"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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שַׁבַּת מִקֵּץ-חֲנֻכָּה ❁ כט-ל כִּסְלֵו תשפ"ו



> *the nogah inclination is increasingly dominant in today's reality. It is the point of origin for addictions... to media in general and social media in particular. Even when the content viewed is seemingly neutral, the addiction itself is destructive. It is now pushing people to experiment with AI.... The nogah curiosity inclination leans to the negative. It has no kabalat ol, meaning it sees no authority higher than its own.... It is invested in experiencing itself whether something is pleasure or a scourge to be avoided*

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Dedicated to the memory of our beloved R' Yisrael Benyamin ben Avraham Sandler עליו השלום.
"I want to see the entire world return to God with love" (RYB)

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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CHASIDIC PSYCHOLOGY

THE INTERMEDIATE INCLINATION

A new inclination (yetzer) is discovered. Is this possible? We are all familiar with the inner struggle between our good inclination (yetzer tov) and our evil inclination (yetzer ra). However, there is a third inclination that lies in between the two—the intermediate inclination.

What is its nature? Where did it come from? How is it the force driving addiction, social media, and all forms of modernity? And how exactly do we rectify it? These are the questions that HaRav Ginsburgh addresses in this foundational teaching of Chasidic psychology.

This innovative teaching was first published in the Toldot 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

THE INCLINATION IN-BETWEEN

One of the most fundamental ideas involved in serving God is the understanding that every human being is in a constant battle between his or her inclinations. This is the ongoing war between the good inclination (*Yetzer HaTov*) and the evil inclination (*Yetzer HaRa*).

Another, seemingly non-related principle in Chasidic thought is that between every two extremes there is an intermediate. It could also be referred to as the average between the two extremes.

Putting these two ideas together, we arrive at the conclusion that between the good and evil inclinations, which represent two extremes, there must be another inclination, which is mixed with good and evil together.

We find this principle of the intermediate applied to the impure husks that represent the negative forces in reality. In the *Tanya*, the Alter Rebbe draws a distinction between holiness, which vitalizes the performance of God's commandments and whose hallmark is its nullification to God, and the three absolutely impure husks that vitalize and sustain everything that is forbidden. In between these two realms, we find an intermediate husk known as *kelipat nogah*, whose source is found in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This husk vitalizes and sustains everything in the world that is considered permissible. A permissible object is one that we are not required to utilize for the purpose of a commandment, but which is also not explicitly forbidden.

When we translate this schema of reality into the human psyche, we find that we have a good inclination, which is constantly pulling us towards everything in life that is holy, and we have an evil inclination, which pulls us to all that is forbidden. Just as there is a realm of the permissible

in reality, so there is an inclination in us that pulls us toward all that is permissible. This in-between inclination we will dub the inclination for good-and-evil. Because this inclination is attracting us to the realm of the permissible, we can also call it the *nogah* inclination or *yetzer nogah* (יֵצֶר נֹגַהּ) in Hebrew.

THE NOGAH INCLINATION AND MASHIACH

Kelipat nogah is considered a "husk," because like the three impure husks, it acts as a curtain to veil Godliness. But because the veil of *nogah* is not completely opaque and a certain amount of light (i.e., Godly revelation) does get through, it is called *nogah*, which literally means "dimmed" or "muted" light. In practice, this means that those things that are in the realm of *nogah* can be elevated into holiness if they are used for the sake of serving God. The intent in such a case can either be premeditated or post-factum. For example, if one eats with the express intent to sustain one's body so that one can serve God with it, then that is a premeditated intent for the sake of Heaven. But, even if one did not eat with this in mind, even if one simply craved food that is permissible to indulge one's appetite, that food can be elevated post-factum is the energy is used in a positive way later. What counts is how the energy from the food is used in practice.[1]

What is true of *kelipat nogah* is also true of the *yetzer nogah*, the intermediate inclination. Fundamentally, it too leans in the negative direction (like *kelipat nogah*, which fundamentally is a "veil" on Divine revelation). Because of that it can turn into a bridge to absolutely forbidden things. However, it can also serve as a bridge in the opposite direction, helping us elevate to holiness the sparks of Divinity trapped in evil. This effect is the inner meaning of the verse, "the path of the righteous is like the light of *nogah*, ever brightening until [it is as radiant as] noon"[2] (וְאֹרַח צַדִּיקִים כְּאוֹר נֹגַהּ הוֹלֵךְ וְאוֹר עַד נְכוֹן הַיּוֹם).

The fact that reality contains a realm called *nogah* is one thing. One can avoid falling into it the wrong way by simply avoiding it altogether. To this end, we find a famous Chabad instruction given by the Alter Rebbe, "What is forbidden is forbidden, but what is permissible is unnecessary."[3] Still, in our generation, the Lubavitcher Rebbe encouraged us to make use of all that is permissible to serve God.[4] However, it is an entirely different thing to say that *nogah* is not only on the outside, it is also part of our psychological makeup and that we have a third inclination that like *nogah* is good and evil together.

