

**1. "Voice from Heaven", versus "Lest another should pre-empt him."**

Hello! What is the meaning of "lest he be pre-empted by another" in matches if the match is predetermined, and a voice comes from Heaven and decrees that so-and-so is destined for so-and-so? Can a person actualize all his aspirations and dreams in the belief that his predetermined match will wait for him? (For example; a person wishes to travel around the world first.)

In this matter there is a long letter from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Igrot Kodesh, Vol. 2, page 193. The Rebbe explains at length the apparent contradiction between the 'Voice from Heaven' and 'Lest he be pre-empted by another', and brings possible ways to reconcile the contradiction.

- A. Another person could pre-empt, but the marriage will not be successful.
- B. The 'Voice from Heaven' decrees but prayer can nullify it.
- C. The matter of the 'Voice from Heaven' reflects itself in a person's natural inclination, but free choice remains to oppose that inclination.
- D. Souls can be swapped.

It is worthwhile studying the Rebbe's letter, despite its academic style, to examine all the details and explanations. In any case, the Rebbe concludes the letter with the following: What stands out from all these approaches is that there is the possibility of another person pre-empting, therefore it is worthwhile to make a conscious effort to find one's match.

Accordingly, a person should definitely not wait till he has actualized all his aspirations on the assumption that his predestined mate will wait for him, and certainly not go on a prolonged tour etc. as you mentioned, rather, he should do everything that depends on him according to the natural order of things, to find a suitable mate. This should be done with belief and trust in G-d that certainly He will find him his true mate speedily.

Good luck and good news!

**2. How is the concept "If you become impure I am not your G-d" applicable since it is also written "a Jew, even if he sinned, is still a Jew?"**

Q. Shalom, I would appreciate it if you would explain the commentary of Rashi on the sentence in Vayikra "You have kept my watch without doing these abominable customs which have been done before you and you shall not become impure by them, I am the Lord your G-d." Rashi: "And you shall not become impure by them, I am the Lord your G-d." If you do defile yourselves, I am not your G-d, and you are cut off from me. And what benefit do I have through you (then) when you are liable to destruction? Therefore it is stated – I am the Lord your G-d."

How could there be such a thing as "I am not your G-d"? And what is "destruction"?

Answer: Thank G-d the Rebbe speaks about this sentence and this explanation is in a long talk in Volume 22. Albeit the talk is in Yiddish, but has also been published in Hebrew in 'Kuntreisim' (pamphlets), but not yet in book form as far as I know.

As I assume that the talk is not available to you at the moment, I will explain in brief, based on the Rebbe's talk, and if you wish to delve further into it, you can study the talk.

First there is a long explanation according to the 'Pshat' – the simple meaning, at the end there is an explanation according to Chassidut, and I will focus on that:

"I am the Lord your G-d" – "I" represents the essential aspect of The Holy One Blessed be He that is above the worlds, and becomes drawn into the worlds through the performance of Torah and Mitzvos, because it is G-d's desire to have a 'dwelling place' in the lower worlds. The name of G-d 'Havaya' comes from the root 'hoveh' the present. 'Elokeichem' – your G-d, is the externally limited G-dly energy or power which is enfolded in the Creation.

Afterwards Rashi says "If you become defiled I am not your G-d" and that refers to three matters:

The first matter, "and you are cut off from me", 'from me' in Hebrew 'me'acharai', which represents the aspect of 'achoraim', (hinder part), Jews become disconnected from G-d's name through transgressing 'the power of the one who acts on the one who is acted upon', (that relates to the third matter.)

Then Rashi says: "And what benefit do I have through you?" – the service of the Jews to G-d brings pleasure above, the desire of G-d's Essence is that Torah and Mitzvos be performed, and if the Jews become defiled, they disturb this pleasure.

After that, "when you are liable to destruction" means as follows: not only is 'the power of the one who acts' negated when Torah and Mitzvos are not being performed, but also there is a negation of G-d's name – which brings things into existence, and when things are not being brought into existence, there is destruction.

Rashi then concludes: "Therefore it is stated, I am the Lord your G-d". The aim of all these warnings is that rather than a situation where the Jews remain in a negative state, G-d forbid, the positive situation should come about – "I am the Lord your G-d", and thus despite the initial negative warning, the conclusion is positive, that the Essence of G-dliness will be drawn into all worldly matters through the Jews' serving G-d by carrying out Torah and Mitzvos.

### **3. Is it correct to call words of Torah "hymns" of "verses of rapture"?**

Shalom,

I wanted to ask: the Sages bring up King David's saying "Your statutes are (were) as hymns to me" in Chapter 119, (Psalms) and say that he was rebuked - "you are calling them hymns?" Also, when he said "Your Torah is my delight", the Sages say that for the Holy One Blessed be He the Torah can be considered a delight, an amusement, but not for flesh and blood, and therefore it should not have been expressed in that manner. This raises two questions:

- A. How could King David express himself in a manner that G-d would disapprove of, being that he was on the spiritual level of receiving Divine inspiration?
- B. If indeed these abovementioned expressions were erroneous, why do we keep repeating them when we read Psalms?

