

BODY AND SOUL

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

"The Rock! - perfect is His work" (Devarim 32:4)

When one looks at creation, especially over thousands of years of history, one might question this concept of G-dly perfection. Creation is filled with imperfections, man being one of the BIGGEST of them all, which usually reflects on the Creator Himself. "If He's so perfect," so many people have asked over the millennia, "then why did He create something so imperfect?!"

The answer is, even that is perfect. In other words, in making creation as He did, G-d created a perfectly imperfect world. Even the most destructive elements in creation are not random aberrations for which G-d had not accounted for, but necessary elements in a very complex system, the understanding of which goes beyond the capacity of any mortal being to comprehend.

Like raising children, for example. Two parents, with G-d's help, are blessed with a child. The father and mother supplied the physical elements, while G-d supplied the spiritual one (Niddah 30b). For the first few years as the parents cope with raising a new baby, nothing seems to be out of the ordinary as they tirelessly cater to the baby's every need with the hope that all the love and care will contribute to a faithful child and human success story.

Then one day, the baby, now a child, exhibits unusual behavior. He seems to be more unruly than was to be expected, less bright than one might have assumed, more temperamental than his siblings or parents were at his age - whatever.

Worried, the parents begin to question what has led to this unexpected deviation? Not enough love? Too much love? Too much discipline? Exposure to the outside environment? Physical handicaps?

There are so many possibilities why children do not turn out as we expect them to. As a result, the parents read more child psychology books and speak to professionals about their son or daughter, to solve his behavior problem before it grows any further.

However, in spite of all this, their efforts seem to be in vain. Instead of bringing the child closer and more in line with the parents' expectations, the child moves even further away, causing even more ill-feeling between himself and his father and mother. The situation goes from bad to worse as the child becomes a teenager, and the parents start blaming themselves, each other, and the world

around them for their 'corrupt' child.

However, in their heart of hearts, they sense that something else is at play here after all the analyses have been completed, something beyond their control, something they could not have known about in advance and therefore, something they could have done very little about. For, while the physical body of the child was new and from the mother and father, the soul of the child may have reincarnated several times before in order to undergo a personal rectification that supercedes any parents' plan for a quiet, 'normal,' and productive family life.

The Arizal, via his main student Rabbi Chaim Vital, taught:

"A person who has come into the world for the first time will have a difficult time subjugating his yetzer hara, even if his soul is very elevated since it is the beginning of his purification from the K'lipos"

That is, spiritual 'encrustations' which inhibit a person's ability to relate to the spiritually correct path, leading instead to sin.

Where DO souls come from before they enter a body? Are they just sitting up in Heaven in that great soul production factory in the sky waiting for the proverbial tap on the shoulder, or are they extracted from another, less soul-friendly source? And, if the latter, how does that affect the body that they inhabit once they make it down to earth?

For 'Shabbos Shuvah' and the 'Ten Days of Repentance,' these are questions for which we need answers.

Shabbos Day:

"For all his paths are just" (Devarim 32:4)

Regarding Dovid HaMelech, one of the greatest individuals of all of history, ancestor of the future redeemer of the Jewish people, the Arizal taught:

"This is the sod of what happened to Dovid HaMelech, who was close to G-d. Amazingly, his yetzer hara overcame him in the incidents involving Bat Sheva and Avigayil. However, as we have said, it occurred because it was the beginning of his departure from the K'lipos, as Dovid wrote, "I am sunk in the mire of the shadowy depths" (Tehillim 69:3)."

Up until now, we know what man has said about Dovid HaMelech and his 'mistakes,' and they have been far from flattering. Until the day he died, and then some, many mocked Dovid HaMelech, his lineage, and his life. Even those of us who know better, still wonder, "How could such a great person make such an obvious and costly mistake?"

Thus, the Arizal explains that Dovid HaMelech did not have any intrinsic desire to make the mistakes

he did, but rather, he was compelled to commit them BECAUSE of his lofty soul. For, as the rule goes, the greater the soul, the deeper the level from within the K'lipos which it originated. He continues, this time regarding another great individual whose mistakes had been even more costly:

"This is the sod of what Chazal said: Had you not been Dovid and he Shaul, I would have destroyed many Dovid's before Shaul (Moed Katan 16b)."

In other words, G-d was telling Dovid HaMelech, before you celebrate your victory over Shaul HaMelech, who, in your eyes (and ours) had been a great sinner, realize that his soul was extremely elevated. Tried as he did, it was difficult for him to succeed because of where his soul emanated from. "However," G-d told Dovid HaMelech, "comparatively-speaking, you would have failed even faster!"

Furthermore, says the Arizal:

"Sometimes, the soul of a 'new' person is very elevated, but he cannot overcome his yetzer hara; if he could, he would easily be very pious."

All we human beings see is a physical person with a troublesome yetzer hara - an evil inclination - great as he or she may otherwise seem to be. However, though we know there is a soul inside that person somewhere, we don't know how old it is, or how many times it's been around, how great it is, and therefore, how deeply immersed it was in the K'lipos before it was extracted from there.