We find that in the past, when addressing the ongoing battle in the psyche between the good and the evil inclinations, this in-between inclination was hardly ever discussed. But as noted, as we approach the era of Mashiach and reality is nearing its rectification, it becomes imperative to discuss the *nogah* inclination because with its proper use lies the key to rectifying all of reality. The *nogah* inclination is the bridge,

1. See *Tanya* ch. 8.

2. Proverbs 4:18.

3. *Hayom Yom* for the 25th of 2nd Adar.

4. Famous in this regard was the Rebbe's stance on technology.

which all the sparks of holiness trapped in reality must cross. The beautiful allusion to this principle can be seen in the value of "the *nogah* inclination" (**יֵצֶר נֹגַהּ**), which is the same as the value of "Mashiach" (**מָשִׁיחַ**), 358!

THE INCLINATION TO KNOW

What is the definition of the *nogah* inclination? The term "inclination" (יֵצֶר) is common in rabbinic texts. Following the expanded terminology of his predecessors, the Alter Rebbe in the *Tanya* adopts the term *nefesh*, which literally means *anima* (in Latin), or life-force. Instead of speaking of simply two inclinations, the Alter Rebbe upgrades the inner battle in most people to one between the animal anima (which most translate as "animal soul," to prevent the confusing repetition) and the Divine anima (again, usually translated as "Divine soul). When pitting animas (*nefashot*, in Hebrew) against one another, the Alter Rebbe does introduce the concept of an intermediate anima, the intellectual anima, or intellectual soul. The intellectual soul naturally leans towards the animal soul (in fact, it develops out of the animal soul in the first 13 years of life) and therefore provides inner rationalization and justification for the negative leaning behavior of our animal soul. But the intellectual soul can be turned to assist the Divine soul by learning Torah and understanding what it is that God (not the animal soul) wants from us. If the intellectual soul becomes the assistant of the Divine soul, it can become the bridge to the ultimate rectification of the animal soul, explaining to it in its native language why to serve God.[5]

With this in mind, we can now state that the *nogah* inclination originates in the intellectual soul and identify it with the intellect's innate *curiosity*. Every inclination represents an attraction. The good inclination is attracted to holiness, the evil inclination is attracted, well, to evil. The good inclination's attraction is alluded to in the words, "the spirit of men, does it strive upwards,"[6] and the evil inclination's attraction is alluded to in the continuation, "and the spirit of the animal, does it strive downwards to earth." The in-between *nogah* inclination, whose spiritual origin is from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, is attracted to knowledge. It wants to know everything there is to know, whether good or bad.

Rebbe Isaac of Homil writes[7] that the good inclination is attracted to what is above reality—the realm of holiness and Godliness out of which reality comes into being; the evil inclination is attracted to what is below reality—the realm of the impure, the realm of non-being where reality is negated and becomes imaginary.[8]

5. In fact, one way to define Chasidut is that it is the principles of the Divine translated into an intellectual language that the animal soul can understand and be drawn towards.

6. Ecclesiastes 3:21.

7. *Channah Ariel*, *Lech Lecha*, "*Chamishah Kinyanim*."

8. Rebbe Nachman famously called the evil inclination "the power of imagination" (**כֹּחַ הַמְּדַמֶּה**), whose numerical value is equal to that of "the Golden Calf" (**עֵגֶל הַזָּהָב**), the imaginary embodiment of Godliness the Israelites worshipped at Sinai. Though imagination initially is controlled by the animal soul (which imagines the next meal, the next pleasure), we are tasked with

Expanding on this observation, we say that the *nogah* inclination is attracted to reality itself. It wants to know all that is, as it is, to collect knowledge, and to experiment with reality.

To state this another way, the good inclination craves the holy Name, *Havayah*, God's essential Name and its instruction: "*Havayah* is one."[9] The evil inclination craves false gods (אֱלִילִים), whose Hebrew equivalent literally means "non-existent."[10] The *nogah* inclination is a craving for God's Name *Shakai* (שַׁ-דַּי), an acronym for "Who said 'Enough!' to His world." This is God's Name that limits nature, making it possible for the limited human mind to know and understand it. But, from the holiness of *Shakai* also derives the "demon" (שֵׁד), the negative dimension of the realm of *nogah*.

Our *nogah* inclination, our curiosity knows no bounds. It finds everything interesting. It is curious about what people say is good and what people say is bad (assuming that perhaps it's not all that bad, etc.). The *nogah* inclination's curiosity also pushes it to experiment. Why trust other people's testimonial when you can try something for yourself. It even knows a bit of Torah and quotes, "no one is as wise as he who has experience."[11] So, it argues, it is not enough to read about psychedelic experiences, I should experiment with them myself. Maybe they will do me good.

