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

בס"ד

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שַׁבָּת חֻקַּת–בָּלָק ❁ יא-יב תַּמּוּז תשפ"ו



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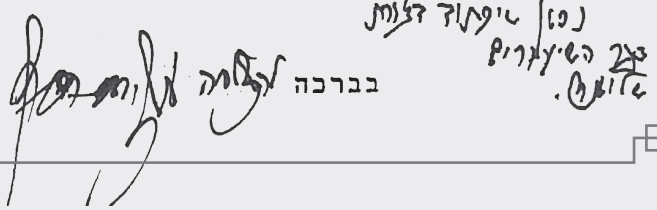
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

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



Wonders

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of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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FUNDAMENTALS OF CHASIDUT

THE NINE PRINCIPLES OF FAITH: CONTINUOUS RENEWAL OF CREATION AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE

One of the best-known concepts in Judaism is Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith, which originally appear in his commentary on the Mishnah. According to the Zohar, their origin is linked to the 13 Principles of Divine Mercy that were revealed to Moses by God to assist in bringing about God's forgiveness. Less known are the 9 Principles of Divine Mercy found in parashat Shelach, from which stem 9 Principles of Faith of the Torah's inner dimension.

In this third installment on this topic, we review the third principle: that not only is reality created from non-being, but it is continually recreated by God, at every single moment.

The contents of this series first appeared in Hebrew, in HaRav Ginsburgh's book, Emunah VeMuda'ut (Faith and Consciousness). It is being translated here for the first time.

According to the revealed dimension of the Torah, one must believe and know that God created the world from absolute nothingness and void, as the Torah begins, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,"[1] but there is no necessity to say that this creation is perpetual, re-occurring at every single moment. The Torah's inner dimension, Kabbalah and Chasidut, explains that Creation was not a one-time event, but is a continuous act of the Creator. Reality cannot exist independently of the Creator and therefore sustaining it requires recreating it continuously.

"THE WORLD WAS BUILT WITH LOVINGKINDNESS"

This principle of faith is connected to the *sefirah* of loving-kindness, of which it is said, "The world was built with loving-kindness"[2] (עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבָּנֶה). The conjugation of the verb "built" (יִבָּנֶה) in this verse, implies a constantly renewing act of building. Loving-kindness itself is associated with continuity at every moment

1. Genesis 1:1.

2. Psalms 89:3.

as in the verse, "the loving-kindness of God is throughout the entire day"[3] as well as "in His goodness, He renews daily, perpetually, the act of Creation."[4]

It is explained in Chasidut that the very renewal of existence flows from God's attribute of loving-kindness. At the same time that Creation is continuously recreated, using His attribute of might (*gevurah*), God conceals Himself from the creatures He created, so that they will feel themselves to be independent, real, and autonomous beings. This concealment of the Creator from creation is known as "contraction" (צִמְצוּם). As a result, one who feels only God's attribute of might—the attribute with which God conceals and hides Himself—is incapable of feeling the renewal of creation at every moment. Experiencing Creation (as well as one's own) continual renewal is the feeling of divine loving-kindness that brings the world into being.

JUDGMENT AND LOVING-KINDNESS

God creates the world at every moment out of His wondrous love for every creature He created for His honor (כָּבוֹד).[5] The Torah includes more than one account of Creation, each from a different perspective and using different Names of God.

The first account is ordered by days and lasts 7 days. We have already seen that it begins with the famous words, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."[6] The second account begins with the verse, "These are the chronicles of the heavens and the earth when they were created on the day *Havayah Elokim* made the earth and the heavens."[7] The Sages remark that the Hebrew word that means "when they were created" (**בְּהִבָּרְאָם**) can be permuted to spell "with Abraham" (**בְּאַבְרָהָם**), meaning, that in some way, Creation was created with Abraham. How can we understand this?

Abraham is described as the man of love and loving-kindness and the idea that the world was created with him means that it was through his soul root—the archetypal soul root of God's attribute of supernal loving-kindness—that God created the world. The Torah's first account of Creation only mentions God's Name *Elokim*, the Name associated with His attribute of judgment. This leads to the realization that the more one experiences God's judgment in Creation, the more one experiences Creation as a one-time act that occurred in the past. By corollary, the more one feels God's loving-kindness—Abraham's archetypal attribute—the more one experiences that Creation is a continuously ongoing act that is occurring even at this very moment.

Indeed, Abraham's soul root can be found not just in the second account of Creation, but in the first one as well. Before his name was changed by God to

3. Ibid. 52:3.

4. Liturgy, blessing of *Yotzer Or.*

5. God's honor also refers to His attribute of love. One illustration of this is in the commandment to honor one's parents: "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). The opposite of love is fear or awe, and indeed we are also commanded to fear our parents—"every man shall fear his mother and his father" (Leviticus 19:3).

6. Genesis 1:1.

7. Ibid. 2:4.

Abraham, our first patriarch's name was Avram; more particularly, he was known in the ancient Land of Canaan as Avram the Hebrew (אַבְרָם הָעִבְרִי), where "the Hebrew" is cognate with "the past" (עָבָר). In the Torah's first verse, "God created" (**בָּרָא אֱ-לֹהִים**) is an anagram of "the God of Avram" (**אֱ-לֹהֵי אַבְרָם**). One might say that when Abraham was still called *Avram*, he possessed faith in God as Creator and Guide of the world, but he did not yet have a complete revelation[8] of the continuous coming-into-being of all of Creation, from absolute nothingness. But at the time of his circumcision, when he merited to be called Abraham, he merited the complete revelation of faith in continuous coming-into-being. It was then that he acquired the capacity to proclaim that God was not just the Creator, but God-world, that God and Creation are one in the sense that God brings Creation into-being at every moment anew: "He [Abraham] proclaimed there of *Havayah*, God-world."[9] This is why "*behibar'am*" is written with a small *heh*, hinting that at the beginning of creation this *heh* was in "potential," to be revealed when Abraham our forefather was 99 years old at his circumcision.) Furthermore, in the Torah's first account of Creation, the verb used for creation (בָּרָא) is in the past perfect form, stressing that it is something that occurred in the past. But in the second account of Creation, the word "when they were created" (בְּהִבָּרְאָם) is in the infinitive construct and therefore does not carry a tense—it is not past, present, or future; one might say that it is timeless, exactly the manner in which we should understand continuous Creation.

