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



Wonders

בס"ד

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שַׁבָּת שְׁמוֹת ❁ כ-כא טֵבֵת תשפ"ו



Once, Rabbi Pinchas came to the mikveh to immerse after midnight, but the attendant refused to open it for him, as that day he had bought some geese and placed them there. Seeing that he was not allowed to enter, Rabbi Pinchas lifted some planks from the roof, entered and immersed.

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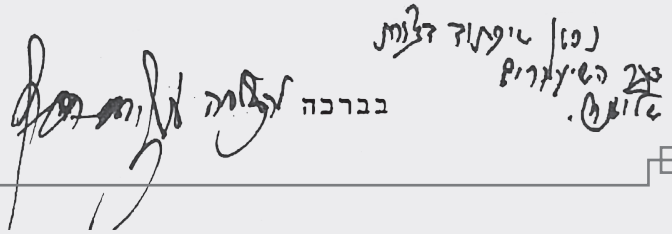
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"…It would be proper to publish your classes in book form. With blessings for success…"



Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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Wonders Staff
Editor: R' Moshe Genuth • Associate Editor: Shelli Karzen
Contributing Editor: R. Avraham Arieh Trugman • Typesetting: Yoel Broderick

CLASS EXCERPT

CHASIDIC PSYCHOLOGY: OPTIMISM, PESSIMISM, AND REALISM

One of HaRav Ginsburgh's favorite themes is taking a topic from modern life and analyzing it through the lens of Torah in general and the Torah's inner dimension in particular.

In a class given on the 28th of Cheshvan, 5786, his 81st birthday, he spoke about optimism, pessimism, and realism. Whenever the Rav tackles a large topic, his treatment of the subject does not usually end with a single class. This topic continued on for another couple of weeks, and we look forward to publishing more on the topic at some later time.

The Hebrew transcript of this class was first published in Nifla'ot for Vayeitzei 5786.

ISAAC AND JACOB ARCHETYPES OF OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM

Let us begin with an important principle that can be gleaned from Chasidic writings on Isaac and Jacob: Isaac has an optimistic character; Jacob has a pessimistic character. These are essential character traits of even the most important people. We know that the Ba'al Shem Tov was heard saying "*Af*" many times. When the Alter Rebbe was arrested, the Russian officials claimed that by saying this syllable, which in Hebrew means "anger," the Ba'al Shem Tov was calling God's wrath upon the non-Jews. But the Alter Rebbe explained that he meant the word "*af*" as it appears in the verse, "All that I have called by My Name, for My honor I have created it, I have formed it, even I have made it"[1] (כֹּל הַנִּקְרָא בִשְׁמִי וְלִכְבוֹדִי בְּרָאתִיו יְצַרְתִּיו **אַף** עֲשִׂיתִיו). The Ba'al Shem Tov's intent was to strengthen the normally weak connection between the lowest World of Action and the three Worlds above it, Formation, Creation, and Emanation, by saying the word that hangs them together, "even" (*af*). The Maggid of Mezritch used to explain that "af" (אַף) is the initials of the words, "*atizlut po*" (אֲצִילוּת פֹּה) meaning "Emanation is here," the highest World of Emanation, a state of consciousness in which there is nothing but God, is present everywhere, even in the lowest reality. Based on these explanations, we have taught in the past that "*af*" can stand for many things, but I do not think that we mentioned that it is the initials of

1. Isaiah 43:7.

the Hebrew version of "optimistic" (**א**ופְטִימִי) and "pessimistic" (**פֶּ**סִימִי).

Isaac's optimism and Jacob's pessimism can be seen in relation to Esau. Despite knowing that Esau is not bound to the Almighty, Isaac wants to bless him. He is optimistic that the blessings will bring out Esau's hidden potential. Kabbalistically, Esau contains many great souls that Isaac wants to empower.

Jacob though is far more pessimistic about Esau (as is his mother, Rebeccah). This comes out strongly when after their reunion, Esau suggests that they travel together, but Jacob rejects his offer saying to him, "let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly… until I come to my lord in Se'ir."[2] Jacob never joined up with Esau in Se'ir and the commentaries explain that his intent was that this would happen in the end of days, when the Mashiach arrives. Jacob is pessimistic about the possibility that Esau would be able to reform himself in his present lifetime.