There is no escaping the fact that the *nogah* inclination is increasingly dominant in today's reality. It is the point of origin for addictions, one of the hallmarks of our generation, especially addictions to media in general and social media in particular. Even when the content viewed is seemingly neutral, the addiction itself is destructive. It is now pushing people to experiment with AI and drawing them to seek to know something about everything. All this is the handiwork of our *nogah* inclination.

THE POSITIVE AND THE NEGATIVE IN CURIOSITY

The *nogah* curiosity inclination leans to the negative. It has no *kabalat ol*, meaning it sees no authority higher than its own, which is why it wants to try everything for itself. It does not accept other's definitions of what is good and what is bad. It is invested in experiencing itself whether something is pleasure or a scourge to be avoided.[12] Put another way, curiosity has no boundaries and what does not have limits will eventually end up in the worst of places. Evil tongue—all manners of negative speech about others—also originates from this inclination to know everything about other people. This is the reason why every academic work must also criticize the subject it studies.

Still, curiosity is innate to man and sets humans apart from all other creatures. It is responsible for all the progress humanity has made in all areas. It is the root of all

rectifying it by using it to learn Torah, specifically midrashim, the rabbinic homiletic interpretations of Torah, which cleanse our mind's by focusing it on imagining the Torah and its contents.

9. Deuteronomy 6:4.

10. See Rashi on Leviticus 19:4. Rashi then continues to say that if you give these idols credence, they will become real as your "gods."

11. *Akeidat Yitzchak* 14.

12. Following *Sefer Yetzirah* (2:4) which states that, "there is nothing higher than pleasure (עֹנֶג) and nothing lower than a scourge (נֶגַע)," which is cognate with *nogah*.

scientific inquiry. Without it, we could not break out of our limited knowledge, discover new science, and invent new technologies. From time immemorial, technology and progress are viewed positively in Torah, beginning with Noah who, by inventing the plow, brought tranquility Above and below.

Indeed, in the future, despite the negative-leaning nature of the *nogah* inclination, the good will be triumphant. This will happen when curiosity matures enough to seek the good in reality. As the Izhbitzer Rebbe writes, when the commandment to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge is punctuated differently—"from all the trees of the Garden you shall eat and from the Tree of Knowledge of good; and evil, you shall not eat from it"[13]—when our craving for knowledge will focus on the good, we will be able to elevate the evil as well. Evil will then not just be transformed into "good," it will be transformed into the "very good."

13. Genesis 3:1.

DREAMS AND THE SECRET OF TIME

Parshat Mikeitz begins: "It came to pass at the end of [*Mikeitz*] two full years, that Pharaoh was dreaming, and behold, he was standing by the Nile."[1] The verse is referring to two years that passed from the time that Joseph interpreted the dreams of the butler and the baker while in jail. Despite Joseph's request from the butler that he mention to Pharaoh how he was incarcerated falsely, the butler forgot about him. However, when Pharaoh sought an interpretation for his dreams, the butler suddenly remembered how Joseph correctly interpreted his dream and finally mentioned him to Pharaoh.[2]

The key to Joseph's correct interpretation of the butler and baker's dreams at the end of *parashat Vayeishev*, as well as his success with Pharaoh's dreams in *Mikeitz*, was his ability to translate the quantities of the physical objects appearing in the dreams into measurements of time. *Rashi* comments that there were many of Pharaoh's magi who interpreted his dream, but none to Pharaoh's satisfaction. They said the seven healthy cows and the seven robust ears of grain signified the number of daughters Pharaoh would give birth to while the seven gaunt cows and the sickly ears of grain symbolized the number of daughters he would bury.[3] Only Joseph realized the intrinsic connection between the space-bound objects in the dreams and time—a connection which Albert Einstein only made at the beginning of the 20th century. Before discussing the specifics of Joseph's ability to translate the spatial objects in the dreams of the butler, baker, and Pharaoh into spans of time, let us first delve more deeply into the relationship between time, space and soul.

1. Exodus 41:1.
2. Ibid 41:9-14.
3. See *Rashi* on Genesis 41:8 based on *Bereishit Rabbah* 89:1.

SPACE, TIME, AND SOUL

The teachings of Kabbalah and Chasidut explain that time is the inner dimension of space, in that the entities within the three physical dimensions of space only "move" or change through time. *Sefer Yetzirah* discusses five dimensions: three of space (*olam*), one of time (*shana*), and one of body/soul or consciousness (*nefesh*).[4] In the context of *Sefer Yetzirah*, the dimension of *nefesh*, at least externally, is associated with different organs in the body. One of the main sources for the correspondence between the Hebrew letters, a major topic of *Sefer Yetzirah*, and the body can be found in the verse, "From my flesh, I will envision God."[5] The Chasidic movement revealed a significant innovation based on this verse. Its rebbes interpreted the word translated as "from my flesh" not only literally, but also figuratively, allowing a symbolic correspondence to be drawn between Godliness and human intellect, emotion and instinctual behavior. Thus, the *nefesh* dimension in *Sefer Yetzirah* has come to encompass the spiritual symbolism of the body, but even more importantly, the associated concept of soul or consciousness.

