

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



Wonders

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“Afterwards he stood up, and the quill in his hand swiftly wrote in a short time—in less than half an hour—a folio or a folio and a half of Torah secrets, supremely lofty matters, all in the language of the Zohar, beyond what any human intellect or hand and quill could produce.”

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FUNDAMENTALS OF CHASIDUT

THREATS, PUNISHMENTS, AND THE CHASIDIC APPROACH TO SIN

Parashat Bechukotai includes God's threats and punishments that will ensue should we not keep the commandments and attempt to live our lives free of Divine Providence. This is one of the most difficult sections in the Pentateuch and traditionally is read quietly by the Public Reader of the Torah. The sages explain that these punishments were already administered during the destruction of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Sammariah and Judea at the end of the First Temple period. The parallel set of threats and punishments appearing in parashat Ki Tavo are said to have been carried out during the years long demise of the Second Temple and the Judean Kingdom.

In the end, it seems that the threats were not a very good deterrence. In that case, what was their purpose in the first place? In general, how should we think about sin in our day and age, 2000 years after the destruction of the Second Temple? The Chasidic approach is surprising and is presented in short in this article, which includes statements made by Rav Ginsburgh in a post-shiur supplement on the 11th of Cheshvan 5774 and excerpts from a shiur from the 11th of Shevat, 5786 (first published in Hebrew in Nifla'ot of Vayikra 5786).

There is a saying that is a foundation of our spiritual work—written also in Chabad in a completely different style, and also in Breslov in another style—that every transgression a Jew commits is 99% foolishness and 1% evil, and every act of repentance (*teshuvah*)—we are the generation of repentance—is 99% directed forward and 1% regret over the past. This is a very nice saying, for which one can easily find support in the *Tanya*. Regarding the second point explicitly: the beginning of *Iggeret HaTeshuvah* states that the essence of repentance, according

to the Torah, is simply the abandonment of sin—everything is about going forward. As for the role that foolishness plays in sin, according to the *Tanya*, one could say that sin is one hundred percent foolishness, following the sages' statement that, "a person does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of foolishness enters him." According to Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, it seems that a person does not commit a transgression unless he has despaired of something, and as we know, Rebbe Nachman holds that despair itself is foolishness.

Now, what we would like to do is to expand this beautiful statement. What is not explicitly mentioned is the causal connection between the two parts. The causal connection between the two parts is that if the transgression is 99% foolishness and 1% evil, and repentance is 99% forward-looking and 1% regret over the past, one must say that the two depended on one another. In other words, the remedy for foolishness is to change one's actions going forward. Conversely, the 1% of evil is rectified through the 1% of regret over the past. There is nothing to regret about having been foolish, but there is something to regret about having been evil.

How can one further sharpen this beautiful saying, which I wanted to explain especially to young people? According to this saying, we should place far less emphasis on thinking in terms of an "evil inclination," and a "good inclination" (*yetzer hara* and *yetzer tov*). In our generation, which is a generation full of *ba'alei teshuvah*, a generation of *teshuvah* (a return to observance), people do not like these terms. And here we have a beautiful, first tier source that tells us that indeed, they are not so relevant, because all the "evil inclination" one might have, all of one's *yetzer hara*, constitutes only 1% of our character. The other 99% of our character that goes into our transgressions, is just that we are fools, we act foolishly but we are not evil. By the same token, when we speak about what the guidance for our generation, the generation of *teshuvah* should be, it is simply a message about starting to do what needs to be done. Join a good community and begin to act in a

positive and constructive way to affect reality. The past is gone. Place all your focus on the future and on leaving your foolishness behind.

WHY GOD AND THE PROPHETS ARE SO HARSH

The Alter Rebbe writes in the *Tanya* that sometimes a person is required to rebuke himself, i.e., to berate his animal soul and evil inclination, telling them: "you are evil and wicked and abominable and repulsive and vile, etc." This in order to humble the "other side" (the *sitra achra*), the coarseness and heresy of the animal soul, and thereby reveal and elevate the Divine soul. As an example of this he cites the benefit brought by Moses's words to the people of Israel after the Sin of the Spies. Initially the people did not believe that God could bring them into the Land of Canaan, as the spies said: "for it is stronger than us," meaning, stronger than Him, God, as it were. Moses rebuked them and told them that God was angry with them and had sworn that they would not enter the Land of Canaan, only their descendants would. As a result, they immediately changed direction and said, "We are ready and we will go up [to the Land]."¹ The rebuke brought the people to a state of a broken heart, meaning that it humbled the *kelipah*, the negative forces within their character that had risen and because of self-pride, stood up against God's instruction. Once their hearts were broken and they came with submission before God, their essential Jewish self—their Divine soul—was revealed, with

1. Numbers 14:40.

all the force of the faith in God that lies hidden in the heart of every Jew providing them with the courage and faith required to conquer the Land of Canaan.

