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

נט"ד

Wonders

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שַׁבָּת וַיִּגַּשׁ ❁ ו-ז טֵבֵת תשפ"ו



two men were coming to me. One was German, dressed in royal garments, and the other was limping on one leg. They took me by the hands and brought me to a place where an enormous and frightening army stood.... Between them a map of the countryside was spread and they taught me the wisdom of map reading. This repeated every night.... I was trapped in a fantasy world.

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"…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

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF THE INTERMEDIATE NOGAH INCLINATION

In Wonders issue 174 (parashat Mikeitz 5786), we introduced the concept of an old/new inclination (yetzer) in the psyche called the Nogah inclination. This intermediate inclination lies in between the well-known good and evil inclinations and can be characterized as the curiosity drive.

We continue with this concept and review some of its most important examples, both in God and in the Bible.

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

CURIOSITY BECOMES AMUSEMENT

Before turning to examples of the three inclinations—the good, the evil, and the intermediate *nogah* inclination—in the Bible, let us see how God Himself, as it were, manifests the intermediate *nogah* inclination. Though this may seem strange to the uninitiated, when we try to identify what seems like a particularly human trait in God—and what could be more human than inclinations?—we are searching for the highest, most pristine example of that trait. Since God Himself is beyond our understanding, we base our search on what the prophets and the sages have articulated regarding the Divine. Once a trait is identified in its Divine form, we can derive inspiration for it regarding human affairs.

The most sublime reason given for Creation is that God craves making Himself a dwelling place below, i.e., in physical reality.[1] The Alter Rebbe explained that one cannot ask questions about cravings.[2] Thus, God's craving for physical reality can be described as His "evil" inclination. As discussed, the evil inclination is what draws us to those things that are intrinsically beneath us,[3] and physical reality is beneath God, as it were. God's "good" inclination is his craving that His infinite light (i.e., revelation) ascend and return to its source.

In between these two dynamics—described as "higher and higher without end" (לְמַעְלָה מַעְלָה עַד אֵין קֵץ) and "lower and lower without purpose" (לְמַטָּה מַטָּה עַד אֵין תַּכְלִית)—there is a state known as "inherent amusement" (שַׁעֲשׁוּעִים עַצְמִיִּים). Amusement, like in a seesaw or an amusement park ride, implies both ascent and descent. This state of

1. *Tanchuma Naso* 16. *Tanya*, ch. 36.

2. *Or HaTorah Balak*, p. 997. See *Sefer HaMa'amarim 5666*, p. 7 and following.

3. As explained elsewhere, the root of the word "evil" (רע) in Hebrew is cognate with the Aramaic root that means "lower" (מִלְּרַע).

amusement stems from the third inclination, the *nogah* curiosity to know myself. In God's case, this is described as "should I create a separate reality [descend] or should I remain solitary [ascend]." This is the amusement that God derives, as it were, from this existential doubt of "Who I am I and what do I truly want?"

ADAM, EVE, AND THE SNAKE

The intermediate inclination of *nogah* has been part of mankind's psychological makeup since Adam and Eve. When he ate from the Tree of Knowledge contrary to God's explicit command, Adam was following his inclination of *nogah* and acting on his curiosity. The intermediate inclination, which we have also identified as the inclination for good and evil, is intimately connected to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Upon closer analysis, we find that the three central actors in the Garden of Eden—Adam, Eve, and the snake—correspond to the three inclinations. The snake is obviously the evil inclination. Adam, until he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, was meant to be the pinnacle of Creation, the creature that would unite all others in serving God. He was placed in the Garden of Eden to "serve it and guard it" by praying for rain that would water the plants and as such represents the good inclination. Eve, who found herself in between Adam and the snake, plays the role of the intermediate inclination. We find her curious and involved in all facets of life in the Garden of Eden. The sages state that despite God's efforts, Eve was, "…excessively curious… an eavesdropper… envious [because she was overly aware of others' affairs]… overly touchy [feeling everything with her hands]…, and overly outgoing."[4] Ultimately, Eve's curiosity tempts her to experiment with the Tree of Knowledge, with herself, her husband, and with all of creation. The snake's poison pushed her out of balance and towards evil, pulling all the good in that direction.

This correspondence also fits with the well-established parallel between Adam, Eve, and the snake and the three central organs of the body, the brain, the heart, and the liver. The brain is the dwelling place of the good inclination or Divine soul. The liver is associated with the evil inclination and the animal soul. In between, the heart is considered a mixture of good and evil, each identified with one side of the heart. The heart is thus naturally the organ we identify with the intermediate *nogah* inclination. The Torah's command, "Do not stray after your hearts,"[5] is a clear reference to the heart's curiosity, which leads it astray.

