"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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"Isaac prayed to God opposite his wife...." It is in prayer that we especially feel that "all of Israel are mutually responsible for one another" and that we can be unified; everyone should pray together.

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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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CLASS EXCERPTS: DAVENING TOGETHER & THE BOTTOM LINE

These two pieces are excerpts from a short class Rav Ginsburgh gave at the end of Yom Kippur last year (5785).

The first excerpt is a foundational point about how to see time as a manifestation of Godliness and ties it to the onset of Yom Kippur, just before Kol Nidrei.

In the second excerpt, the Rav recollects his time with Rav Asher Freund zt"l, whom he often refers to as his mashpia. Reb Usher, as he was known by his disciples was a tzaddik who lived in Jerusalem and was known for his miracles and for his staunch demand that every person see themselves as humble and lowly before God. He had a special bottom line that he encouraged people to see once the services of Yom Kippur had ended.

This class was first published in the Yom Kippur 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

DAVENING TOGETHER

TIME MANIFESTS GODLINESS

We are all familiar with the saying that "time is the most precious commodity." It is the one thing that no matter what we do, we cannot restock on. The life we have been given by God is limited in time and so it should be a cornerstone of every spiritual system to teach its followers how to relate to time properly.

Time is much more than just what the calendar or our watch would have us think. It is one of the three dimensions in which Godliness appears in reality, as *Sefer Yetzirah* states, "God created reality with space, time, and soul."[1] One of God's connotations in Judaism is "the space" (הַמָּקוֹם), indicating that the space we inhabit is a manifestation of Godliness. Likewise, the higher soul in man is known as the Divine soul, indicating that it is "an actual part of God."[2] Though there are sacred days and festivals on the Jewish calendar and every Shabbat is sacred, we do not usually think of time as a manifestation of God. However, our attitude and view on time are essential to our spiritual well-being and to performing our mission in life, because time too is a manifestation of Godliness.

1. *Sefer Yetzirah* beginning with 3:5 and all through chapters 4 and 5. *Pardes Rimonim* 5:5.
2. *Tanya*, ch. 2.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Our time is made up of our past, our present, and our future. Most people are familiar with the Hebrew words for these as "*avar*" (עָבָר), for the past, "*atid*" (עָתִיד), for the future, and the present is known as "*hoveh*" (הוֹוֶה). But the present has several synonyms among them "*beinoni*" (בֵּינוֹנִי), which literally means "in-between" or "intermediate," since the present stands between the past and the future. Once we know this fact, it brings to mind that the Tanya, the foundational book of Chabad (and Chasidut in general) is subtitled, "The Book of Beinonim," i.e., the Book of Intermediates. The plain reason for this is that it is structured around the distinction between three types of people: *tzaddikim* (the righteous), *beinonim* (intermediates), and *resha'im* (wicked). To simplify, each type of person has a different relationship with his or her evil and good inclinations. The *tzaddik* hears and follows only his good inclination, the *beinoni* hears both inclinations *but follows only the good*, and the wicked individual may or may not hear both inclinations but is seduced by his evil inclination.

One might say that the *Tanya*, which teaches that most of us are *beinonim* (or at least have the potential to be), is of the view that we mostly live in the present moment. Not in the sense that we are necessarily mindful, but that we are constantly dealing with the chatter between our mind and our inclinations. The *beinoni* is engaged in a constant battle to ensure he or she does not transgress. It follows then that the *tzaddik* lives in the future, constantly living in a future state when all that we believe in—the coming of Mashiach, the Redemption, even the Resurrection of the Dead—will be fulfilled and God will recreate the world. The wicked though are constantly living in the past, which usually means that they are anchored by the weight of their transgressions, unable to break free to pursue a life of goodness.

The wicked are also bogged down by their past self-image, which hampers their ability to truly fulfill their potential (regardless of whether this image is positive or negative[3]). Strengthening this three part correspondence is the Hebrew translation for "transgression" (עֲבֵרָה), which stems from the same root as "past" (עָבָר), and a person who transgresses is called an *avaryan* (עַבְרָיָן).