SPEECH AND GAZE

God perpetually creates the world through the Ten Sayings of Creation. This is alluded to by the verse, "Forever, O' God, Your word stands in the heavens"[10] which describes God's saying, "Let there be a firmament,"[11] which stands, as it were, at every moment in the heavens and firms them into the firmament. If for a single moment that creative utterance were to cease, the heavens—and in fact all of Creation—would cease to exist.

Clearly, God does not "speak" in the literal sense, for that would make God corporeal and anthropomorphize the act of Creation, which we know are against Maimonides' third principle of faith: that God is not corporeal. Chasidic philosophy explains that the Torah describes the act of Creation with speech, "God said, 'Let there be a firmament'" to imply that even continuous Creation is merely the external dimension of God's relationship to His world, just as speech is relatively external to thought. In fact, speech is the external expression of thought, revealing that interior to the continuous act of Creation, there is an inner dimension relating God with Creation. This inner relationship is Divine Providence, and it is sometimes described as the loving and caring gaze

8. Abraham's initial revelation is referred to as, "the mind beyond all conception" (שֵׂכֶל הַנֶּעֱלָם מִכָּל רַעָיוֹן), corresponding to the faculty of super-conscious wisdom. He did not yet have a revelation that that would also engage his faculties of understanding and knowledge.

9. Genesis 21:33.

10. Psalms 119:89.

11. Genesis 1:6.

God has over every one of His creatures. Gaze is another way to express attention. God does not merely bring Creation into existence, He constantly gazes, cares, and pays attention to for all the small and specific events occurring within Creation.

God's gaze, as it were, His individual Providence, also expresses His wondrous love for the world He created for His glory. Once again, one who experiences only the attribute of judgment in Creation cannot feel individual Divine Providence, only general Providence.[12] Faith in individual Divine Providence corresponds to Maimonides' first principle of faith, that the Creator knows all the deeds of humans and all their thoughts, except that according to the Torah's inner dimension, God's knowledge and individual Providence over all He created (with love) unite with His speech that brings it all into existence, at every moment constantly. God's attention, care, and love are thus the inner vitality of all that exists.

CONTINUAL CREATION AND LOVING-KINDNESS

We have already seen the intimate connection between Creation as an act of love and awareness of continual Creation and Abraham's faith. What is left for us to explore is one additional connection between this principle of faith of the Torah's inner dimension and the sefirah of loving-kindness. Loving-kindness lies on the right axis of the sefirot, above it is wisdom (*khochmah*), and underneath it is eternity, or victory (*netzach*). One of the ways in which the difference between the right and left axes can be understood is that the right axis is relatively masculine and the left axis relatively feminine. Whereas the masculine is characterized by a descent from above to below, an extension (הִתְפַּשְׁטוּת) into reality, the feminine is characterized by an ascent from below to above and a withdrawal (הִסְתַּלְּקוּת).[13]

Indeed, God's extension into reality, which occurs through the act of Creation is most naturally associated with the right axis, which represents God's effluence and love for reality. Above loving-kindness is wisdom, which we have seen corresponds to the principle of faith in the renewal of Torah in the future.[14] These two sefirot—representing the renewal of Torah and continuous recreation of the world—are joined by the Sages' statement that, "God gazed into the Torah and created the world."[15] The gaze is associated with wisdom (the seat of the eyes), while the actual act of Creation is associated with loving-kindness, as we have seen.

12. See Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* 3:17.

13. See also our article, "When Will the Mashiach Come?" in *Wonders* issue 195 (*Shavu'ot* 5786).

14. See the first installment of this series in *Wonders* issue 198.

15. *Zohar* 1:134a.

STORY

THE HOLY OR HACHAIM: THE LETTERS OF THE TEFILLIN

Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, known eponymously by his Torah commentary as the holy Or HaChaim, was born in 5456 (1696) in Salé, Morocco, to his father Rabbi Moshe, and learned Torah from his grandfather Rabbi Chaim ben Attar the Elder. He married his relative Petzunyah and was appointed to lead the yeshivah in Salé. He became known there as a holy man of God, regularly taught Torah before the community, and served as a charity collector. Since his wife did not bear him children, he married a second wife, Esther, and both his wives lived with him until the end of his days in Jerusalem. After a series of disputes and persecutions against him, he made aliyah to the Land of Israel, passing through Livorno, Italy, where he printed his famous commentary on the Torah. There is a tradition that he wrote his commentary especially for his daughters. In Italy, he raised financial support for his move to the Land of Israel and for maintaining the yeshivah he planned to establish there.

At the end of 5741 (1741), he arrived with his students in Acco, where the yeshivah was first established. The invitation from the Jews of Tiberias to establish his seat in their city was not followed through, and after a brief period of settlement in the village of Peki'in in the Galilee, they moved to Jerusalem at the end of 5742 (1742), where his yeshivah Midrash Kenesset Yisrael was reestablished. Less than a year later, he departed this world and was laid to rest on the 15th of Tammuz 5743 (1743) in the ancient cemetery on Mount Olives.

The holy Rebbe Avraham Shalom Halberstam, head of the Stropkov dynasty and the author of *Divrei Shalom*, of blessed memory, related at a *Melaveh Malkah* in Cracow in the name of his father, the holy Rebbe Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam, author of *Divrei Yechezkel* of Shineve (Sieniawa, Poland), of blessed memory, who related the following story upon his return from the Land of Israel:

[It is known that in 5629 (1869), the Shinever Rebbe visited the Land of Israel and stayed in Tzfat and Jerusalem, and in 5631 (1871) he returned to Galicia]:

The holy and pure Rabbi, awesome and sublime, Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, of blessed memory, author of the holy book *Or HaChaim*, had two wives. Before

his passing, the women wept before him, asking him to advise them how they would earn their livelihood after his death. He said to them: "Behold, I give you my *tefillin* (phylacteries), and after my death, publicize in all places that whoever wishes to pray with my *tefillin* may come and pray with them. In exchange, each person who prays with them will pay a certain sum, and from this you will earn your livelihood. But one extremely important warning: you must take great care that anyone who places the *tefillin* on his head must not, God forbid, speak mundane words while the *tefillin* are on his head. The *tefillin* are holy, and with mundane speech, God forbid, their holiness will be blemished and the letters inked on the parchments will disperse into the air and the *tefillin* will immediately become invalid for use.