Science, which now posits time as well as space as a dimension, still has not acknowledged the soul dimension. Time serves as the intermediary between the dimensions of space and soul, between the physical world and the spiritual worlds. Interestingly, science has recently accepted the critical effect consciousness and observation have on reality. Eventually science will come to understand soul as a dimension as well.

Time functions as an intermediary between the space and soul dimensions because of the insurmountable conceptual distance between God's infinite light and the finite spiritual and physical worlds. Divine light, i.e., God's revelation, by its very nature cannot illuminate the physical realm directly. If it were to do so, one of two things would happen: either the physical world would be totally nullified by the tremendous influx of Divine light and cease to exist, or, to prevent this, the light would have to become so diffused and subservient to the lower worlds that creation would lose its Divine purpose for existing. Therefore, God's light constantly assumes a pulsating rhythm of "run and return." By doing so, the light can enliven all the worlds but not overwhelm them—dynamically running in and instantaneously retreating out. This dynamic, rhythmic current creates time, as every pulsation is a segment of time. In this way, time—the pulsation of Divine light—becomes the bridge connecting the dimensions of soul or consciousness to the dimensions of space.

This mystical notion fits with the scientific understanding that light is composed of a stream of tiny packets or particles of light called photons. These tiny packets or quanta are the reason that our modern understanding of the physical world is known as "quantum physics." One of science's greatest paradoxes is that light (and in fact, all particles) acts as both a particle and a wave. This mystery of light is intrinsically connected to the mystery of time, for the Kabbalistic tradition teaches us that both light and time, which appear to act like waves of a constantly

4. *Sefer Yetzirah* 3:3.
5. Job 19:26.

flowing stream, are fundamentally Divine pulsating energy.

An excellent metaphor for understanding the flow of time is to understand how movies were once shown in theaters. Movie reels of individual picture frames moving faster than 23 frames per second projected on the screen were experienced by the brain as continual motion. If something would impede the projector and it slowed down, one could see the individual frames surrounded by black celluloid.[6]

Every morning in our prayers we repeat the statement that God, "in His goodness renews daily, perpetually, the work of creation." According to Chasidut, the world is recreated literally every moment. So though this would make time similar to the old-time movie reels, with gaps in between the moments, we experience time continuously flowing, not sensing the instantaneous recreation that is occurring. Each moment of time is like an individual movie frame, a state of "being" (*yesh*) emerging at every moment from the surrounding state of non-being (*ayin*), again like a movie frame surrounded by the dark, blank space of the celluloid.[7]

THE WISDOM OF JOSEPH

With these ideas in mind let us now focus on Joseph and his dream interpretation skills. Joseph was able to recognize the inner essence of time enlivening the symbols in the dreams and interpret them accordingly. When interpreting the dreams of the baker and the butler, he interpreted the number three, which appeared in both their dreams, as days, but not just as days, specifically as the same three days. The butler dreamt of a grapevine with three branches of budding blossoms and clusters of fruit. Pharaoh's cup was in his hand, and he pressed the grapes into the cup and served Pharaoh. Joseph's interpretation was that in three days he would be restored to his position. The baker dreamt of three baskets on his head full of a baker's delicacies, yet from the top basket birds were eating the baked goods. Joseph once again interpreted the number three in the dream as three days; in three days Pharaoh would have him hung and birds would eat his flesh.[8] Both of Joseph's interpretations were in fact realized: the butler was returned to his post after three days and the baker was hung after the same three days.[9]

In Pharaoh's dreams, it is the number seven that is repeated. Pharaoh sees two separate dreams, which Joseph explains are symbolic of a single string of events. The repetition, he explained, is because God wants Pharaoh to know the events foretold in his dream would begin immediately. In his first dream, Pharaoh sees seven healthy cows emerge from the Nile and graze until seven ugly, gaunt cows emerge and swallow them. In his second dream, seven healthy ears of grain sprout on one stalk, followed by seven unhealthy ones. The thin ones, scorched by an eastern wind, swallow the healthy ones. This time, Joseph interprets the number in the dreams, seven, as years,

6. *The Inner Dimension: Insights into the Weekly Torah Portion, Parshat Balak.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. Genesis 40:9-19.
9. Ibid 40:20-23.

not days. More importantly, the years do not overlap as in the case of the baker and the butler's dreams. Instead, Joseph says they symbolize seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine.[10]

