the entire Land of Israel. The goal of the third term is that all the Jews who live in the Land of Israel live according to the Torah and its principles of justice with the feeling that this leads to the joy of Torah as it was given at Sinai and to the feeling of God's joy in the Torah, which is revealed through the joy found in Torah innovations.

7. *Midrash Tehillim* on ch. 122.

FROM PRIME MINISTER TO MASHIACH

As noted earlier, it might be that if all three terms are led by the same individual, the same individual who continually reinvents himself and renews his focus, that individual might not just lead us toward the coming of Mashiach, but may be the Mashiach himself. Isaiah describes Mashiach as someone who is constantly elevating and improving, "Behold, my servant will succeed, will rise, elevate, and attain great heights."[8] As discussed elsewhere, the stages of the Mashiach's development parallel the stages described in Maimonides' description of the required actions of Mashiach.

According to Maimonides description of the Mashiach's rise, his first act is just his background as a scholar like King David his progenitor. During this stage, before he is recognized as even being the Mashiach in potential, he might be the three times elected Prime Minister (or this stage could be completed, as discussed, by three separate individuals) focusing each term on the Ba'al Shem Tov's simple faith in God and the Torah, on creating a consensus among the people, and on preparing the way for a Torah based legal system. The sages describe this stage as the coming of Elijah the prophet, the harbinger of the Redemption. Elijah is famous for instilling the simple faith of every Jew that there is only God and no other force ruling the world—"*Havayah* is God"[9] (יי-הוה הוא הָאֱ-לֹהִים). Elijah is also described

8. Isaiah 52:13.

9. 1 Kings 18:39; see also v. 24.

as the one who will foster understanding between generations, creating a sense of solidarity and consensus.[10] Finally, Elijah is tasked with clarifying the final halachic rulings and providing the necessary genius that scholars of Torah require to fully comprehend the Torah, thereby paving the way for using the Torah as the basis of a legal system.

Once this order of the pre-Messianic era is complete, the Mashiach can appear, first as Mashiach in potential, and then subsequently as Mashiach in practice. Thus, we have a new insight into Maimonides description[11]:

> If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law as David, his ancestor,

Reflects the pre-Messianic order orchestrated by Elijah.[12]

> … [If he] will compel all of Israel to walk in [the way of the Torah] and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, we may, consider him Mashiach in potential.

The state of Mashiach in potential is usually associated with the Midrashic figure of Mashiach ben Yosef.

And finally, the third stage:

> If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Mashiach.

The third stage is associated with the definitive state of Mashiach also known as Mashiach ben David.

10. Malachi 3:23.
11. *Hilchot Melachim* 11:4.
12. In the *Zohar*, this stage is described as *Ra'aya Mehemna*, the Faithful Shepherd. It is the stage in which the Mashiach identifies with the figure of Moses who is known by this connotation.

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who was led by his egotism practices self-nullification to prevent himself from sinning or, once he has sinned, does teshuvah.

One of the cornerstones of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings is that the contraction is not literal, in other words, it is not to be understood as a realistic description, and it follows that even the sins that seem to have been committed have not forever turned unity into responsibility. In fact, one might argue that the reason that responsibility works is because it still has a glimmer of the supernal unity within. Mutual responsibility is thus the contracted and limited form of unity that is still available to all who genuinely seek the Divine unity between all souls.

THE MYSTERY OF FOUR HUNDRED

THE AFTERLIFE

Parashat Chayei Sarah begins with the verse: "The lifetime of Sarah was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life."[13] The concluding words, "the years of Sarah's life," seem redundant, for the verse opens with the words "the lifetime of Sarah." Yet, it is just such redundancies that alert us to deeper meanings in the text. In this case, the fact that the Hebrew word for "the years" (*shenei*) can also mean "two" reveals an important truth, for it suggests that Sarah had two sets of years, or "two lifetimes."