After the *Or Hachaim* passed on, the widows followed his instructions and announced the opportunity to pray with his *tefillin*. Jews came with great longing to pray with the holy *tefillin*, and from this his widows earned their livelihood.

Once, a great merchant came and prayed with the *tefillin*, and suddenly a distinguished gentleman came and said he had to urgently speak with the merchant and could not wait until after the prayer because he was hurrying on his way. The widows always guarded the entrance to the study hall when someone had put on the Or HaChaim's *tefillin*, requiring him to pray in seclusion so that it would not be possible for him to speak mundane words while wearing the holy *tefillin*.

That gentleman had come in great haste and entered without permission, and the women had not noticed. He exchanged some words with the merchant. When the widows saw that he had entered, they cried out with a great cry, "How have you done this evil deed, to speak of mundane matters while wearing these holy *tefillin*?" They checked the *tefillin* and found that they had no letters, for they had all ascended to the heavens.

The holy Or HaChaim was a messianic figure. In Chasidut, many stories and sayings have been handed down about this, and we particularly note the following story:

Once, a printer named Asher brought the holy Rebbe, Pinchas of Koritz, a set of the Five Books of Moses that he had printed with the commentary *Or HaChaim* inside. When the *tzaddik* opened the books, he happened upon the Torah portion of *Re'eh* at the verse, "If there will be among you a needy person from one of your brothers," (Deuteronomy 15:7). Rebbe Pinchas knew that the *Or HaChaim* had explained that this verse alludes to the "one" among your brothers, i.e., the

Mashiach, and he wrote in his commentary: "the Mashiach—his name is Chaim."

But in this printing, Rebbe Pinchas saw that the words, "his name is Chaim" had been omitted. He immediately turned to the printer and asked him, "Why did you omit these words?" The printer replied: "Because he was referring to himself!"

Immediately, Rebbe Pinchasa opened the Book of Numbers to the Torah portion of Naso, to the verse, "And the woman shall say, 'Amen, Amen" (Numbers 5:22) and looked at Rashi's commentary. Rashi explains why the woman says "Amen" twice, "Amen if [she has been intimate] with this man, Amen if with another man." The word for "another" is *acher* (אַחֵר), but Rebbe Pinchas showed the printer that in his printing it was copied erroneously and read, "Asher" (אָשֵׁר), the printer's name. Rebbe Pinchas said to him, "Here is where you have signed your name," and the man's face turned pale.

Befitting such a *tzaddik* who was the Mashiach of his generation, the wives of the holy Rabbi Chaim ben Attar were also special women. Despite being married to the same man, they lived in peace and exceptional friendship. Moreover, they embody in many ways the so-called elevation of kingdom—the Kabbalistic idea that as the Messianic era approaches, the status of the feminine is elevated until the masculine and the feminine become equal in stature.

The Or HaChaim's first wife, Petzunya, was particularly distinguished in this regard. She was known for her deep wisdom and even donned *tefillin*, a practice the Sages say was upheld by Michal, the daughter of King Saul. In our story, the connection between both women together and their husband's *tefillin* stands out.

In Kabbalah, it is said that when a husband puts on *tefillin*, the *tefillah* (singular of *tefillin*) of the hand is considered and acts like it is the *tefillah* of the head for his wife. In an inner dimension, the husband thereby fulfills his wife's "obligation," as it were, regarding the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. This is also why he first dons the hand *tefillah* and only then the head *tefillah*, which is his alone. But the wife of the *Or HaChaim* was not satisfied with this, and she put on tefillin herself. Later, both of her husband's *tefillin*—the head and the hand—passed into her possession and to that of her peer Esther. It would seem that the head tefillah belonged especially to the scholarly Petzunya, while the hand *tefillah* belonged to Esther, with whom the holy *Or HaChaim* had children thereby fulfilling the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply."

What can the women of our era learn from this? It is known in Chasidut that tefillin is "draw down Divine consciousness" (מוחין). What does this mean? In the story, the drawing down of Divine consciousness was expressed in bringing the Or HaChaim's *tefillin* to

the worshippers and in his wives' careful attention to the words of those putting them on. As a directive for the women of our generation, drawing down Divine consciousness means spreading Torah and teaching it to others, as it is written in the *midrash*[1] that performing the commandment of *tefillin* is comparable to learning Torah all day and all night. A woman who engages in this, within the family and even more so outside of her family (by organizing Torah classes and women's groups), merits thereby the spiritual wearing of *tefillin*: drawing down Divine consciousness—the light of Torah, to all who hear.

1. *Midrash Tehillim* on Psalms 1:2. See in length in the essay *Itta BeMidrash Tilim* 5653, the essay recited traditionally in Chabad by a Bar Mitzvah boy.

PARASHAT CHUKAT
PARADOXES OF THE EGO

Our *parashah* begins,

> This is the statute of the Torah that God commanded, saying, speak to the Children of Israel and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished heifer, that has no blemish, that no yoke was laid.[1]

The red heifer was slaughtered and burnt along with a mixture of cedar wood, hyssop, and a crimson thread until only ash remained. This ash, when added to pure spring water, was sprinkled on individuals who had become ritually impure through contact with a source of ultimate impurity—usually death. The Hebrew word for "statute" in this verse is *chukat* (חֻקַּת), the name of our *parashah*. This word indicates a type of *mitzvah*, a commandment that transcends or even defies normative logic. The *parah adumah*, the ritual of the red heifer, is considered the cardinal statute or *chok* of the Torah as it paradoxically purifies those who are impure because of their contact with death, yet at the same time, it defiles those who were prepared the mixture of the purifying ashes and the spring water. How can the same set of elements purify and defile simultaneously? According to tradition, even Solomon, the wisest of men, was unable to resolve this paradox.[2]

A PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The Ba'al Shem Tov offers a deep psychological analysis of this paradoxical ritual in a manner that is relevant to every person, in every generation.[3] Depression, sadness, inaction, low self-esteem, and stagnation are equated spiritually with death. When one is in such a state, the evil inclination whispers in one's ear every reason in the world to make them believe they are not worthy or capable of initiating or accomplishing anything. What can possibly be done in such a situation?