UNDERSTANDING NUMERICAL SYMBOLISM

The interpretive leap from spatial objects to periods of time demanded that Joseph possess a deep understanding of numerical symbolism. Beginning with the first book of Kabbalah attributed to Abraham (Joseph's great-grandfather), the number three refers to the three inner, intellectual *sefirot* of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, while the number seven refers to the seven lower *sefirot*, associated with emotional and behavioral traits.[11] One of the differences between the intellect and the emotional/habitual realm is that the intellect operates primarily within the individual, inside his or her private realm, while the behavioral characteristics are primarily directed outwards. As a result, the three intellectual faculties are more unified, and the seven emotional/habitual faculties are more differentiated. This is also hinted to in the description of the seven as "doubles." Joseph thus understood that in the dreams of the butler and baker the number three signified a single span of three days, after which the butler and the baker's private fates would be determined but in Pharaoh's dreams, each span of seven years would be separate.[12]

How did Joseph know that the number three signified days while the number seven signified years.[13] The clue to this insight comes from the objects themselves. In Hebrew, objects have gender. Both the baskets and the branches are masculine in Hebrew, which is reflected in the number three: "three (m) branches" (שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׂרִיגִם) and "three (m) baskets" (שְׁלֹשָׁה סַלֵּי חֹרִי). Both the ears of grain and the cows are feminine and once again this is reflected in the number seven: "seven (f) ears of grain" (שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים) and "seven (f) cows" (שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת). Incredibly, "day" (יוֹם) in Hebrew is masculine but "year" (שָׁנָה) is feminine. It seems that Joseph simply associated the masculine three with a masculine unit of time—a day—and the feminine seven with a feminine unit of time—a year!

The Hebrew root of the word meaning "year" also means change. Thus, Joseph intuited that the seven lean cows and the unhealthy ears of grain consuming the seven fat cows and the seven healthy ears of grain, signified a process that would occur over a considerable length of time. Joseph's ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams correctly was also due to his awareness of the mystical insight found in the Midrash that kings dream not just about themselves, but about the future of the world.[14]

CREATING A UNIFIED DREAM INTERPRETATION

One final insight into dream interpretations relates to how Joseph

10. Genesis 41:25-29.

11. In the language of *Sefer Yetzirah*, there are "ten *sefirot*, without substance" and they divide into 3 origins and 7 doubles, corresponding to the 3 origin letters in Hebrew and the 7 double letters so-called because there are two ways to pronounce each.

12. *Yayin Yitzchak, Mikeitz*, §2.

13. *Mivchar Shiurei Hitbonenut* vol. 15, pp. 90-91.

14. *Bereishit Rabbah* 89:4.

was able to tie together the various symbols in the dreams—time, physical objects, and numerical allusions—to create a unified interpretation. The Hebrew word the Torah uses to describe a dream interpreter in these stories is "*poter*" (**פּוֹתֵר**). The same letters arranged differently spell "one who sews" or "one who ties together" (**תּוֹפֵר**). Joseph was able to take diverse symbols in a dream and rearrange them, sewing them together to create a unified garment or interpretation. When Jacob blesses Joseph at the end of his life, he begins the blessing with "Joseph is a *fruitful* bough, a *fruitful* bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall."[15] The Hebrew word for fruitful is "*porat*" (**פּוֹרָת**) containing the same letters as to interpret and to sew!

15. Genesis 49:22.

STORY

BELOW TEN HANDBREADTHS: A STORY FOR CHANUKAH

The holy tzaddik Rabbi David of Tolna, of blessed memory, had a custom of lighting the Chanukah candles with great intent. His Chanukah menorah was made of pure gold, a masterpiece of craftsmanship and wondrous artistry. The *chasidim* would gather with special festivity at the Rebbe's house, and holy songs would fill the air on the nights of Chanukah.

Once, on the first night of Chanukah, as the Rebbe prepared to light the Chanukah candle with all the *chasidim* crowded around him, he approached one *chasid* and said to him: "Listen, your wife is short in stature. How do you manage when you need to speak with her? Do you bend down to her, or does she raise herself up to you?" As soon as he said these words, without waiting for the man's response, the *tzaddik* began reciting the blessings for the Chanukah candle and lit it.

Both that man and all the *chasidim* who were present were astonished by these strange and cryptic words of the *tzaddik*. At that time, the tzaddik's relative, his great-nephew Rabbi Mordechai Dov of Hornosteipel, of blessed memory, was a guest in the house of the Tolna *tzaddik*. He, of course, also stood with all the *chasidim* during the candle lighting of his great-uncle, the *tzaddik*, and also heard the tzaddik's odd question to that *chasid*.