SHEM, HAM, AND JAPHETH

In our previous article on this topic, we identified Noah's curiosity, which led him to invent the plow and bring a relative sense of peace and prosperity to human civilization. Noah's three sons can also be corresponded to the three inclinations. Though their order of birth is Japheth, Shem, and Ham,[6] the Torah[7] uses the order of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, which reflects their inner essence. Shem represents the good inclination, Ham the evil inclination, and Japheth the intermediate *nogah* inclination.

Unlike the previous threesome, where Eve's seduction by the evil inclination caused

4. *Bereishit Rabbah* 18:2.
5. Numbers 15:39.
6. *Rashi* on Genesis 5:32.
7. Genesis 5:32.

the intermediate *nogah* inclination (and all of reality) to fall, here we have an opposite example where even though Ham saw Noah naked and wanted to seduce his brothers to come see their father's humiliation,[8] Shem initiates a proper response and is joined by Japheth. Japheth's curiosity could have gotten the better of him, but thankfully, he was won over by his brother Shem's example and joined him in walking backwards so as not to see their father's nakedness and covering him. The conclusion of the episode indeed sees Japheth included with Shem, "May God broaden Japheth and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem."[9] Even though Ham was concurrently cursed, the real goal remains to elevate all the sparks of holiness found within him as well, a goal that will be achieved ultimately by engaging Japheth in his intermediary role.

ABRAHAM'S FAMILY

The next significant appearance of the three inclinations is in Abraham's generation. Clearly, Abraham who begins to shine the light of faith in God despite the darkness enveloping reality and reveals the Creator as not just the God of the heavens (the spiritual realms) but as also the God of the earth (the corporeal) represents the good inclination. In fact, there is no better example of the good inclination alluded to by the beautiful phenomenon that the value of "Our Patriarch Abraham" (**אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ**) is the same as "good inclination" (**יֵצֶר טוֹב**). Opposite Abraham, we find different antagonists who represent the evil inclination. Who then represents the intermediate *nogah* inclination?

With the first command he received from God to leave his home in Haran, Abraham took his nephew Lot with him. Lot had been accompanying Terach, Abraham's father ever since his father, Abraham's brother Haran died in *Aram Naharayim*. Even after Lot eventually parted ways with Abraham, Abraham promised to continue protecting him from afar, which he did when Lot was captured during the War of the Four Against the Five Kings.[10] When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, again it was Abraham's intervention that saved Lot and his two daughters.[11]

Lot belongs to the *kelipah* of *nogah*, which as we have explained is a husk that allows only a dimmed revelation of Godliness to pass through and is therefore considered a mixture of good and evil. It is the intermediate realm that lies between Abraham's holiness that spreads awareness of God and the impure forces that separated from him entirely.[12] When Abraham sets out to save Lot the hostage, his goal is to save the two good sparks of holiness in him who will ultimately emerge as the two righteous converts, Ruth (the Moabite) and Na'amah (the Ammonite).[13]

Going forward another generation, we find that while Abraham remains the good inclination, the evil and intermediate inclinations are represented by Esau and Jacob. Esau's association with the evil inclination is clear. Jacob's soul corresponds to the *sefirah* of beauty (*tiferet*), which lies along the middle axis. About Jacob the sages say that his face resembles Adam's face and as such he is a rectification for the latter's

8. And worse, according to the sages.
9. Genesis 9:27.
10. Ibid. ch. 14.
11. *Rashi* on Genesis 19:29.
12. See Alter Rebbe's *Torah Or* 11d.
13. *Baba Kama* 38b.

curiosity. Beyond his great Torah knowledge, Jacob is curious about the ways of the world, i.e., the world that the sages describe as the world of deceit. He learns about these when he impersonates Esau to receive his blessings from Isaac, when he enters a battle of wits with his father-in-law Laban, and when he uses his knowledge of genetics to increase his wealth. When we identify Jacob as the intermediate *nogah* inclination, we can reinterpret his namesake. He holds on to Esau's heel as they exit their mother's womb because he wants to pull Esau towards Abraham's holiness and to Abraham's faith. If Esau were to be elevated, he would join Jacob in bringing about the true and complete redemption.

THE KABBALISTIC ART OF CREATING MODELS

There is a verse that comes from the Song of Channah, the prophet Samuel's mother, that has been incorporated in many prayer books in the morning service: "There is none holy like God, for there is none besides You, neither is there any rock like You."[1] The sages taught, "Do not read this word as 'rock' (**צוּר**) rather as 'artist' (**צַיָּר**)."[2] Similar to how an artist signs his paintings, God's signature is within every aspect of the incredibly complex and beautiful natural world He has created.