From this example we can also understand a key difference between our present reality and the days of Mashiach. Our present reality is described by the sages as one of deceit. Specifically, from Jacob's conduct, we learn that this means that even if you have a worthy goal, you may asymptotically approach it, but you will never be able to fully reach it. This is known in technical terms as "up to but not including" (עַד וְלֹא עַד בְּכְלָל). This is a central trait of our present reality, which is why it is described as a deceptive reality: you think you can reach your goal fully, but in fact, it eludes you. Mashiach is thus a change in reality that allows us to reach our goals, completely: "up to an including" (עַד וְעַד בְּכְלָל). When Mashiach comes, says Jacob, I will be able to reach Se'ir, I will be able to go to the mountain of Esau and appraise him, and the sovereignty will be granted to God.[3]

GENERAL PRINCIPLES VERSUS DETAILS

Jacob's pessimism stems from his firm belief that it is impossible to reform Esau all at once. You cannot "scare" Esau into changing all at once. You cannot extract all the holy souls from him in one lifetime. This is simply not possible in our present reality. What would have happened if Isaac had blessed Esau? One of two things: either Isaac's plan would fail because despite Esau's lofty spiritual origin, his energy would fall prey to and contribute to the impure husks of reality (husks are *kelipot*, which mask God's revelation). Alternately, and perhaps even worse, the blessings would be too much for Esau's vessels and instead of elevating the holy sparks and souls within him, it would shatter him completely, leading to his absolute demise. All that Esau is—the bad and the good—would be lost.

Seemingly, the loss of Esau could be considered a positive turn of events, as the verse says, "When the wicked perish, there is joy."[4] However, Chasidic teachings explain that the loss of the wicked is not total and they will return reincarnated in another life so that the sparks of goodness

2. Genesis 33:14.

3. Based on Obadiah 1:21.

4. Proverbs 11:10.

in them can be extracted. Therefore, the demise of Esau would only lengthen our exile, until all the good within him would be elevated. The principle that all goodness must be elevated is based on the verse, "We are going to die, like water spilled on the ground that cannot be regathered; but God will not forsake any soul and ponders thoughts on how no outcast will be lost."[5] So long as there is an inkling of a holy spark, be it in a Jew or a non-Jew, even the most wicked, God is devising a plan for elevating that spark and releasing it.

Another way to describe the difference between Isaac and Jacob is to say that Isaac thinks in general principles, while Jacob is sensitive to details. Those like Jacob, that are aware of the details, know that things take time. This is one of the typical features of those who are more pessimistic. It takes time to reach your destination, your goal, and there are going to be failures along the way. As the verse states, "the righteous will fall seven times and rise."[6] Who can guarantee that you are not standing just before a fall right now?

Those like Isaac who approach things from a more general perspective tend to be more optimistic; they think they can bring about change in one fell swoop.

"IN ITS TIME… I WILL HASTEN IT"

There is a central prophecy from Isaiah regarding the redemption. Says Isaiah, that when the time to redeem us comes, God will hasten the process. The sages note that this prophecy can be understood to be speaking about two options for the redemption: either it will come in its season, in its predetermined time, or it will come with haste, meaning that there is no predetermined time for the redemption. To reconcile these two options, the sages state what has become a well-known formula: "If they merit—the redemption will be hastened; if they do not merit—the redemption will be in its time."[7]

Following this formula, Isaac is the secret of "if they merit," therefore the redemption will be hastened. He believes that if at this moment, just before his passing, he blesses Esau, the redemption will come immediately.[8] Jacob, however, is pessimistic, believing that our state is one of "if they do not merit," meaning that we will not be successful in rectifying Esau and all his sparks of holiness in one concerted effort, for we ourselves are not rectified yet.[9]

To merit in Hebrew also means to

5. 2 Samuel 14:14.
6. Proverbs 24:15.
7. *Sanhedrin* 98a.
8. As Rebeccah described it to Jacob, Isaac is planning on blessing Esau, "before *Havayah*, before my passing" (Genesis 27:7). Following the interpretation that "before *Havayah*" (לִפְנֵי הוי') with regard to Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:30) means "loftier than God's essential Name, *Havayah*," here too we can say that Isaac believed his blessings would carry Esau above God's essential Name, *Havayah* in the World of Rectification (our reality) to his root in the World of Chaos, and "before my passing," would carry Esau above the root of the death of the kings of Edom, symbolizing the emotive sefirot that shattered in the World of Chaos. Thus, Isaac believed his blessings would bring Esau back to his soul's primordial root above the chaos and issues that had plagued his life and would set him on a track of bringing the redemption.
9. The Lubavitcher Rebbe consistently claimed that the responsibility for rectifying the world lies with us, not with Esau. Once we do *teshuvah*, we will find that Esau is ready for the redemption.

prevail, as in a dispute or a conflict.[10] Who then are those that hold that the redemption should hasten? Those who say, "Let us be prevail. Let us be victorious" (בּוֹאוּ נְנַצֵּחַ). If we are victorious over our enemies, we will merit to hasten the redemption. If *Am Yisrael* would just want to win, we could bring the redemption today. But Jacob knows that *Am Yisrael* does not yet want to win, therefore we are still in a state of "if they do not merit," i.e., "if they do not prevail." It follows that having a true disposition to be completely victorious is the merit needed to hasten the redemption. To be completely victorious is to take our cue from King David who said, "I will pursue my enemies and overtake them, I will not return until I have annihilated them."[11]

It should be the most straightforward conclusion that we should want to win the war. Is there really someone who does not want to win? We are capable of winning the war today. The authority of the Jewish people should be dominant over our enemies.[12] It is completely our choice. If we would choose to act this way, the Mashiach would come today, all would be clear, and we would see the hastening of redemption.

