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

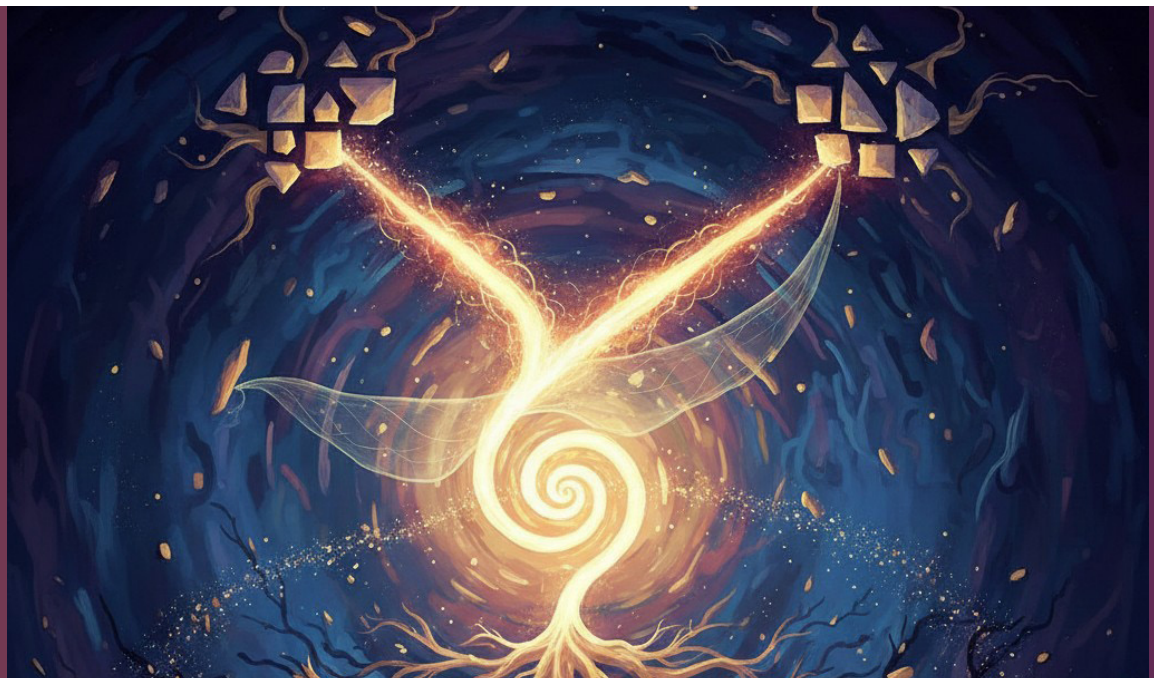
נס"ד

Wonders

Weekly Magazine of the Shiurim and Farbrengens
of HaRav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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שַׁבָּת וַיִּשְׁלַח ❁ טו-טז כִּסְלֵו תשפ"ו



this is not only referring to the beginning of Creation in general, but also to the point of inception of every person—the point of origin of that person formed when he or she came out of their mother's womb... known as the person's mazal, the revelation of the root of his or her Divine soul. But at the same moment God... also provides the person with free choice. This is the secret of the evil inclination that is active from the moment the person emerges from the womb.

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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 EXCERPT
MALE AND FEMALE IN EVERY WORD OF THE TORAH

Beginning in 5779, HaRav Ginsburgh dedicated one of his weekly Shabbat classes to the anthology of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings, Keter Shem Tov.

In this class, he reviews section 21, one of the seminal teachings that demonstrates the novel rationale in understanding the Torah revealed by the Ba'al Shem Tov, a rationale that leads to a whole new way of looking at Torah and its message.

The class was given on the 2nd of Second Adar, 5779 and was first published in the No'ach 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

In section 21 of the anthology of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings, Keter Shem Tov, the author quotes a foundational teaching from his master, the Ba'al Shem Tov. In this case, the teaching is linked to Noah's Ark. "Ark" (תֵּבָה) in Hebrew is the same as "word."[1] Into the ark, Noah brought a male and female specimen of every species. And so, this teaching begins,

> Behold in the ark [or, a word], among the animals, there are two: a male and a female.

The Hebrew word for "animals" (חַיּוֹת) can be read as "lifeforce" (חִיּוּת). A similar adaptation of the meaning is made on another famous instance of this word in Ezekiel's description of the Divine chariot: "And the animals would run and returned"[2] (וְהַחַיּוֹת רָצוֹא וָשׁוֹב), which can be read as, "And life-force runs and returns." Using this insight, we can say that the Ba'al Shem Tov means that in every word in the Torah there are two types of life-force: A masculine force and a feminine force.

