

Shvilei Pinches

Chag Hashavues – Matan-Torah

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Receiving the Torah based on the Holy Ba'al Shem Tov zy" a: Convert the Evil Inclination - Yeitzer Ho'rah, into a Good Inclination

Concerning the unique revelation of the Torah to Yisroel, the Gemorah (Shabbos 88:) describes a heated debate that transpired between Moshe Rabeinu and the ministering angels:

“אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, בשעה שעלה משה למרום, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה, רבונו של עולם מה לילוד אשה בינינו, אמר להן לקבל תורה בא. אמרו לפניו חמודה גנוזה שגנוזה לך תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות קודם שנברא העולם אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם, מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו, ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ אשר תנה הודך על השמים. אמר לו הקב"ה למשה החזיר להן תשובה, אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם מתיירא אני שמא ישרפוני בהבל שבפיהם, אמר לו אחוז בכסא כבודי וחזור להן תשובה...”

אמר לפניו, רבונו של עולם תורה שאתה נותן לי מה כתיב בה, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, אמר להן למצרים ירדתם, לפרעה השתעבדתם, תורה למה תהא לכם... שוב מה כתיב בה לא תרצח לא תנאף לא תגנוב, קנאה יש ביניכם, יצר הרע יש ביניכם, מיד הודו לו להקב"ה שנאמר ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ, ואילו תנה הודך על השמים לא כתיב.”

When Moshe ascended to the heights, the angels protested to the Almighty about the presence of a human being among them. They opposed the giving of the treasured Torah—which had been stored for nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world—to a mere mortal; they beseeched Hashem to keep it in the heavens and give it to them. The Holy One asked Moshe to respond to their protests. When Moshe expressed his fears that the angels would burn him with their fiery breath, the Almighty told him to grab hold of His throne of Glory and to proceed.

He said, Master of the Universe, is not the Torah meant for those who descended to Egypt and were enslaved by Pharaoh, and for those who must be warned against murder and adultery and theft? Did they descend to Egypt? Are they subject to jealousy? Do they possess an Evil Inclination? The angels immediately conceded.

We must understand: seeing as the thrust of the angels opposition to bestowing the Torah upon mere mortals, was due to human beings' susceptibility to the Evil Inclination and their propensity to sin, how, then, was Moshe able to refute these arguments specifically by arguing that the angels lack of an Evil Inclination made them unworthy to receive the Torah?

Which Person is Strong? He Who Subdues His Personal Inclination

Let us begin by introducing the commentary of the holy Ba'al Shem Tov zy" a, to explain the Mishnah (Avos 4,1): “איזהו גבור הכובש את יצרו”—which person is strong, he who subdues his personal inclination. He deduces from the language of the Mishnah, “איזהו גבור”, that we are confronted by at least two types of strong people,

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and we are in doubt as to which type is truly the strongest. If the Mishnah was simply stating that he who subdues his inclination is a strong person, it could have expressed this as **"מני הוא גבור"**.

So, he teaches us that there are two ways to battle the evil inclination, the yeitzer ho'rah: (1) by pushing it away and resisting its attempts at persuasion and enticement to commit sins, and (2) rather than merely pushing the yeitzer away, subdue and conquer the yeitzer, turning it into an ally to help one serve Hashem for the good. Clearly, the second path is preferable and a greater accomplishment.

For example, if the yeitzer entices one to behave wildly and foolishly, one should utilize this energy to learn Torah and daven to Hashem with increased fervor and joy. Similarly, if the yeitzer incites jealousy in a person, he should direct this jealousy and envy toward those occupied in the service of Hashem; for we have learned (Bava Basra 21.): **"קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה"**—jealousy between scholars increases wisdom.

This, then, is the meaning of the Mishnah: **"איזהו גבור"**—of these two who have withstood and overcome their evil inclinations—i.e. he who has merely resisted the yeitzer ho'rah versus he who has converted it into an ally in the service of Hashem—who is truly mightier? To this our blessed sages reply: **"הכובש את יצרו"**—he who conquers his yeitzer and utilizes it to better serve Hashem is the truly mighty one.