The Ba'al Shem Tov proposes that we employ—self pride—something that is usually looked upon as taboo in Chasidic thought. To lift oneself up with renewed energy and free oneself of despair, a little bit of self-pride is required. One must tell oneself: "the world was created for me."[4] If I fail to act, who knows what will happen to the entire world. God is counting on me to get up and move, to initiate and be successful. I am the only one capable of acting right now. Instead of the usual humility, the Ba'al Shem Tov encourages us in these situations

1. Numbers 19:2.

2. Ecclesiastes 7:23; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:3
3. *Ba'al Shem Tov Al HaTorah*, *Chukat*.
4. *Sanhedrin* 37a.

to remind ourselves that we are not insignificant but rather created "in the image of God."[5] In this way we turn the impurity of inaction and despair into an emotional state of energy, strength, and even self-pride.

Yet, here is where the paradox creeps in: by acting with these thoughts in mind, it is inevitable that self-pride and arrogance will creep into our mind and spiritually defile the very positive act being done! The solution to this is to adopt a deep sense of humility, especially when acting with an "uplifted spirit," and particularly after completing a task successfully. One can achieve this by thinking simply and earnestly that the credit for this good act I just did goes to God, not to me. Without God giving me life, without God giving me the prowess to act, none of this would have happened. This explanation by the Ba'al Shem Tov reveals how this mysterious and paradoxical ritual of the red heifer can be applied to very real situations in life.[6]

MORE ON THE EGO

In line with the Ba'al Shem Tov's idea of how to make this paradoxical ritual highly relevant to each and every person, let us proceed briefly to explore other Torah insights on the paradoxical nature of the self and ego. This is of course an extensive and profound subject beyond the context of a short article but nevertheless, we will bring a few relevant points worth pondering.

THE I AND NON-BEING

Ego literally means "I." The Hebrew word for "I" is *ani* (**אֲנִי**). It has the same letters but permuted differently as the Hebrew word for the seemingly opposite non-being, sometimes translated as "nothingness" (**אַיִן**), pronounced *ayin*. The ego according to Chasidut is rectified and elevated through a constant process of self-nullification. The goal is not to obliterate the ego, but rather to purify it of selfishness, jealousy, greed, and the desire for honor and power. Ideally one should strive to experience both the rectified "I" and a sense of spiritual nullification at each and every moment.

RECTIFYING THE EGO

The letters of the word for "wisdom" (חָכְמָה) when permuted can be read as "the power of what" (**כֹּחַ מָה**) the ability to envision essence.[7] Wisdom is the first conscious level of the intellect but maintains links to higher levels of pure essence within the crown, the highest of the *sefirot*, where there exists a substratum known as *mocha stima'ah* or the "concealed mind."[8] Hence, wisdom, likened to a flash of insight, a brainstorm, or epiphany, isn't merely drawn from logical deduction but is brought forth from this hidden brain in the superconscious level of the crown.

5. Genesis 1:27.
6. *The Inner Dimension: Insights into the Weekly Torah Portion*, *Chukat*.
7. *Anatomy of the Soul*, p. 91.
8. *Mystery of Marriage*, p. 434.

The word "what" (*mah*) is also a code word for the inner motivational aspect of wisdom—the power of what—known as *bitul*, or self-nullification, as in the statement by Moses, who the Torah itself attests was the humblest of all men: "What are we [Moses and Aaron] that you murmur against us."[9] Accessing this level of wisdom only comes through *bitul*, self-nullification of the ego.[10] The more we make His will our will and subjugate our animal soul to the Divine soul within, the more we rectify the ego. *Bitul* involves setting the ego aside, opening the soul to a higher level of wisdom. Self-nullification depends on feeling true appreciation for every moment of life, acknowledging that all is a gift from God.[11]

THE HUMILITY OF MOSES

Closely associated with a rectified ego is humility, as mentioned above. The Midrash states that the Torah was given in the desert – a place symbolizing simplicity and humility. This insight also explains why God gave the Torah to the Jewish people through Moses, for the Torah itself testifies that Moses was the humblest man in the world.[12] Humbleness, entailing a high level of ego clarification, did not diminish Moses' power; paradoxically, it increased it exponentially.

Moses was considered a king, a position connected to the *sefirah* of kingdom. The inner motivating force of kingdom is paradoxically *shiflut*, a deep sense of existential lowliness. Yet, Moses' sense of *shiflut* was actually his source of strength to lead the people for 40 years.[13]

Moses had conquered his ego to such an extent that God spoke to him "face to face," as no other human being before or since.[14] He received the Torah on behalf of the Jewish people and transmitted it to the nation as an eternal inheritance. Whether or not we merit as individuals the gift and inheritance of the Torah ultimately depends on our own abilities to conquer our egos, pride, and anger and reach genuine levels of self-nullification and humility.

MAKING SPACE FOR TORAH

This idea is found metaphorically in *parshat Chukat*: "This is the Torah regarding a man who would die in a tent."[15] Although, on a literal level, this verse, and the subsequent passage, seems to deal with the ritual purity of a tent and the objects in it after someone dies in the tent, yet, on an allegorical level, the sage, Reish Lakish, applies the verse to a Torah scholar: "From where do we know that Torah is only established by one who kills himself over it?' As it says: 'This is the Torah regarding a man who would die in the tent.'"[16] The tents referred to here are those of Jacob of whom it says, "Jacob was a wholesome man, abiding in

9. Exodus 16:7.
10. *Anatomy of the Soul*, p. 91.
11. *The Hebrew Letters*, p.69.
12. Numbers 12:3.
13. *What You Need to Know About Kabbalah*, p. 113.
14. Exodus 33:11.
15. Numbers 19:14.
16. *Berachot* 43b.

tents.[17] Rashi explains these are the tents of Torah. Obviously, Reish Lakish is not suggesting that a budding Torah scholar must study so hard that he kills himself. Rather he means that in order to reach a deep and fundamental understanding of the Torah one must experience an ego death so that that there is "space" for the true teachings of Torah to enter mind and heart.

