

# A LIGHT TOPIC

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male . . . (Vayikra 12:2)

It is called the “miracle of birth.” Everything about it is miraculous, especially how something so small and dependent can grow into something so big and independent. The most amazing part itself is how during the physical development of the fetus it actually becomes alive. By the 40th day of gestation the gender of the child has already been decided by Heaven (*Brochos* 60a).

What is also amazing is that this process is not only the basis of human life, but of all of Creation. Many people already know about the birth process, and many have already heard of *nitzotzei kedushah*, or holy sparks. But how many know that the two go together to make and maintain Creation from moment to moment?

First an introduction. The story begins a long time before God even made Creation as we know it. For the sake of this discussion it is only important to know that all of the holy sparks, with which Creation is made and maintained, begin their journey from something called the “*Klipos*.”

The concept of the *Klipos*, Hebrew for “peels,” is a Kabbalistic one. In essence, the *Klipos* are the source of evil within Creation. They are completely spiritual, but they have great impact on the physical world, evident by all the evil that has occurred ever since man first ate from the *Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra*—the Tree of Knowledge of God and Evil.

Like a fruit peel they intercede between two realities. In this case it is not to protect the inside from the outside, but to keep a person from sensing the reality of God and pursuing a meaningful life. Find a place in the world in which immorality rules and you will find a “branch” of the *Klipos*, maybe even a “headquarters.” Sdom in the Torah was such a place.

Think of the *Klipos* like a thick, slimy, and filthy spiritual swamp, the kind that once something falls into, it doesn't leave so quickly. This is especially true of holy sparks because, as the Arizal explains, the *Klipos* are nourished from them just like holy things. They'll do anything to hold on to the sparks over which they have control.

Another reason why the *Klipos* hang on so tightly to holy sparks is because they know that those sparks can be souls of people. They “understand” that the greater the spark the greater the soul. Therefore, they know, the greater the chance that the person, after leaving the *Klipos*, will rectify the world and end their existence.

Consequently, God has caused sparks to leave the *Klipos* in convoluted ways, to fool the *Klipos* into surrendering certain important souls. For example, though Terach was an idol worshipper, even a maker of idols for others, Avraham Avinu was born to him. Likewise, Dovid HaMelech was born in a very controversial manner, as have other great people throughout history.

One of the main ways that a holy spark leaves the *Klipos* is through the prayers of righteous people. The Talmud says that God causes difficulty to righteous people so that they will pray for Divine assistance. For example, Yitzchak and Rivkah did not have children for years until they prayed for them. Apparently God "enjoys" the prayers of the righteous so much that He creates scenarios to inspire them to pray.

That is the simpler explanation. The deeper one is that it is their prayers that draw holy sparks out of the *Klipos*. The *mitzvos* and prayers of the average person help as well, but not as much as the prayers of the righteous.

Once a holy spark is drawn out of the *Klipos*, it must be cleansed of its spiritual filth. To accomplish this it enters the lowest of the 10 *sefiros*, the *Malchus*, where it stays for a period of time determined by the level of the spark. Some may only stay three "days," whereas others may spend seven months in the *Malchus*. Others can stay nine months while in some instances a spark can even remain in the *Malchus* for 12 months.

If these numbers sound familiar it is because they correspond to periods of pregnancy as well. Even 12 months is a possible time for pregnancy, according to the Talmud. Rare, but possible. It turns out that just as a human fetus must gestate so must a holy spark "gestate" if it is going to mature into what it is destined to become.

And what is a holy spark destined to become? A world unto itself.

Like a seed, a holy spark is a single unit capable of very little on its own. As it ascends the system of *sefiros* it picks up additional light, spiritual nutrition so-to-speak. This causes it to grow in size and increase in complexity until it becomes a microcosmic version of the world which gave it life and nurtured it.

It actually ascends close to the top of the entire system of 10 *sefiros* and once it reaches its highest point it begins to descend, picking up light on the way down just as it did on the way up. This helps to complete its growth process. By the time it is ready for "birth" into this world it is a relatively independent unit just like a baby, and just as miraculous.

For example, let's say that someone is in need of a miraculous recovery. The doctors have done what they can to help the person recover but even they agree that only a miracle will save the patient. Though every recovery, no matter how small, is miraculous, some are more miraculous than others. Sometimes small miracles do not occur while major ones do. Why is that the case?

Or, someone badly needs money. All *parnassah* is a miracle, even called "*tzedakah*" by the Talmud

(*Brochos 17b*). Sometimes the miracle is more visible than at other times, especially when a person comes up with a large amount of money in ways he cannot explain. This is even though others cannot raise a small amount of money in a natural way. Why the difference?