PRAYING WITH TRANSGRESSORS

At the start of Yom Kippur we say, "We permit praying with the transgressors" (אָנוּ מַתִּירִים לְהִתְפַּלֵּל עִם הָעֲבֵרָיָנִים). We normally explain that an *avaryan* is someone who is a transgressor because he continues to live with his past transgressions. There can also be a positive way to live with the past; not with my own individual past, but with the tzaddikim of past generations, with the Patriarchs (as we are living now in our weekly Torah

3. Self-image is the picture a person has of himself or herself, whenever they think about themselves or refer to themselves. It is formed entirely out of past experiences. Whether the image or positive (the past was good) or negative (the past was bad) does not really matter. In the end, we use the self-image to cast an image of ourselves, which not only makes it harder to truly take advantage of new opportunities arising at every moment, but can also be likened to

readings). But there is an even deeper past that makes us all do a reckoning with ourselves—living with the deep past of Adam and Eve's sin. Individually, we can also live with the rabbinic injunction, "Remember from where you came: from a putrid drop."[4]

What we want to focus on is that when it comes to prayer specifically, we give ourselves permission to be together. It is in prayer that we especially feel that "all of Israel are mutually responsible for one another"[5] and that we can be unified; everyone should pray together. When it comes to learning Torah, for instance, people do not always like to be together with just anyone. There is a story that when the Rebbe Moharash (the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe) was a child he was very sharp-minded and did not like learning with his brothers or classmates. Each of his brothers became a great rebbe in his own right, but the Moharash felt that they were hard of understanding. They simply did not understand the material as fast as he did. Of course, Torah also contains many disputes. Even though in the end the sages, "come to love one another,"[6] but first the opinions are a source of contention. This can even be between a father and a son or a Rav and his student. When it comes to acts of loving-kindness, we also cannot treat everyone equally. Truly everyone deserves to receive the tzedakah, but in practice, there is a list of priorities dictating who receives first. Where we are all equal is in prayer. Of the three pillars on which the world is founded—Torah, prayer, and acts of loving-kindness—true unity can only be found in prayer.

How does this happen? When we are all "transgressors" in the sense of remembering the past. When we all remember our origin, which is the same from everyone—"a putrid drop." When we recall this common past, we can also keep in mind that we are all destined for the same place as well. As the Mishnah continues: "Remember where you came from… and where you are headed…." More deeply, we are all together in this long exile, hoping that the Redemption will extract us from it. Since exile is a punishment for transgressions—as we say in the *Amidah*, "because of our sins we have been exiled from our Land"— in this sense, we know we are all equally to blame. If we remember this well, then we can all pray together, even with the greatest *avaryan* (I myself…). God accepts us all and the true tzaddikim accept us all and are waiting for us to join them in prayer. In their merit, all our prayers are accepted above.[7]

4. *Avot* 3:1.

5. *Shavu'ot* 39a. *Sifra Bechukotai* 7. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:5.

6. See *Kidushin* 30b, based on a homiletic understanding of the words, "And Vahev in Sufah" (אֶת וָהֵב בְּסוּפָה); note that the value of the name place "Vahev" (**וָהֵב**) is 13, the same as "love" (**אַהֲבָה**).

7. See *Keritot* 6b which states that during a fast day, we must include transgressors, like the inclusion of the galbanum in making the Temple's incense.

THE BOTTOM LINE

WHAT IS THE TAKEAWAY FROM YOM KIPPUR

There is a short teaching that I heard myself, more than once, from Rav Asher Freund zt"l. He would say that the most important sentence from our Yom Kippur prayers and the takeaway from the entire day is the end of the confession,

> "My God, before I was formed, I am unworthy. Now that I have been formed, it is as if I had not been formed. I am dust while alive, how much more so when I am dead. See, I am before You like a vessel filled with shame and disgrace"[8] (אֱ-לֹהַי, עַד שֶׁלֹּא נוֹצַרְתִּי אֵינִי כְּדַאי. עַכְשָׁיו שֶׁנּוֹצַרְתִּי, כְּאִילּוּ לֹא נוֹצַרְתִּי. עָפָר אֲנִי בְּחַיָּיו, קַל וָחוֹמֶר בְּמֵיתָתִי. הֲרֵי אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ כִּכְלִי מָלֵא בוּשָׁה וּכְלִימָּה).