That rebuke is required to break the impure elements within our psyche provides an answer to a question that many who awaken to draw close to Torah and return to God ask: Why does the Torah—beginning with the Five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch, and continuing through the words of the Prophets and the Writings, and after that, in many statements from the sages—contain threats of harsh punishments, curses, and the like directed at sinners? Is God not the very essence of good, and is it not, “the nature of the Good to do good.”² The Torah itself is all good, as the sages say, “there is no ‘good,’ but Torah.” Indeed, what is all this evil—threats, punishment, and curses—doing in the Torah? How is it that a Torah of kindness³ contains so much anger and punishment?

The answer is that the curses and harsh judgments are considered the tried and tested way to humble evil, and a wondrous means to reveal the Divine soul. The curses are not meant to ever be fulfilled. They are meant to scare the evil inclination. They are meant to humble the *kelipah* which in every generation raises its head anew (like “a root that produces gall and wormwood”⁴). Their purpose is to subdue heresy and doubts and to reveal faith.

People are more than happy to hear of all the Torah’s promises of good to those

who follow God’s instructions. Naturally, they do not feel the same way about the harsh punishments, such as those in *parashat Bechukotai* and in *parashat Tavo*. But the right way to respond to the harsh statements and the rebukes is to understand that they present a demand upon us to increase our faith in God, faith that increases when we develop the recognition of our own lowliness as a result of the rebuke. The intention is that from within the harsh, rebuking words, faith will be revealed, and then everything will be transformed into a goodness that is seen and experienced.⁵

When Moses and all the prophets after him tell us that we have sinned and that we are destined to continue to sin, their intent is to chastise us, and by the very act of striking the heart with these allegations and chastisement, save us from current and future sin. This is in essence prophylactic care, preventative medicine that comes either before we sin in the first place, or to prevent further sin through the repentance that will be done for the sins we have already committed. Throughout the Bible, we find that the true prophets follow this pessimistic method, while the false prophets constantly indulge the people with optimism, which in the long run (sometimes even in the short term) prevent them from repenting and paradoxically, cause them to continue to sin, in even worse ways.

2. Eitz Chaim, beginning of *Sha’ar HaKelalim*.

3. Proverbs 31:26.

4. Deuteronomy 29:17.

5. Indeed, the value of “faith” (אֱמוּנָה), 102 is 6 times the value of “good” (טוֹב), which means that “faith” is the value of all 6 possible permutations of “good” (טוֹב טבוּ בוטּוּ ובוטּוּטּוּ)—faith is the ultimate development and expression of the good.

Did this approach succeed? Did Moses and all the prophets manage, through their threatening rebuke, to save us from sin? In practice, we see that this approach did not work so well (except, to some extent, among those who “feared God”); the commoners continued to sin. The path of the prophets became the path of *musar*, a path that was followed by the preachers (מגידים or מוכיחים) who would shower fire and brimstone speeches on their audiences. This was the common way for preachers up until our teacher the Ba’al Shem Tov who argued for a different path.

When a person is told that he is essentially a sinner, "I knew you would sin," he accepts this, and the words themselves bring him to sin. This reaches its absolute extreme with Christianity, which held that the very essence of man is sin and all of humanity is essentially a self-reflection of Adam's primordial sin). To put it sharply: Moses' attribute of strict and harsh judgment (מדת הדין) itself implanted an a mixed multitude (עַרְבֵי רַב) of harsh sentiment into the heart of every Jew, and Moses' soul must come back in every generation to rectify this.