In other words, different people have different yetzer haras. The greater the soul, the rules of free-will say, the greater the yetzer hara. Some of the more insightful people, or educators, might say, "He's so clever and so talented but he has this yetzer hara that just keeps dragging him down. It is really quite tragic, because he could have been someone important, even righteous, but instead"

By our standards, the person in question (which at times might even be ourselves) may appear to be a failure. However, by G-d's standards, the person may be doing the best he can given the spiritual weight attached to his soul, and a success as far as Heaven and rectification is concerned. Thus,

"This is a powerful sod (Kabbalistic secret), for it explains why sometimes a person may only transgress lightly but receive a serious punishment"

After all, there are also people who have far less potent yetzer haras, because their souls aren't as elevated. We may envy their simplicity and lack of desire for things that we just can't seem to do without, allowing them to hurdle over the very things over which WE stumble. We don't even notice their small and innocuous sins, but Heaven DOES, and may punish them severely for them, because there is little excuse for having committed them.

"While someone else may perform a terrible sin, and yet not get punished for it."

With a soul like that, from so deep within the K'lipos, resulting in such an amazingly difficult and tricky yetzer hara - it's amazing he doesn't sin more, or worse! It's complicated, which is what makes

speaking loshon hara about people so ridiculously futile, let alone such a big sin. Concludes Rabbi Chaim Vital, on behalf of the Arizal:

"This is enough for those who comprehend. Therefore, one cannot question the ways of G-d, or even of the righteous when they sin." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 27)

And thus, the connection to this week's parshah:

"This is the sod of, 'The Rock! - perfect is His work, for all his paths are just'" (Devarim 32:4)."

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

"You weakened the Rock that bore you" (Devarim 32:18)

As we learned from the previous posuk, the 'Rock' is a reference to G-d Himself. He gave birth to us, so-to-speak, when He extracted us out of the 'iron furnace' that was Egypt and allowed us to become a nation. Then He gave us Torah at Mt. Sinai, and it was this that truly transformed us into the Jewish people forever.

However, how do WE weaken G-d, if G-d, being Who He is, is beyond any effect man can create? The answer comes at the end of the posuk:

"...and forgot G-d Who brought you forth."

Thus, by forgetting G-d and our covenant with him, we sin. And, when we sin, we weaken G-d. And, when G-d is weakened, so-to-speak, evil is strengthened and becomes victorious, and even good people suffer.

That explains the 'how,' but it does not explain the 'why?' However, that answer can be found in the first section of Nefesh HaChaim, where Rav Chaim Volozhin explains: ... Likewise, when G-d created man, He empowered him to control countless forces and worlds, handing them over to him so that he should be the one to direct them, according to his actions, words, and thoughts - for good, or, G-d forbid, the opposite. It is the positive actions, words and thoughts of man that sustain and give energy to countless forces and holy celestial worlds, increasing their holiness and light, as it is says, "I have placed My word in your mouth... to plant heaven and to establish land" (Yeshayahu 51:16). And, as the rabbis teach, "Don't read 'banayich' (your children), but 'bonayich' (your builders)" (Brochos 64a), because it is they who arrange the Upper Worlds like a builder does his building, giving them great strength. Likewise, G-d forbid, man can destroy countless forces and holy upper worlds through his immoral actions, words, or thoughts, as it says, "Your destroyers and wasters emanate from you" (Yeshayahu 49:17); he darkens and reduces their light and holiness, G-d forbid, adding strength instead to the source of spiritual impurity. This is the meaning of, "And G-d created the man in His image; in the image of G-d" (Bereishis 1:27), and, "Because, in the image of G-d he was made" (Bereishis 9:6). Just as G-d is Elokim, "Master of all Forces" everywhere, ordering and directing

them each moment, likewise, it was His will to empower man to be able to control countless forces and worlds through the details of his behavior at every moment in time, depending upon how his act, word, or thought is 'rooted' in the Upper World - as if he was the master of their energy. Thus, the rabbis taught: Rebi Azariah said in the name of Rebi Yehuda b. Rebi Shimon: When Yisroel does the will of G-d, they add strength to Above, as it says, "Through G-d (Elokim) we will do valiantly" (Tehillim 60:14). But, when Yisroel disobeys G-d, they weaken the strength Above, as it is written, "You weakened the Rock that bore you" (Eichah Rabbosai 1:33). (Nefesh HaChaim, Section 1, Chapter 3)

In other words, while in essence G-d is completely unaffected by the actions of man, He acts as if He is, with respect to history, to make our free-will choices count. To allow our thoughts, words, and actions to have REAL consequences, He acts as if He is unable to interfere with them WHEN - and this is one of the most important conditions of all of history - it suits the master plan for creation.