One who merely resists the yeitzer without conquering it, runs the risk of falling prey to the yeitzer at a later date. The deflected yeitzer may patiently lie in wait for that person to exhibit a moment of weakness and then, precisely at that vulnerable moment, return to tempt him once again to sin. One who is strong enough to conquer the yeitzer and not merely resist it, need not worry about falling prey to it at a later date. For, he has converted the yeitzer into an ally, assisting him in the service of Hashem. This is the gist of the words of the Ba'al Shem Tov.

The Torah Is a Spice Which Converts the Yeitzer Ho'rah to Good

It seems obvious that the Ba'al Shem Tov is also addressing the Mishnah (Berachos 54.) which elucidates the verse (Devarim 6,5) as follows: **"ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך, בשני יצריך ביצר טוב וביצר הרע"**—you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all of your heart, in other words, with both of your inclinations, your good inclination and your bad inclination. It turns out that one who is only able to deflect the yeitzer, but is unable to conquer it and turn it into an ally in the service of Hashem—albeit he is rewarded for that accomplishment—has failed to fulfill the positive commandment of: **"ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך, בשני יצריך ביצר טוב וביצר הרע"**. He has yet to love and serve Hashem with all of his heart—with both of his inclinations. At this point, it is worth focusing on how one can actually turn the evil inclination into a good inclination.

We find a solution to this problem in the writings of the Orach L'Chaim (Bereishis), who presents an important and basic principle in the name of the holy maggid, Rabbi R' Dov Ber of Mezritsch, zy"va, who carried on the legacy of the Ba'al Shem Tov. He addresses the teaching in the Gemorah (Kiddushin 30:): **"כך הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל, בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין"**—so said the Holy One to Yisroel, son I created the Evil Inclination, and I created the Torah as a spice for it. The choice of the word **"תבלין"**, spice, here is perplexing. Spices are meant to enhance the flavor of a food, not to ruin it; yet, here, the purpose of engaging in Torah study is meant as a poison for the Yeitzer Ho'rah, not as a spice.

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He explains, in his holy and inimitable way, that, indeed, the goal is to convert the yeitzer ho'rah into an ally for good, by serving Hashem even in mundane matters. This is the meaning of the verse (Devarim 6,5): **“ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך”**. So long as the Evil Inclination has not been turned into a positive asset and ally for good, it must be resisted and kept away. Therefore, the Holy One says to Yisroel: **“בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין”**—by engaging in Torah study, a Jew is able to spice up the yeitzer ho'rah and change it into a force for good.

With this insight, we can resolve a difficulty presented by the Arvei Nachal (Ki Tisa, 1). He is bothered by an apparent contradiction between two statements in the Gemorah. First, the Gemorah states (Kiddushin 30:): **“בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין”**—implying that the Torah empowers man to defeat the yeitzer ho'rah. Later on, however, the Gemorah states: **“יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו... ואלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אין יכול לו”**—suggesting that man is incapable of overcoming the yeitzer ho'rah if left to his own devices—without the Holy One's assistance.

As long as a Jew is not properly engaged in Torah study, he lacks the spice necessary to alter the Evil Inclination and to turn it into an ally for good; he is forced, therefore, to battle for his spiritual survival. Referring to this situation, the Gemorah says: **“יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו... ואלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אין יכול לו”**. The holy Admor Maran Maharid of Belz, zy"ta, explains that the Evil Inclination is an angel who, by its nature, is stronger than creatures of flesh and blood.

In the event, however, that a Jew successfully engages in proper Torah study, and uses the Torah as a spice to convert the yeitzer ho'rah into an ally for good, he will no longer need to battle the yeitzer ho'rah. Concerning this situation, it says: **“בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תבלין”**.

“The Orders of Hashem are Upright Gladdening the Heart”

Let us expand this idea based on a teaching in the Gemorah (Berachos 32.):

“אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, אלמלא שלש מקראות הללו, [שמעידין שיש ביד הקב"ה לתקן יצרנו ולהסיר יצר הרע ממנו. רש"י], נתמוטטו רגליהם של שונאי ישראל [במשפט, אבל עכשיו יש לנו פתחון פה שהוא גרם לנו שברא יצר הרע. רש"י], חד דכתיב, ואשר הרעותי, וחד דכתיב, הנה כחומר ביד היוצר כן אתם בידי בית ישראל, וחד דכתיב, והסירותי לב אבן מבשרכם ונתתי לכם לב בשר”.

