

ONE TEASPOON, OR TWO?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe, "After you lie with your fathers, this people will act immorally and pursue the gods of the strangers of the land they are going to. They will abandon Me, and nullify My covenant which I have made with them." (Devarim 31:16)

We take for granted that we do not feel the Presence of G-d among us. After having lived 2300 years without prophecy and the miracles of the First Temple, we are accustomed to going it alone. For us, hester panim (the hidden Presence of G-d) is a way of life - the norm. Today is August 29, 2004, and as I write, the breaking news of a new spy scandal, once again implicating Israel certainly makes the hidden Presence of G-d feel even more pronounced.

It is also Elul Zman, the month that speaks of an ever-increasing closeness to G-d. This is the month, tradition teaches, that the King of Kings approaches man in advance of Rosh Hashanah and the Ten Days of Repentance. Reaching out to G-d at this time of year is supposed to be far easier than any other time of year, at least for the person who appreciates a close relationship with the Creator.

It is also eight weeks in advance of the next U.S. Presidential Election, one that many feel will greatly alter the course of events of world history in the near future, perhaps even setting up the final stage that can bring the War of Gog and Magog to a close with a bang - a BIG bang. Even the newspapers in the U.S. are suspicious about the timing of this leak to the press, given its proximity to the elections and the implications for George W. Bush and his administration.

Who says lightning doesn't hit the same place twice (1992 and 2004?)?

There is no better example of Hester Panim at work than this, which makes the topic of Hester Panim a timely one.

(Those who are reading my series, "The Sod of Today" will recognize this essay from two weeks ago. However, because of its relevance to this week's parshah and the events of today, it is worth adapting for a larger audience.)

To begin with, not only is G-d's light infinite, but it is by definition, perfectly good. Likewise, anything made from His Light, which is everything that exists, must also be perfectly good. And thus, within this short and simple statement lies the biggest paradox known to man: how can evil exist in a perfectly good world?

To begin with, you have to know that what we call "evil" cannot have any intrinsic existence of its own, otherwise it would have to exist forever, and that, we are taught, is not the case. For, as the Talmud states, in Yemos HaMoshiach, the yetzer hara will cease to exist (Succah 52a), signaling the end of all of evil temptation. Likewise, as the Leshem points out, at the same time the Malach HaMaves (Angel of Death) will also cease to exist (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 489), another way of expressing the same idea.

In Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote the following:

We have already mentioned that as a result of the sin of Kayin and Hevel, the souls became mixed together in the K'lipos (i.e., spiritual impurity) and that this is called, "the mixture of good and evil." From that time onward, the souls have been undergoing a process of "separation" from within the K'lipos, just as silver is smelted from waste . . .

In other words, all of history is about separation, the separation of good from evil, and the rejection of the latter. When Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he caused an intermingling of good and evil that up until that time had been separate from each other. Tikun is about separating them again, and once that process is complete, the world will be perfected and the mandate for Creation will be fulfilled.

. . . This process will continue until all the souls that fell into the 248 Limbs of Adam HaBli'al are separated out from the full length of its being, which is until the bottom of Adam d'Kedushah which overlaps with the legs of Adam d'K'lipah. This is hinted to in the Zohar (Pekudei): Until the legs reach the legs, as it is written, "His feet will stand on that day" (Zechariah 14:4). Once the separation of all the souls has been completed, Adam d'K'lipah, the spiritual "refuse" which is only removed through deeds, will collapse on its own and be absorbed to the point of "bal yira'eh" and "bal yimatze" . . .

Without going into detail, this means that Evil does not have a source of existence of its own. Rather, as long as it has access to Good, it derives spiritual nourishment from it and survives. Separate Good from Evil and Evil disappears like smoke on a windy day, in the blink of an eye.

. . . For, holiness is the life that results from separating from spiritual impurity that is called "death." Therefore, death will no longer have any energy and will disappear like smoke, as it says, "Death will be absorbed forever" (Yeshayahu 25:8), but not until all of the souls are separated out. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

So, you see: Evil does really exist, right?

SHABBOS DAY:

*"I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them."
(Devarim 31:17)*

This is also the sod of the statement of Chazal that "all G-d does He does for good" (Brochos 60b). It

means that even that which appears exceedingly evil to man, must at its core, be good. It only appears contrary to the purpose of Creation and the will of G-d, but ultimately, it cannot be, for that would imply a power other than G-d, the very basis of the concept of idol worship and that which is forbidden to all mankind.