To reveal God's signature, Kabbalah employs models and paradigms that help us see patterns and correspondences within the multiplicity of this world and the underlying Divine oneness that unites all plurality. Although using models to reveal concepts and correspondences has been used from the initial transmission of Kabbalah, it was the Arizal, the great Kabbalist of Tzfat in the 1500's, who made it a cornerstone of his teachings.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD KABBALAH

The original Biblical meaning of the Hebrew root of Kabbalah (**קבל**) means "parallel" or "correspond."[3] It is only at the very chronological end of the Bible, in the Book of Esther, that we find this same root used in the sense of "receive." When applied to Kabbalah, the latter meaning alludes to this wisdom being a received body of Jewish mystical knowledge. But its more original meaning reveals that the foundational methodology used in Kabbalah is to draw parallels or correspondences. This meaning of the word sheds light on the very essence of what Kabbalah attempts to reveal and achieve. By drawing correspondences, we can use our intellect to somewhat grasp that which is concealed from our senses. Furthermore, once a correspondence is drawn, as explained elsewhere, the mind's understanding can unlock a further awareness of the subject through the heart's

1. 1 Samuel 2:2.
2. *Berachot* 10a.
3. As in the verse (Exodus 26:5), "the loops were parallel to one another" (מְקֻבִּילֹת הַלֻּלְאֹת).

inner understanding. This is the meaning of the famous phrase, "understanding is the heart, and with it the heart understands"[4] (בִּינָה לִבָּא וּבָהּ הִלֵּב מֵבִין).

We are taught that the context in which a word or root first appears in the Torah defines its very nature and meaning. Turning then to the first appearance of the Hebrew root of Kabbalah in the portion of *Terumah*, which describes the instructions for making a Tabernacle, we can examine the context of its appearance and thus reveal the root or word's deeper nature.

> You shall make the Tabernacle of ten curtains, twisted linen with turquoise, purple and scarlet wool with a woven design of cherubim shall you make them. The length of a single curtain was twenty-eight cubits and the width for each curtain four cubits, the same measure for all the curtains. Five curtains shall be attached to one another and five curtains attached to one another. You shall make loops of turquoise wool at the edge of the single curtain at the end of one set and you shall make the same on the edge of the outermost curtain on the second set. Fifty loops shall you make on the first curtain, and fifty loops shall you make on the end of the curtain that is on the second set; the loops *will correspond* to one another. You shall make fifty hooks of gold, and you shall attach the curtains to one another with the hooks, so that the Tabernacle shall become one.[5]

As the text clearly states, the purpose of fifty loops made on each set of curtains, was to connect them together with fifty gold hooks, "so that the Tabernacle shall become one." This is in essence the purpose of Kabbalah: To reveal the parallels or correspondences between objects, entities, and events on manifold levels until the essential unity underlying all reality can be perceived. The study of Kabbalah makes us sensitive and aware of the connection and ultimate harmony between physical and spiritual, form and substance, cause and effect, plurality and singularity. Ultimately, Kabbalah seeks to reveal our deepest essence, to show how we are united with the Divine, and to unlock our fullest potential as human beings.[6]

THE FOUR-LETTER NAME OF GOD

Perhaps of all the models that Kabbalah uses, the four letters of God's essential Name, *Havayah* (י-הוה), are employed for corresponding the widest array of concepts. The words, "I place *Havayah* before me at all times"[7] can be interpreted to mean: *I recognize that every point of time and space is in reality a manifestation of the four letters of God's name*. Therefore, the four-letter name of God is used as an organizational paradigm through which we can map and meditate on all levels of reality.

It is important to note that Kabbalah explains that the tip of the letter *yud*, the first of the four letters, represents a spiritual level to itself. Therefore, the model of the four-letter Name of God is sometimes expanded to become a model of five.

THE TEN SEFIROT AND THE TWENTY-TWO LETTERS

Two other cardinal models in Kabbalah are the ten *sefirot* and the twenty-two Hebrew letters. According to the Jewish

4. Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Patach Eliyahu*).
5. Exodus 26:1-6.
6. Based on *Yain Yitzchak*, *Terumah*, pp. 395-401.
7. Psalms 16:8.

mystical tradition,[8] creation is constructed from a combination of the twenty-two Hebrew letters and the ten *sefirot*, the Divine channels through which God creates and maintains the world. Kabbalah uses the models of the letters and the *sefirot* to symbolically structure all reality, from the highest spiritual realms to the physical world of matter.