This is of course a very typical thing for Rav Asher to say. In fact, all year long, he would repeat this sentence. This is what a person should take with him from Yom Kippur, this is the bottom line.

This saying from the Talmud has three parts to it. First, "I am unworthy," which means that I am not in a position to demand anything. It follows then that all that you God give me, it is all out of compassion, it is all a free kindness. Second, "I am dust while alive," which is based on God's words to Adam, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."[9] Or, as Ecclesiastes says, "Everything comes from dust, and everything returns to dust."[10]

Dust is the essence of lowliness. A person should always be like dust, as Abraham says, "I am dust and ashes."[11] Dust in Hebrew is the name of the ancient element usually called earth; the four elements were earth, water, air, and fire. Thus dust (earth) represents the category of all that is inanimate. In Hebrew, the root of "man" (אָדָם) is cognate with the "inanimate" (דּוֹמֵם). So even though, man belongs to the highest category of being, i.e., to the "speaker" (מְדַבֵּר), the element that he is made of is dust or earth. In man's creation, we see that first God formed the physical body, which was made from dust, as the verse says, "*Havayah Elokim* formed the man dust from the earth."[12] Only then did He breathe into man the breath of life and then man became an animated living being.

The third part of this sentence is that we should feel like a vessel filled with shame and disgrace.

Now, Rav Asher would not have calculated a *gematria* normally, but we enjoy having fun with numbers. So, we find that the value of the key phrases, "I am unworthy… I am dust… like a vessel filled with shame and disgrace" (...**אֵינִי כְּדַאי**... **עָפָר אֲנִי**... **כִּכְלִי מָלֵא בוּשָׁה וּכְלִימָּה**) is 1092, which is also the value of "And who is like Your

8. *Berachot* 17a and *Yoma* 87b in the name of Rav Himnuna.
9. Genesis 3:19.
10. Ecclesiastes 3:20.
11. Genesis 18:27.
12. Ibid. 2:7.

people Israel, one nation in the land"[13] (**וּמִי כְעַמְּךָ כְּיִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בָּאָרֶץ**). This is the virtue of the Jewish people. That we are one nation, as it were, planted deep in the earth. Only a Jew can take this sentence with them and feel good about it, feeling joy in deserving nothing and being nothing more than dust from the earth, all this to be a vessel for God, ultimately receiving all His blessings and goodness, both physically and spiritually.

13. 2 Samuel 7:23.

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(אֵין טוֹב אֶלָּא תוֹרָה). These are most pronounced in the authentic and true novel Torah created by the Jewish people from generation to generation—novel teachings that illuminate the eyes and the hearts with the revelation of Godliness. Thus, the rectification of the World of Formation is through Torah. Jacob is the pillar of Torah, about whom the Torah states in this week's *parashah*, "Jacob was a guileless man, living in tents [of Shem and Ever to learn Torah from them]."[8]

The state of mind experienced in the World of Creation is that of continual recreation, especially during prayer, whose explicit purpose is to create a new will in the Creator Himself, as we say, "May Your will be…" (יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ). This state of mind leads to the healing of the sick, the blessing of livelihood, all in a miraculous way that supersedes nature.[9] This is the realm associated with Isaac, the pillar of prayer. Indeed, the value of Isaac Rebeccah (**יִצְחָק רִבְקָה**), with whose prayers for children this week's *parashah* beings, is 515, the same as the value of "prayer" (**תְּפִלָּה**), "Isaac prayed to God opposite his wife."[10]

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC IN THE MESSIANIC ERA

From the passage of *Tanya* quoted earlier we learn that to bring the Mashiach (to raise the *Shechinah* from dust), the most important thing is *tzedakah*, the service of Abraham that rectifies the World of Action. But in the future, with the Resurrection—part of the second stage of the Messianic era, when the world enters a supernatural existence—we will identify with Isaac as our father.[11] Then we will see that "the righteous will live by their faith"[12] and with their faith (alone) will be able to give life to others.

8. Genesis 25:27.

9. See *Tanya*, *Kuntres Acharon* 4 ("To understand the passage in Pri Eitz Chaim, that today the primary rectification is only through prayer…").