This teaching is linked with what appears earlier[3] regarding the verse describing King Solomon in his old age, "his wives turned his heart,"[4] and the author mentions it here:

I have already written elsewhere in the name of my teacher the interpretation of the verse, "In his old age, his wives turned his heart," that in every word there are two meanings: the first is compassionate and is known as the male aspect, the second is judgmental and is known as the female aspect. And this is the meaning of "his wives turned his heart."

1. The Hebrew identity between "ark" and "word" is the reason the lengthy section known as "The Pillar of Prayer," which appears in another anthology of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings known as *Ba'al Shem Tov Al HaTorah*, was placed in *parashat No'ach*. The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that every word we utter when praying is like an ark, like a ship we can enter with our full consciousness and mindfulness.

2. Ezekiel 1:14.

3. §7.

4. 1 Kings 11:4.

Actually, the first time this idea was mentioned, it was taken a bit further: that since everything was created out of the Torah's words, it follows that everything in Creation has both a masculine and a feminine aspect. It is this inner duality that allows for free choice, "And the choice is given for one to decide which way he wants to turn his heart."

MASHPIA AND MEKABEL, INFLUENCER AND RECEIVER

Now, normally, when we find a reference to there being a masculine side and a feminine side, the simplest meaning is not compassion and judgment, but rather *masihpia* (influencer) and *mekabel* (receiver), respectively. The Lubavitcher Rebbe is known to have explained that the difference in essential traits between a Jew and a non-Jew is that the former is a *mashpia* and the latter a *mekabel*. This is particularly true with regard to faith in God and with respect to the Torah.

What does it mean to read the Torah as an influencer or as a receiver? One who reads the Torah to influence is constantly asking themselves: How do I teach this to others? But one who is reading it to receive wants to benefit—to receive something—from his Torah study. For instance, he might want to be honored by others, be called a rabbi, etc. When one learns Torah in the receiver mode, it awakens the aspect of the non-Jew within[5] and can drag him down even unto idolatry, like Solomon, who though he never actually worshipped a false God, did not confront his wives and allowed them to do so. From a spiritual perspective, idolatry is first and foremost self-worship. Indeed, what happened to King Solomon was that he began to view himself as special: I am the wisest, I am…."

MALE AND FEMALE AS COMPASSION AND JUDGMENT

Apart from this basic interpretation of what it means to see two facets in every word in the Torah, the Ba'al Shem Tov now adds that these two facets are also compassion and judgment. For example, a judge that wants to rebuke everyone reads the entire Torah as one long accusation. But you can also read the Torah, even its harshest parts, from a perspective of compassion.

Case in point: the values of "murder" (**רֶצַח**) and "compassion" (**רַחֲמִים**) are the same. What can this mean? As explained by the sages and the commentaries on the prohibition "You shall not kindle a fire [in all your dwellings on Shabbat],"[6] when a court of justice executes a capital punishment, they are called "good murderers."[7] This is murder, so to speak, but out of compassion on the soul of someone who is truly wicked and for

5. Based on Deuteronomy 28:43, "the resident alien [non-Jew] who is among you."

6. Exodus 35:3.

7. See *Zohar* 2:93b on the commandment, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). There is a *pesik ta'ama* mark, which acts like a semicolon, between "You shall not" and "murder." The *Zohar* explains that this indicates that there are times when you must "murder," for example when a court of law executes a sentence of capital punishment, for if it was universally forbidden, there would be know path to rectification.

whom this is the only path to atonement.[8] In the same manner, every punishment prescribed by the Torah is inwardly compassionate.

This is the way in which a word is transformed from judgment to compassion, as he continues to say,

And it is the *tzaddikim* who can turn the measure of judgment into the measure of compassion.

To turn judgment into compassion is also known as "sweetening judgments at their root." One can use *gematria*, as we did above, but the true meaning of sweetening a judgment at its root is to discover that inwardly it is not an act of judgment but an act of compassion. If so, one might say that *tzaddikim* turn the females into males, following the verse attributed to the times of Mashiach, "[Zion] a man and a man will be born in it."[9]

8. As long as one believes that a *Sanhedrin* is fulfilling God's judgment, capital punishment though exceptionally rare—a court that executes capital punishment once in seventy years is considered murderous—is legitimately required. See also *Tosafot s.v. Ain* on *Sanhedrin* 35a.