While the oral tradition makes many references to an afterlife, the Written Torah never explicitly mentions one. This makes the allusion in our verse all the more important. Indeed, perhaps an even more obvious allusion to the notion of an afterlife in this portion is the simple fact that even though the portion speaks about Sarah's death it is called *Chayei Sarah*, a phrase that can be translated literally as "the lifetimes of Sarah." That Sarah's "two lifetimes" are both defined as "living" makes sense considering the rabbinic teaching that, "the righteous in death are called alive, while the wicked, even in life, are called dead."[14]

Significantly, Sarah's death leads to Abraham's first purchase of land in the Land of Canaan: a life-affirming symbol that Abraham and Sarah's descendants will eventually inherit the entire land and transform it into the Land of Israel. Abraham's purchase of the Cave of the Machpeilah and the surrounding land for 400 silver *shekels*[15] alludes to this as the sages teach that the borders of the Land of Israel are 400 *parsah* (each *parsah* being a distance of approximately four kilometers) by 400 *parsah*.[16] Furthermore, the *Zohar* explicitly states that the Cave of Machpeilah is a microcosm of the entire land of Israel.[17]

These 400 silver *shekels* also allude to the *Zohar*'s tradition that the soul inherits 400 "worlds" of Divine pleasure in the World to Come.[18] Thus, the Land of Israel—symbolized by the Cave of Machpeilah—can be understood as the place where Divine pleasure and revelation are most accessible. The Land of Israel serves as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual, between this world and the World to Come. It is the place where the fine line between life and death is transcended.

FROM EFRON TO ABRAHAM

The Torah concludes the story of Abraham's purchase of Sarah's burial plot by stating that the field with its cave

13. Genesis 23:1.
14. *Berachot* 18a-b.
15. Genesis 23:14-16.
16. *Megillah* 3[a].
17. *Zohar* 1:128b.
18. *Ibid.* 1:123b.

"rose up … unto Abraham for a purchase."[19] Rashi explains that the wording "rose up" literally means "entered the possession of." However, he also explains the word metaphorically, citing the Midrash that the land Abraham purchased to bury Sarah was elevated because it left a commoner's possession and entered a king's.[20]

The commoner referred to is Efron who owned the field and cave Abraham wanted to purchase. At first, he offered to give it as a gift but in the end asked for an enormous amount of money. The numerical value of Efron (**עֶפְרֹן**) is also 400, the same as an "evil eye" (**רַע עַיִן**), indicating that this was Efron's mode of perceiving others. Abraham, on the other hand, looked upon everyone with "pure eyes" (**טְהוֹר עֵינַיִם**), an expression whose value is also 400. Thus, through the purchase of the field and the cave by Abraham for 400 pieces of silver it was elevated to a new level altogether, nullifying Efron's "evil eye."

TAV, THE LAND OF ISRAEL, AND DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS

The number 400 is the numerical value of the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, *tav* (**ת**). The name of this letter when spelled out is תיו, which equals 416. Since the land is 400 by 400 *parsah* it also alludes to two letters *tav*. If we substitute the letter *tav* with its name, then we have 2 times **תיו**, or 2 times 416, which equals 832. Amazingly, 832 is the exact value of the words, "Land of Israel" (**אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל**).

Every day in the morning service we recite praises of the angels on High. The prophet Isaiah relates that one group of angels proclaims "Holy, holy, holy is the God of Hosts, the whole world is full of His glory."[21] The sages juxtapose a response spoken by another group of angels and taken from the Book of Ezekiel, "Blessed is the glory of God from His place."[22]

We would normally say that God's place is the upper realms, where the angels surround Him like hosts. Yet, when multiplying the numerical value of God's essential four-letter Name, Havayah (**י-הוה**) whose value is 26 by the word "glory" (**כָּבוֹד**), whose value is 32, the product is once again, "Land of Israel" (**אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל**), 832. In other words, even though the glory of God is manifest everywhere and at every moment, it is most revealed and concentrated in the Land of Israel.