STORY

RABBI MOSHE CHAIM LUZZATTO: SECRETS FROM HEAVEN

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto was born in Padua, Italy in 5467 (1707) to his father Rabbi Yaakov and his mother Diamanta. He was known as a prodigy from a young age, and by the age of 14 he already knew the entire Talmud and the writings of the Ari, Rabbi Isaac Luria, by heart. At age 20 he merited a revelation from a heavenly maggid (a muse) who dictated to him supernal secrets, an event that ignited fierce controversy in the Jewish world. Many rabbis accused him of Sabbateanism and he was forced to take an oath not to engage in practical Kabbalah. In 5491 (1731) he married Tzipporah Finzi and settled in Padua. He later moved to Amsterdam, where he composed his famous works Mesilat Yesharim (Path of the Upright) and Derech Hashem (The Way of God). In 5503 (1743), he made aliyah to the Land of Israel and settled in Acre, where he wrote a Torah scroll and prepared to continue his journey into the interior of the Land. He departed from this world in a plague at age 40 on the 26th of Iyar, the day that corresponds to the Yesod SheBaYesod (foundation in foundation), 5506 (1746) and was buried in Tiberias (though some say his final resting place is in Kfar Yasif).

When he was about twenty years old, after having already studied extensively in both the revealed and hidden teachings and even composed a book similar to the Book of Psalms, the Ramchal merited a wondrous revelation from Heaven: a *maggid* (similar to an inner muse) who revealed to him hidden mysteries in the language of the Zohar. Initially, he kept this secret, but after the matter became known and caused controversy regarding the valid nature of these revelations, the Ramchal himself began to relate it firsthand.

In a letter to Rabbi Binyamin HaKohen, the Ramchal described:

On *Rosh Chodesh* Sivan, 5487 (1727), while I was meditating on a certain unification, I fell asleep. Upon awakening, I heard a voice saying, “To reveal we have brought down, hidden secrets of the Holy King.” For a moment I trembled with fear, but then I strengthened myself. The voice did not cease, and spoke the secret of what it had said. On the second day at that same hour, I made an effort to be alone in my room, and the voice returned and spoke another secret. Until one day, it revealed to me that it was a *maggid* sent from Heaven, and it gave me specific meditations to focus on each day, and then it would come. I do not see it, but only hear its voice speaking from within my mouth. Afterwards, it also gave me permission to ask questions.

About three months later, it gave me specific *tikkunim* (acts of penitence) to perform each day, so that I might merit the revelation of Elijah, of blessed memory. Then it commanded me to compose a book on Ecclesiastes, as it would explain to me the secret of each verse. Afterwards, Elijah came and spoke the secrets he spoke. He said that now (the angel) Metat, the great prince, would come. When he arrived, I knew it was him because of what Elijah had told me, and from then on I recognized each one individually.

There are also revealed souls, whose names I do not know... and all these things I do while fallen on my face. And I see these holy souls, as if in a dream in human form.

Rabbi Raphael Israel Kimchi writes:

With my own eyes I saw the wondrous mystical unifications that he performed while falling on his face, leaning on his hands on the table for about half an hour. Afterwards he stood up, and the quill in his hand swiftly wrote in a short time—

in less than half an hour—a folio [equivalent to two Letter sheets of paper] or a folio and a half of Torah secrets, supremely lofty matters, all in the language of the Zohar, beyond what any human intellect or hand and quill could produce. He did this several times, and this is possible, because the Holy Blessed One bestowed upon him an influx from on high. And he concealed in concealment what his heart desired, "God will make it prosper in his hand...."

But these revelations, so short a time after the devastation caused by Sabbatai Zevi, aroused fear of another false Messiah, a fear that intensified due to the Ramchal's extensive preoccupation with the Mashiach and messianic matters. The Ramchal's teacher, Rabbi Isaiah Bassano, advised him to cease engaging in such matters to avoid inflaming the controversy further.

Ultimately, the chest with his writings was sent from Padua to Rabbi Yaakov Katz, who sentenced most of the writings to burial and a minority to burning. Individual copies of about half of the Ramchal's books survived in manuscript, and from these they spread and were copied in secret until their printing many years later after the controversy subsided and he and his teachings were accepted by all of Israel.

According to the Ramchal, the Creator conducts His world through two forms of governance: the governance of unity, which is entirely good and kindness in manifest and revealed good, and the governance of judgment: open rebuke motivated by concealed love.