10. Genesis 25:21.

11. Based on Isaiah 63:16 as interpreted by the sages in *Shabbat* 89b.

12. Habbakuk 2:4, following the reading that "will live" (יִחְיֶה) means "will give life" (יְחַיֶּה).

THE MONTH OF KISLEV AND DREAMS

Sefer Yetzirah, one of the most ancient of all Kabbalistic texts, assigns a "sense" to each of the months. The five bodily senses are joined by seven others. The "sense" of the month of Kislev is sleep.[1] Since Kislev is the month usually nearest to the winter solstice (December 21), its nights are some of the longest in the year, making the sense of sleep very appropriate. But by sleep, *Sefer Yetzirah* is not referring just to the literal act of sleeping. One of the deeper meanings is that sleep refers to a sense of calmness, an important attribute in serving God. In the introduction to the Tanya, the classic text of Chasidut, it is written that the purpose of the book, and of Chasidut in general, is to come to an inner state of calm. Another explanation of the sense of sleep is that it refers to a sense of dreaming. Although almost all people dream, not everyone has a "sense" of dreaming.

In the Five Books of Moses, there are ten incidents where dreams play a significant role. All ten dreams occur in the book of Genesis. Many of these are among the most famous and beloved of all Biblical "stories." Dreams continued to play a major role in the lives of the judges, kings and prophets, and are recorded in the books of the Prophets and the Writings.

The main themes underlying all the dreams of Genesis are the notion of dreams being either a channel of Divine inspiration and prophesy, or as the means through which Divine messages or signs are transmitted to the dreamer. There is no doubt that the main thrust of Biblical dreams is prophetic in nature or the instrument of Divine intervention.

A beautiful allusion to the connection between dreams and prophesy is seen in the following numerical correspondence. In the Book of Genesis, there are 48 words whose root stems from the root of "dream" (חלמ) and another 7 words in the other four books of the Pentateuch. These numbers correspond exactly to the statement in the Talmud that there are forty-eight male prophets and seven female prophetesses among the Jews whose prophecies were written in the Bible.[2] This numerical correspondence alludes strongly to an essential connection between dreams and prophetic states of consciousness. The Talmud in fact states that dreams are considered one part in sixty of prophesy.[3] This means that even ordinary people at times may experience an glimmer of prophecy in a dream.

It is important to note that although each calendar year is different, the variations in the first three months are minor, and therefore in almost every year, the Torah portions read during Kislev

1. *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:9.

2. *Megillah* 48a.

3. *Berachot* 57b.

include almost all ten dreams mentioned in the Pentateuch.[4] These include two dreams of Jacob, two dreams of Joseph, the dreams of the butler and baker which Joseph correctly interpreted, as well as the two dreams of Pharaoh which Joseph also interpreted correctly, leading him to be appointed as the viceroy of Egypt. In the very month where the sense of dreaming is dominant we read almost all the dreams of Genesis! This obviously strengthens the idea that the sense of Kislev is dreaming.

Yet, despite the fact that the ten dreams of Genesis are all prophetic in nature, the Talmud surprisingly explains that there are many types of dreams and most are far from being prophetic. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani in the name of Rabbi Yonatan questions the entire concept of dreams being prophetic by stating that a dream is nothing more than a product of the dreamer's own thoughts. Rav Chisda said: "A positive dream is not fulfilled in its entirety, nor is a negative dream fulfilled in its entirety."[5] In other words, even a dream that is fulfilled has some extraneous non-sensical elements. Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, that just as it is impossible to have wheat without some chaff mixed in it, so too it is impossible to have a dream without some senseless matters mixed in.[6] In fact, an opinion is presented based on a verse in Zechariah that "Dreams speak lies,"[7] thus one should not pay all that much attention to dreams in general. When the sage Shmuel would have a negative dream, he would recite that verse.

In order to understand our dreams, we must realize that they are mirror images of our own conscious, unconscious and subconscious thought, and our imagination, be it rectified through the study of the Torah's homiletic part of distorted by non-Torah media. The word for imagination in Hebrew is *dimyon* (דִּמְיוֹן). The last three letters spell Yavan (יָוָן), the name for Greece, whereas the first two letters spell *dam*, (דָּם), meaning blood, associated with the body and the lowest level of soul, the *nefesh*.