This confirms a profound teaching of the Maggid of Mezritch. The Ba'al Shem Tov was often heard saying the syllable "af" (**אַף**). The Maggid of Mezritch explained that his meaning was that "af" is the initials of the words, "Emanation is here" (**אֲצִילוּת פֹּה**). The World of Emanation, *Atzilut*, is the highest and most Divinely infused of all of the worlds. The Ba'al Shem Tov was declaring that even though a plain reading of Kabbalah would have us think that Emanation is somewhere else and is inaccessible to the common man, this is not the case. Emanation is present everywhere, even in every facet of life experienced by common people. For Emanation is the consciousness that "God is all and all is God," and every person

19. Genesis 23:17-18 and v. 20.
20. *Bereishit Rabbah* 58:8.
21. Isaiah 6:3.
22. Ezekiel 3:12.

can attain this understanding, wherever they are and in whatever situation they find themselves in. Thus, although in one sense the four Kabbalistic Worlds are hierarchical, in another sense they are each manifest in a holistic manner in this the lowest of all of the created worlds. It is in the Land of Israel that this consciousness of Emanation is most easily attained, and from our Holyland, it is meant to spread to every corner of reality, the secret of "the Land of Israel is destined to spread everywhere in the world."

CURE BEFORE AILMENT

On close inspection, the number 400 is already mentioned in the Torah when God made His first covenant with Abraham, the covenant over the Land of Israel: "On that day God made a covenant with Abram saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land.'"[23] At this covenant, known as the "Covenant Between the Shards," God revealed to Abraham the future of the Jewish people: "Know with certainty that your offspring will be strangers in a land not their own, they will serve them, and they will oppress them for four hundred years.... And the fourth generation shall return here."[24] Thus, Abraham's purchase of his first piece of the Land of Israel for 400 shekels of silver was prophetically sinking roots in the land so his descendants could return, thus "providing the cure even before the ailment."

23. Genesis 15:18.
24. Ibid. 15:13-16.

ELEVATING SPARKS FROM ESAU TO DAVID

Later in *parashat Vayishlach*, when Jacob was returning with his family after twenty years outside of the land, the number 400 reappears. Esau came to meet Jacob with 400 men so that he could prevent him from re-entering the Land that is 400 by 400 *parsah*.[25] By merit of Jacob's twenty years of Divine service, when he spiritually redeemed and elevated sparks of Divine holiness from the depths of exile (20 squared[26] is also 400), he was able to subdue Esau and his 400 men.

After the encounter between Esau and Jacob ends peacefully, the Torah reports that Esau left for Mount Seir. Curiously, the 400 men who came with him go unmentioned. Once Jacob prevailed over Esau's angel and then emerged the next day unscathed from his confrontation with Esau, the spiritual strength of the 400 men was dissipated to the point that they actually disappeared from the scene altogether.

Paralleling the law of conservation

25. Ibid. 32:7.
26. Revealing the Divine spark of holiness can be described as finding the reality enclothed within reality. There are three basic figurate numbers that correspond to the three basic relationships discussed in Chasidic philosophy: evolution (הִשְׁתַּלְשְׁלוּת) corresponds to triangular (מְשֻׁלָּשִׁים) numbers, enclothement (הִתְלַבְּשׁוּת) corresponds to square (רְבוּעִים) numbers, and immersion/inspiration (הִשְׁרָאָה) corresponds to interface (הִשְׁרָאָה) numbers, also known as centered-square numbers. The triangle of a number n is the sum of integers from 1 to n. The square of a number is n^2. The inspirational value of a number n is $n^2 \perp (n \perp 1)^2$.

of energy, the 400 men and the energy they embody were actually transformed by what transpired. They reappeared at a later time in Jewish history as the 400 men who were the first to recognize David's greatness—even while he was still being pursued by Saul—and joined his ranks before he became king.[27] David went on to become king of all of Israel and was more successful than any other figure in Jewish history in establishing a kingdom incorporating nearly the entire 400 *parsah* by 400 *parsah* recognized by the sages. David who had red hair was actually considered the rectification of Esau who is also known as Edom, "the red one." The transformation of the 400 men of Esau to the incarnated 400 men of David symbolizes this rectification.[28]

Here we see a beautiful example of how "connecting the dots" within the Torah text, in this case the number 400, reveals deep connections that otherwise might go unrecognized. Jewish numerology, reveals a deeper set of correspondences than immediately apparent in the literal text and points to an entire mathematical structure underlying the Torah. Similar to how physics and chemistry rest on a mathematical foundation, so too, deeper dimensions of Torah are revealed through gematria and a host of other numerical methodologies.