But the governance of judgment operates only in this era, when there is the reality of evil in the world. In the future to come, with the coming of Mashiach, the governance of judgment will be completely nullified and only the governance of unity will remain (this is the secret of the verse, "And of Zion it shall be said, 'This man and that man was born in her,'" indicating that even the woman, the secret of the Divine Name whose value is 52 (יוד הה וו הה) corresponding with the governance of judgment, will return to being masculine,

symbolized by the Divine Name whose value is 45 (יוד הא ואו הא), and corresponding with the governance of unity that is entirely kindness and revealed love. Indeed, this concept is alluded to in that the value of the two governances (הנהגת היחוד הנהגת המשפט) equals the value of the phrase, "he [man] shall cling to his wife, and they will become one (וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד).

In the Ramchal, who strove all his life to bring about complete unity, there was indeed a spark of Mashiach. It is not for naught that his writings were accepted by virtually all of Israel, the *mussar* authorities cling to *Messilat Yesharim*, Lithuanian Kabbalists revere the Kabbalah books he wrote, and even in Chasidic writings, his teachings are brought down.

Still, in several places it would appear that the attitude of the great Chasidic

leaders toward him was complex: The Tzemach Tzedek, on one hand, criticized his practice of being without a beard while he was outside the Land of Israel, as was the practice of the Italian Kabbalists from whom he learned. On the other hand, it is reported that the Tzemach Tzedek knew the Ramchal's book *Messilat Yesharim* by heart. The Ba'al Shem Tov said of the Ramchal that he was a spark of Mashiach, but that he was relatively speaking a Mashiach of the World of Chaos. It is told that the Maggid of Mezritch would read a line from the Ramchal's *138 Gateways of Wisdom* before delivering his own Torah teachings, and then say, "Behold the superiority of light that emerges from darkness."

But the simple interpretation of these words raises questions: For the Maggid of Mezritch himself defined the Ramchal's book, on another occasion, as "clear and pure." Moreover, in the introduction to the book *138 Gateways of Wisdom*, the enthusiastic approbation written by Rebbe Yaakov Yosef of Ostroh, a premier disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch, was printed and the publisher added that he had told him in the name of his teacher "that his generation was not worthy to understand his [the Ramchal's] righteousness and asceticism."

Therefore, the Maggid's words referring to his own teachings relative to the Ramchal's as illustrating, "the superiority of light that emerges from darkness," should be understood as referring to the supernal darkness, the sublime darkness referencing the Divine level that is incomprehensible and unrevealed, preceding in time and in rank to the light,

i.e., to the revelation of the Divine, that emerged from within it. Only against the background of the supernal darkness does the excellence and essence of what is revealed as the light of the Divine properly shine forth. Thus, the Maggid meant that even Chasidic teachings emerge against the background of the Ramchal's teachings that preceded them.

If we summarize the attitude of these *tzaddikim* toward the Ramchal and his Torah, we can see in them an order of Creation, Formation, and Action, the three lower worlds in which opposition and disagreement between opinions are possible. The Ba'al Shem Tov's evaluation of the Ramchal as a spark of Mashiach reflects the world of Creation. The world of Creation is connected to the supernal darkness because it is a world of potential possibilities, not yet completely actualized. Specifically, the root of the Mashiach, who is an ethereal reality prepared to be actualized at any moment, is found in that world.

The Maggid's reference to the Ramchal's teachings on the one hand as "darkness" and on the other hand as "clear and pure" belongs to the World of Formation. Here once again, the Ramchal's teachings are set as belonging specifically to the World of Creation, as in the verse "He Who forms light and creates darkness," darkness in Creation, above light, in Formation.

The Tzemach Tzedek's criticism, that growing a beard was fundamental in his teaching [both in the revealed and hidden Torah], belongs to the World of Action. As told about the Tzemach Tzedek, who demanded of his student: "*Mach da Eretz Yisroel!*" (meaning: make the place that you are in a part of the Land of Israel).

The Tzemach Tzedek believed that even abroad one can illuminate all thirteen Rectifications of the Beard. And if even abroad, in exile, one can feel the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, it follows that it is a *mitzvah* to resemble God about whom it is said that, “Just as He is merciful [in actual revelation even in exile], so too should you be merciful,” when you grow your holy beard.

The Tzemach Tzedek's innovation is that

even in the World of Action, referenced by the word “even” in the verse, “even I have made it,” there is a Divine revelation whose source is above the Worlds of Creation and Formation, reaching all the way to the World of Emanation. The word translated as “even” (אף) and which can also mean “anger,” comes to include Emanation in the place of Action specifically and to reveal the supernal unity in the place of separation and judgment.