REALISM

Lately,[13] we have been talking about how there is an intermediate in-between every two extremes. Specifically, we developed the concept of the intermediate *nogah* inclination that lies between the good inclination and the evil inclination. Here too, between optimism and pessimism, there lies an intermediate approach: realism. Realism is a product of familiarity with reality as it is. Just as in the case of the intermediate inclination, which tends to deteriorate and join the evil inclination, so too realism is predisposed to become pessimism. The more an individual is steeped in the details of reality, the more he or she will tend to be pessimistic.

Realism needs to be pushed towards optimism. It has to be realistic optimism, not fanciful optimism that is divorced from reality. Fanciful, made-up optimism is how we would characterize the state of the World of Chaos, which therefore shattered. To further our understanding of optimism, realism, and pessimism, we can correspond them to the three Worlds of *Akudim*, *Nekudim*, and *Berudim*; the latter two we have referred to as the World of Chaos and the World of Rectification. The World of *Berudim*, the World of Rectification also known as the World of Emanation (*Atizlut*) is associated with pessimism, but a realistic pessimism. Its effect is to imbue the three lower worlds with a pessimism that is also connected with realism, but in the three lower worlds, the so-called realistic scenarios are closer to fanciful, even horrifically nightmarish scenarios, which never play out in reality.

It is the World of *Akudim*, the world that precedes the fanciful optimism of *Nekudim* (the World of Chaos) and the realistic pessimism of *Berudim*, that harbors the energy needed to push optimism into

10. See *Mishnah Berachot* 1:5: "Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: I am approximately seventy years old, and I never prevailed to have the Exodus from Egypt mentioned at night…."
11. Psalms 18:38.
12. *Ketubot* 26b.
13. See *Wonders* for *parashat Mikeitz-Chanukah* 5786.

realism. Since *Nekudim* corresponds to Isaac's optimism and *Berudim* to Jacob's pessimism, *Akudim* corresponds to Abraham, particularly to his God-given gift to bless. Abraham, who like the World of *Akudim* stands above time and space, can bless others with optimism and pull realism out of its spiraling descent into pessimism and bring it over to the side of optimism. Doing so is akin to the plain meaning of the phrase, "In its time… I will hasten it." The first part, "in its time" expresses realism. The second part "I will hasten it" expresses optimism. Spoken together, Isaiah is conveying a sense of realistic optimism about the redemption.

Couched in the language of general principles versus details, realistic optimism is the product of seeing how the details of reality, when combined, paint an overall picture of progress towards the redemption. The realistic optimist is not divorced from reality but is able to compile its myriad features into a unified structure that leads to a better world.

LESSONS FROM THE BURNING BUSH

After God reveals to Moses at the Burning Bush that he has been chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses asked God what he should tell the Jewish people when they ask who sent him and God names Himself as, "I Will Be That Which I Will Be."[1] However, in the following verse, God states that the Tetragrammaton, the essential four-letter Name *Havayah*, is the Name by which He shall be known forever. While God is never again referred to as "I Will Be That Which I Will Be" in the *Tanach*, Kabbalah associates this Name with the *sefirah* of crown (*keter*), the highest of the ten *sefirot*, the most elevated and hidden aspect of God.[2] This Name and its significance will only be truly revealed after Mashiach comes. Other traditions teach that this unique name of God is also associated with the *sefirah* of understanding (*binah*), which is likewise related with the future and the World-to-Come.[3]

The connection between the Name, "I will be that which I will be" (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) and Moses is astounding. Firstly, the numerical value of, "I Will Be That Which I Will Be" (**אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה**) is 543, the inverse of the numerical value of Moses (**מֹשֶׁה**), 345. This in and of itself suggests that a "face to face" mirrorlike relationship existed between Moses and God. Bolstering this notion, Moses' name (**מֹשֶׁה**) spelled backward in Hebrew is "HaShem" (**הַשֵּׁם**), meaning "the Name," the connotation used to refer to God when we wish to avoid enunciating one of His holy Names.