It is interesting to note that not only acquisition of Torah is equated with "ego death" but so too is love, as expressed in the Song of Songs: "Place me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm, for love is as strong as death."[18] True love entails great selflessness and ego rectification in order to make real space for someone else in our thoughts, speech and action.[19]

Before receiving the Torah, Israel proclaimed "we will do and we will hear," a statement of trust, faith and love of God. Significantly, at every word God spoke to us at Sinai our souls left our bodies and experienced a type of death. Angels were dispatched to revive the people.[20]

THE BLESSING AND CURSE OF EGO

Another important insight regarding the ego is based on the Ba'al Shem Tov's reading of this verse in Deuteronomy: "I was standing between God and you at that time to relate the word of God to you."[21] He explained that when Moses stated that "I was standing between God and you," he meant to imply that "the aspect of 'I'—the ego—stands between you and God."

In truth, there is a great paradox at work here. In essence, the Divine soul is at one with God and has no real independent status, yet God has fashioned human beings in such a manner that they feel quite independent. (This same paradox obviously shares many similarities with the paradox of human free will and Divine Providence and Omnipotence.)

Inherently, the ego is neither a blessing nor a curse, it all depends on how much we clarify our sense of self. At times the ego truly does stand between us and God, between us and other people, and even between us and our own true natures. Truth be told, most of the time the ego stands between us and everything else. However, this only happens when we allow the ego to go unchecked, when we give our animal impulses full reign over our thought, speech, and action. However, when we channel the ego in the right direction, it becomes a healthy instrument for doing good and aiding us in fulfilling our life goals. When clarifying and purifying the ego through true selflessness, one's true soul reveals itself. We then realize that the ego, the "I," is merely the unrectified animal soul which when left to its own devices leads us into an endless morass of jealousy, anger, selfishness, and the drive for power

17. Genesis 25:27.
18. Song of Songs 8:6.
19. Mystery of Marriage 171-2.
20. Ibid.
21. Deuteronomy 5:5.

and control.[22]

Ultimately when the soul strives for self-fulfillment and actualization it paradoxically leads to its self-abrogation. A rectified ego infused with the constant awareness of the soul being an actual part of God above and that there is nothing other than God, is fulfilled in the dictum of the sages: "Make His will, your will, so that He make your will to be as His will. Nullify your will before His will, so that He nullify the will of others before your will."[23]

22. *Mystery of Marriage*, p. 402.

23. Ibid, p. 378.

PARASHAT BALAK
PROPHETIC POWERS

Parashat Balak recounts the attempt of Balak, the king of Moab, to hire the heathen prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites. Balak was terrified that his country would be overrun by the Children of Israel as they entered the Land of Israel. Balaam, despite his deep hatred (fueled by jealousy) of the Israelites and his unsatiable desire to curse the Jews, was coerced by the Almighty to bless them instead. In fact, some of the most beautiful and descriptive blessings in the Torah come from the mouth of Balaam. He also prophesied regarding what would occur in the Messianic, "end of days,"[1] reminiscent of what later Jewish prophets prophesied as well. Maimonides, in his influential treatment of traditions regarding the Mashiach, view Balaam's prophecies and blessings as the source for many of these traditions.[2]

ATTAINING PROPHETIC POWERS

The idea that an idolatrous prophet could attain such prophetic powers raises many deep questions regarding how a person as impure and morally base as Balaam could achieve such a level of consciousness. To answer this question, we must probe various ideas and traditions regarding prophecy and Divine inspiration.

We begin with the Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746) who wrote extensively about the entire realm of prophecy in his classic work, *Derech HaShem*.[3] He discusses at length the influence that negative and evil forces can exert when an individual delves into higher powers of consciousness. Since imagination, according to all the commentaries, especially Maimonides,[4] plays a fundamental role in the prophetic experience, it can be tainted by all sorts of false ideas and fantasies if it is not purified. In one case, a person may unwittingly experience a false vision due to these unconscious influences. In other cases, a person may become totally corrupted by these forces and knowingly mislead people as to his true nature and the validity of his prophecies. The psychic power released when contacting higher forces of consciousness unfortunately can, like other temptations and powerful energetic experiences, lead a person astray. The phrase, "power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely," regretfully may also apply to spiritual or supernatural matters, as it does to the material desire for riches, power, glory, fame, and control.

On a deeper level, we may apply the well-known formula, which works equally in both the physical and spiritual

1. Numbers 24:15-24.
2. *Hilchot Melachim* chs. 11-12.
3. 3:3-5.
4. *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*, chapters 7-10 and *Guide to the Perplexed*.

dimensions, that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Thus, the possibility of true prophecy carries with it the equal possibility of error, falsehood, lack of understanding, and even misuse. This idea is put forward to explain how Balaam, who was considered by the Sages to be an immoral, unsavory character, could reach such heights of prophecy. The Midrash relates that the nations said to God: "If we had a prophet the likes of Moses we too would serve You." Therefore, God gave them Balaam, who in potential was Moses' equal in prophecy, but whose nature was corrupt and under the influence of his own inner evil. Balaam's corruption proves that having a prophet of Moses' caliber is not enough to lead people to serve God and the nations' argument is disclaimed.[5]

It is interesting to note that according to tradition, Balaam was a master of all sorts of witchcraft, yet he was also able to receive visions and messages directly from God, as attested to many times in *parashat Balak*. This phenomenon parallels the juxtaposition in the Torah of warnings against forbidden magical practices and witchcraft, which are then followed directly by instructions regarding prophecy.[6] Both witchcraft and prophecy are in a sense tuning into the same paranormal energies. The differences lie in the spiritual level of the one seeking this wisdom. This dynamic can be expressed using Kabbalistic terminology: *the quality of the light revealed is dependent upon the integrity of the vessel which receives it*. When unbridled ego, pride, lust, and uncontrolled passion mix with these spiritual energies, the results are illusory at best and dangerous at worst. This is exactly what happened to Balaam.