THE FIVE NAMES OF THE SOUL

Another model used frequently is of the five levels of the soul. The five names or levels of the soul as learned from the sages are: *nefesh, ru'ach, neshamah, chayah* and *yechidah*.[9] These five names refer to an ascending hierarchy of soul powers and serve as a powerful tool in analyzing and understanding the human psyche.

Nefesh, the lowest level of soul, can be translated as anima (or psyche) and refers to the instinctual and behaviorist drives and patterns of human action, most associated with the body; in the *Tanya*, it is sometimes replaced with the term "animal soul." *Ru'ach*, or "spirit," refers to the emotive faculties. *Neshamah*, which literally means "soul," is considered the seat of the intellect. *Chayah*, which means, "the living one," refers to the interaction between consciousness and its superconscious origin. Finally, *yechidah*, meaning, "the single, unique one," relates to the most Divine aspect of soul.

There is a fascinating teaching regarding the 103rd and 104th Psalms, which both begin with the words, "Bless God, O my soul" (בָּרְכִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת יְ־הוָה). In all, this phrase appears 5 times in these two chapters and the sages[10] question why King David repeats it five times. The Talmud provides a fundamental answer: Each of the five repetitions alludes to a different characteristic of the soul and each of these traits is shared with the Creator:

1) Just as the Creator fills the entire world, so the soul fills the body.
2) Just as the Creator sees but cannot be seen, the soul also sees but cannot be seen.
3) Just as the Creator sustains the entire world, the soul sustains the body.
4) Just as the Creator is pure, so too is the soul.
5) And, just as the Creator abides in the innermost chambers, so the soul also dwells deep within.

The sages conclude by stating that these five qualities of the soul should come together to praise the One who possesses these same qualities. Thus, the phrase "Bless God, O my soul" is repeated five times. This teaching is of utmost importance, as it ponders the specifics of our resemblance to God. Human beings are created in the image of God, a unique attribute that sets us apart from the rest of creation.

Remarkably, the five levels of the soul align precisely with the order of comparisons presented in the Talmud. The soul that fills the body corresponds to the *nefesh*, which represents the closest connection to the body and the physical realm. The soul that sees but remains unseen is the *ru'ach*, the spirit representing the emotional aspect of the soul. The soul that nourishes the body is the *neshamah*, the intellectual component of the soul. The soul that is pure is the *chayah*, the essence of life. And finally, the soul that dwells within the inner chamber is the *yechidah*, the unique Presence of God hidden within.

This discussion in the Talmud is truly

8. *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:1.
9. *Bereishit Rabbah* 14:9.
10. *Berachot* 10a.

extraordinary, shedding light on the intricate relationship between the soul and the Creator. It reinforces the fundamental concept that our souls bear a resemblance to God, manifesting in various ways and attributes.

There is another fascinating insight here, a mathematical gem. The value of the phrase, "Bless God, O my soul" (**בָּרְכִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת יי־הוה**) is 1099, the same as the sum of the five names of the soul, *nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah*, and *yechidah* (**נֶפֶשׁ רוּחַ נְשָׁמָה חַיָּה יְחִידָה**). When we say the words, "Bless God, O my soul" we are activating all five levels of the soul. Thus, the five names of the soul together with the five comparisons of the soul to God become a powerful meditation.[11]

11. For more on this subject see *What You Need to Know About Kabbalah*, pp. 61-66.

letter of Havayah	level of the soul	property of God/soul
tip of *yud*	*yechidah* (singular one)	dwells in an inner chamber
yud (י)	*chayah* (living one)	is pure
hei (ה)	*neshamah* (soul)	sustains the body with life
vav (ו)	*ru'ach* (spirit)	sees and is not seen
hei (ה)	*nefesh* (psyche/anima)	fills the body