1. Exodus 3:14.

2. *Sha'areh Orah*; Rabbi Yosef ben Avraham Gikatilla.

3. *Sha'ashuim Yom Yom; parsaht Shemot,* p.205.

From this we may infer that during their conversation at the Burning Bush, God was trying to bring out and reveal to Moses his inner potential, while Moses was trying to draw out more information from God.

When Moses initially turned to see the unusual sight of a bush that was burning yet not consumed, God called to him by name twice, "Moses Moses," instructing him to remove his shoes as the place he was standing was holy earth.[4] It is explained in Chasidut that this directive was referring to Moses' need to mentally strip off his physical nature in order to ascend from his initial state of physicality to a higher level of spiritual consciousness.[5]

When God calls Moses by name twice, he is among only four people whose names are called twice: Abraham, Jacob, Samuel, and Moses. In the Masoretic tradition and in most printed books of the Tanach there is a line separating the two names. This line is a mark called *pesik ta'ama*, and literally means a comma, indicating a short gap or rest between the two names. The only exception is Moses. There is no comma creating a gap between his names when God called out to him. By calling him twice without a gap, God was revealing to Moses that his higher self (as his soul stands above, before God) and his lower self (his soul as embodied in this world) are identical. God was telling Moses that he can actualize his deepest soul qualities and potential in his corporeal existence; his highest and lowest selves could truly be identical.

THE POWER OF SONG

There is a profound numerical gem associated with the Divine name "I Will Be That Which I Will Be." The numerical value of "I will be that which I will be" (**אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה**) equals the phrase "the power of song," (**כֹּחַ הַשִּׁירָה**), both equaling 543. This mathematical identity teaches us that an individual's cumulative potential and mission in life is aroused through song. In this sense, every person has an inner song, an inner vibrational field that attunes itself and guides him or her to fulfill their unique potential and purpose, the "I will be that which I will be," of his or her life.[6]

Parenthetically, according to the *Zohar*, Moses knew how to play all styles of music in prayer.[7] It is explained in Chasidut that this means that Moses could play the individual melody of every soul.[8] It was Moses who later led all of Israel in the Song of the Sea, one of the most inspirational collective moments in Jewish history. He not only awakened the inner song of each individual, but he also assembled them into one coherent and beautiful symphony. Indeed, Moses is the archetypal soul of the *sefirah* of victory (נֶצַח), which also means "to orchestrate" or "to conduct," revealing Moses' ability to unite people through their inner song.

The Hebrew word "I will be" (**אֶהְיֶה**) has the numerical value of 21 and is deemed one of God's Names in its own right, connected to the *sefirah* of wisdom. Since

4. Exodus 3:4.
5. *The Hebrew Letters*, p.176.
6. See approbation for Rabbi Avraham Arieh Trugman's book *The Mystical Power of Music*.
7. *Zohar* 2:114b.
8. *Kuntras HaHitpa'alut* 1.

"I will be" appears twice in the full Name "I will be that which I will be," Kabbalah notes that when the numerical value of "I will be," (21) is squared it equals 441, the numerical value of the Hebrew word for "truth" (**אֱמֶת**). One's inner song reflects inner truth, the essential truths and sense of purpose that guide a person throughout their lives. This is what God was trying to teach Moses by revealing His Name "I will be that which I will be."

UNIFYING PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL

As mentioned above, God's first instruction to Moses at the Burning Bush was to remove his shoes, symbolizing his need to ascend from the downward pull of materialism to a higher level of spirituality. It is important to note that one of Judaism's basic goals is the unification of the physical and spiritual realms, both on the practical and mystical level. Almost all the commandments entail a bodily action, physical object or speech, which is also considered an action. Every *mitzvah* (commandment) draws down and reveals the spiritual meaning and influence intrinsic to that *mitzvah*.

The relationship between the physical and the spiritual can be compared to that of matter and energy. Science changed our perception of reality forever when it revealed that matter is in essence pure energy. Similarly, when physicality is stripped of its exterior form, we find an inner core brimming with spiritual potential. The physical and the spiritual, like matter and energy, are two sides of the same coin, intrinsically bound together.

This profound observation serves as an illustration for how a Jew serves God physically through everyday actions but is at the same time also intimately bound to the final redemption and Mashiach's task in the world. Mashiach's primary goal is not political power or military domination, it is to educate humanity, to introduce an irreversible sea change in human consciousness. In the Messianic era, the entire world will finally perceive the Divine unity underlying reality and the consummate union between the physical and spiritual spheres.