Evil, therefore, is man's perception of reality when the light of good is hidden from him, what the Torah in this week's parshah refers to as *hester panim* (the hiding of G-d's Face). Hiding implies that it really remains, just out of eyeshot of people. Until now, we have spoken about the constriction of light as if the light itself was held back, and therefore absent. However, the very concept of *hester panim* implies otherwise, that the light in fact is there, but only covered over. The only question is, what is capable of hiding the Light of G-d?

Thus, Kabbalah speaks of two primary lights: Chesed and Gevurah, whose natures are complete opposites. Chesed (Kindness) is compared to water which flows without boundary, though it is considered to be quiet and peaceful. Gevurah (Strength), on the other hand, is compared to fire and the source of *tzimtzum*, the constriction of G-d's light, like the glass that contains and gives shape to water. It is always considered to be in motion and noisy.

Thus, it is the role of Gevurah to contain Chesed, and for Chesed to temper Gevurah. When this is achieved, the harmony is called *Tifferes*, which means beautiful, because that is the ultimate beauty within Creation. Thus Ya'akov Avinu, who represented the trait of *Tifferes*, was the third of the Forefathers, the first two being Avraham Avinu, associated with the trait of Chesed, and Yitzchak Avinu, associated with the trait of Gevurah.

Though one might think that Gevurah is just the state of Creation when the light of Chesed is absent, it is not true. Like Chesed, Gevurah is also a light, a dark light that when present has the ability to block the light of Chesed or to mitigate it (and vice versa). The Zohar HaKadosh alludes to this unique reality when it says that the Torah was written with "black fire upon white fire" (Zohar 3:132a), the white fire being the light of Chesed and the black fire being the light of Gevurah.

Likewise, Chesed is the source of Divine mercy in the world, and Gevurah is the source of Divine judgment. Thus, the following dialogue is really about the lights of Chesed and of Gevurah:

Rebi Yishmael ben Elisha says: I once entered into the innermost part [of the Sanctuary] to offer incense, and I saw . . . the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me: 'Yishmael my son, bless Me!' I replied, 'Will that Your mercy may suppress Your anger and prevail over Your other attributes, so that You may deal with Your children according to the attribute of mercy and may You, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice!' And He nodded to me with His head. (Brochos 7a)

Thus, *hester panim*, the hiding of G-d's face, is really the light of Gevurah overtaking the light of Chesed. The light of Chesed cannot be eliminated any more than the Light of Ain Sof can be, for that is its source, and anywhere the Light of Ain Sof is removed, that part of Creation ceases to be.

Rather, the light of Chesed becomes spiritually blocked from our mind's eye just as the light of the sun is blocked from our physical view by a cloud. The light of the sun remains unaffected; only our ability to view it is reduced.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

They will be devoured, and plagued by many evils that will distress them, and will say, 'Do we not suffer because G-d has left us?' " (Devarim 31:17)

If these two different kinds of lights exist, then this must be reflected in the Sefiros as well, and indeed it is: the Ten Sefiros are divided into two groups, those belonging to the side of Chesed, and those belonging to the side of Gevurah. For example, lining up under the banner of Chesed is Keser, Chochmah, Chesed, and Netzach; on the side of Gevurah are the sefiros of Binah, Gevurah, Hod, and Malchus. The other two sefiros, Tifferes and Yesod, being balanced between Chesed and Gevurah possess the potential to be pulled in either direction, depending upon circumstance and the needs of Creation.

Technically speaking, the side of Chesed is called the "Right Side," and the side of Gevurah is called the "Left Side." Thus, the Talmud teaches:

... The left should push away, but the right should bring close. (Sotah 47a)

Being associated with Gevurah, the Left Side creates the impression of distance and the breakdown of relationship. Thus, when a parent punishes a child for the good of the child, the mood is one of coldness and dislike. When G-d allows the Jewish people to suffer, the sense is one of abandonment . . .

'Do we not suffer because G-d has left us?' " (Devarim 31:17)

... even though the suffering is for the ULTIMATE good of the Jewish people.

Thus, in order for free-will to exist, the main purpose of Creation, Gevurah has to exist. If the light of Chesed is allowed to (permanently) dominate, it is impossible to deny the reality of G-d on any level, and therefore sin becomes an impossible choice (as was the case when the Torah had been given, and as will be the case when Moshiach arrives and finally brings world peace). In a very real sense, it is Gevurah that makes possible the existence of the yetzer hara (man's inclination to do evil).

On the other hand, if Gevurah is allowed to dominate for too long, then death and destruction, what the Torah refers to as Tohu (Null) results. First, fear of sin disappears, and this is followed by a corrosion of morality, as we have witnessed countless times throughout history. This, in time, leads to extreme selfishness and wars amongst the nations, terrible destruction, and eventually a desire to return back to the side of Chesed.