STORY

RABBI AHARON OF STRASHELYE: HOW DOES A BLEMISH REACH A SOUL

Rebbe Aharon HaLevi Horowitz was born in 5526 (1766) to his father Rabbi Moshe who was said to be a descendant of the holy Shelah. He was among the close disciples and household members of the Alter Rebbe, Rebbe Shneur Zalman of Liadi with whom he stayed from the age of seventeen. In Liadi, he served as a choizer—one who would review and repeat the Rebbe's teachings—and guide for the older married scholars, alongside the Rebbe's son, the Mitteler Rebbe, who guided the younger ones. In the Alter Rebbe's final years, differences of opinion intensified between Rebbe Aharon and the Mitteler Rebbe. After the Alter Rebbe's passing, RebbeAharon established a court which he led according to his approach: serving God

with great enthusiasm and excitement. At the beginning of 5586 (1825), he was arrested along with the Mitteler Rebbe due to slander by opponents of Chabad and on the first of Kislev, he was released. He authored the books Sha'arei Avodah and Sha'arei Yichud VeEmunah on the Tanya, and more. His teachings on the weekly Torah portions and festivals were collected in the book Avodat HaLevi. Several of his melodies were preserved in Chabad tradition. He departed this world while in devout prayer on Shemini Atzeret 5589 (1828) in his city of Strashelye.

In the year 5605 (1845), two great *chasidim*, Rabbi Moshe, son-in-law of Reb Ze'ev Tzipes and Rabbi Yisrael Yosef, traveled to the grave of their Rebbe, the holy Admur of Strashelye. As they passed through the town of Kopust, not far from Strashelye, they made a stop. As they stood by their wagon stood in the street, a simple man approached them, dressed in a short pelt and a red sash, and asked where they were going. They told him their destination was Strashelye. The man said, "Take me also with you." Rabbi Moshe wondered about him and asked, "What does a man like you have to do at our Rebbe's grave? Did you even know him?"

The man answered, "Why do I want to go to his grave!? Because he saved my life, rescued me from death, and brought me out from the depths of the *kelipot* (forces of impurity). It has been seventeen years since his passing. What interest do you young people have in travelling to his grave?"

When the two heard his words, they implored him to tell them how their Rebbe had saved him. But he refused, until Rabbi Yisrael Yosef grabbed him and said, "By my life, I will not let you go until you tell us everything that happened to you with our Rebbe."

When the man saw this, he said: "Perhaps it has been decreed from Heaven that I should reveal to you today what I have never told anyone else. Listen and hear.

In my youth, right after my wedding, we lived with my father-in-law in a village near Shklov. My father-in-law rented an old inn that had been uninhabited for eight years. When we intended to move in, all sorts of rituals were performed there, as old wives would call them. A little distance from the inn house stood an old barn that was considered haunted, and everyone was careful not to pass before it, even during the day.

I was a scholar of Torah at the time and did not engage in commerce at all. One time, my father-in-law was not home all week and did not return even for Shabbat. That Saturday night, I smoked a pipe and went out to walk alone, until I passed in front of the barn. Suddenly, a black dog came out, circled me three times, barked at me, and ran back to the barn. I was very frightened and with my strength failing me hardly made it back into the house. There they treated with me with herbs to revive me and to try and free me from the fear that had set in.

In this manner, the night passed, until I lay down to sleep. When I fell asleep, immediately it entered my imagination that two men were coming to me. One was German, dressed in royal garments, and the other was limping on one leg. They took me by the hands and brought me to a place where an enormous and frightening army stood. The two looked like kings in my imagination, each at the head of his army. Between them a map of the countryside was spread and they taught me the wisdom of map reading. Believe me, more than twenty years have passed since then, and still if I were to see their faces today, I would recognize them by name and know the exact layout of the map.

This repeated every night. Knowing that I was trapped in a fantasy world, sometimes my family lit candles, and my wife sat by my side all night, but to no avail. When I woke up from sleep, my shirt was so soaked with sweat that you could wring water from it. During the days, I was weak and ill. On the following nights, the kings (as I had come to call them) themselves did not come, only their emissaries, and every night they taught me a different skill: sometimes how to ride a horse, sometimes how to carry loads, sometimes how to draw and shoot a bow. If I did not meet their expectations, they would beat me harshly. All the rituals and remedies I tried to break out of this fantasy world did not help, I even turned to sorcerers, but they too could do nothing to help me. Months passed with me locked in this fantasy world. I began to grow accustomed to it and even found joy in the work I was assigned to do there; I was quite quick in performing my duties there. But during the daytime hours, when I was not in that world, I withered and was sick from the intense night labor.

My father-in-law and my father were simple people, they never traveled to rebbes. But when they saw how weakened I had become and that my appearance had deteriorated, they said to me, "You must go to Strashelye." I set out for Strashelye in the evening. Surprisingly, that night on my journey, I had no experience of the fantasy world. I began to entertain the thought that it was traveling that had helped me and so I turned the horse back from the long road ahead and wanted to return to my father. But on the second night, the kings appeared again and treated me as they had in my home. It was only then that I understood that what the fantasy world and its inhabitants feared was Strashelye, and so I decided to once again turn around and resume my journey.