Rashi alludes to this future reality in an intriguing commentary on the verse that describes Moses' preparations to return to Egypt and redeem Israel: "And Moses took his wife and his sons and put them on a donkey and he returned to the land of Egypt."[9] *Rashi* explains that this was no ordinary donkey: rather, it was the same donkey that Abraham saddled before the binding of Isaac, and it is the same donkey that the Mashiach will ride in the future. Obviously, this statement is not to be taken literally; the same donkey has not lived thousands of years! Rather this Midrashic tradition alludes to the ongoing historical development of an idea. The letters comprising the Hebrew word for donkey (*chamor*; **חֲמוֹר**) are the same as those comprising the Hebrew word for "physicality" or "materiality" (*chomer*; **חוֹמֶר**). Mastering and transforming physicality so that it serves the spiritual is both humanity's and particularly the Jewish people's ongoing mission. Abraham symbolically began the process by saddling the donkey/physicality, while Moses went further by placing his wife and children

9. Exodus 4:20.

over it. The Mashiach will complete the process by riding on the donkey himself, symbolizing his mastery of the material in the service of the spiritual.

The Midrash states that Moses "is the first redeemer and he [his soul reincarnated in the soul of Mashiach] will be the last redeemer."[10] This statement links the souls of Moses and Mashiach together. The connection between Moses and Mashiach is further stressed by both their Hebrew names beginning with the letters *mem* and *shin*. This link hints that Moses was, and the Mashiach will be, entrusted with the same basic mission: leading the Jewish people from slavery to freedom and from exile to redemption by revealing God's essential unity and the harmony and union of the physical and the spiritual.

10. *Shemot Rabbah* 4:2.

STORY

RABBI MOSHE OF LELOV: EXTRICATION FROM EXTERNAL FORCES

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Geliner, the Preacher of Polnoye, was among the first disciples of the Ba'al Shem Tov and one of the greatest disseminators of his teachings. Even before drawing close to the Ba'al Shem Tov, he served as a maggid (preacher) and cantor in Polnoye. When he came close to the Ba'al Shem Tov, he was sent to travel among Jewish communities and utilize his oratorical talents to draw souls to the Chasidic movement. Indeed, his sermons were very impactful, and under his influence, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Katz of Polnoye, author of Toldot Yaakov Yosef, came close to Chasidut, and according to one tradition, so did the Maggid of Mezritch. Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Geliner passed away in Polnoye on the 21st of Tevet 5530 (1770) and was buried there. Twelve years later, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye was buried adjacent to him, and an "ohel" was erected over their graves.

In his youth, Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz was a teacher in the town of Polnoye, where they called him *der shvartzer melamed* [the black teacher]. He would frequently visit the home of the Preacher of Polnoye, who was very fond of him, for he recognized Rabbi Pinchas' righteousness and holiness which others did not. The Preacher had a special room and a private *mikveh* (ritual bath) in the

bathhouse, separate from the large *mikveh* for the townspeople. Rabbi Pinchas asked permission to use his *mikveh* whenever he wished, night or day. The Preacher agreed and instructed the bathhouse attendant to admit Rabbi Pinchas whenever he came.

Once, Rabbi Pinchas came to the *mikveh* to immerse after midnight, but the attendant refused to open it for him, as that day he had bought some geese and placed them there. Seeing that he was not allowed to enter, Rabbi Pinchas lifted some planks from the roof, entered and immersed. When he finished, he exited through the hole, but because it was narrow and tight the roof's crossbeam broke and when he descended from the roof, the crossbeam fell on Rabbi Pinchas and killed him. As all of this took place in the middle of the night, nobody knew what had happened.

The Preacher suddenly awoke from his sleep and said to his attendant: "What is this noise I hear outside? Go out and see!" The attendant went out and heard nothing, came back and told the Preacher that there was no noise outside. The Preacher sent him again to look, for he heard a great noise from outside. The attendant went out again and came back, telling the Rabbi he heard no noise. When day broke, a dead man was found lying by the bathhouse. A great commotion arose in the town, and when the matter became known to the Preacher of Polnoye, he ordered that the deceased not be moved from his place until he arrived there.

Then the Preacher went to the synagogue to recite Psalms and wept greatly. He prayed before God in these words: "Master of the Universe, return Rabbi Pinchas' soul to him and let him live! You will yet thank me for this; he is a great God-fearing man and a *tzaddik*!" He wept and prayed for some time, and afterwards went to the place of the deceased, moved him and said to him: "Pinchas'l! Get up and go teach your students, you are a day laborer!" Rabbi Pinchas rose and went to his home, and they saw, with God's help, a true revival of the dead.

"The smallest among you revives the dead" (*Avodah Zarah* 10b) said Emperor Antoninus to Rabbi Yehudah the Prince. But what is life itself, and how do the righteous renew it after it has ceased?