It seems from this Gemorah that the Holy One Blessed be He has regrets, daily, and is troubled by the fact that He created the Evil Inclination that causes us to sin. This allows us a deeper insight and understanding of the magnitude of the defect created when one sins. In addition to the sin itself, which represents an act of treason against the King of the Universe, the sinner has also caused the Holy One great remorse over the creation of the Evil Inclination. There is no greater desecration of Hashem's name than this. For, He is the source of all good, and all that emanates from Him is good. Man's transgressions, however, suggest that the Almighty erred in creating the Evil Inclination.

On the other hand, if a Jew engages in Torah study, the spice for the Evil Inclination, he converts it into a Good Inclination. Thus, he gives the Holy One tremendous cause for rejoice. For, now he has shown that the creation of

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the Evil Inclination was a good thing, after all. This is the meaning of the verse (Tehillim 19,9): **“פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב”**—the orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart. This verse can be interpreted as an allusion to the Holy One Blessed be He. When man sins, the following is fulfilled (Bereishis 6,6): **“ויתעצב אל לבו”**—His heart, as it were, is saddened; however, when man observes the Torah, **“משמחי לב”**—His heart is gladdened.

This is also the meaning of the saying (Berachos 5.): **“אין טוב אלא תורה”**—there is no “good” other than Torah. By means of the Torah, the Evil Inclination has been turned into an ally, a Good Inclination. As a result, only good remains in one’s heart—even the left cavity of the heart, the usual residence of the yeitzer ho’rah, has become a source of good.

Moshe Rabeinu’s Reply to the Angels:

“Do Any of You Possess an Evil Inclination?”

We may now begin to understand how Moshe Rabeinu defeated the angels who wished to keep the Torah in the heavens. They argued that human beings are likely to sin, whereas they are not. Moshe convinced them that they were not worthy by asking incredulously: **“Do any of you possess an Evil Inclination?”**

It is well-known that the Holy One is the ultimate good, and no evil derives from Him. Consequently, the creation of the Evil Inclination was only intended for the good of mankind—the intention was for man to conquer it and turn it into a good angel assisting him in the service of Hashem. In reality, however, not every Jew is capable of overcoming the yeitzer ho’rah and transforming it into a good ally; as a result, the Holy One, as it were, regrets creating it and causing Yisroel distress.

Based on this understanding, it turns out that one who succeeds in transforming the Evil Inclination into a good ally deserves a huge reward. For, he has sanctified the Name of Heaven by proving that the creation of the Evil Inclination was truly for the good of mankind. This is the explanation of the elucidation: **“והנה טוב מאד”**—and, behold, it was very good—is a reference to the Evil Inclination. Furthermore, he has given Hashem cause to rejoice over the creation of the Evil Inclination rather than cause for remorse. If he fails, however, to convert it into a good ally, and proceed to fall into its trap, he is punished doubly. He is punished for the transgression itself; he is also punished for the distress and remorse he has caused the Almighty for creating the Evil Inclination.

This was Moshe’s rebuttal to the angels: **“יצר הרע יש בניכם”**—is there an Evil Inclination amongst you? Seeing as the Torah serves as a spice to transform the Evil Inclination into a Good Inclination, it is appropriate to give it to mortal, human beings who possess an Evil Inclination. They can utilize it to sanctify the Name of Heaven and reveal the great kindness the Holy One performed on behalf of mankind by creating the Evil Inclination. You the angels, however, who lack an Evil Inclination, are incapable of utilizing the Torah for this purpose and are, thus, incapable of sanctifying G-d’s name in this manner. Therefore, Yisroel certainly deserve the Torah more than the angels. To this the angels conceded and proclaimed: **“ה' אדונינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ”**—Hashem, our Master, how mighty is Your Name throughout the land—in other words, they admitted that only down on the land can the Torah be utilized to sanctify the name of Heaven.