WALKING WITH GOD EARNESTLY

Between the sections in the Torah of forbidden magical practices and prophecy is a very important transitional verse: "Be earnest with *Havayah*, your God."[7] *Rashi* comments: "Walk before Him earnestly, and put your hope in Him, and Do not attempt to probe the future, but rather accept whatever happens to you earnestly, and then, you shall be with Him and will be part of His portion." *Rashi* is articulating the psychological nature of the prohibition against magical forms of fortune telling because, as his comments indicate, a Jew should not seek to know the future through divination but rather should have simple faith in Divine Providence.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, proposes that Rashi's explanation may even indicate that some of the forbidden practices could be effective, but nonetheless the Torah forbids them as they are deemed counterproductive to being "simple hearted with God." We see this, for example, in the Book of Samuel when King Saul consults a fortune-teller

5. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:20. For more on the spiritual relationship between Moses and Balaam see *Sha'ashuim Yom Yom*, *Balak*.

6. Deuteronomy 18:9-22.

7. Ibid 18:13. For an in-depth study of this verse see the many classes by HaRav Ginsburgh appearing in the series *Mivchar Shiurei Hitbonenut*, vols. 14, 15, 17, 18, and 20.

out of desperation, to raise the deceased spirit of his teacher, the prophet Samuel, with whom he wanted to consult about his war with the Philistines. The fortune-teller is successful and the spirit of Samuel seems to speak to Saul.[8]

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Nachmanides, on the other hand, felt that the prohibition against fortune telling was because only God knows the future; therefore, these magical attempts to reveal the future are inherently false and unreliable. It therefore follows that prophecy is meant to be a true and Divinely sanctioned alternative to those who practiced magic and witchcraft to foresee the future.

Yet, according to *Rashi*, prophecy itself might be considered problematic, as it too predicts the future. Similarly, the Lubavitcher Rebbe asks: how does *Rashi* understand the practice of consulting with the High Priest, who wore his breastplate, which included the mysterious *Urim* and *Tumim* that were used as divination devices, as prescribed in the Torah. He answers these formidable questions by pointing out that *Rashi* stresses in his above comment that not probing the future means not *intensively* investigating one's personal destiny, while the Torah does permit consulting a prophet, or the breastplate, if this will assist one in their service of God and personal growth, as long as it does not contradict the injunction to be simple-hearted and to ultimately trust God above all else.[9]

8. 1 Samuel ch. 28.
9. *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 14, p. 64ff.

ACCESSING THE PARANORMAL

With all of this in mind, we now return to the connection between prophecy, Divine inspiration and various practitioners of the occult, like Balaam. Although a vast majority of people claiming to possess special healing powers or paranormal abilities to foretell the future are certainly charlatans, there are those who do in fact have these powers. How do these individuals tap into these psychic forces?[10]

Firstly, it should be stated that Divine inspiration is open to any person regardless of gender, race or nationality. This tradition comes from no less than Elijah the Prophet who exclaimed: "I call heaven and earth to witness, that any individual, man or woman, Jew or gentile, freeman or slave, can have *ruach hakodesh* ("Divine inspiration") come upon him. It all depends on his deeds."[11] Similarly, Moses, the greatest of the prophets, pronounced his fervent hope: "Would it be that all God's people were prophets and that God would put His spirit upon them!"[12]

Therefore, certain individuals are able to access information in a paranormal manner by tapping into a more expansive level of consciousness, which then unlocks certain concealed layers of information. However, the problem is that those who are born with these abilities, or who practice certain types of meditative disciplines without the hard work of character refinement, are often psychologically unstable and

10. *A Sense of the Supernatural*, Letter 3.
11. *Tanna DeBei Eliyahu* 9.
12. Numbers 11:29.

unprepared for such an immense and sudden download. Since these powers tend to amplify any unrealistic or overblown egocentric self-image, this is an easy trap to fall into.[13] This explains the Talmudic teaching that states that when the era of the prophets ended, prophecy was given over to seriously unstable characters and children.[14] Additionally, these powers, when misused, can have a negative influence on others or, in many cases, may even be truly dangerous.

THREE GARMENTS OF THE SOUL

According to Chasidut, the psyche has three garments: thought, speech and action. When a person develops and refines these garments through hard spiritual work, he or she may merit an experience of Divine inspiration, although that is not the explicit goal of serving God. Those who possess these abilities without having gone through the proper course of soul development are considered to have figurative holes or rips in their garments, which then allow powerful lights and information to seep into their unprepared consciousness. These holes reveal a certain nakedness of soul, similar to one wearing tattered clothing. In this sense, they reveal a certain soul blemish despite whatever clairvoyant powers they may attain.[15]

There have been many righteous people who were gifted with clairvoyant powers from birth or were even granted these abilities as the result of a long and arduous spiritual process of refinement, but once they experienced the burden of such knowledge, they actually prayed for these powers to be taken away because they realized they were hindering their spiritual service, which was predicated on being simple-hearted with God. Other righteous people maintained these powers but were ever aware of the true Divine source of their inspiration and made sure to only use them for positive and holy purposes.[16] Balaam, on the other hand, is a prime example of one who attained real prophetic powers, but due to his unrectified soul, descended into immoral behavior, witchcraft, sexual aberrations, and became a prophet for hire who thrived on his reputation as one who could curse and whose curses were potent. Yet, God had other plans and turned his desire to curse into blessings, and his evil intent into good, as the Ba'al Shem stated: evil is the throne of good,[17] and the ultimate good is God.