9. Psalms 87:5. "And this is the meaning of 'And to Zion it will be said that a man and a man will be born in it,' all will be male, even the female…" (*Torah Or* 37c).

THE SONG OF CREATION PART 2

In the first part of this article,[1] we discussed four different traditional answers to the question: Who is singing the songs of the various creations and creatures mentioned in *Perek Shirah*. Each of the opinions has merit according to a certain perspective. Ultimately all four opinions are complimentary.

These four originators of the songs of *Perek Shirah* further correspond in a most beautiful manner to four ascending sections or levels of our daily morning prayers and as we shall see they also correspond to the four Kabbalistic Worlds.[2]

FIRST LEVEL OF PRAYER: BLESSINGS AND SONG

The preliminary morning blessings are followed by *Pesukei DeZimra*, meaning "Verses of Song." These verses are replete with references to songs and praise of the natural world. This section of prayer corresponds to the notion that it is the creation itself singing the songs of *Perek Shirah*. It is interesting to note that before the Men of the Great Assembly set the current order of the prayers, including *Pesukei DeZimra*, they would sing "the song of the creatures." Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe of Chabad, writes that this is a reference to *Perek Shirah*.[3] This level of the prayers corresponds to the World of Action.

1. See *Wonders*, Issue 170 (*Toldot* 5786).

2. For the ideas presented in this article see *The Quill of the Soul*, pp. 161-166.

3. See *Or HaTorah Bamidbar* vol. 1, p.204.

SECOND LEVEL: PREPARING FOR THE SHEMA

Next in the order of the prayers is the section of blessings preceding the *Shema*, the cardinal statement of faith in One God in the Torah.[4] This section describes in majestic language how the angels and various heavenly beings daily praise God from on high. This corresponds to the second opinion that it is the guiding angel of each part of creation that is singing in *Perek Shirah*. This level corresponds to the World of Formation.

THIRD LEVEL: THE SHEMA AND THE AMIDAH

Reciting the *Shema*, the third of the ascending levels of prayer, is considered the song of man, thus corresponding to the idea that it is man who is singing the song of creation. The first word of the *Shema* is "Hear," which is a call to understand and integrate into our consciousness that God is One, and by extension, that all reality is ultimately united in His essential oneness. By coming to know and understand the unity of God and His creation, man acquires the ability to hear the song of creation and thus become the mouth to express the essence of that reality through his own song. This section of prayer corresponds to the World of Creation. Reciting the *Shema* is followed by the *Amidah* the silent prayer, where man directly approaches God and pours out his heart.

4. Beginning with Deuteronomy 6:4.

FOURTH LEVEL: GOD'S PRAYER

After the *Shema* and the *Amidah* is the section called *tachanun,* consisting of confession and a plea for God's compassion. Here we recite the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion as taught by God to Moses after the Sin of the golden calf.[5] The Talmud relates that God prays daily that His attribute of compassion will overcome His attribute of judgment.[6] These Thirteen Attributes of Compassion relate to God's song, thereby corresponding to the fourth opinion that it is God who is singing in *Perek Shirah*. This level corresponds to the World of Emanation.

THE KISS OF PRAYER

Each of the four sections of song in the morning prayers has one verse that epitomizes that entire section. The last verse of *Pesukei DeZimra*, is also the final verse of the last chapter of King David's Psalms: "Every soul will praise God, *Halleluyah*!"[7] As the concluding verse it is the seal of all the psalms and the climatic aspiration of the soul. The first letter of this verse is the letter *kaf* (כ).

The song of the angels, recorded in the book of Isaiah is placed in the middle of the blessing preceding the *Shema*: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the God of Hosts; the whole world is filled with His glory."[8] This verse is sung every day by the angels and heavenly beings in great awe, tranquility

5. Exodus 34:5-7.
6. *Berachot* 7a.
7. Psalms 150:6.
8. Isaiah 6:3.

and sweetness. The first letter of this verse is the letter *kuf* (ק).

The central song of man in prayer is clearly the *Shema*: "Hear O Israel, *Havayah* our God, *Havayah* is one."[9] Here Israel represents the ideal human being. The *Shema* articulates the mission of the Jewish people in particular to bring all mankind to recognize and worship God as one. The first letter of the *Shema* is the letter *shin* (ש).

The song of God is the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion, as discussed above. It is interesting to note that these Thirteen Attributes are considered so holy that they are only recited in a *minyan*, a prayer quorum. Yet, an individual may still recite them, but only if he or she does so in the same manner as one would read the verse from the Torah with its proper musical cantillation. The initial letter of the Thirteen Attributes, which according to the Arizal begin with God's Name *Kel* (אֵ-ל), is the letter *alef* (א).