The battle between Greek culture (Hellenism) and Israel is commemorated on Chanukah, whose first 5 or 6 days are in the month of Kislev. This was more than merely a military battle. It was a confrontation between civilizations with contradictory world views, philosophies, and lifestyle. The Greek mindset, based on physicality, nature, and the glorification of the body fed into an egocentric sense of imagination—*dam Yavan*.[8]

It is significant that the word for logic in Hebrew is *higayon* (הִגָּיוֹן), where again the last three letters are *Yavan*, i.e. "Greece." The value of the first two letters—*hei* and *gimel*—is 8. Greek logic was based on rationality including the tenet that, "if you can see it, it is real; if not, it does not exist." Jewish logic also believes in rationality, but the number 8 found in the Hebrew word for logical symbolizes that which is beyond

4. See *Wonders* issue 131 for a *partzuf* (model) of the ten dreams and more insights into this topic.
5. *Berachot* 55a
6. *Ibid.*
7. Zechariah 10:2.
8. *Mivchar Shi'urei Hitbonenut*, vol. 10, "*Chodesh Kislev*."

our senses. It points to a higher source for logic, because the number 8 in Judaism symbolizes that which is above the natural world, which is symbolized by the number 7. In an ironic twist, it seems that in the past hundred years or so, science, once the flag-bearer of quantifiable, rational thought, has now become the epitome of counter-logic and paradox following the quantum revolution.

THE DREAMING AND HEALING STONE

Another connection between the month of Kislev and dreams is seen in the twelve gem stones that appeared on the breastplate of the High Priest. Kislev is the ninth month of the year and the corresponding ninth stone is called "amethyst" (אַחְלָמָה), which shares the same root as "to dream" (לַחֲלֹם) and "to heal" (לְהַחֲלִים).[9] To deepen this connection, we need to explain in short, a basic foundation of the Hebrew language.

Words in Hebrew have three-letter roots, of which two are known as the gate (or two-letter root).[10] In "dream" (חֲלוֹם), the two essential letters are the *chet* and the *lamed* (חל). Word roots in Hebrew usually have many meanings, and this one, like many others, paradoxically, contains opposite meanings. The letters *Ch-l* are the root of the word "sick," *choleh* (חוֹלֶה), "disease," *machalah* (מַחֲלָה), as well as "weakness," *chalash* (חָלַשׁ). Yet, the same letters are the two-letter root of "strength," *chayil* (חַיִל) or "soldier," chayal (חָיַל). *Eishet chayil*, which means "a woman of valor" or "a woman of prowess," are the first two words of a section of Proverbs, traditionally sung by husbands to their wives every Shabbat eve.[11] In Aramaic, a language closely associated with Hebrew, the two-letter root *chet-lamed* means both bitter and sweet. Paradoxically, as we saw, in Hebrew it is the root of both sickness and healing, as well as of "to dream" and the gem stone "amethyst."[12]

These same ideas apply to dreams. Dreams are like formless "raw material." In fact, the Hebrew word for "dream" (**חֲלוֹם**) can be seen as a *notarikon*, or shorthand, for "raw material" (**חֹ**מֶר גֶּ**לֶם**). What this means is that how we shape the raw material of a dream will determine its positive or negative effect on us. A dream can drag us down to the depths of fear and despair or lift us up to the very heavens. The paradoxical nature of dreams is that they contain both the roots of sickness and health, weakness and strength, bitterness and sweetness. When we rectify our imagination, it clarifies our dreams which then strengthens and heals body and soul.

The Rebbe Rayatz, the sixth Chabad Rebbe, stated that if during the day a person is involved in Torah and *mitzvot*, he or she will be able to receive innovative ideas when dreaming. His statement is based on the above discussions that most dreams are a product of what we are thinking and doing during the day.[13]

9. Exodus 28:19

10. The three-letter root grammar has been used since about the 11th century. The two-letter root grammar was used by the rabbinic sages before then and remains the foundation of *Sefer Yetzirah*, the first book of Hebrew grammar and of Kabbalah.