The Zohar HaKadosh, at the beginning of Parashas Bo, reiterates this idea:

"It happened one day that they came... to present themselves before G-d... (Iyov 1:6): When they (the Heavenly Accusers) want to prosecute the actions of Yisroel, against G-d they lay their charges, because when Yisroel acts improperly, they weaken the strength of G-d; when they act correctly, they give strength and power to G-d. With respect to this it is written, "Give strength to G-d (Elokim)!" (Tehillim 60:14). Through what? Through proper conduct. (Zohar 2:32b)

Is it not bad enough that we have sinned, and now stand before G-d begging for atonement, thinking that it is a private matter between us and G-d? According to the Zohar and the Nefesh HaChaim, we have to also bear a heavy responsibility for things that have gone wrong in creation, because G-d 'couldn't' stop them - because of our sins!

All punishment comes to the world because of Israel. (Yevamos 62a)

Truly.

Melave Malkah:

Thus, the Nefesh HaChaim continues:

A Jew should conduct himself accordingly, and never think to himself, "What am I, and what difference can my insignificant actions make to the world?" Rather, he should understand and be conscious that every detail of his actions, words, and thoughts, at any moment, is NEVER meaningless, G-d forbid. On the contrary, how many and exalted are his actions, each one reaching up to its specific root, to have its impact in the highest heights, in the worlds and the splendid lights above. Certainly, the wise man who fully understands this idea, finds his heart trembling when

he considers his inappropriate actions and how destructive their impact can be, G-d forbid, worse even than the damage done by Nebuchadnetzar."

Nebuchadnetzar?! You mean that VERY evil person who destroyed the First Temple and exiled the surviving Jews into Babylonia? What could we Jews, who mean well and try somewhat to be good people, possibly do to even come close to the evil and destruction that Nebuchadnetzar perpetrated?

"This is because Nebuchadnetzar and Titus could not affect the worlds above, since they themselves were not rooted in those worlds. It was because of our sins, through which we 'weakened' the strength of G-d, and through which we defiled the temple of G-d above, that Nebuchadnetzar and Titus were able to destroy the temples below, which corresponded to the temple above. This is the meaning of what the rabbis wrote, "You ground already ground flour" (Eichah Rabbosai 1:43). Our sins destroyed the Heavenly Abode, the holy upper worlds; they only destroyed the Earthly Abode. (Nefesh HaChaim, Section 1, Chapter 4)

It is very hard to fathom, but crucial that we do. For, it is one of the most important cause-and-effect relationships in creation, though our physical eyes may not be able to see it in effect. In truth, it is what we are doing teshuvah for during the Asres Yemai Teshuvah - Ten Days of Repentance. We are not just apologizing for moments of weakness when we went against the Torah, but also for all the 'ripple effects' of doing so.

The extent to which our actions can have such an effect depends, as the Nefesh HaChaim pointed out, on the greatness of the soul of the person who commits the sin. The higher up the root of a person's soul, the greater the damage his sin can have on creation, which is what it means when it says that "G-d judges His righteous to a hairsbreadth," since a small sin from them can have a monstrous effect on creation.

On the other hand, when such people perform mitzvos, the positive effect is tremendous as well, drawing down untold light into the darkness of our daily world, elevating it closer to G-d. This is one of the reasons why the mishnah warns us to not take 'light' mitzvos lightly (Pirkei Avos 2:1), because depending upon who performs them, the effect on creation can be tremendous, and as well as the reward for performing them.

However, these ten days are about more than just begging for forgiveness from G-d; they are also about preparing for a better year. After convincing the 'Boss' not to fire us, we have to now convince Him to give us the proper expense account to make the best of our efforts in the upcoming year. It says:

According to what a person measures for himself, that is the measurement from Heaven. In other words, based upon the measure that a person invests in the performance of a mitzvah through natural means, Heaven invests a similar amount [However, in reality,] miraculous help from Heaven is actually far more than measure-for-measure, sometimes even a thousand times more... (Kol

HaTor, Chapter 5:3)

In other words, the Vilna Gaon is revealing that, we are able to accomplish MUCH more in life than we are capable of accomplishing, that is, through NATURAL means. As we have been told by the rabbis, it is rarely our job to complete the task, especially when it is much greater than anything we could ever hope to accomplish on our own. We are only meant to get things started, to "open the door a pin-hole's" worth, so that G-d can "drive the wagon through it."

"How much more so is the case," says the Gaon, "when it comes to being involved in the work of ingathering the exiles, regarding which it says, 'In great mercy I will gather you' (Yeshayahu 54:7)." (Ibid.)

The year 5763 has already started, and we are still here, and G-d willing, we will remain to be here for many years to come. However, to make this more of a reality, we have to come to terms with just how important what we think, say, and do is, not just to ourselves, but to all of creation. From there, we have to act accordingly, and knowing just how much Heaven wants us to succeed at fulfilling the mandate of creation, we have to go boldly into the new year with big plans and lots of faith to do what we can, to bring about the Final Redemption for which we pray three times a day, and have longed for many generations until now.

Have a great Shabbos,
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