When taking the initial letters of the first words of each of the four cardinal verses brought above, from the last to the first verse, it spells the word, אשקך, which has two possible meanings: "I will kiss you" and "I will offer you to drink." Amazingly both meanings come in two consecutive verses in the Song of Songs, the quintessential parable for the love between God and the Jewish people,

… when I should find you outside, I will kiss you (אֶשָּׁקֵךְ) and none would scorn me. I will lead you and take you to the house of my mother who brought me up; I will offer you to drink (אַשְׁקְךָ) of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate.[10]

Kissing is joined with drinking wine already at the very beginning of the Song of Songs: "The Song of Songs of Solomon. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine."[11] The word for wine in Hebrew (**יַיִן**) equals seventy, the same as the word for "secret," (**סוֹד**). The sages teach: "When wine enters, a secret exudes."[12] This verse is explained as expressing Israel's longing for closeness with God, through God communicating His deepest secrets of the Torah. This experience is greater than any physical gratification or stimuli the world can offer. These deep secrets of the Torah will be fully revealed in the future by the Mashiach.

Kissing and song are similar in that they both express what is impossible in words alone. The word "I will kiss you," (אֶשָּׁקֵךְ), alluding to the four levels of prayer, is thus the song of all strata of creation as it exists in a state of existential prayer and longing for intimate closeness with God. Prayer on this level expresses the passion of the soul, and in essence all creation, to be united with God.

There are exactly thirteen times that the (two-letter) root (ש-ק) of "kiss" are mentioned in the Five Books of Moses, the same number as the Attributes of Compassion. God's compassion is, as it were, His way of kissing man.

9. Deuteronomy 6:4.

10. Song of Songs 8:1-2.
11. Ibid 1:1-2.
12. *Eiruvin* 65a and *Sanhedrin* 38a.

who sings *Perek Shirah*?	World	part of Morning Prayers	representative verse	letter of אשקך
God	emanation	13 Attributes of compassion	"Compassionate and merciful God" (אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן)	א
man	creation	*Shema*	"Hear O Israel" (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל)	ש
ministering angel	formation	Blessings before the *Shema*	"Holy, holy, holy" (קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ)	ק
the creature	action	*Pesukei DeZimra*	"Every soul will praise *Havayah*, Halleluyah" (כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יָהּ הַלְלוּיָהּ)	ך

Another important Torah model that contains four elements is the structure of the Torah's text. The Torah text is based on the Hebrew letters, but there is more to it. Each part of the structure can be used as a basis for a different level of understanding of the text itself. First there are the letters themselves. Above that are the crowns drawn on the letters when written in a Torah scroll. Third are the vowels by which we know how to verbalize a word. Finally, at the fourth level are the musical cantillation marks by which we sing the Torah text. In a Torah scroll only the letters and the crowns appear while the vowels and musical notes are known from the Oral tradition.[13]

The "kisses of his mouth" discussed above are associated with the rationale of the commandments (טַעֲמֵי מִצוֹת) the deeper, secret reasons for God's commandments, which will be revealed by the Mashiach. The Hebrew word for "rationale" (טַעַם) is the same as the Hebrew word for a musical cantillation mark of the Torah text, considered the highest level of understanding. Thus, the Mashiach will use the Torah's song—passed down using the cantillation marks—to reveal the deepest levels of Torah understanding. This will be the ultimate expression of the song of Creation.

13. *Sod HaShem LiYerei'av*, Gate 24.

STORY

THE MAGID OF MEZRITCH: THE BEGGAR'S REPLY

Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch, was the disciple and successor of the holy Ba'al Shem Tov. During his leadership, most of the great leaders of the next generation joined the Chasidic movement. Though unlike his teacher, the Maggid was a distinct "tent dweller" and did not travel extensively, he sent his disciples to many places in Poland and Lithuania, and even to distant Germany to spread the teachings and ways of Chasidut. Chasidism flourished, and naturally, opposition to it deepened. It is said that the Maggid passed away because of the intense controversy, when some of his disciples responded with fierce counterattacks, which took a toll on his health and ultimately his life. In 5532 (1772), a plague broke out in Mezritch. Rebbe Zusha brought the Maggid to Anipoli, where he lived for about seven months until his passing on the 19th of Kislev, 5533 (1772). After his passing, his disciples dispersed throughout Europe, spreading Chasidut in their locations, laying the foundations of the Chasidic movement as it is today.