BEHAR: A MOUNTAIN OF LIGHT

The only *parashah* in the Torah whose name refers directly to Mount Sinai is *BeHar* (בְּהָרַ), which simply means “on [or in] the mountain,” as the opening words indicate: “God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, speak to the Israelites and you shall say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to God.”¹

To understand the connection between the reference to Mount Sinai and the *mitzvah* to give the land its rest—a Sabbath to God—we begin by considering the deep connection between the name of the *parashah*, *Behar* (בְּהָרַ) and “light” (אֹר). First, the numerical value of both words is 207.² More deeply, in Hebrew, there are thirteen synonyms for light,³ one of which is written identically to *Behar*, but pronounced *Bohar* (בֹּהַר). Like the Thirteen Measures of Compassion,⁴ the thirteen synonyms of light represent channels of Divine compassion and love emanating from the Almighty Above and flowing down to the physical world and mankind below. The word “love” (אהבה), *ahavah*, also equals 13.

Note that five of the synonyms of light end with the syllable *har*, the same as our

parashah’s name, *BeHar*, which means “mountain.” The association of light to the image of a mountain is of course connected to receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai, the ultimate revelation of God’s light and will to humanity.

THE LIGHT OF SHABBAT

Another hint that is relevant to our contemplation of our *parashah*’s name, *Behar*, relates to the numerical value of the word “Shabbat” (שַׁבָּת), which is 702, the exact inverse of the numerical value of “light” (אֹר), which is 207.⁵ The Hebrew word for light also has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for *Ein Sof*, “the infinite” (אֵין סוֹף). This web of connections, linking the words *Shabbat*, light and the infinite teaches us that God’s infinite light is most accessible to those experiencing *Shabbat*. By connecting to *Shabbat*’s spiritual dimension, we can bask in God’s infinite light, which although constantly accessible in potential, is most accessible on the holy *Shabbat*.

Significantly, the connection between light and *Shabbat* is symbolized by Jewish women lighting *Shabbat* candles to ceremonially usher in the day of rest. Both light and *Shabbat* awaken the same associations of holiness, spirituality, and joy. Just as God’s infinite Presence was revealed at the Giving of the Torah at

1. Leviticus 26:1-2.

2. *V’Shavta Haaretz* p.6.

3. *Amudeha Shevah* p.193. The thirteen synonyms are in Hebrew: אור, בהר, זהר, נהר, נגה, צהר, זיו, חשמל, יקר, בהק, זרח, הלל, טהר.

4. Exodus 34:6-7.

5. *V’Shavta Haaretz* p. 6.

Mount Sinai, so too God's infinite light is highly-concentrated in Shabbat's finite and detailed laws.

THE SOUL OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

We return now to the opening verses of parashat *BeHar*: “And God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, speak to the Israelites and you shall say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Shabbat to God.” The Sabbatical Year, the *Shemittah*, is a Shabbat for the land; just as the weekly Shabbat gives the Jewish people a rest from the six days of work, so too the Land of Israel deserves to rest every seventh year. Shabbat is a day of rest not only for the body, but for the soul as well. In fact, the *Zohar* calls Shabbat “a day of the soul.”⁶

One of the secrets of the Sabbatical year when we give the Land of Israel a year of rest every seven years, similar to a Shabbat, implies that the land also requires its Shabbat, its rest, because it too possesses a certain level of soul.⁷ Just as human beings and animals need to refrain from work and rest on Shabbat, the Land of Israel is granted the opportunity to rest every seven years. This raises thought-provoking questions about what it means for the land to rest and to have a level of soul. How can we attribute rest to something inanimate like the earth? This suggests that the concept of rest applies not only to living beings but also to those elements from the mineral world.

Furthermore, the Sabbatical year highlights the special bond between the

Jewish people and the Land of Israel. The people of Israel are referred to as Adam, as in the statement, “And you [Israel] are called Adam,”⁸ while the root word for soil or earth is *adamah*, a feminine word and concept closely related to Adam. This alludes to a deep relationship of love between the people of Israel—the groom—and the land—the bride.

The idea of the physical earth having a soul invites us to develop a deep appreciation for the living essence within the land, beyond its vegetation. It encourages us to recognize the profound affinity between ourselves and the earth, acknowledging that the land, too, possesses a certain level of life force or soul. By observing the laws of *Shemittah* and granting the land its rest, we align ourselves with the natural rhythms of creation and honor the living consciousness embedded within the earth.