Thus, world history has been a story of pendulum swings between Chesed on the right and Gevurah on the left (although it seems as if the pendulum often became stuck on the side of Gevurah,

remaining there for a period of time). Each light in its extreme form can produce evil, either by denying mercy or by showing it at the wrong time and in the wrong measure, and history is replete with examples of both.

Hence, it is the balance between the two extremes that needs to be achieved, and this is why Torah was given to man. For, the Talmud states that G-d said:

"I created the yetzer hara and I created the Torah as its spice." (Kiddushin 30b)

That is, I created the light of Gevurah, and I created the Torah to act as the vehicle to channel its energy in a positive and fulfilling manner.

For example, the light of Gevurah can push a person to sin by keeping the light of Chesed away from him, or it can hold him back from doing a good deed, like a weight attached to his leg. As a result of the intellectual clarity possible through Torah, and the mitzvah as a positive objective to be achieved, the light of Gevurah can be used to energize the body to withstand temptation, or to perform a positive deed. When the latter occurs, it is called Mituk HaGevuros (Sweetening of the Gevuros) and is, according to Kabbalah, the source of one's reward in the World-to-Come.

This is the sod of the Akeidah, which had Avraham (Chesed) binding and preparing to slaughter Yitzchak (Gevurah). Therefore, it was this tenth and last test of Avraham Avinu that represented our commitment to the process of Mituk HaGevuros, and which also put into us our ability to do so.

It is not difficult to figure out which light is most dominant during a particular period of history, since the Torah has taught us what is objectively right and wrong. When knowledge of G-d is at a premium, when wars plague mankind, when social norms break down, and when the Jewish people cease to be a light unto nations, the light of Gevurah is ruling history. When a so-called decent people can accept what the Torah itself rejects as a part of life, Gevurah has blocked the light of Chesed.

Likewise, when the light of Torah is allowed to shine and morality is the accepted norm, the light of Chesed is dominant. Thus, the End-of-Days, after the War of Gog and Magog has occurred, is described in the following terms:

After, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will take His revenge against them, as spoken about in Yechezkel, and the Jewish people will dwell in their land in security and much good, Da'as (G-dly understanding) will greatly increase, as will wisdom and purity. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 491)

MELAVE MALKAH:

Later, when Yitzchak was old and his eyesight was poor, he called Eisav his eldest son and said, "My son." He answered, "I am here." He said, "I have grown old and I don't know when I will die. Please take your weapons, take your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt some wild game for me. Make me some tasty food the way I like it. Then bring it to me and I will eat it so my soul can

bless you before I die." (Bereishis 27:1-4)

It is important to point out that as much as Gevurah is instrumental in creating the reality that can result in what the Torah calls "evil," especially at its source from above, it is pure good like the light of Chesed. In many respects, Yitzchak Avinu was the most righteous of all the Forefathers, considered to be living without a yetzer hara, and living with the status of a Burnt Offering. Indeed, according to the Talmud it is Yitzchak Avinu who successfully pleads our case before G-d, Who will consider to destroy us because of our many sins (Shabbos 89b).

On the other hand, Eisav, his own son and ancestor of Amalek, the very symbol of evil and the nemesis of the Jewish people, was also pure Gevurah. However, Eisav was what the pure light of Gevurah looks like when it is projected downward, to the bottom of Creation without mituk (rectification). However, Yitzchak knowing the source of Eisav, also saw his potential to be a tremendous tzaddik, with the proper influence and the proper mituk.

This is why he was prepared to give Eisav the blessings of the firstborn, but only after he had performed the mitzvah of honoring his father by preparing a meal for him. Yitzchak had plenty of places from which to order a meal, most of them with a better hashgochah kashrus than that of his son Eisav. And, being blind wouldn't help Yitzchak see what his son was really serving him.

However, just as his own father had performed a mituk, a sweetening of his own Gevurah through the Akeidah, Yitzchak had tried to sweeten the Gevurah of his son Eisav, and he would have succeeded had Heaven not gotten in the way, making it impossible to catch a kosher animal. Apparently history had not been ready for a righteous Edom at the time, otherwise Eisav would have succeeded, prepared the proper meal for his father, been affected positively and ready to receive the blessing to lead the future Jewish people.

On the other hand, sometimes history is ready for mituk but Creation lacks sufficient individuals to bring it about: there just aren't enough Jews doing what they should do in order to sweeten the Gevuros. This is a problem, because then Heaven takes over, and Hester Panim is its most effective tool for bringing about mituk without lessening free-will. And, if you want to understand what THAT amounts to, just take a good look at the events of history in the last year, and then prepare yourself for what will come next.

Have a great Shabbos (anyhow),
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Text

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