Before the Maggid of Mezritch became a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, he had a *yeshivah* for students (or according to other versions, a *Talmud Torah* for children). When a student wanted to be accepted to his *yeshivah*, he would test him in a special way: He would speak with him about the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and try to awaken a memory of it in him. If, through speaking with him, the student remembered receiving the Torah or even something specific that happened there, he would accept him. If not, he would reject him as a student.

This is certainly an interesting and unique test for accepting students. While regular tests examine a student's intellectual abilities or refined character traits, the Maggid is testing something entirely different here. He is looking for the soul connection of the student to the Torah, a connection that completely transcends the intellect. But how does he do this? Naturally, it is hard to imagine that an ordinary person would remember what his soul experienced many generations ago! We do not know for certain, but it is possible that an encounter with a *tzaddik*, who is entirely permeated with the experience of cleaving to the Giver of the Torah, makes the moment of the Giving of the Torah tangible and alive in the soul and the memory of the event suddenly awakens from its slumber.

Apart from this unique practice, the connection revealed here between the

Maggid and his future teacher, the holy Ba'al Shem Tov, is particularly interesting. Chabad tradition relates that the Ba'al Shem Tov would approach each new follower with the question: "Vos gedenkst du?" meaning "What do you remember?" The purpose of the question was to awaken the person's earliest memory, thus connecting him to the root of his soul. It seems that, inspired by this custom, the Ba'al Shem Tov's great-grandson, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, told the story of the Blind Beggar in his lengthy story titled "Seven Beggars." The blind beggar in the story describes a group of people competing for who has the earliest recollections. The blind beggar wins the contest by recounting the earliest possible memory: "I remember the nothingness."

Although the special relationship to memories connects the Ba'al Shem Tov to his disciple the Maggid, there is a significant difference between them. The essence of the memory they seek to awaken is very different. While the Ba'al Shem Tov (and similarly his great-grandson Rebbe Nachman) is interested in revealing the earliest memory of the Jew, the Maggid seeks to awaken the memory of the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai specifically. This difference in focus is reminiscent of the dispute in the *midrash* about who came first: the Torah or the souls of the Jewish people. Chasidut follows the *Tanna DeBei Eliyahu*, which states that "the thought of Israel precedes everything."[1] But the Maggid, before drawing close to the Ba'al Shem Tov, believed that the Torah preceded Israel and that the Jewish people connect to God only through the Torah.

FROM NOTHINGNESS

In essence, one could say that this is the central shift the Maggid experienced when he became a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov. He came to understand that the thought of Israel preceded even the primordial Torah. In Kabbalistic terms, the Maggid then ascended from the *sefirah* of wisdom to the *sefirah* of crown. The *Zohar* states that, "Torah emerges from wisdom."[2] From the perspective of wisdom, the Torah is indeed superior to Israel. The Torah is God's wisdom and His will that guides Israel in cleaving to Him. Without it, they might have strayed very far from Him, Heaven forbid. Despite this, the Ba'al Shem Tov identifies that the root of Israel is higher. This root is the supernal crown, in which no conception or thought is possible, only faith alone.

This is the secret of the holy Name כְּכָה, which literally means "so! [and no different]," but whose letters, the Ba'al Shem Tov revealed stand for the phrase "the crown of all crowns" (כֶּתֶר כָּל הַכְּתָרִים).[3] This holy Name expresses the earnest and dimensionless faith of Israel that they are truly the real purpose of the Torah. According to this view, the entire Torah was designed for the sake of the people of Israel. It is all instructions, addresses, and guidance specifically for them, and they themselves are connected to the Holy

1. *Tanna DeBei Eliyahu* ch. 14 and ch. 31. *Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4. See also *Emek HaMelech* 1:2 that it precedes even the primordial Torah.

2. *Zohar* 2:121a.

3. *Keter Shem Tov* (*Kehot* ed.) 163.

Blessed One with an unchanging essential connection that lies beyond reason, rationale, or logic. Thus, it is written that the Creator consulted with the souls of Israel before creating the world, and they are "the first of His produce,"[4] whose thought preceded everything.

The place where there is nothing but the Holy Blessed One and Israel, "Israel and the King alone," is the secret of the Ba'al Shem Tov's rereading[5] of the classic rabbinic statement "Israel has no *mazal*"[6] (meaning that the Jewish people are not dependent on luck or foreign influences) as "*ayin* is the *mazal* of Israel." The *mazal*-root of Israel is from the *ayin*, the nothingness of the supernal crown, the crown of the Good Name that rises above the crown of Torah, priesthood, and royalty.[7] Therefore, the most primal memory according to Rebbe Nachman is precisely the memory of *ayin* (nothingness).