DIVINE LIFE FORCE

The implications of the land possessing life force alerts us to the fact that nothing can exist without a constant flow of Divine energy animating it. If God were to interrupt or withdraw this flow of energy, everything, from the tiniest atom to the vastness of galaxies, would simply cease to exist. This understanding is encapsulated in our morning prayers, when we acknowledge the Holy Blessed One as the sole Creator of all things in the heavens, earth, and waters, and as the Giver of life to all.

Ultimately all things have life in the sense that they possess the necessary

6. 2:205b.

7. *Veshavta Ha'aretz*, p. 8.

8. *Sanhedrin* 37a.

conditions for their continued existence. Even in seemingly inanimate objects like stones, there is a dynamic movement of molecular energy, a hidden vitality that science is only beginning to grapple with. This notion of “life” extends beyond traditional boundaries and encompasses a level of sentience present in all aspects of creation.

This is especially seen in the following words recited daily in the morning prayers: “It is You alone, God, You have made the heavens, the most exalted heavens, and all their host, the earth and everything upon it, the seas and everything in them, and *You give them all life.*”⁹

SPACE, TIME AND CONSCIOUSNESS

When taken one step further, we see that physicality hides an inner essence of spirituality. According to science, matter is pure energy, and ultimately energy is the light of Divinity infusing every point of space and time. This realization is tangibly felt at the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The Torah describes Mount Sinai as being on fire and full of smoke. The Hebrew word for “smoking [mountain]”¹⁰ (עֵשָׁן), is comprised of three Hebrew letters, which form an acronym for the various dimensions of reality described by *Sefer Yetzirah*.¹¹ The letter *ayin* (ע) represents the Hebrew word for “world” or “space” (עוֹלָם), *olam*; the letter *shin* (ש) represents

the Hebrew word for “year” or “time” (שָׁנָה), *shanah*; the letter *nun* (נ) represents the Hebrew word for “soul” or “consciousness” (נֶפֶשׁ), *nefesh*, a dimension, according to the *Sefer Yetzirah*, as real as the other physical dimensions.

This unity of space, time, and consciousness was tangibly experienced by the people: “And all the people saw the sounds of the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the shofar and the mountain smoking.”¹² Rashi comments that all the people were able to see that which is normally heard, something which cannot ordinarily happen. In the context of what is being discussed here, the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai represents God revealing (among many other things) that the physical mountain in its very essence is energy, or spiritual light. It is important to note that according to all opinions, the Torah was given on Shabbat.

THE HOLY LAND

From giving the Land of Israel its due rest every seven years, we come to understand the sanctity and light imbued in the land itself, and by extension, all physicality. This is one of the greatest secrets of the holiness of the Land of Israel. This holiness is more than a concept: the land itself—the mountains, trees, stones, rivers and the fields—is in its very essence holy and spiritual. This is why the produce of the Land of Israel during the Sabbatical year is considered to have a special holiness and must by Jewish law be treated as such.

9. Nehemiah 9:6.

10. Exodus 19:18

11. The concept of World/*Olam*, Time/*Shanah*, Soul/*Nefesh* is found throughout chapters 4-6 in *Sefer Yetzirah*.

12. Exodus 20:15.

ULTIMATE UNITY

In summary, we see profound connections between Mount Sinai and what occurred there on Shabbat and the concept and reality of light. The Torah which was given on the mountain of Sinai is itself referred to as light: “For a *mitzvah* is a candle, and the Torah is light.”¹³ Thus, there exists a deep and essential synergy

between the infinite light of God as revealed in the Torah and the physical, material world that God has created. Shabbat is the ladder connecting heaven and earth, God and Jew, physicality and spirituality, body and soul. The light of Shabbat in time and the light of Shabbat in space, represented by the Sabbatical year, reveal the ultimate oneness and unity of all reality.

13. Proverbs 6:23.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH HARAV GINSBURGH

How to Celebrate a Birthday; Healing the Sick

These two responsa originally appeared in Hebrew in the Beshalach 5786 issue of Nifla'ot.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY?