Seeing the chasidim's bewilderment at this, Rabbi Mordechai Dov said to them:

"I will explain the words spoken by the *tzaddik*. The Talmud states (*Sukkah* 5a), 'The Divine Presence never descended below ten handbreadths.' However, the Chanukah candle is an exception to this rule, as its *mitzvah* is specifically to be placed below ten handbreadths, close to the ground. At that time, the Divine Presence descends below ten handbreadths. In the writings of the Arizal, it is written that this is the meaning of the colloquial saying quoted in the Talmud (*Baba Metzia* 59a), '[If] your wife is short, bend down and whisper to her.' The tzaddik wanted to allude to this teaching and remind us of it."

The next day, during the lighting of the second candle, the Tolna tzaddik again turned to a *chasid* and said something incomprehensible to him. To his relative, the Hornosteipel *tzaddik*, he said: "This time, you won't succeed in explaining it as you did yesterday." And the Hornosteipel *tzaddik* was greatly impressed by the holy spirit of the Tolna *tzaddik*, of blessed memory.

(Rabbi S. Y. Zevin, *A Treasury of Chasidic Tales*, Chanukah)

What is there in that narrow strip that lies below ten handbreadths? More generally, is it even a good idea to bend down that low, or is it all downhill from there, heralding the beginning of the end?

A *halachah* from another area can help us clarify the issue at hand. In the laws of Shabbat, ten handbreadths is the minimum height of that some space must have to be considered a "private domain." In contrast, the total height of what we call the "public domain" is ten handbreadths. It is in the public domain that we are not allowed to carry objects on Shabbat.

If we translate the concepts of private and public domains symbolically, the private domain, which in Hebrew is literally, "the domain of the individual" (רְשׁוּת הַיָּחִיד), is a state in which we are aware of *the* Individual, i.e., the Master of the Universe, and He alone. The public domain, which in Hebrew is literally, "the domain of the many" (רְשׁוּת הָרַבִּים), is a state in which all we experience is the manifestation of separateness from the one, Individual Creator, which makes reality seem like the domain of multiplicity and divisiveness with every part fighting against every other part. That is why the space "below ten handbreadths" was traditionally considered the place of demons, harmful spirits, and other agents of chaos. In the Arizal's Kabbalah, the vessels of the World of Chaos that shattered descended "below ten handbreadths" and scattered there, creating a residue of chaotic energy at the bottom of reality. In Chasidic parlance, "below ten handbreadths" is identified as being in a state of small or contracted mindedness and in a state of feeling separate from the Almighty.

Usually, the Divine Presence, the *Shechinah*, dwells in the private domain. This is its natural place, and that was where the candles in the Menorah in the Holy Temple were lit, because the *Menorah* was taller than ten handsbreadths. But with the Chanukah *menorah*, the situation is different. The Divine light, i.e., the revelation of Godliness, which usually happens higher up, in the more harmonious and unified physical and mental space,

descends into the public domain with the purpose of conquering the separateness and multiplicity and then elevating the sparks of holiness captured in their chaos. It is about this effect that Chanukah has that we say in *Al HaNissim*, "You delivered… the many into the hand of the few."

The full revelation of Godliness in the space "below ten handsbreadths" will only happen fully and completely with the Redemption, when all the dark, low corners of reality and our psyche will be illuminated. But until that time, we are commanded to light the Chanukah candles and gaze at them.

What then should be our toil regarding the space "below ten handsbreadths," now? Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhin says that Chanukah is the secret of the verse, "I have considered my ways, and I have returned my feet to Your decrees."[1] In our generation, the last generation before Mashiach, it is difficult to rectify souls through Torah study and prayer—the forms of Divine service associated with the mind and the heart. Our generation is described as a generation of "feet," the "footsteps of Mashiach," which symbolize the active performance of *mitzvot*. The Alter Rebbe concurs that the for the souls of the Talmudic era, "Torah study is considered commensurate with all of the *mitzvot*." Souls in the time of the Arizal were primarily rectified through the toil of prayer. But as for us, we are symbolically likened to the feet and so our primary rectification lies in the performance of *mitzvot* and in acts of kindness, the attribute of Abraham.

However, the practical dimension of performing *mitzvot* and acting with loving-kindness to others is only part of the story. The *Bat Ayin*, in his discourses on Chanukah, says that to light a Chanukah candle, one must bend down... one must descend below ten handbreadths. This means that one must be "contrite and lowly of spirit." This is a beautiful intention to have in mind for anyone who bends down to light a Chanukah candle, to think that by doing so, he is fulfilling the *mitzvah* with lowliness and humility. This is the meaning of, "Bend down and whisper to her."

With God's help, may we merit that the Divine light of the *mitzvot* and of our lowliness continue to increase until the coming of Mashiach, until God's revelation descends and illuminates the space below ten handbreadths, in the most literal sense!