13. A Sense of the Supernatural, *loc. cit.*
14. *Bava Batra* 12b.
15. *A Sense of the Supernatural*, *loc. cit.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Keter Shem Tov 70, Ba'al Shem on the Torah, parashat Bereishit, 45.

FUNDAMENTALS OF CHASIDUT

THE NINE PRINCIPLES OF FAITH: ALL DESCENT IS FOR THE PURPOSE OF ASCENT, EVEN SIN

We continue our review of the 9 Principles of Faith of the Torah's inner dimension with the fourth principle: that all descent is for the sake of a subsequent ascent, meaning that all failures are meant to lead to an ultimate higher state, even those failures that the Torah deems to be sins.

The contents of this series first appeared in Hebrew, in HaRav Ginsburgh's book, Emunah VeMuda'ut (Faith and Consciousness). It is being translated here for the first time.

We now come to the fourth principle of faith of the Torah's inner dimension. God created our world to present our souls with the opportunity to rise higher, to an elevated state. To access this opportunity, our soul must be willing to descend from heaven into our physical body. Despite this initially being a descent from the soul's high spiritual state, ultimately, by traversing the difficulties inherent in life, the soul merits to ascend to a higher state. This is the root of the principle that every descent is for the purpose of an ascent.

Every descent from one's earlier, higher status, is brought about by the *sefirah* of might (*gevurah*), also known as the attribute of judgment (מדת הדין) and of contraction (or, sometimes, concentration). Every descent is for the purpose of a subsequent ascent to a place incomparably higher than the initial starting point. It requires a keen sense, but for one who can "see,"[1] present already within the descent itself is its purpose—the peak of the ascent.[2]

This principle applies not only to the descent of the soul into our mundane reality, or any other descent that accords with God's will, but even to a descent caused by sin or transgression committed by a person through his free will and contrary to God's will. Though sin is against God's supreme will, concealed within the unwanted act their lies a hidden intention

1. In the *Zohar* (see also *Tanya* ch. 37), one who can see is described as the wise man who has "eyes in his head" referring specifically to the supernal wisdom, the supernal eyes in the crown, the super-consciousness, which is known as "the concealed wisdom," a manifestation of the might (*gevurah*) of *Atik Yomin*, the higher part of the crown.
2. See *Likkutei Moharan* 1:22 ch. 11. See also *Torat Menachem* 5712, vol. 2, p. 192.

that originates from God's highest essence, a realm that is higher than God's revealed will, as explained in Chasidut regarding the verse, "God is… held in awe for His deeds toward humanity"[3] (לְכוּ וּרְאוּ מִפְעֲלוֹת אֱ־לֹהִים נוֹרָא עֲלִילָה עַל בְּנֵי אָדָם), which is explained in the *midrash* as follows[4]:

> Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah said: Even the terrible things You bring upon us, You bring them through entrapment (עֲלִילָה, *alilah*).
>
> Come and see: when the Holy Blessed One created the world, from the very first day He created the Angel of Death…. Adam was created on the sixth day. Yet the scheme was pinned on him and he was blamed that *he* had brought death into the world, as it says: "for on the day you eat of it [the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge] you shall surely die."[5]
>
> To what may this be compared? To a man who wishes to divorce his wife. Before going home he wrote the bill of divorce, then entered his house with the get already in hand, seeking a pretext to give it to her. He said to her: "Pour me a cup to drink." She poured it for him. As soon as he took the cup from her hand, he said: "Here is your bill of divorce." She said to him: "What is my offense?" He replied: "Leave my house, for you poured me a lukewarm cup." She said to him: "You already knew that I was going to pour you a lukewarm cup, for you wrote the *get* [Bill of Divorce] and brought it in your hand!"
>
> So too, Adam said before the Holy Blessed One: "Master of the Universe, You did not create Your world until two thousand years had passed, during which the Torah was with You…. And in the Torah it was already written, 'This is the Torah: when a man dies in a tent.'[6] Had You not already ordained death for Your creatures, would You have written such a thing in it? Rather, You have come to pin the scheme upon me."[7]

Let us explore this for a moment from God's perspective. God knows all human deeds, including those defined by the Torah as sin in advance. Nonetheless, He sustains and makes even these actions possible, despite their being contrary to His revealed will as stated in the Torah. The sinner could argue that because of this, he is not to blame for the sin, for if God had only willed otherwise, God could have prevented the sin from ever happening. Yet, God chose that free-will would be a fixture of human existence and based on man's freedom of will, God would judge man and his actions. Given all of the above, every individual is responsible for his or her deeds and must answer for them. However, when a sinner returns to God in complete *teshuvah* and cleaves to God's primal will and desire for Creation that transcends Creation and the ways of the created world, they reveal how the sin

3. Psalms 66:5.
4. *Tanchuma Vayeishev* 4.
5. Genesis 2:17.
6. Numbers 19:14.
7. See also *Torat Chaim* of the Mittler Rebbe, *Toldot*, s.v. *VeYiten Lekha*, ch. 10 and onwards; *Sefer HaMamarim* of the Rayatz, *Kuntresim* vol. 1, 191b and ff.; *Sefer HaMamarim Melukat*, *Kuntres Yud Shevat 5751*, that the pretext applies even to the sin itself.

is actually a connection to God Himself—to God's essential and transcendent Being that is beyond understanding and definition.

EVIL AS A THRONE FOR GOOD

Accordingly, the ultimate purpose of all evil in the world is to serve as a means for refinement and redemption. Evil is destined to become "a basis for good," as expressed in the famous teaching of our teacher the Baal Shem Tov: "evil is like a throne upon which the good sits."[8] In other words, once evil serves its true purpose, it will be instrumental in elevating the good in our world to a level incomparably higher than it was when it stood in direct opposition to evil. After evil is refined, the good need not confine itself to definitions that prove it is not evil, and it can rise above all definitions to become infinite and ever more similar to its source—God—who is infinite.

In a similar vein, the Maggid of Mezritch explained that the linguistic origin of the Hebrew word for evil (רַע) is related to the word meaning, "lower" (מְלֻרָע). Thus, evil entered our world with what fell, shattered, and died with the Breaking of the Vessels, the Kabbalistic idea that parallels (and includes) Adam and Eve's sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Evil is meant to act as a scaffolding for the good. It supports from the bottom.