The verse states that "the fear of God [is the source] for life" (Proverbs 19:23) but life itself is "life and goodness" (Deuteronomy 30:15). From this we learn that the experience of life begins with a moment of awe because lifeforce, when it enters, shakes and strikes the soul, but afterwards the consciousness of life is present in its beneficence, causing one to sense the good permeating all of reality. When the experience of life awakens the attraction to good, it transforms the initial point of awe into a full experience of love. Therefore, love, and ultimately the love of God—the Absolute Good—is the complete expression of the experience of life. In contrast, emphasizing the evil around us

stems from a general experience that tends more towards death. But all this relates to one's own experience, so how does love lead to the revival of the dead?

THREE LEVELS OF LOVE OF GOD

The Torah instructs us, "Love *Havayah*, your God… for He is your life and the length of your days" (Ibid. v. 20). This love is revealed on three levels: life of the body, life of the soul, and the life of life. Each level of life begins with an initial point of awe, which shakes the vessel and brings it into a state of life pulsation.

At the level of bodily life, the feeling that "God is your life" stems from the consciousness of vitality embedded in physical reality, particularly in one's own bodily life. For the Jew, the complete experience of vitality flowing through all parts of the body is connected to serving God in every bodily movement and every breath. Chasidut teaches that the physical experience of love of God can and should cause an increase in heartbeat and breathing rate, similar to the physical experience of loving another person. As the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote (*Hayom Yom* 20 Av),

> Just as with the *mitzvah* of tefillin, for example, there is a designated place for them on the head and arm, and one feels the weight of the head-tefillah and the tightness of the hand-tefillah, so too with the *mitzvot* of love and fear.… The degree of fulfillment of these *mitzvot* is that there be a bodily sensation, that the very flesh of the heart actually feel; just as when one meets a truly devoted friend. Not only does one feel good and forgets all his troubles, he even enjoys a newly awakened inner liveliness and optimism, all stemming from his cheerful mood.

The second level of love of God stems from the sense of vitality embedded in the soul itself. At this level, one is occupied with awareness and concern for the spiritual well-being of other souls, which are inherently connected to one's own soul. To truly connect with love to another soul, transcendence above the experience of the body (and even the soul-body, meaning the self-image of one's soul, as explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe) is required. Here, love and service of God are performed jointly by all souls, as one organic whole with the *tzaddik* of the generation as its heart. A person experiencing this love feels the life flowing from the *tzaddik* to all of Israel and to himself among them.

But when one experiences love and life at the level of the body, or even the soul, he is unable to overcome death. His vitality is limited and therefore susceptible to death and certainly does not have the power to revive another person. However, at the third level, God's presence is fully revealed, and it is felt that life itself must live within God. This is the feeling that all vitality depends on its connection to the source of all life, to God as the life of life. Some awareness of this exists at all levels of love of God; if not, even the spiritual experience of soul life could degenerate into empty bodily vitality and even to actual death. But after the *tzaddik* achieves perfect awareness of the Life of life, he receives from the hand of the Holy Blessed One, "the key to the revival of the dead" (see *Ta'anit* 2a).

POST

IS THIS WORLD GEHENOM?

"Our master of blessed memory began and said: Everyone says there is This World and the World to Come. We believe that the World to Come exists. It is possible also that This World exists somewhere, in some world, because here, what we see is Gehenom, for everyone is full of tremendous suffering constantly. And we said: It is possible that This World does not exist anywhere at all" (Likkutei Moharan 1:119).

So goes one of the most well-known quotes from Rebbe Nachman, well-known because it paints our present reality as Gehenom, purgatory, because of all the suffering people endure.

In this note posted to X on the 10th of Kislev, 5786, HaRav Ginsburgh reinterprets Rebbe Nachman's famous quote using the constructs of Kabbalah and Chasidut leading to some very surprising conclusions. This post was first published in the Vayishlach 5786 edition of Nifla'ot.

There are three Worlds: This World (עוֹלָם הַזֶּה), the World to Come (עוֹלָם הַבָּא), and the Future to Come (לֶעָתִיד לָבא), which is considered loftier than the World to Come.[1]

Whenever there are three elements that are connected chronologically or developmentally, it is worthwhile to explore how they correspond to the Ba'al Shem Tov's model of development known as submission, separation, and sweetening.[2]

Our toil in This World—the toil of the *beinoni*, the intermediate, or inbetweener, the toil of the everyman—is performed out of a sense of *submission*. We are meant to carry the yoke of the commandments and to carefully obey the Divine directive while believing that all that happens to us is for the good.