1. Psalms 119:59.

POST

RECTIFYING GREEK AESTHETICS

On Chanukah we commemorate the deliverance God gave us from the Seleucid Empire and its idolatrous Greek Hellenic culture. Over the centuries, the Jewish spirit has continued to struggle spiritually against the same

polytheistic Hellenic elements, especially those related to aesthetics. The progenitor of the Greek world was Japheth, Noah's son. Noah blessed him that his aesthetic spirit would eventually be rectified and find its way into the "tents of Shem," through a process of clarification carried out by the Torah.

Much of this is discussed in length in HaRav Ginsburgh's newly translated book, Dancing Flames: Meditative Essays on Chanukah. Here we have an abridged version of a post regarding the lineage of Japheth and the aesthetic element in his progeny.

The full post was first published in Hebrew in the Noach 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

THE RECTIFICATION OF JAPHETH (YEFET)

"The sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth." These three are considered the three archetypes of souls: a righteous individual (*tzaddik*), a wicked individual (*rasha*), and an intermediate individual (*beinoni*). Their corresponding realms are thus: holiness (Shem), the three impure husks (Ham), and the intermediate husk known as *kelipat nogah* (Japheth). The rectification of Japheth thus leads to the complete rectification of the realm of *nogah*, the intermediate husk that veils God's revelation partially, but can also be elevated to holiness.

An important principle is that rectification invariably requires us to focus on the intermediary between good and evil. The intermediate state or realm has an entropic tendency to descend into evil. If this can be overcome and the intermediate would cleave to the good, absolute evil would be eradicated.[1] Applying this principle to Noah's sons, our focus is therefore on Japheth.

The Torah describes Japheth's lineage: "The children of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Yavan, Tuval, Meshech, and Tiras"[2] (בְּנֵי יֶפֶת גֹּמֶר וּמָגוֹג וּמָדַי וְיָוָן וְתֻבַל וּמֶשֶׁךְ וְתִירָס). Japheth (**יֶפֶת**), whose numerical value is 490, or 10 times 7 squared, had 7 sons, and they correspond to the 7 lower *sefirot*, from loving-kindness to kingdom, in the order the Torah mentions them in:

loving-kindness-chessed **חֶסֶד**
Gomer גֹּמֶר

might-gevurah **גְּבוּרָה**
Magog מָגוֹג

beauty-tiferet **תִּפְאֶרֶת**
Madai מָדַי

victory-netzach **נֶצַח**
Yavan יָוָן

splendor-hod **הוֹד**
Tuval תֻּבַל

foundation-yesod **יְסוֹד**
Meshech מֶשֶׁךְ

kingdom-malchut **מַלְכוּת**
Tiras תִּירָס

JAPHETH AND SUKKOT

As we will now see, the rectification of Japheth and his sons is related to Sukkot. The clearest connection is that the *haftarah* reading for the Shabbat of Sukkot begins with the words, "on the

1. See in length *Tanya*, ch. 37.

2. Genesis 10:2.

day that Gog arrives."[3] Gog is the king of Magog, "Gog [from] the land of the Magog, the king and head of Meshech and Tuval." These three—Magog, Meshech, and Tuval—are all sons of Japheth as we saw, and they correspond to the *sefirot* might, foundation, and thanksgiving, respectively.

It is within Japheth's four son, Yavan (Hebrew for Greece), who corresponds to the *sefirah* of victory (or eternity), that all of Japheth's sons are included. This we learn from the interpretation the sages gave to the blessing Japheth received from Noah, "May God expand Japheth [materially], but may he dwell in the tents of Shem"[4]: Japheth's beauty, referring to the Greek language, will be worthy of dwelling in the tents of Shem, meaning that a Torah scroll may be written in Greek writing.

The Greek language represents Greek culture, the secret of the intellectual soul (Japheth), which acts as an intermediary between the Divine soul (Shem) and the animal soul (Ham).

The letters of the Hebrew word for "Greece" (**יָוָן**) in reverse spell one of the eight synonyms for "beauty" in Hebrew,[5] usually translated as "ornament" (**נוי**). The eight synonyms correspond to the *sefirot* from understanding to kingdom, and ornament is the one that corresponds to victory. One of the enduring staples of Sukkot are the ornaments hung on the walls of the Sukkah. These are known as "Sukkah ornaments" (נוי סוכָה). Thus, it is on Sukkot that we rectify the *external* dimension of the Greek aesthetic sense.

Perhaps the most important Greek aesthetic principle is known as "the Golden Mean," or "the Golden Proportion," which is intrinsically (albeit somewhat mysteriously) connected with what is known as the Fibonacci series of numbers: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, etc. The Fibonacci series is an additive series—a series in which each number is the sum of the two previous numbers—that begins with 1 and 1. This series is essential to the Japheth ideal of beauty, as the value of, "May God expand Japheth [materially], but may he dwell in the tents of Shem" (**יַפְתְּ אֱ־לֹהִים לְיֶפֶת וְיִשְׁכֹּן בְּאָהֳלֵי שֵׁם**) is 1870, the product of 34 and 55, the ninth and tenth Fibonacci numbers.