Evil has two dimensions. There is the "real" part of evil. This part includes the Divine spark that is trapped within it and sustains its existence together with the shard of the broken vessels; they constitute its very existence.[9] This part is destined to be refined and redeemed, and it will fulfill the purpose of evil as a throne for good. But there is also an imaginary part to evil, about which the prophet says, "I shall remove the spirit of impurity from the Earth." This will happen once the real part of evil is refined.

"NONE SHALL BE LOST"

The ascent that follows the descent is an act of *teshuvah*—a return to God. *Teshuvah* governs both the ascent of the individual and of the collective. Maimonides writes that regarding the Jewish people: "Israel will ultimately return to God at the end of their exile, and they will be immediately redeemed."[10]

One who has returned to God by ascending out of his descent attains a higher level of closeness to God than even the righteous who have never sinned. The Talmud tells us that, "where masters of *teshuvah* [of return to God] stand, the completely righteous cannot stand."[11] Because of this, one of the most important tasks of the Mashiach is "to bring the righteous to do *teshuvah*,"[12] so that even the

8. The precise words from the Ba'al Shem Tov are in Hebrew and read, "Evil is a throne for good" (הָרַע כִּסֵּא לְטוֹב). The initials of this phrase spell the word "all" (**הַכֹּל**), alluding to the mysterious meaning of the conclusion (and the inception) of Ecclesiastes. The book begins with the verse, "Vanity of vanities, says Ecclesiastes, vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (**הַכֹּל** הֶבֶל). The conclusion reads, "The end of the matter, with all having been heard is: fear God and observe His commandments, for this is all that man is" (**הַכֹּל** נִשְׁמָע). See *Sod Hashem LiYerei'av*, *Hara Kise LaTov* (*Sha'ar* 21).

9. As known from the writings of the Arizal concerning lights, sparks, and vessels.

10. *Hilchot Teshuvah* 7:5.

11. *Berachot* 34b.

12. *Zohar* 3:153b

righteous individuals will merit to stand at the level that the penitents—the masters of *teshuvah* can stand. The distance opened between them and God, between their being and all that is Godly and good, creates a yearning like no other to ascend and that energy catapults them above the state they were in before they sinned. The point is that those who have done *teshuvah* for their sins, for having engaged with evil, reach their greater proximity to Godliness because they have completed the full cycle of "descent is for the sake of ascent, even with sin," and they have done so out of love for God, love for what is good.

Teshuvah that is born of love for God—and within every Jew there is a hidden love destined to be revealed as *teshuvah* from love—has the power "to transform even intentional sins into merits."[13] The sin and the distance from God become, retroactively, propulsions toward greater and more powerful closeness. This is the deep meaning of the verse said about each and every individual soul of Israel, "none shall be lost."[14]

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

This fourth principle of faith of the Torah's inner dimension—"All descent is for the sake of ascent," even regarding sin—corresponds to Maimonides' 11th principle of faith regarding the reward that comes to those who observe God's commandments and the punishment that is administered to those who transgress His will. The Torah's inner dimension adds that punishment is nothing more than a concealed act of loving-kindness. Its function is to refine evil itself so that it may become a throne for good.

According to Maimonides, "evil does not descend from Above," meaning that it does not originate in God.[15] Evil is entirely man made. But according to the wisdom of the Torah's inner tradition, nothing in the world is truly created by the lower beings themselves—everything is created from Above. The meaning of the phrase "evil does not descend from above" is that since everything in the world, including all evil within it, is from Above—it is not true evil[16] whose purpose is to punish and cause suffering, but rather it comes to ascend itself and to elevate the good to be encompassed within the infinite.

THE CHAMBER OF MERIT

We have already explained the connection between descent and the left axis of the sefirot and particularly the *sefirah* of might (*gevurah*), to which we correspond this fourth principle of faith of the Torah's inner dimension. Let us add another point in this respect.

The Zohar and the writings of the Arizal speak of another parallel nomenclature for the seven emotive sefirot—a nomenclature that is rooted in the idiom of heavenly chambers. Among them, the "Chamber of Merit" (הֵיכַל הַזְּכוּת), where the Heavenly Court sits to judge reward and punishment,

13. *Yoma* 86b.
14. 2 Samuel 14:14.
15. *Bereishit Rabbah* 51:3.
16. That which is truly evil—not a spark of Divinity or a shard of a holy vessel, the dimension of evil described as "imaginary" earlier—it is illusory and it will disappear entirely at the time of the Redemption.

is the chamber associated with might, the attribute of judgment. It is telling that it is not called the Chamber of Justice, but rather the Chamber of Merit. From this we learn that the true purpose of reward and punishment is to vindicate the person, to refine even the evil within him so that it can become a throne for the good, and to transform every descent into the purpose of ascent.

This principle of faith is associated with the left axis of the sefirot also because it is sensitive to the inherent limits—limits are related to contraction—of created beings, just as it is the power of contraction that limits the Divine revelation so that it can be understood by the lower creatures, and on the other hand produces the attribute of judgment that evaluates each and every act of the creatures. Because it corresponds with the *sefirah* of might, this principle situated just under the principle of faith in "Our Divine service is a need of the Most High," which corresponds with the *sefirah* of understanding. The relationship between understanding and might is captured in the verse, "I am understanding, I have might."[17] Applied to these two principles of faith of the Torah's concealed tradition, this verse means that when a person, in serving his Creator and does good below, in the mundane realm, Above he is also doing good, as it were, for God. This is governed by the principle that, "an awakening below generates an awakening Above. But even when a person sins below, the supernal intent (concealed within God's highest essence, as above) descends to transform the descent caused by the sin into an ascent that will bring God endless pleasure and satisfaction (especially with the ultimate repentance of the entire Jewish people, as above). Thus, "I am understanding" refers to good that is needed by the Most High and "might is mine" refers to the might needed to transform a descent into an ascent, might that is possessed by God Above.

17. Proverbs 8:14.



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