The day I arrived was a non-working day and all the *chasidim* and great rabbis were in the large house of our rebbe, Rebbe Aharon of Strashelye. Rabbi Avraham Sheines of Shklov and the rabbis of Dubrovna and many others were waiting for our rebbe to come out of his room. I poured out my bitter heart before Ber, our rebbe's attendant. I gave him a gift, and he brought me into the room. When I entered, our rebbe was just removing his *Rabbeinu Tam tefillin*. I approached him as he was smoking his pipe. He looked at me and asked, "What do you want? What are you seeking?" I told him everything.

When I finished, I raised my eyes and saw that his face was burning like torches. The pipe fell from his hand, and he rose from his chair, running back and forth in the room, rubbing his forehead vigorously with his right hand, calling out, "*Vi kumt a pgam tzu a neshamah*?" (How does a blemish reach the soul?!). When I saw his anguish, I wept bitterly from the sorrow in my heart. There was no one in the room but us. I saw him rubbing his forehead so hard that his blood was about to spatter on the wall. He circled like this for about ten or fifteen minutes.

Afterwards, he approached me and asked, "Do you say *Shema Yisrael*?" I answered through my tears, "Yes." The rebbe asked, "Do you understand its meaning?" Then our rebbe explained to me the meaning of the word "one" [in "God is one"] in such simple language that it established faith in my heart that God is one and His kingdom is everywhere. These words are engraved in me to this day, as if I had heard them just yesterday. Then he gave me rituals to perform (which I will not reveal). He instructed me to read from a holy book before sleep. And he told me, "Review the things I tell you all day until they are fluent in your mouth even at night." He also instructed me to say to the destructive forces when they come: "*Der rebbe hat gezogt ihr zolt mich nit tchefen. Der Rebbe hat gezogt ihr vet haben a psak oyb ihr vet mich tchefen*" (The Rebbe said you should not bother me. The Rebbe said you will be judged if you bother me).

Afterwards, he comforted me and said that they would not frighten me anymore. Outside, the *chasidim* and rabbis were already waiting, wondering why our rebbe was delayed. Our rebbe sensed this, opened the door, and signaled for them to go. Everyone was amazed at his long conversation with me. When I came out, they wanted to know what he had spoken with me about, but I did not reveal the content of our conversation.

When I returned home, I did everything our rebbe commanded. At night, I lay down to sleep after reading from *Ein Yaakov* [an anthology from the Talmud]. As I dozed off, I saw again in a vision the two men from the first time, not their messengers this time. They stood far away, motioning for me to come with them. I told them the rebbe's words. The German, who always looked like a good person, immediately retreated and said nothing. The lame one stomped his foot, gnashed his teeth, and shouted, "Who is the rebbe that I should listen to him?!"

I repeated our rebbe's words again, and they stood far away, afraid to approach, for about a quarter of an hour. Then they tried to speak to me in a kind tone. They promised to make me a king of nightmares, and many other things. But I repeated our rebbe's words again and again. Finally, they became angry and made a commotion, knocking on the house door until everyone in the house heard, and then disappeared. I awoke to the sound of knocking and told my family that there was nothing more to fear.

[From *Shivchei HaRav*]

Having dedicated a good portion of the previous issue of Wonders and the present issue to the topic of the intermediate *nogah* inclination fueled by our sense of curiosity, we present this story which deals with the topic from an almost unbelievable perspective. At first glance, this story sounds like a myth, a distant legend: demons and sorcerers, kings of nightmares and forced servitude. But in fact, in modern times, we who are struggling with our inclinations old and new can identify with the narrator.

If we reflect a bit, a disturbing similarity is revealed between the narrator's situation in the story and the modern condition so prevalent today, namely the addiction to screens. Like the narrator, so many people today spend night after night locked into a fantasy world, which provides dubious pleasures while taking a heavy toll on our mental and physical strength. It is not only screens that people have become addicted to. Every fall into cravings and bad deeds can lead to a form of servitude to a foreign power that blemishes our Divine soul.

So how do we escape from these worlds of fantasy and our enslavement to them and what they offer? Many things can be learned from the story, but we will focus first on the most significant detail: The narrator and his family, even when they are clearly afraid and troubled by the situation, all focus on the superficial problems. They are troubled by the narrator's weakness, by his daytime fatigue, his inability to function, and even deteriorating external appearance. Rebbe Aharon of Strashelye, on the other hand, is shocked by something completely different. He also makes sure that the narrator realizes what the real issue is: How does a blemish pierce through and affect the Divine soul?!