Not only are the Sukkah ornaments related to beauty; the Sukkah itself is also related to beauty. The value of the filling of Sukkah (**סמך וו כף הא**—סוכָה—is 238, the same as "Rachel" (**רָחֵל**), who is described as possessing, "beautiful features and complexion"[6] (יְפַת תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה)

JAPHETH AND CREATION

Japheth's first and last born are Gomer and Tiras. Gomer, corresponds to loving-kindness, alluding to the verse "to God who consummates what I do"[7] (לְאֵ-ל גֹּמֵר עָלָי), the Name of God appearing in this verse is *Kel* (אֵ-ל), the Name that corresponds to loving-kindness. Gomer

3. Ezekiel 38:18.

4. Genesis 9:27.

5. The eight synonyms are "blooming beauty" (שֶׁפֶר)—understanding (*binah*), "beauty" (יופי)—loving-kindness (*chesed*), "goodly" (טוֹב)—might (*gevurah*), "magnificent" (פְּאֵר)—beauty (*tiferet*), "ornamental" (נוי)—victory (*netzach*), "glory" (הוֹד)—acknowledgment (*hod*), "splendor" (הָדָר)—foundation (*yesod*), and "grace" (חֵן)—kingdom (*malchut*). See in length in our upcoming volume, *Dancing Flames: Meditative Essays on Chanukah*, Fifth Candle.

6. Genesis 29:17.

7. Psalms 57:3.

has a special connection to Japheth's aesthetic. Tiras is Persia, the kingdom of Japheth. The sum of their names, Gomer Tiras (**גֹּמֶר תִּירָס**), is 913, the value of "In the beginning" (**בְּרֵאשִׁית**), indicating that the world was created with the purpose of rectifying Gomer and Tiras—i.e., rectifying their aesthetic sense.

Gomer equals 243, or 3 to the 5th power, the secret of Abram (**אַבְרָם**), as elaborated upon in Kabbalah. This number, 243, is one of the secrets of Creation and with the identity "Abram is Abraham"[8] (אַבְרָם הוּא אַבְרָהָם), is further connected to Creation as hinted to in Abraham's name (בְּהִבָּרְאָם), meaning "When they were created" but when transposing the letters becomes, "With Abraham, the Heavens and the earth were created."

Words spelled Gomer (גֹּמֶר) appear 9 times in the Bible. 9 times 243 is 2187, or 3 to the 7th power! Of these 9, there is one more person. She is Gomer the daughter of Divlayim, a promiscuous woman whom God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry.[9] Interestingly, "daughter of Divlayim" (**בַּת דִּבְלָיִם**) equals twice the value of Gomer (**גֹּמֶר גֹּמֶר**) as well as the value of Sukkot (**סֻכּוֹת**), so her full name is equal to 3 times Gomer, 729, or 3 to the 6th power. Thus, Sukkot is also the season of rectification for the soul of Gomer, the daughter of Divlayim.

Most interesting is Gog, who also has a positive side to him—even though most of his essence is the negative side of *nogah*—which is why he will be brought to burial, the final rectification in Kabbalah[10] and as explained in Chasidut.[11] The value of Gog (**גּוֹג**) plus the value of each letter squared (3 squared plus 6 squared plus 3 squared) is 66, the value of Yavan, Greece (**יָוָן**). Gog and Magog together (**גּוֹג וּמָגוֹג**) equal 70, making them inclusive of all 70 nations of the world.

One of the *gematria* methods we use is akin to finding the equivalent of the crown and intellectual faculties of a word. We do this by taking the sum of the word, its first and second filling, and its value in primordial numbering. In the case of Gog, these are 12 (**גּוֹג**)—the *gematria* of "this" (**זֶה**), the special prophetic formula of Moses: "This is the thing that God commanded" (**זֶה** הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הוי'). The value of the filling of his name (**גימל וו גימל**), 178 and the filling of the filling (**גימל יוד מם למד וו וו**) 538, and the value of his name in primordial numbering (**אבג אבגדהו אבג**), 33. The sum of all four is 761, the *gematria* of the Torah's final three words, "[as Moses did] before the eyes of all of Israel"[12] (**לְעֵינֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל**), the words that designate the final rectification of *kelipat nogah*.

8. 1 Chronicles 1:27.
9. Hosea 1:2-3.
10. *Sha'ar HaPesukim* on *Shoftim*.
11. See *Avodat HaLevi*, *BeYom Bo Gog* (discourse for *Shabbat Sukkot*).
12. Deuteronomy 34:12.

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