11. Proverbs 31:10

12. See also *Body, Mind and Soul*, pp 127-131.

13. *Mivchar Shi'urei Hitbonenut*, vol. 10, "*Chodesh*

Chanukah is the holiday of pure olive oil through which a miracle occurred. The contents of one cruse of oil that were enough for just one day burned for eight days. Pure oil in Jewish tradition represents the inner dimensions of the Torah. It is particularly through learning these secrets that the imagination is purified leading to rectified dreams.[14]

Kislev."

14. *Ibid*.

THE MAHARSHA: THE REINCARNATIONS OF AHAB

Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer HaLevi Eidels, one of the greatest commentators on the Talmud, was born in the year 5315 (1555) to Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi and Gittel from the family of the Maharal of Prague, in Kazimierz, Poland. He married the daughter of Rabbi Moshe Lifshitz, the rabbi of Brisk, and he and his wife were supported by his mother-in-law, Eidel, who also maintained the Maharsha's yeshiva. Because of this, the Maharsha referred to her as his second mother, hence his nickname "Eidels" (of Eidel).

In 5368 (1608), Eidel passed away, and upon her death, the Maharsha moved to serve as rabbi in Chelm. He later served as rabbi in Lublin, Tiktin, and Ostroh, and participated in the Council of Four Lands in Yaroslav. He became famous during his lifetime for his many acts of kindness, and on his door was inscribed the verse, "I would open my doors to the wayfarer" (Job 31:32). He wrote his commentary on the Talmud entitled "Chiddushei Halachot" and "Chiddushei Aggadot," and in an unusual step, united them into one book to emphasize the equal importance he attributed to both parts of the Torah. Tzaddikim testified that his book was written with Divine inspiration, and he was among the first scholars of the revealed tradition to bring the opinions of the Kabbalists in his books. He passed away on the 5th of Kislev 5392 (1631) and was buried in Ostroh.

The Maharsha was a rabbi in a certain community, where he studied Torah in his yeshivah all day. At that time, there was a Chief Rabbi of the region under whose authority the Maharsha served, and all the rabbis of the communities belonging to the Chief Rabbi were obligated to come to him and receive his permission to serve their communities, as was customary in previous generations.

All the rabbis of the communities came to the Chief Rabbi, but the Maharsha continued to sit and study and did not go to meet him. The Chief Rabbi judged him favorably and said: "Perhaps because he is occupied with his studies, he has not come to give me honor?" The Chief Rabbi decided to travel to the Maharsha. When he arrived, the entire town trembled before him, and they all came to greet him, but the Maharsha refused to go to him. The Chief Rabbi again judged him favorably, attributing this, too, to his unwillingness to interrupt his studies.

The Chief Rabbi went to the synagogue where the Maharsha was studying, but the Maharsha did not interrupt his studies and did not greet him at all. Nevertheless, the Chief Rabbi judged him favorably even now, saying, "Perhaps this too is

because he does not want to interrupt his studies?" Just then, a handsome young man entered the synagogue, and immediately the Maharsha rushed to greet him, stood up before him, and spoke with him at great length.

The Chief Rabbi became very angry with the Maharsha, saying, "At first, when you didn't come to me, I judged you favorably and attributed it to your wish not to interrupt your Torah study. Then when I came to your town and you didn't come to me, I said the same. Afterward, when I came to the synagogue and you didn't greet me, I again judged you favorably, attributing it to your wish not to interrupt your Torah study! But now I see that it's all false, for you have honored this young man and spoken with him at length in the middle of your studies!"

The Maharsha said, "As a sign and wonder that there is a secret reason for my actions, I will tell you that this young man will be killed within two hours." The Chief Rabbi did not believe this, so he took the young man and walked with him here and there, talking with him at length so as not to let him out of his sight until the two hours had passed, to disprove the Maharsha's words. As they were walking through the town, a nobleman passed by, casually carrying a firearm to shoot at some bird or the like, as was their custom. He mistakenly shot the young man, who was killed immediately, just as the Maharsha had said.

The Chief Rabbi ran to the Maharsha, who told him that soon they would bring a dead person to the town. While they were speaking, a dead person was brought in. "What is the meaning of this?" asked the Chief Rabbi in alarm. "What caused this person to die?"

