

The month of Tevet

## The body enjoys the body

Excerpt from a shiur given on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, 5771

(Monday, Dec. 13, 2010)

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

### Lights and Vessels: Mixing vs. Clinging

Before his passing, Moses taught us that, “Man cannot live on bread alone, for man lives on God’s spoken word.” This verse does not mean that man does not need bread in order to live—you cannot live on spirituality—rather, that bread alone is not enough. In Kabbalah it is explained that bread—understood here as an archetypal symbol for any and all sources of nourishment—contains both a physical dimension and a spiritual dimension. The physical dimension by itself cannot sustain life. It must go hand in hand with the bread’s spiritual dimension, itself the “spoken word of God” that is encloded within the physical dimension. To use the model of lights and vessels, the spoken word of God is the light encloded within the vessel that is the bread’s physical body. The light within the bread is identical with the holy sparks contained within the food. But, without the body of the bread, without its physical dimension, the light cannot be transferred to us. So the bread’s physical dimension is necessary in order to figuratively feed us the light, as taught by the Magid of Mezritch. In this sense, the physical dimension is key to attaining the spiritual dimension. This is a very important principle. Instead of looking at the physical dimension of our reality as hiding the existence of the spiritual dimension, Chassidut teaches us to see the physical dimension as the bridge to the spiritual. Every physical facet that contains holy sparks is not hiding those sparks from us but rather guarding them, or holding them, so that we can reach them. This change in outlook is related specifically to the month of Tevet, about which the sages say that, [in the month of Tevet,] “The body enjoys the body” (הגוף נהנה מהגוף).

Tevet is about seeing the intrinsic value of the physical, similar to this example where the body is found to act as the vessel that can hold the spiritual thereby making it accessible to the soul.

Along the same vein, the teachings of the Arizal explain that while lights, i.e., the stuff of spirituality, can mix together, lights cannot cling to one another. There can be no



GALEINAI PUBLICATION SOCIETY

383 Kingston Ave. #353 • Brooklyn, NY 11213 • www.inner.org

clinging (דבוקות) on the part of lights. Clinging is a state that only vessels can attain. It is the physical dimension that can cling, whether this be like the bread clinging to the spoken word of God that dwells within it (and clings to the body that consumes it), or whether this be like the body that can cling to God. One of the greatest paradoxes inherent within the Almighty is that God Himself is neither physical nor spiritual, and yet at the same time He is both simultaneously. Still it is specifically the physical body that can cling to the root of limited being in God's infinite self (sometimes referred to as the true essence of being in contrast to the absolute essence of nullification), just as the physical bread clings to the spiritual vessel of the word uttered by God, as explained above). Indeed, it says in Chassidut that when the Mashiach comes, the body will sustain the soul!

### **The Torah's body and soul**

The Torah is likened to God's bread, and like bread, the Torah too has a spiritual dimension and a physical dimension. The Torah's spiritual dimension is figuratively called the Torah's soul (נשמתא דאורייתא) and the Torah's physical dimension is called its body (גופא דאורייתא). We see that like all the objects in the Torah's physical dimension can cling to one another, they can connect, just as vessels can be made to bind to one another. The objects of the Torah's physical dimension are the opinions or rationales held about one topic or another in the Torah. Most of the time, sages hold disparate opinions and are in dispute with one another about how to analyze a particular issue. Still, the objects of the physical dimension cling, they connect to form a single whole, and as the Talmud states, "both these and these are the words of the living God" (ואלו דברי אלהים חיים). Just as the Name of God chosen for this idiom is *Elokim*, a Name that connotes plurality (even though God's essence is of course, One, Single, and Singular), likewise, the various and disparate opinions and scholarly positions that make up the body of Torah law are all one in the end. Not only do the polar opposite positions assumed by the sages not lead the Torah to polarization, all the opinions together make up a single whole and act to bring the sages together in love. The spiritual dimension of the Torah, the Torah's soul is similar to light. From the perspective of light there are no separate bodies. From God's perspective all bodies are as naught—none of them occupy any space at all. Thus, from the perspective of the Torah's spiritual dimension, there are no actual disputes and all is serene and harmonious. In the Tanya, the Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad, cites the *Zohar* that states that in the Torah's soul there really are no disputes or differences of opinion.