The *tzaddik* sees the real issue. He focuses on the heart of the matter. A Divine soul is being blemished and desecrated. Rebbe Aharon understands how absurd and terrifying such a situation is. Powers that are peddling fantasy have taken control of the Divine. The young man himself, who came to seek his advice on the matter, is shocked by the sight of the rebbe's pain and weeps. He does not weep for himself (he is still unable to understand the true gravity of his situation). He weeps because he sees how pained the *tzaddik* is because of *his* plight. This is the first step out of addiction—a penetrating understanding that the sin blemishes something holy and exalted and that this blemish is infinitely worse than the superficial problems of a wasted tomorrow or a worn and tired appearance. In fact, the narrator himself testifies that, after a while, he had learnt to enjoy his predicament.

MY FALL NEEDS TO BE JUSTIFIED

In Chasidic psychological terms, when I am shocked only by the fact that "I have fallen," this type of shock, which is actually saying, "how is it possible that I, me, the great illustrious me, has succumbed to desire and cravings," actually tends to lead to a deeper entrenchment in sin. A deeper entrenchment acts as a justification for my behavior; after all, if this was just a simple test, I would not have failed it, I would have emerged from it already. But, by staying enslaved to my desire, I justify just how difficult it is to break free. Like the narrator, I do not find the strength needed to resist temptation. The sense of compulsion, the feeling that only deepens from one realization to the next that I am still enslaved by my desires, demonstrates just how powerful this craving, this king of the fantasy world of terror, really is.

But if the pain is for the holy soul within

me, it opens a path to realizing that within I am not related to these sins, to these addictions. My Divine soul is not like my body and my animal soul, whose fall no longer surprises or shakes me up. When I begin to see the inherent freedom my Divine soul has from enslavement to desires and addictions, while at the same time realizing how painful it is that such a holy and pure soul should not be able to express itself and exercise its will to serve God alone, there is a chance that this pain will motivate me to break free and identify with my Divine soul.

AWAKENING GREAT COMPASSION

Another crucial element for rectification is the great compassion with which the *tzaddik* looks upon one who has fallen into the net of the "other side." When we feel, as the young man felt through Rebbe Aharon, how much mercy God has on us and how much the tzaddik (like God) desires to help us, shame and guilt cease to paralyze us and begin to become a drive for rectification. This compassion is actually the result of the deep pain over the Divine soul's fall, which awakens great mercy from Above for the individual. When we feel God's mercy and know that there is nothing outside of Him, we can decide to free ourselves from the grip of the other side.

CONNECTING TO TORAH AND THE TZADDIK

Finally, there is the liberating power of Torah and *tzaddikim*. The word Torah also means "to free" (הַתָּרָה). When one opens a book to learn before falling asleep, one frees himself, like the narrator, from the choking grip of the kings of nightmares, and in our age, one is freed from the need to bring a screen into bed. But using Torah to free himself is not enough. To prevent the other side from enslaving him (or her) again, from retaking control of his soul, the individual is required to do something that neither he nor his elders did: Connect to a *tzaddik*. As he declares time after time that he belongs to the rebbe and that he has faith in him, the enslavers back down and eventually leave with the slam of a door and do not return. Only the connection to the *tzaddik* remains, and it lives and pulsates today, even years after Rebbe Aharon's passing.

POST
PRESERVING WEALTH

We are all aware of the importance of giving tzedakah. As part of a long series of classes and X-posts on the topic of Hiddur Mitzvah (Enhancing our Performance of Commandments), HaRav Ginsburgh focused a great deal on the legal and meta-legal stipulations of tzedakah.

In this excerpt, taken from one of these posts, he focuses on a famous saying from the end of the Second Temple period, a saying that serves as a fundamental rule for preserving and augmenting our wealth through tzedakah and kindness.

The full post was first published on X on the 25th of Cheshvan, 5786 and appeared in print in Hebrew in the Vayeitzei 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

PRESERVING AND AUGMENTING WEALTH

The sages provide us with seminal advice about wealth:

> The salt of money is lack; and there are those who say [the salt of money is] lovingkindness (מֶלַח מָמוֹן - חֶסֶר. וְאָמְרִי לַהּ: חֶסֶד).[1]