The *tzaddik* serves God in This World as if it were a microcosm of the World to Come.[3] As such he enjoys a *separation* from the darkness of This World and is even able to receive from the light sequestered for the righteous from the light that was created on the first day of Creation,[4] "And God saw that the light was good"[5] (וַיַּרְא אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב) good for the *tzaddikim* in the future, and the *tzaddik* is described as good, "State that the *tzaddik* is good"[6] (אִמְרוּ צַדִּיק כִּי טוֹב). Indeed, when "God separated the light from the darkness," He also separated the actions of the *tzaddikim* from those of the wicked,[7] meaning that He ensured that the tzaddik's essence would exist in existential separation from the wicked.

1. *Eitz Chaim* 15:5.
2. *Keter Shem Tov* §28.
3. *Bava Batra* 16b-17a.
4. *Chagigah* 12a and *Bereishit Rabbah* 12:6.
5. Genesis 1:3.
6. Isaiah 3:10.
7. *Bereishit Rabbah* 3:8.

It is the true *ba'al teshuvah* who merits not only a microcosm of the World to Come but also the level known as the Future to Come; he tastes the simple oneness of "it was evening and it was morning, one day."[8] This is the taste of the sweetening of "sins becomes merits,"[9] where the sins are represented by the evening and merits by the morning. He merits to reveal the goodness hidden in the evening.

To summarize:

This World	*beinoni*	submission
The World to Come	*tzaddik*	separation
The Future to Come	*ba'al teshuvah*	sweetening

ELEVATING GEHENOM THROUGH JOY AND AWE

The combined values of This World (**עוֹלָם הַזֶּה**), the World to Come (**עוֹלָם הַבָּא**), and the Future to Come (**לֶעָתִיד לָבֹא**) is 864, the value of "serve *Havayah* with joy"[10] (**עִבְדוּ אֶת יְ-הוה בְּשִׂמְחָה**), whose value is itself the filling of the word for joy (שִׂמְחָה), **שין מם חית הא**, or 4 times the value of "awe" (**יִרְאָה**), which means that "awe" is the average value of each word in the phrase, "serve *Havayah* with joy" and each letter as written in the filling of the word "joy."

The average value of these three states is 288, the number of holy sparks that fell with the shattered vessels of the World of Chaos that preceded the World of Rectification.

From this we can extrapolate on why 864 is also 8 times the value of "Gehenom" (**גֵּיהִנֹּם**)—normally designating a fourth state or World situated below the three we are discussing.

Our soul descended into This World, which rightfully seems to us sometimes like Gehenom itself to elevate Gehenom to holiness (together with these 288 sparks).

"THIS TOO IS FOR THE BEST"

To better understand the concept of elevating Gehenom, we first need to explore what Gehenom is.

Gehenom is a state in which God is concealed as described in the verse, "And I will completely conceal My face from them on that day."[11] The Ba'al Shem Tov explains that this refers to a state in which God is doubly hidden, "a concealment that is concealed," a state in which we are not even aware that God is concealed from us.

How can we emerge from this state? How can we come to reveal God if we are not even aware that He is hidden? The only way is through earnest faith that "this too is for the best"[12] (**גַּם זוּ לְטוֹבָה**) whose value is 108, the same as "Gehenom" (**גֵּיהִנֹּם**)![13]

As explained elsewhere, "this too is for the best" was the phrase Nachum Ish Gamzu would regularly repeat, indicating that Nachum was able to see and point to the good in every situation. His disciple,

8. Genesis 1:5.
9. *Yoma* 86b.
10. Psalms 100:2.
11. Deuteronomy 31:18.
12. *Ta'anit* 21a.
13. Note also that the first and last letters of the "Gehenom" (גֵּיהִנֹּם) spell the word גם, the first word in the phrase "this too is for the best" (גַּם זוּ לְטוֹבָה), which means that the interior letters of "Gehenom" (**גיהנם**) equal the words "this is for the best" (זוּ לְטוֹבָה), or 65, the value of God's Name, Adni (אֲ-דֹנָי), meaning that what is the best about this situation is that it too is God.

Rabbi Akiva continued this direction, but because he himself could not actually see the positive aspect in every situation, he would regularly say, "All that God does is for the best,"[14] not in Hebrew but in Aramaic, the language that is considered the backside of the Holy Tongue, Hebrew. Where Nachum saw, Rabbi Akiva believed.

Rabbi Akiva is identified as a reincarnation of our patriarch Jacob.[15] Jacob thinks he is marrying his beloved Rachel but, "In the morning, behold she was Leah."[16] Jacob believes in Divine Providence (a belief he inherited from his grandfather Abraham). Interestingly, the word "she" has a phonetic form and a written, orthographic form (*kree* and *ketiv*). Though it is read as "she" (הִיא) it is written as "he" (הוּא). The written form then reads, "In the morning, behold he was Leah." To which "he" is the verse referring to?