ISRAEL, TORAH, AND THE TEMPLE

If the memory of the Sinai revelation is a distinct memory related to the *sefirah* of wisdom, and the memory of the nothingness (the *ayin*), the root of the Jewish soul, is from the crown, it follows that we should continue and awaken a memory corresponding to the next *sefirah* in line, understanding (*binah*). What could this memory be?

Understanding in Hebrew is cognate with contemplation (הִתְבּוֹנְנוּת). This is the closest Hebrew word to the original meaning of meditation (not in the Eastern sense, but in the contemplative sense). It is also related to the concept of structure (בִּנְיָן) and is described in the *Zohar* as the chamber or palace within which the seminal point of wisdom resides and where the seed of an idea sown by wisdom is expanded and developed through the intense contemplative faculties of understanding. Translating this into a memory, the *sefirah* of understanding is the source of our memory of the Holy Temple, where we experience coming to see and be seen[8] by the Almighty.

Expanding this thought a bit further: there are two aspects to understanding, known as either the supernal mother and the lower mother, or as understanding (*binah*) and contemplation (*tevunah*). These two aspects correspond to memories of the two Temples, the first and the second. The same holds true for wisdom and its memory. Wisdom too has two aspects known as the supernal father (*Abba Ila'ah*) and Israel the Elder (*Yisrael Saba*). They correspond to memories of the Giving of the Torah and the Sinai revelation.

If the Ba'al Shem Tov awakened the memory of the nothingness and the Maggid the memory of Torah, it follows that the memory of the Temple is the memory that the Alter Rebbe awakened in his disciples. The three fathers of the Chasidic movement correspond to the three Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and

4. Jeremiah 2:3.

5. *Ba'al Shem Tov Al HaTorah*, *Lech Lecha*, 26.

6. *Shabbat* 156a.

7. *Avot* 4:13. In Kabbalistic terms, the three crowns of Torah, priesthood, and royalty correspond to the three upper *sefirot* of *Arich* where the sefirot of knowledge, loving-kindness, and might of *Atik* shine. The crown of the good name, however, corresponds to the much higher *sefirah* of the crown of *Atik*.

8. *Chagigah* 2a.

Jacob. Abraham is the first believer and corresponds to the Ba'al Shem Tov's simple faith in the true nothingness, referring to the true source of all being. Isaac corresponds to the *sefirah* of might and thus to the memory of the Giving of the Torah, which the sages describe as having been given "from the mouth of might (*gevurah*)." Additionally, the *shofar* heard at Sinai was made from Isaac's ram. Jacob is inherently connected to the memory of the Temple since it is he who identified the location as "the House of God."[9]

NATURAL REPENTANCE

The Maggid of Mezritch, in his role as a preacher, had a parable he often related meant to awaken the public to *teshuvah*, to repent:

> A certain country rebelled against its king. But after some time had passed, they all awakened to appease the king. They decided to send an emissary to appease the king on behalf of all the country's inhabitants. But whom should they send?
>
> First, they turned to the prime minister, but the prime minister refused. Since he was of highest rank, his sin was also the worst, and he was ashamed to approach the king. One after another, all the ministers and important people of that country said the same. Then they turned to simple people, and they too evaded the mission. And so, they went down and down until they reached the lowliest and most rejected beggar in the country. The beggar did not hesitate much, and when he heard what was required of him, he immediately went to the king, conveyed the country's remorse for their rebellion, and appeased him.

How does one awaken to repentance? In the time of the Maggid of Mezritch, there were many preachers who tried to do exactly this. If it was a preacher with a harsh character, he would pour fire and brimstone upon the listeners and describe the punishments of hell awaiting them. If it was a man of softer and more compassionate heart, he would describe the Creator's love and kindness, and His sorrow over the evil deeds of His beloved children.

But here, the Maggid of Mezritch does something entirely different. He illuminates in a vivid, even humorous way, the evasion and difficulty that usually accompany the work of repentance. The question he asks is the question of his listeners: How does one do *teshuvah*? He resolves this difficulty through the character of the beggar. He is, as it turns out, the only one capable of doing what everyone else fears—going to the king and begging for reconciliation. What does the beggar teach us and what answer does he have to this question?

