

# WHY WE KEEP SINNING

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

*Since the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth. (Bereishis 8:21)*

Ouch. Everyone's? Judging from the world around and over history, it would seem, yes. It's pretty corrupt out there, and has been for a long time now. Righteous people are hard to come by, and are usually that way only after working hard at it. Yes, there's a lot of good out there, but most of society caters to the yetzer hara, man's evil inclination.

If it wasn't so, Yom Kippur would not be a national event. It would only be a personal opportunity for the few deviants to get their acts back together and back on track. But it is a national event, because, as the verse states, our inclinations, from youth, are towards evil.

It wasn't always that way. Once upon a time, our hearts were pure, and only interested in serving God. For at least a couple of hours on Day Six of Creation, before man became entangled with the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, man and his world was distinct from the force of evil.

In the beginning, Kabbalah explains, the world of good and the world of evil were separate from each other. Indeed, the world of good, in which man was created, existed, spiritually-speaking, above the world of evil. Evil, at that time, occupied the lowest 14 levels of existence, and the world of man began above that.

Kabbalah explains that even the Original Snake that convinced Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil lacked access to her and the Garden itself in the beginning. It was only after Adam HaRishon contemplated the Tree and how best to overcome its potential for evil that the worlds were transformed, the Snake entered the Garden (with the Sitra Achra inside of it), and was able to approach Chava and change history.

Then came the first sin, the greatest game changer of them all, and the basis of the verse quoted above. Not only was the sin itself not as simple as it is portrayed in the Torah, but its impact was also very complex and complicated. But the long and short of it is that the world of good that once only began where the world of evil ended, now overlapped it.

It is analogous to a whole block of well-mannered people mistakenly moving into a neighborhood of hooligans. Though it is possible that some of the former will influence some of the latter in a small way, it is more likely that the latter will influence the former in a major way, if only just to survive. It

has tended to be much easier for evil to overcome good in history than the other way around.

This is why a person's inclination is evil from his youth. Our 'neighborhood' is smack in the middle of the worst one of all, the World of the Klipos, the force of spiritual impurity in Creation. Man starts off behind the proverbial eight ball from birth, with a huge propensity to sin just because of the world in which he lives.

That's on a general level. On a more personal level, there is the following from a more Kabbalistic perspective:

Know that all souls were included in Adam HaRishon before the sin, as has been explained many times. When he sinned, his limbs fell off him, which were those souls that were a part of him, and they fell into the Depths of the Klipos. None remained in Adam HaRishon except the level of "one hundred amos" only, as explained in its place. Not all the souls were equal, since the blemishes were not all the same. The limbs that were most affected by the sin of Adam HaRishon fell deeper into the Klipos than the rest of the limbs further away from the blemish. Certainly, not all souls are the same, since one soul desires sin more than another soul. Thus, the impact of the sin on a limb determined how deep it fell into the Klipos. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 23)

It is a well-known idea that all souls that would ever exist until Yemos HaMoshiach were incorporated into Adam HaRishon's soul. Until he sinned, the first man represented the totality of mankind.

However, as Kabbalah explains, as a result of the sin of eating from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra—the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—all souls, except for the one he needed for his own life, 'fell off' him and into the Klipos, the reality of spiritual impurity within Creation. It is the Klipos that stand between a person and God, and which create the opportunity for sin based upon a person's own spiritual vulnerability.

The depth to which a soul fell into the Klipos, apparently, was determined by its proximity to the limbs used by Adam to commit his sin. The closer it was to the sin, and the more involved it was in the transgression, the more impacted the soul was, and the deeper it fell into the Klipos, increasing its propensity to sin each time it reincarnates in this world.

Thus, a lot of times the difference between a repeat sinner and a person who walks the spiritual straight-and-narrow is not necessarily will-power, for which a person is rewarded by Heaven. The difference can be more fundamental than this; it may be that the one drawn to sin has a soul that was more impacted by Adam HaRishon's violation, and therefore its desire for sin is greater than the person whose soul was further away from Adam's transgression, and therefore, less spiritually impacted by it.

It might hardly seem fair except for the fact that God knows all of this, and takes it all into account when judging a person and the mistakes he commits:

Rav Aivo said: "Chanoch was a hypocrite; sometimes he was righteous and sometimes he was evil. The Holy One, Blessed is He, said, 'When he is righteous, I will take him.' " (Bereishis Rabbah 25:1). Though his soul was from the side of Gevuros, it was a very great soul. For, a soul from the side of Gevuros is prone to sin, and such people continuously have major battles with their yetzer hara. They are in very great danger because the Chitzonim are zealous about them and constantly overpower them . . . For a person who is from the side of Gevuros, "the evil walk on every side" (Tehillim 12:9) . . . However, with respect to such people it says, "Praiseworthy is the man to whom God does not ascribe iniquity" (Tehillim 32:2). For, God does not play tricks on His creations, and after he is successful against his yetzer, as well as when it overcomes him, his transgressions become merits. As the Midrash Shachar Tov says: "Praiseworthy is the man to whom God does not ascribe iniquity"—when he does a corresponding mitzvah against it . . . Therefore, he was taken while he was righteous, and he merited to stand and serve in the highest heights of the angels. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 1, Drush 7, Os 2)

There are two basic forces in Creation: Chesed and Gevurah, Kindness and Strength. Chesed is compared to water, which easily spreads and takes the shape of the container into which it is poured. Likewise, a person whose soul is Chesed-based tends to be more concerned about others than himself. His spiritual battles in life may be few and far-between.

Gevurah, on the other hand, is compared to fire. It is hot and dangerous, and tends to consume that with which it has come into contact. Similarly, a Gevurah-based soul can be sharp, critical, demanding, and passionate, sometime overly so, and sometimes for the wrong things. His tests in life are constant and sometimes overwhelming.

This is why a Gevurah-based person is heroic, from Heaven's point of view, when he rises to the occasion and conquers his negative passions, and uses them in a positive way. God knows his struggles, the reasons for his successes and failures, and takes his soul's drive into account.

The upshot of all of this is that the nature of a person's soul has a lot to say about his spiritual successes and failures in life. The other point is that God takes all of this into account when judging a person in terms of life in this world, and life in the next one. All we can do is do the best we can to do what the Torah asks of us, and leave the accounting up to Heaven.

Text

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