What is this "lack?" Many are familiar with a similar saying found in another source, "Tithes [giving a tenth of one's wealth to charity] are a fence for affluence." The *Magen Avot* explains that tithing [giving *ma'aser*] not only preserves one's money, but it also augments it providing for affluence. This possibility is captured in the verse, "There is one who distributes and yet more is added."[2] This also relates to the well-known prophecy, "Test Me with this… and I will pour out for you a blessing without end," and to the sages similar statement, "Tithe so that you may become wealthy." The Hebrew words for "tithe" (עַשֵּׂר) and for "become wealthy" (תִּתְעַשֵּׁר) are virtually identical except for the switching of the left *shin* (שׂ) for a right *shin* (שׁ), alluding to the powerful connection between tithing and become wealthy. Switching the left for the right is a very important principle in Kabbalah known as "including the left in the right" (לְאָכְלָא שְׂמָאלָא בִּימִינָא), following the principle that the higher one reaches in the supernal realm the more all that is related to the left axis of reality is swallowed within the right axis. The left axis represents judgment and might, while the right axis represents kindness and love. And so the more one gives charity, the more one transforms judgments that might be hanging over their head into kindness.

The first two words of the verse, "There is one who distributes…," (יֵשׁ מְפַזֵּר) suggest that one should distribute or scatter one's sense of being (יֵשׁ). This type of distribution of one's being leads to eternal sustainability, as in the verse, "He scatters, he gives to the poor; his righteousness stands eternally."[3] The initials of "He scatters, he gives to the poor" (**פִּזַּר** נָתַן **לָ**אֶבְיוֹנִים) spell the word "fallen" (**נֹפֶל**). By distributing and scattering one's wealth, one lifts and revives the fallen, not just the poor who receive the gifts but also one's own fallen state described in the verse, "Seven times the righteous shall fall and be lifted."[4]

HOW SALT WORKS

The identification of "lack" as a preservative for money is based on the well-known fact that salt is a preservative, specifically for meat. The *Magen Avot* explains that salt preserves by removing the moisture in the meat, which is what causes it to spoil and putrefy. Moisture symbolizes pleasure, as is well known that, "Water

1. *Ketubot* 66b.
2. Proverbs 11:24.
3. Psalms 112:9.
4. Proverbs 24:16.

generates all forms of pleasure" (מַיִם מַצְמִיחִים כָּל מִינֵי תַּעֲנוּג). To preserve meat, external pleasure must be removed, which refers to the sense of self-importance that one receives from eating meat. To preserve money, one needs to remove the external pleasure, i.e., the sense of self-accomplishment and importance that one can receive from money. One example of this can be seen in the animal soul's interest in counting and recounting money (or constantly checking the balance in one's bank account).

Interestingly, the Torah does not state that what was created on the second day of Creation was good, because all was water, all was pleasure. Even though the water was split into the higher waters, representing Divine pleasure, which is free of a sense of being, the lower waters represent human pleasure derived from one's feelings of self-importance. Only on the third day, when the lower waters collected and dry land—akin to the removal of moisture—could be seen, does the Torah describe what was created as good. By scattering one's money as *tzedakah*, one becomes part of society, grows affluent, and goes from true strength to strength.

SECRETS OF LACK

The Hebrew word for "lack" (**חֶסֶר**) permutes to spell the root (**סַחַר**) of "trade" (מִסְחָר) or "business." A Jew must strive to conduct trade, to do business, and the best type of trade is distributing *tzedakah* and acting with kindness. This is the right way to do business with God, as He Himself invites it through the prophet, "Test Me with this…."

"Lack" (**חֶסֶר**) also permutes to spell one of the synonyms for "sun" (**חֶרֶס**), suggesting that this also leads to healing, as in the verse, "the sun of *tzedakah* brings healing in its wings [rays]"[5] (שֶׁמֶשׁ צְדָקָה וּמַרְפֵּא בִּכְנָפֶיהָ).

Another permutation of "lack" (**חֶסֶר**) is "stench" (**סֵרַח**), suggesting that either one exercises "lack," i.e., *tzedakah* and preserves one's wealth, or it will stink and be spoiled.

Interestingly, the vowel signs in the word "kindness" (חֶסֶד)—in the variant that, "the salt of money is kindness"—are both *segol*. There are 9 vowel signs in Hebrew and they correspond to the *sefirot* (from crown to foundation, excluding knowledge and kingdom).[6] The *segol* corresponds, how appropriately, to the *sefirah* of loving-kindness (חֶסֶד). The doubling of the *segol* suggests that one should perform kindness after kindness. It is because of our acts of kindness that we are known as an *Am Segulah*,[7] which means a "treasured people," because our innate nature is merciful. Our innate nature is developed even further when we take it beyond its natural state and devote ourselves to the service of charity.

5. Malachi 3:20.
6. *Tikkunei Zohar* 70 (129a-b).
7. Deuteronomy 7:6.


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