Yet, it is not Kabbalah alone which employs *gematria* and other insights gleaned from mathematical phenomena. The Talmud, Midrash and Rashi, for example, also use these techniques of learning on occasion in order to point out a cogent idea, and it has been used as well by a wide range of commentators throughout the ages. In as much as Kabbalah seeks to make known the oneness of God and the interconnectedness of all reality, *gematria* and other numerical methodologies assume a major role in revealing this unity through the Torah text.

27. 1 Samuel 22:2; 25:13.
28. For more on the number 400 and the letter *tav*, see *The Hebrew Letters*, pp. 326-337.

REBBE MENACHEM NACHUM OF CHERNOBYL: PURITY OF THOUGHT

Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl was born in 5490 (1730) to his father Rabbi Tzvi. According to a tradition in Chabad, Rabbi Nachum was the grandson of Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem. He is known by the name of his book Me'or Einayim, one of the foundational texts of the chasidic movement, and as the founder of the Chernobyl chasidic dynasty. He was among the eldest disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch and had also basked in the presence of the Ba'al Shem Tov.

Rabbi Nachum served as a maggid (preacher), traveling between towns to inspire the people with sermons on ethics and Chasidut. After the passing of the Maggid of Mezritch, chasidim and men of deed gathered around him, and he began to function as an Admur (Chasidic leader). After periods of wandering, his court eventually settled in Chernobyl in Volhynia (today Ukraine). Many of the tzaddikim of his generation would travel to him as chasidim. Rabbi Nachum passed away on the 11th of Cheshvan 5558 (1797) and was laid to rest in Chernobyl.

Rebbe Menachem Nachum drew most of his Torah from the Maggid of Mezritch, but he managed to visit the holy Ba'al Shem Tov twice.

It is said that the Ba'al Shem Tov invited him to come, but he refused, saying that he was a teacher of children and could not leave his students without a teacher.

The Ba'al Shem Tov asked the people of his town to appoint another teacher in his place, so that he could travel to him. The townspeople heeded his words, and at the beginning of the next month, Rebbe Nachum suddenly found himself without students. Rebbe Nachum thought the reason was dissatisfaction with his performance as a teacher, and he went to the parents to return the money he had received from them until now because he feared he had stolen from them, as they were not satisfied with the way he taught.

When he learned the true reason, he decided to travel to the Ba'al Shem Tov and visited him twice before he passed away (after which he began to travel to the Maggid of Mezritch).

When he was with the Ba'al Shem Tov on his first visit, a coarse poor man

entered the house and asked for charity. As soon as the poor man entered, a glass cup that was on the table burst and shattered into pieces. The Ba'al Shem Tov commanded that the man be given charity and not be detained in the house. After he left, the Ba'al Shem Tov turned to Rebbe Menachem Nachum and said: "Do you see, my son? Even my vessels cannot tolerate a coarse person. But you, with the smallest thought, you can cause much more damage than the sinful act of this coarse man."

Afterwards, the Ba'al Shem Tov prepared a meal in honor of Rebbe Nachum's visit. They ate together and recited the Grace after Meals that is recited by a quorum of three men who dined together. The Ba'al Shem Tov said that Moses ate *kest* (meals provided by his father-in-law) at Jethro's, and the last day he ate there was Wednesday. Since the Ba'al Shem Tov directed the same intentions that Moses had during that meal, Moses had joined the meal, and he was the third for the quorum of three needed for the blessing.

In accordance with the first instruction he received from the Ba'al Shem Tov, the purity of thought occupies a very important place in Rebbe Nachum's teachings. In his discourses on *parashat Lech Lecha*, he explains why the righteous are required to do this: He interprets the verse "And Abram went, as God had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him" as referring to the *tzaddik*. Abraham, who is the *tzaddik*, walks in the way of God and does all that is required of him. But after he elevates himself on his path, he discovers that "Lot went with him," meaning that the evil inclination, represented by Lot, still accompanies him. Now, when the evil inclination has become so refined and sophisticated, it is very difficult to guard against it and one must be careful of every small thought that is not perfectly precise.