The Maharsha revealed to him that the young man who he had spoken to and who was killed by the wandering shot of the nobleman was a reincarnation of Ahab, king of Israel, and that was why he had shown him such great honor. Because Ahab, king of Israel, was killed by a wandering arrow,[1] the young man would suffer a similar fate. To that end, as soon as the young man, the reincarnation of Ahab was born, the force of his demise was also created to kill him. It had been standing in that place, near our town, waiting until the time came for the young man to be killed by it. Because you delayed his death, until he was killed by that nobleman, the force of his demise was given another person in his place. Therefore, you need to repent, for this dead person was killed because of you!

The Chief Rabbi fell before the Maharsha's feet, begged him for forgiveness, and asked him to prescribe a penance. The Maharsha told him, "Your penance is to give up your rabbinical position and become a wagon driver." He accepted this upon himself and became a wagon driver.

1. 1 Kings 22:34.

Ahab the king, around whose reincarnation our story revolves, is one of the kings most remembered for evil in Jewish history: he married the daughter of the king of Sidon, devotedly worshiped idols, and seized his subjects' lands. If so, why did the Maharsha honor him?

The holy Ari reveals that until Ahab's great sin of taking Naboth's vineyard, there was indeed a good and holy part in him, but it departed from him at the time of the sin. Because of that good part, the prophet Elijah constantly tried to cause him to repent. Had Elijah succeeded in drawing Ahab close, the messianic destiny of uniting the two kingdoms—"the tree of Joseph and the tree of Judah"[2]—would have been fulfilled then, and our righteous Messiah would have arrived.

This duality of good and evil characterizes Ahab's entire generation. Elijah the prophet rebukes them for "hesitating between two options"[3] and living double lives: on one hand praying to God and believing in Him, and on the other bowing to the Ba'al, the popular idol of the Canaanites. Both sides are hinted to in Ahab's name (אַחְאָב), which is a composite of "brother" (אָח) and "father" (אָב). The brother half alludes to Ahimelech (אֲחִימֶלֶךְ), a righteous priest, and his father half alludes to Abimelech (אֲבִימֶלֶךְ), the wicked Philistine king.

What was Ahab's positive half? In Ahab as an individual, there were positive aspects of submission to God and generosity. God praises him for his humility, and the holy Ari notes that because he was generous with his wealth, he merited to indirectly provide for Elijah through the ravens that brought food from his kitchen to the Cherith Brook, where Elijah was hiding.[4]

More broadly, Ahab symbolizes the entire kingdom of Israel: Caring for the people's welfare, fostering religious pluralism, and struggling to deal with those he deemed extremists, like the prophet Elijah. In modern terms, the Northern Kingdom corresponds to liberal Jews. The Kingdom of Judah, on the other hand, corresponds to traditional Jews who are more committed to the past and who practice a relatively strong and cohesive Judaism that maintains fewer connections with surrounding foreign cultures.

The process that the kingdoms must undergo is similar to that of a bride and groom. Like every heavenly match, they have an original common source. But then they were split and must develop and consolidate, individually, separate from one another. The culmination of the split is when they rediscover their connection, this time through their own free choice and in a mature way. Both kingdoms have their unique virtues that, at their core, do not contradict: Liberals are not necessarily secular, and conservatives can certainly join the desire for civil rights and justice. But for this to happen, both camps must look at each other with love, face to face, and agree to contain the very different poles within themselves.

2. Ezekiel ch. 37.

3. 1 Kings 18:21.

4. Ibid. 17:5-6. *Chullin* 5a.

TIKKUN OLAM IN THE MESSIANIC ERA

Every Jew burns internally with the need to fix the world. We have inherited this burning desire from the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the Matriarchs, each of whom set out to do the same in a distinct way. This week's parashah, Toldot, begins with Isaac and Rebeccah's prayers for children. Isaac and Rebeccah are considered the pillars of prayer. To achieve Tikkun Olam, we need their power of prayer, Abraham and Sarah's kindness, and Jacob and his wives' dedication to Torah.

In this post, HaRav Ginsburgh draws a correspondence between these three paths and the rectification of reality according to the Torah's inner dimension, based on the insights offered by the Alter Rebbe.