In the *Zohar*, the *sefirah* of understanding is identified with *teshuvah*.[10] But understanding is also known as "the

9. Genesis 28:17.
10. *Zohar* 1:79b, 3:122b (in *Raya Mehemna*).

world of freedom." The *teshuvah* that the beggar teaches us is a *teshuvah* of natural consciousness, where behaving properly is the simplest and most natural thing. Such *teshuvah* is free from all the inhibitions of the ministers, who by virtue of their roles feel the complexity and toil that reality demands.

Usually, we are far from a lifestyle of natural consciousness. This is a messianic, redemptive style of *teshuvah*, of a world whose nature draws it to behave according to God's will. But the identification of natural *teshuvah* specifically with a beggar prompts us to an interesting thought: It is precisely the importance we attribute to ourselves and our actions that prevents us from changing them and ourselves. If I hold myself to be important, like a minister, I also attribute great importance to the sin I have committed. Consequently, I will fear admitting to having transgressed and will not be able to beg forgiveness for my actions. Paradoxically, I will continue to linger on and on in the severe and terrible sin. But if I see myself as a beggar, then I am no one and I have no reputation or history to protect; then, the transition from sin to *teshuvah* is simple and easy. Approaching repentance in this way can only come from true and deep lowliness and humility. From the perspective of a feeling of true lowliness, all our actions, whether bad, requiring *teshuvah*, or good and seemingly deserving of reward, can only be weighed by the Creator alone. When we sever ourselves from His will, our sins immediately become too heavy to carry, but in one moment of *teshuvah*, all their weight can be lifted and annulled.

POST

HE WHO FORMS THE BEGINNING

One of the seminal tensions in life is between the good inclination (yetzer tov) and the evil inclination (yetzer ra). The Torah's inner dimension expands our knowledge of the two inclinations with the final product appearing in the Tanya, which explains that these two inclinations are an extension of the more complex Divine soul (nefesh Elokit) and animal soul (nefesh bahamit) we all possess.

In this post, HaRav Ginsburgh provides us with an original take on the source of these two souls, showing how they are deeply rooted in our moment of birth and God's decision to provide us with free choice. He does this by analyzing the origin and meaning of one of the most well-known connotations of the Almighty: "He Who Forms the Beginning" (Yotzer Bereishit).

This piece is a bit more challenging than our usual articles, but well worth the effort. The original Hebrew was posted on the 2nd of Elul, 5785 to the Rav's Hebrew X account (https://x.com/RavGinsburgh) and was first edited and published in the No'ach 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

"HE WHO FORMS THE BEGINNING"

The Almighty is also known as "He who forms the beginning" (יוֹצֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית), a connotation we use in the repetition of the *Amidah* when the congregation recites the rabbinic *Modim*[1]: "We give thanks to You that You are *Havayah* our God and the God of our forefathers, the God of all flesh, the One who formed us, He who forms the beginning…." This is the rabbinic source for this connotation.

Another source for this connotation, which might even predate the first source, can be found in the *Heichalot* literature, in the *midrash* known as *Shiur Komah* where we find it used in the famous statement that, "Whomever knows the measure of He who forms the beginning is guaranteed to be a son of the World to Come."[2] This is known as the secret of the "measure of stature" (שִׁעוּר קוֹמָה), alluded to in the opening verse of the *midrash*, "Great is our Master and of Much Power"[3] (גָּדוֹל אֲדוֹנֵינוּ וְרַב כֹּחַ), where "much power" (**וְרַב כֹּחַ**) is equal to 236, also equal to "a righteous heart" (**לֵב צַדִּיק**).

What does it mean that the Almighty is the one who forms the beginning? The literal meaning of this connotation is that the Almighty creates the point of

1. *Sotah* 40a. As noted there, the central point of the rabbinic Modim is that "we give thanks… for being able to give thanks" (מוֹדִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ... עַל שֶׁאָנוּ מוֹדִים לָךְ).

2. Midrash *Shiur Komah* as quoted in many sources including *Ibn Ezra* on Exodus 33:21 and *Eitz Chaim* 42:2.

3. Psalms 147:5.

Bereishit, the point of the "beginning." This is not only referring to the beginning of Creation in general, but also to the point of inception of every person—the point of origin of that person formed when he or she came out of their mother's womb. This is equivalent to what is known as the person's *mazal*, the revelation of the *root* of his or her Divine soul.[4] But at the same moment that God creates this point of origin, He also provides the person with free choice. This is the secret of the evil inclination that is active from the moment the person emerges from the womb.[5] The connection between "choice" and the "evil inclination," can be found in Aramaic. The regular translation of the root "choice" (בחר) to Aramaic is based on the two-letter root רע, which means evil, but in Aramaic is related to "will" (רְעוּתָא).[6] From that moment and on, every individual is tasked with forming his or her own path in life, all under the direct personal Providence of the Almighty.[7]