Regarding the broken cup, it is worth noting that there are sometimes people who boast of such phenomena: a person enters the house, and immediately cups start to break, spoons bend, and so on. However, in contrast to those who see this as a spiritual phenomenon indicating greatness or uniqueness, the Ba'al Shem Tov calls this a "coarse person". Indeed, even the coarse person can repent and become refined [and graduate from from *tohu* (breaking) to *tikkun* (rectification), following the sages' observation that, "first darkness and then light"]. The power to bring him to this lies in the hands of the *tzadidik*—the Ba'al Shem Tov, who gave him charity and asked that he not be detained in the house, which is the beginning of his rectification. It was because of this power that he named his daughter Adel, which means "refined" in Yiddish.

Once Rebbe Nachum visited a town, and when he wanted to immerse, he learned that there was no *mikveh* there. The *tzaddik* asked: "How can this be? A Jewish town without a *mikveh*?!" The locals explained that the village was built on a high mountain, and to reach the groundwater, they would need to dig very deep. Such digging would cost a great deal of money, which they could not afford.

Rebbe Nachum called out: "Whomever donates the required amount, I promise him all of my share in the World to Come!" Upon hearing this, a wealthy man hurried to donate the entire sum. They wrote a bill of sale and signed it, and the *mikveh* was built. Rebbe Nachum became very joyful and said that now he could serve God for the sake of serving God without any expectation of reward, for he had just given up his share, his reward, in the World to Come. When they saw his joy in heaven, a heavenly voice came forth and proclaimed: "Rebbe Nachum is destined for life in the World to Come!"

This story, reminiscent of tales about the Ba'al Shem Tov, is also connected to the purity of thought of the *Tzaddik* of Chernobyl: First, the *mikveh* in Kabbalah is associated with the *sefirah* of *binah* (understanding), which is the world of thought and of course the mikveh purifies, hence connecting it with the purification of thought. Second, Rebbe Nachum's joy also comes from the same source: Rebbe Nachum used to say that the Hebrew word for "thought" (**מַחְשָׁבָה**) has the same letters as "with joy" (**בְּשִׂמְחָה**). Both thought and joy are associated with the *sefirah* of *binah* (and hence, the *mikveh*) and *binah* is described as "the mother of children is joyous." In this context, we recall the language of the Tanya, about "opening the heart and purifying it from any trace of worry and sadness," thus joy is a byproduct of the purification of the heart.

Interestingly, the World to Come, which Rebbe Nachum relinquishes, is also connected to the *sefirah* of *binah*. He gives up his personal *binah*, his personal World to Come, to bring forth Jewish souls in holiness and purity. What gives him the strength to do this?

There is a distinction between "intellect that belongs to emotions" (מוֹחִין הַשַּׁיְכִים לְמִדּוֹת) and "intellect in itself" (מוֹחִין בְּעֶצֶם). The World to Come belongs to *binah*, in a way that relates to emotions, that is, to external revelation: The souls in the World to Come delight in the revelation of the light of their good deeds. But there is a higher level than the World to Come (עוֹלָם הַבָּא), called "the future to come" (לֶעָתִיד לָבוֹא) and it is included in "intellect in itself," *binah* as it is for itself, without the need for revelation. Rebbe Nachum attained this level through his absolute purity of thought. He became so unified with *Ima Ila'ah* (the Supernal Mother), the inner dimension of *binah*, that the revelation in the World to Come became small for him. His true joy is in purity itself—purity of thought, purity of the *mikveh*, and purity of heart from all ulterior motives.

UNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

On the afternoon of Shabbat Nitzavim 5785, HaRav Ginsburgh gave a class at his home to the students of the Shiloh Hesder Yeshivah. One part of the class analyzed the four themes found in the parashah. The first two—unity (achdut, in Hebrew) and mutual responsibility (arvut, in Hebrew)—are here analyzed in a beautiful way that helps us understand our role in life as well as providing us with a better sense of what we need to work on to create more unity among the Jewish people.

This excerpt from the class was first published in the Ha'azinu-Sukkot 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

UNITY AND MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Two of the four topics of *parashat Nitzavim* are unity and mutual responsibility. They are close in nature, but still different. Let us see how.