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BACKGROUND

One of the most well-known concepts from the rabbinic sages is that of *Tikkun Olam*. Even though in the revealed tradition of Torah this concept was limited to limited legal regulations meant to fix society, in the Torah's concealed tradition, it has always referred to a rectification of cosmological scope. In modern times, it has become so well-known in part because of the Jewish soul's inner yearning to bring the Redemption and to end suffering. This yearning was always strong but heightened especially after the destruction of European Jewry among non-traditionally observant Jews.

The Torah's inner dimension has a well-defined cosmological interpretation of what *Tikkun Olam* means. According to the Arizal, after God introduced the infinite light of His revelation into the vessels of reality, these vessels shattered and their shards together with sparks of the infinite light of God's revelation fell. Then God rebuilt many of these shards into the more robust World of Rectification; but He only completed the highest part of Rectification, the part known as Emanation (*Atizult*). The three lower parts known as Creation, Formation, and Action remained fragmented with the shards and their sparks of God's revelation still scattered. The task of reconstructing these three lower parts was given to man, specifically to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though previous generations were successful in rebuilding much of reality, their efforts were toppled over repeatedly by the collective sins of the Jewish people, the most recent of which was marked by the destruction of the Second Temple and the beginning of our 2000 year long exile.

As the rabbinic sages state, "Because of our sins, we have been exiled from our land." *Tikkun Olam* is thus the rebuilding of reality through teshuvah for the past and

committing to the *mitzvot* in the present, leading to the revelation of Godliness, as was the original intent of Creation. Once Godliness is revealed and God's infinite light can be contained, the rectification of society and the individual will follow.

REVEALING GOD'S ONENESS

The Alter Rebbe writes in the *Tanya*,[1]

> ...as the footsteps of Mashiach approach, as "the Sukkah of David[2] has fallen" to a level of "feet" and "heels"—which is the level of "[the World of] Action"—there is no way of truly cleaving to it and to convert the darkness into its light, except through a corresponding category of action, namely the act of charity. For, as known to the scholars, the plane of Action with reference to Divinity is the notion of a diffusion and efflux of vitality to those most distant—to he who has nothing of his own.

In *Likkutei Torah*,[3] the Alter Rebbe writes that for now, the three lower planes of reality, the three Worlds[4] of Creation, Formation, and Action, have not been rectified of the fall and shattering of the vessels that occurred. Only the World of Emanation is in a rectified state. It is our duty to bring *Tikkun* to the three lower Worlds. Even though the World of Emanation and its clear revelation of God's oneness penetrate all of reality—even the three lower Worlds—for now, its effect is hidden. Thus, to rectify the three lower Worlds we must reveal God's oneness as it already exists but is hidden.

TIKKUN THROUGH TZEDAKAH, TORAH, AND PRAYER

The *tikkun* or rectification of the World of Action is through the act of *tzedakah* and the service of *tzedakah*, as stated by Isaiah, "For the act of *tzedakah* will be peace and the service of *tzedakah* will give calm and confidence forever"[5] (וְהָיָה מַעֲשֵׂה הַצְּדָקָה שָׁלוֹם וַעֲבֹדַת הַצְּדָקָה הַשְׁקֵט וָבֶטַח עַד עוֹלָם).[6] Tzedakah is an act of kindness and thus the act of *tzedakah* is the special virtue of Abraham, the archetypal soul of loving-kindness.[7]

Formation, in (Modern) Hebrew also means "creativity" (יְצִירָה). It is the realm of the inclinations (יְצָרִים) and though the evil inclination is very creative in its efforts to draw us to sin, it is rectified by the creativity of the good inclination, which for a Jew is demonstrated best by creativity in Torah and its scholarship; as the sages say, "the good is only Torah"

1. *Iggeret* 9.
2. A connotation for the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence.
3. *Re'eh* 33d.
4. Worlds do not denote a physical space. The best way to grasp them is as states of consciousness. At the level of Emanation, consciousness openly sees God's revelation and oneness, as follows.
5. Isaiah 32:17.
6. See *Tanya*, *Iggeret* 12 for the difference between the two.
7. See Micah 7:20 and Isaiah 41:8. See *Pardes* 23:1.

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