Question: My birthday is approaching soon. A birthday is always a difficult day for me—a day of soul-searching (*cheshbon nefesh*) that forces me to look back and gaze gloomily at the passing year and all the hopes that were not realized. Additionally, on my birthday this year—five years before the age at which one of my parents passed away—I am reminded of the sages' statement: "When a person reaches the lifespan of [either of] his parents, he should be apprehensive five years prior to that age." How should I relate to this?

Furthermore, I would be grateful for the Rav's blessing for all the family members, some of whom are currently experiencing some difficulties.

Response: One must live in the present. The present is called *Beinoni*-time (זמן בינוני) and the *Beinoni* is the "intermediate individual," the common man in the *Tanya* who is required to serve God with this frame of mind. Thus, you should not think about the past (except to raise good memories—points of light that arouse and encourage) and certainly not about the future for "the past is gone,

the future is not yet here, and the present is like the blink of an eye."¹ The sages tell us that, "he who comes to be purified is assisted"² and conversely, for "he who wants to be defiled, the door is opened for him" opened with a statement from the sages that creates trepidation and anxiety such as the one you quoted about worrying five years in advance, etc.

Our ongoing mission and task in life is, "Today, perform them." To pray to God that I merit to do, meaning to rectify *this* day, to do some good deed today, and nothing more can be expected. The greatest principle in the Torah is: "Be earnest with *Havayah* your God,"³ do not investigate or ponder the future, do not worry—for everyone, all the family members, are in the good and faithful hands of the Almighty.

Your role as a husband and father is only to encourage everyone with a wide smile on your lips, always.

Blessings for the upcoming birthday and for the entire family.

1. *Pele Yoetz*, s.v., *De'agah*.

2. *Menachot* 29b.

3. Deuteronomy 18:13.

The Concealment of God's Countenance (*Hester Panim*)

Question: One of our very close family members has fallen seriously ill. The difficult news landed on us quickly. Time and again, as we strengthened ourselves with hope, we received an update that crushed it. Additionally, recently there is a general feeling of God concealing His countenance from us in various family events. How should we relate to this? What does God want from us?

Response: None among us see the Divine plan and how long they might take. In such situations, we have no grasp of the ways of God's Providence; we must only be silent and nullify ourselves before the Infinite, "which no thought can grasp at all." As it says in Psalms, "Be silent before God and wait longingly for Him." This is certainly a most difficult trial, both for the patient and for you and all the family members and relatives.

The trial is not to lose God forbid faith in God's goodness (for in exile, one does not always see the good as "visible and revealed good"). No one demands of us to be on the level of Nachum Ish Gam Zu, the teacher of Rabbi Akiva who could point at any event and wholeheartedly state that "this too is for the good." Even Rabbi Akiva himself was not on his level and only said "All that God does [is for the good], etc.," out of faith, while seeing bad things occurring before his eyes.

The essence of Divine service (*avodah*) during such a time of distress is specifically in the heart (not in the mouth)—to bind the heart in faith to the One God and to fulfill the verse, "Hope to God, be strong

and let your heart take courage, and hope to God," to strengthen and embolden the heart to hope to God that all will be good, in visible and revealed good. At the same time, increase your charity and good deeds as much as possible.

Sit beside the patient and retell stories of *tzaddikim*—awesome and wonderful stories about the events and miracles enacted by true *tzaddikim*—starting with the Ba'al Shem Tov, through whom the essence of Divinity in the world was revealed.

Prayer to God is called *Rachamei* (mercy). We beseech God, "Father, have mercy on us," all from our interior, and a deepfelt heart, as mentioned above. During the High Holydays, we say, "Seek mercy like a pauper at the doorway" (בְּקֶשׁ רַחֲמִים כְּעֶבֶר בַּדְּפֹתַי). The final letters of this phrase form the word *Mashiach*.

We learn from Hezekiah, the king of Israel (who was worthy of being the *Mashiach*), that "even if a sharp sword is resting on a person's neck, he should not give up on compassion." Indeed, he turned to the wall, the walls of his heart, to seek mercy, and God added fifteen years to his life.

May it be the will of our Father in Heaven, our merciful Father, that He perform a revealed miracle (God is All-Powerful) and that [the patient] be healed with a complete recovery from Heaven, and may you be able to share good news soon!

P.S. Presumably, you have checked the *tefillin* and *mezuzot*. It is advisable that everything be of the highest aesthetic standard and it is recommended that they be in the writing of the Alter Rebbe.