Unity of the Jewish people in Hebrew is אַחְדוּת. Mutual responsibility is known as עֲרֻבוּת.[1] Unity is associated with the *sefirah* of crown—there we are all united as one, one integrated piece. But mutual responsibility—being held accountable for one another—implies that there is some separation, so the unity has descended into our reality where people lead separate lives. Still, the Torah tells us that despite the perceived separation, we are nonetheless responsible for one another's conduct. Mutual responsibility is associated with the *sefirah* of wisdom, because the inner experience of wisdom is self-nullification. To ensure that others are not harmed because of my personal conduct, which is the goal of mutual responsibility, we must each nullify ourselves, our egotistical and conceited interests, and by doing so bridge the gap between us and others created in this physical reality. Self-nullification is thus the remedy for conscious separation between people.

Unity is discussed in *parashat Nitzavim*'s first verse, "You stand today, all of you, before *Havayah* your God… both those who are present and standing with us today before *Havayah* our God as well as those who are not here with us today."[2] Mutual responsibility appears a little later in the *parashah* in the words, "the concealed [conduct] is the domain of *Havayah* our God, but the revealed [conduct] is for us and our children forever, to ensure that all of this Torah be kept."[3]

An interesting question to ask is what happened to break the unity and to create people with separate realities that must strive for mutual responsibility for one another? What caused this descent from the crown to wisdom? Between the two verses quoted, the Torah describes many calamities that are almost as harsh as the

1. In Modern Hebrew, one would normally hear people say עֲרֻבוּת הֲדָדִית.

2. Deuteronomy 29:9.

3. Ibid. v. 28.

curses in *parashat Ki Tavo*. Why does the Torah mention these here? "Lest there is among you some man or woman… whose heart is even now turning away from *Havayah* our God…; Lest there is among you a stock sprouting poison weed and wormwood."[4] These weeds of sin break apart the unity.

Sins cause our united state to fall apart, in a negative manner. If follows that the disunity between souls is the main negative meaning of sin and that *teshuvah* for a sin mainly means restoring that unity. Normally the effect of sin is described in Chasidut as causing some blemish above. There are Divine channels that bring effluence down and sins damage them, clogging them. But what *parashat Nitzavim* is calling us to meditate upon is that sins cause disunity among the Jewish people.

A sin is the product of separate egotism. When a person sins, he or she is setting themselves apart, feeling that they are a separate reality from the rest of Israel. The goal of our Divine service is "to unite the Holy Blessed One and His *Shechinah* [Presence], in the name of all of Israel." But sin derails us from achieving this goal.

THE END AND THE MEANS

To understand the relationship between unity and mutual responsibility, let's take a deeper look at their correspondence to crown and wisdom. The *sefirah* of crown is known in Kabbalah as "the infinite."[5] Thus, the crown is limitless and has no boundaries. Wisdom is where contraction from the infinite (light, or revelation of Godliness) to a single point occurs.[6] The contraction is needed because the vessels cannot contain the light of the infinite, the light of the crown. Vessels are mostly associated with the *sefirah* of understanding (*binah*), but they begin to form already in wisdom, there they are known as "abbreviated letters"[7] (אוֹתִיּוֹת קְצָרוֹת). When we translate these concepts to the realm of souls and the Jewish people, we can see that a certain contraction is needed between the souls as they make up a single united whole and the way in which they are imbued in bodies in this physical reality. As explained, the contraction—the movement from unity to mutual responsibility happens because of sin, which contracts the light of unity. In other words, the Almighty wants this contraction to occur, which is why reality was created intentionally with the potential for egotism. Otherwise, there would be no room for vessels to form. Incidentally, the vessels are fully formed when an individual

4. Ibid. v. 17.

5. *Zohar* 3:258a.

6. See *Tanya*, *Iggeret HaTeshuvah*, ch. 4 that the four letters of God's essential Name, *Havayah*, correspond to the stages of Creation described as: contraction, expansion, extension, and a second expansion. Thus, the *yud*, which also corresponds to wisdom, is the stage of contraction.

7. *Tikkunei Zohar* 19 (41b). Rebbe Hillel of Paritch's *Likkutei Be'urim* on *Sha'ar HaYichud*, p. 175a. See also *Sha'ar HaEmunah*, ch. 5.

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