From a Kabbalistic perspective, all good in this world is called "blessing," or "*shefa*" in Hebrew, and the result of an influx of Divine light into Creation. Anything that goes wrong in life, even though everything ultimately is for the good (*Brochos 61a*), is caused by a blockage of the flow of Divine light. The greater the bad the greater the blockage.

How is this remedied? Sometimes God does it Himself for the sake of history, or because of *zechus Avos*, some merit the person's ancestors may have built up that benefit their descendants. Other times it may not be remedied no matter, also for history's sake, and no matter what people do the result occurs nevertheless.

Then there are the times that man cannot only make a difference, but he does. He does some *mitzvah* and a miracle occurs. He prays for a good result and gets it. The situation looked bleak and inspired a person or people to take action and this seemed to save the patient, bring in the necessary money, or avert an evil decree. What was the mechanism?

It all has to do with *nitzotzei kedushah*, or holy sparks trapped in the *Klipos*. The situation of lack, after causing people to pray extra hard or to do additional *mitzvos* to change the situation, draws a spark or sparks out of the *Klipos*. This in turn allows the spark or sparks to ascend to the *Malchus*, where they remain the amount of time fitting for them.

As the spark ascends through the system of *sefiros*, perhaps assisted by additional prayers or good deeds, it gains additional light until it can ascend no further. It then "turns around" and begins its descent, through the same *sefiros* it passed on the way up. This is how it becomes complete based upon its potential which in turn is affected by the merit of the people who caused it to enter the system and ascend in the first place.

When the spark, now a "world" unto itself, enters the world, it does so in the form of a blessing. To us it will appear as the answer to our prayers, such as a recovery, financial assistance, or success at some difficult performance. This just conceals the Divine light on the "inside" that is the basis of all blessing in this world, just as new born baby conceals the miracle that is the basis of its existence.

The second half of this story is the *metzora*. *Tzara'as* is usually translated as leprosy but clearly it is a spiritual ailment, mainly for speaking *loshon hara* about others. Moshe Rabbeinu was stricken with it on his hand at Mt. Sinai for speaking badly about the Jewish people, and Miriam, his sister, was inflicted with *tzara'as* for speaking *loshon hara* about Moshe.

Even though *tzara'as* is something "extra," that is something that a person did not naturally have, it was really the result of Divine light being removed. Divine light can only cause good, and its removal results in destruction of any kind on any level, as when a limb or part of the body is denied the flow

of blood.

Speaking *loshon hara*, or doing any sin, blocks Divine light from coming into the world. Specific sins by specific people cause the Divine light to specifically not flow to them in a specific way. In this case, just as bacteria flourishes from a lack of sanitation, *tzara'as* grows on a person, *measure-for-measure*, from the lack of Divine light he has caused in the world.

The remedy for illness, be it spiritual or physical, is to draw more Divine light into the world. The prescription for doing this is outlined in the Torah as part of the "purification" process of the *metzora*, the person inflicted with *tzara'as*. Just as a pharmacist knows which elements affect which illnesses, or which can be combined to amplify the effect, the Torah tells us specifically what to do or combine to cure ourselves of what ails us.

Hence the Talmud refers to the Torah as an elixir of life or an elixir of death. Just as the right medication heals and the wrong one can kill, Torah performed in the right way heals and, in the wrong way, can damage or even cause the death of a person. The right *mitzvah* at the right time in the right way has, according to the Talmud, tremendous "healing" impact, spiritually and physically. The "right" *mitzvah* at the "wrong" time, especially in the "wrong way," can be spiritually, and ultimately, physically damaging.

Learning *halachah* is not only about doing the right thing, of proving one's loyalty to God and His Torah. Just as people read about the "side effects" of the medication they have been prescribed to make sure that they apply it correctly, likewise a person must know how to correctly "apply" the Torah and its *mitzvos* to his benefit and the benefit of the world in general.

The Talmud says that God has said:

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

Rebi Alexandri in the Talmud referred to the *yetzer hara* as "leaven in the dough" (*Brochos* 17a). It is the source of all spiritual illness because it interferes with our service of God. The Torah, the Talmud says, was given to man to "spice" the *yetzer hara*, but in this context it can mean as a prescription for it. Hence the Talmud concludes:

If one has the opportunity to study the Torah and does not study it, The Holy One, Blessed is He, visits him with "ugly" and painful sufferings which stir him up. (*Brochos* 5a)

Whether it is a case of actual physical illness, spiritual malady, or especially anti-Semitism, it is meant to wake us up to the Divine light that we are missing. This is in order for us to turn to Torah to help us fill the gap. This is not just religious theory. This is historical fact.

Text

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