We can imagine that Jacob said to himself, "this too is for the best" (**גַּם זוּ לְטוֹבָה**), whose value is equal to 3 times "Leah" (**לֵאָה**). "This too is for the best" (גַּם זוּ לְטוֹבָה) contains 9 letters, so the average value of each letter is 12, the value of "he" (**הוּא**), but it is also the value of "this" (**זֶה**). The pronoun "he" refers to the concealed World (עָלְמָא דְּאִתְכַּסְיָא), the pronoun "this" refers to the revealed World (עָלְמָא דְּאִתְגַּלְיָא).

By saying "this too is for the best," Jacob revealed that "this"—what he was witnessing, that Leah was now his wife instead of Rachel—was He, God! Concealed behind this unexpected (and unwanted) situation was God Himself. Through earnest faith that concealed within every reality is He—God—one merits to reveal Godliness and point to it; one is able to reveal the secret behind the concealed World.

LEVELS OF CONCEALMENT

The concealed World is associated with the *sefirah* of understanding (*binah*), but understanding is divided into two levels known as comprehension (תְּבוּנָה) and supernal mother (אִימָּא עִילָּאָה). Comprehension corresponds to one level of concealment describing the state of "the World to Come" (עוֹלָם הַבָּא) within This World. Supernal mother, the higher level of understanding, reflects a double state of concealment, in which the concealment itself is concealed (הִסְתַּר אִסְתִּיר) describing the state of "the Future to Come" (לֶעָתִיד לָבֹא).

The Arizal explained that comprehension itself is divided further into two corresponding to two separate levels of "the World to Come." The first is the World to Come as it influences our present state of mind, even within the difficulties of our present reality. The second is the World to Come as it influences our existential state from afar, meaning that we feel an existential angst regarding the concealment of the purpose of Creation. The first level acts like a near-surrounding influence (מַקִּיף קָרוֹב),[17] the second as a far-surrounding influence (מַקִּיף רָחוֹק), but in both, we are aware of the concealment therefore it is not a double

14. Based on *Berachot* 60b.

15. Arizal's *Sefer HaLikutim Vayeitzei* ch. 29. *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* 31 and 38. *Sha'ar HaPesukim* on *Vayeitzei*.

16. Genesis 29:25.

17. Also described as an influence that is "touching/not-touching" (מָטֵי וְלֹא מָטֵי), as if hovering closely over the mind much the same as an eagle hovers close to its nest, just touching it, but never placing the full weight of its body on the nest lest it collapse.

concealment.

These three levels of understanding themselves correspond to the three Worlds we have been discussing. The first level of comprehension corresponds to This World with the World to Come hovering above it and providing it with purpose and life. The higher level of comprehension corresponds to the World to Come as an existential angst in our reality, but one that cannot be consciously pinpointed. Finally, the supernal mother corresponds to the Future to Come.

To summarize:

This World	*beinoni*	submission	comprehension	World to Come hovering above This World
The World to Come	*tzaddik*	separation	comprehension	concealed World to Come
The Future to Come	*ba'al teshuvah*	sweetening	supernal mother	double concealment of Future to Come

MASHIACH, A LEADER THAT RECTIFIES GEHENOM

As stated earlier, we are called upon to uncover the concealed good at all its levels until it is revealed to our physical eyes. This represents the reversal of the descent from Nachum of Gamzu to Rabbi Akiva—from a state of "All that God does is for the best," back to a state of "this too is for the good." If we do not engage in this spiritual work, we are left with a feeling that our reality is one of Gehenom, and as noted earlier, not just one layer of Gehenom, but up to 8 different layers of Gehenom.[18]

The individual who can elevate the Gehenom in This World and reveal the light of God in it—God's essential light regarded as a superior form of light because it came out of a transformation of darkness—merits to lead the Jewish people. The Hebrew word for "leader" (**מַנְהִיג**) is a palindrome of Gehenom (**גֵּיהִנֹּם**). The leader is also one who has compassion on the people, "for the one who has compassion for them, he will lead them"[19] (כִּי מְרַחֲמָם יְנַהֲגֵם). The connection between compassion and leadership is also related to the transformation of Gehenom; the final word, "he will lead them" (**יְנַהֲגֵם**) is a permutation of "leader" (**מַנְהִיג**) and of Gehenom (**גֵּיהִנֹּם**) and the first two words, "for the one who has compassion on them" (**כִּי מְרַחֲמָם**) equal "Mashiach" (**מָשִׁיחַ**).

Indeed, great compassion is needed for us dwellers of Gehenom who need Mashiach Now, beginning with the revelation of the spark of Mashiach in each of us, the spark that shows us that, "this too is for the good."

18. See above regarding 864.

19. Isaiah 49:10.

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