While the lights cannot cling, the bodies cannot mix. By definition bodies are in contention. Two bodies cannot occupy the same space, so the different opinions—bodies of thought—of the sages bring them into dispute with one another. But instead of causing polarization and distance between the sages themselves, they bring them closer together, they make them cling together, increasing the love and bond between them. The sages learn this from the verse, “Therefore, it shall be stated in the book of the wars of God, Vahev in Sufa...” (Numbers 21:14). The literal meaning of the verse, according to Rashi, is that God did as He willed in Sufa, i.e., in the Sea of Suf, the Red Sea, when He drowned the Egyptians and saved the Jewish people. But, the sages learn that if the wars, i.e., the dispute between bodies—different opinions—is indeed the war of God, meaning that the dispute is solely for the sake of heaven (and not for some ulterior motive, such as honor, or envy) then it will end [Sufa] with a state of “Vahev” (וָהֵב), a word that not only resembles the word “love” (אַהֲבָה), it actually has the same *gematria* as “love” (both equal 13). So, this is a new explanation for the saying related to the month of Tevet, that, “The body enjoys the body.” When the differing opinions over an issue in Torah stem from love of the Torah, then the bodies, the opinions gain love and respect for one another and cling together to form a unified whole.

### **Maimonides and the Alter Rebbe**

There are a number of great sages whose day of passing, their *yahrzeit*, is in the month of Tevet. Two of them are Maimonides, also known as “the great eagle,” and the Alter Rebbe, also known as “the great luminary.” Apart from both of them having passed away in the month of Tevet (Maimonides on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, the Alter Rebbe on the 24<sup>th</sup>), let us now see how these great sages have a particular affinity to the saying that in Tevet, “The body enjoys the body.”

What Maimonides and the Alter Rebbe have in common is that both wrote a great work that falls under the heading of the body of the Torah, i.e., a legal, halachic work. Both also wrote a seminal work that falls under the heading of the soul of the Torah. Maimonides, known by the Hebrew acronym of his name, the Rambam, is most widely acknowledged because of his body-of-Torah-work, the *Mishneh Torah*, while his soul-of-Torah-work, the Guide to the Perplexed, though highly regarded, is not considered to be the very marrow of either Jewish thought or of the Jewish soul.

The Alter Rebbe is something of the opposite. He too was a legalist, dedicating himself to the physical dimension of the Torah and producing his updated *Shulchan Aruch*. But central to all his writing is his soul-of-Torah-work, the Tanya. In the Alter Rebbe’s case one may say that the body of his writing (the *Shulchan Aruch*) is part and

parcel with the soul of his writing (the *Tanya*). It is said that when one studies the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, one is actually studying Chassidut.

With the Rambam, the relationship between the body and the soul is reversed. One might say that the entire Guide to the Perplexed (the Rambam's soul-of-Torah work) is a lengthy commentary and expansion of the first 4 chapters of the *Mishneh Torah* (his body-of-Torah work). Indeed, in modern times, we find that the Rogachover, one of the great geniuses of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, saw the philosophical principles of the Guide to the Perplexed as providing the rational foundations for the Rambam's entire methodology of making legal decisions in the *Mishneh Torah*.

In any case, since in the month of Tevet, the body enjoys the body, we can now say that in this month the Rambam's body—his *Mishneh Torah*—enjoys the Alter Rebbe's body—his *Shulchan Aruch*, and vice versa. So this is a month that is especially auspicious for studying these two great works in conjunction. Indeed we have seen many times in the past how a great deal of the Alter Rebbe's reasoning in his *Shulchan Aruch* goes back to the Rambam's methodology in the *Mishneh Torah*. And, we know the special regard that the Lubavitcher Rebbe had for the learning of the Rambam, this even though we often do not rule according to the Rambam's opinion. Still, the Rambam is the only one of the great legalists who encompassed all the *mitzvot* and laws of the Torah in his legal work, even up to the laws of kings and their wars, and through the laws of Mashiach.

Now let us do a little *gematria* demonstrating how these two bodies enjoy one another. The numerical value of "*Mishneh Torah*" (מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרָה), 1006, together with "*Shulchan Aruch*" (שֻׁלְחָן עָרוּךְ), 684, is 1690, the product of *Havayah* (יְהוָה), 26, with *Adni* (אֲדֹנָי), 65. The product of God's essential Name (*Havayah*) with the Name *Adni*, the Name that symbolizes His sovereignty (kingdom) represents the grand unification of the higher unification and the lower unification.

Many scholars call the Rambam's body by a different name, *Hayad Hachazakah* (הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה). If we add this name, whose numerical value is 144, to the Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch* (שֻׁלְחָן עָרוּךְ), 684, the sum is 828, or 4 times "light" (אוֹר), 207, implying that the average value of each of the 4 words in this beautiful union between the Rambam and the Alter Rebbe's bodies is "light."

828 is also the value of *Tzafnat Pa'ane'ach*, the name given by Pharaoh to Joseph, which means "he who deciphers the concealed," chosen by the Rogochover (whose proper name was Joseph) for his own books. We mentioned the Rogochover above as one of the most important modern commentaries on the Rambam's work.