"HE WHO FORMS THEIR HEARTS"

The verse that that links the connotation "He Who Forms the Beginning," with the inclinations in the heart is, "He Who forms their hearts as one, who understands all their actions"[8] (הַיֹּצֵר יַחַד לִבָּם הַמֵּבִין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם). The two-letter root (i.e., the *sha'ar*, or gate) of the verb root יצר is *tzaddik-reish* (**צר**), the initials of "righteous-wicked" (**צַ**דִּיק **רָ**שָׁע), alluding to the simultaneous formation of both at the point of every person's beginning in life. In Hebrew, יצר is the root of the word meaning "inclination" (יֵצֶר). Whenever the sages mention "inclination" without specifying to which one they are referring (the good or the evil), by default the reference is to the evil inclination. But there is of course also the good inclination, which is 13 years younger than its older brother, the evil inclination.

Since the evil inclination emerges first, upon birth, what do the sages mean when they say that at the moment of birth, "One is sworn to be a *tzaddik* [righteous]…?"[9] The One Who Forms the Beginning saturates[10] the Jew, from the moment of birth, with the character traits and psychological energy needed to be righteous despite the evil inclination, which is older, more experienced, and more powerful than the good inclination.

These powers are primarily meant to assist us in bringing the "One," i.e., the Almighty, uniquely into our hearts—"He Who forms their hearts as one." Indeed, we mention this goal in the blessings before the *Shema* every day, "and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name." The unification of "Oneness" in the heart refers to feelings of joy (שִׂמְחָה) and delight (חֶדְוָה) in the heart, which bring us to serve God with love and fear. But to come to joy and delight, one must first conduct a reckoning (in one's intellectual faculty of

4. See *Ma'amarei Admur HaEmtza'ee Devarim*, vol. 4, pp. 1169ff.
5. *Rashi* on Genesis 8:21 (see also *Sanhedrin* 91b).
6. See Radak's *Sefer HaShorahim, s.v.* רעה at its end.
7. See Addendums to *Keter Shem Tov* (Kehot, 3rd ed.) 179 and following. See also *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 8, pp. 277ff.
8. Psalms 33:15.
9. *Niddah* 30b and *Tanya* ch. 1.
10. An alternate pronunciation of the word "sworn" (מַשְׁבִּיעִין and מַשְׁבִּיעִין)

understanding) that will lead to *teshuvah*,[11] and to a full correction of one's conduct.

CREATION, FORMATION, AND ACTION

The Torah's opening words, "In the beginning, God created…" refer to the creation of the World of Creation.

Our connotation, "He Who Forms the Beginning" and the verse, "He Who forms…" refer to the formation of the World of Formation

The end of the verse, "who understands all their actions" refers to the rectification of the World of Action.[12]

The World of Creation is mostly (almost completely) good, meaning that it was created by God without man, who is only created at the very end of the first account of Creation.

The World of Formation is half good and half evil, meaning that it is a partnership between God and man. God forms its beginning—the origin of man—but entrusts man with the toil of refining his character traits—love and fear, etc.—through his own free choice. This is a trademark characteristic of the World of Formation, where everything follows the principle: "this opposite that is God's doing"[13]; for every positive force there is an equal and opposite negative force, and it is up to man to choose which to pursue.

The World of Action is mostly evil, meaning that it is made up of man's actions. It is the reality that God has entrusted completely to man as, "from Heaven, *Havayah* looks down… from His dwelling place He gazes"[14] at man, safeguarding him so that He can help him in his positive choices. By God's design, it is only man that can fix the World of Action's ills and faults, not just by choosing good over evil, but also by revealing his powers of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice is the product of the soul's highest level, the singular one (*yechidah*), which can only be revealed here, in this lowest of all realities, where God seems to be entirely concealed, leaving man, as it were, to act alone. But again, God is constantly looking down and gazing, safeguarding us and our choices.

11. A return to God, following the verse, "And his heart will understand, and he will return" (Isaiah 6:10).

12. "Everything that was created during the six days of Creation requires some action [to bring it to its perfected state]" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 11:6).

13. Ecclesiastes 7:14.

14. Psalms 33:13-14. Note these are the two verses preceding, "He Who forms their hearts as one, who understands all their actions."


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