Thank you.

Answer:

The main point in answering these questions is that we must be careful not to say that King David said things that it was incorrect correct to say, rather, there are various levels of depth in understanding Torah and commentary, and King David – on his spiritual level, would have been expected to express himself in the most optimal way. Since he did not do so, he was punished. Therefore it is not a problem to continue saying those words, because they are certainly relevant and true for us.

In greater detail:

Chassidus explains that the Torah has two virtues. First, all the worlds are dependent on a single detail or a single letter of the Torah. Second, Torah is the wisdom and desire of the Holy One Blessed be He and is uniquely connected to Him.

King David who praised the Torah and called it "hymns", was referring to the first virtue. Namely, that all the worlds, including spiritual worlds, are dependent on a single detail of the Torah. So G-d tells him regarding this praise; although it is true that all the worlds are dependent on a single detail of the Torah – the fact that the Torah has some sort of relationship to the worlds is only its external virtue, even if it is a relationship of negation. (If it wouldn't be for every detail of the Torah the worlds could not exist.) The essential virtue of the Torah is that it is utterly connected to the Creator, and cannot be measured or compared, not even by way of negating the worlds. This explanation appears at length in Tanya – the Kuntreis Acharon, section 6.

#### **4. How can one rectify negative impressions that remain from the past?**

Answer: Firstly we must remember what is written in Tanya, that a person who is at the level of 'beinoni' (one who doesn't sin but still possesses an evil inclination) which is the common category, can control his thought, speech, and deed, but not necessarily his feelings. Therefore whoever has not entered the category of 'righteous', (meaning one who has mastered his emotions as well as his thought, speech, and deed,) has what to improve in the realm of emotion, and therefore has not necessarily 'erased' his past. Of course we have the responsibility to rectify our emotions, especially in the context of incidents that occurred due to our misuse of free choice, not just as a result of our inherent natures – which in any case must also be worked on.

Erasing negative impressions means that they must be 'burned' and 'wiped out'. How do we do 'burn'? Through fire. What is 'holy fire'? Chassidut explains that the holy fire within a person, is when he arouses within himself a strong and forceful desire which says: "I want to be connected to HaShem! I am not willing to become disconnected, and be exposed or

connected to all those negative scenes and impressions which are a part of the most external aspect of the world, and belong the 'husks' (shells) of impurity. They are false imaginations, for they do not represent true existence, which is closeness and cleaving to G-d, and fulfilling His will in the world.

As long as a person tells himself these things, in one manner or another, he arouses within himself a holy fire, and this holy fire burns and wipes out the evil images from his heart.

Another point from Tanya (the basic text of Chassidic thought by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi) that is important to emphasize, and which is also expressed in many letters from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is that when a negative thought comes into a person's mind, it is not necessary at all to address the thought, dwell on it, or relate to it, because someone who wrestles with an unsavoury character becomes affected by that person's attributes, by virtue of his occupying himself with him. Even if the aim is to negate the thought, dwelling on it can make it more 'real' in one's mind. So, as soon as a negative thought enters one's mind, he must divert his attention from it as completely as possible, and divert his mind to a different topic, a topic which interests him and is close to his heart, and all the better if it's in an area of holiness.

The concept mentioned above of arousing an internal will, forceful internal fire of the soul that wants to connect with HaShem, is a task incumbent on us in general, but not a direct remedy against the negative thoughts that affect us.

Aside from that, of course, the more a person is occupied with matters of Torah and Chassidut, Rebbe, holiness, its affects one in a peripheral way until it eventually lifts a person from the negative state he was in.

The Sages (of the Talmud) have promised us – "He who wishes to become purified, becomes helped (from above)." And certainly the Holy One Blessed be He sees the sincere will and positive desire of the person's G-dly soul, and aids him.

Another little tip, it is important to be involved with good deeds, the more the merrier! Also to be always increasing in the performance of matters pertaining to holiness, this also causes detachment from negative matters. Sometimes even thoughts about how to fix the evil, come from the evil inclination that wishes us to be occupied with it, and 'hopefully' be sad on account of it. So it is preferable not to give in to its strategy, rather to serve G-d with happiness and joy, with a positive look to the future. Best wishes!

5. **How can the concept "Divine Providence" be explained?**
6. **What is the difference between 'Divine Providence' and 'General Providence'?**
7. **Is the concept of 'Divine Providence' a Chassidic concept or a general Jewish concept?**
8. **What is the correct outlook when we know that G-d supervises us in every detail?**
9. **How can we explain to people the matter of free choice if everything is Divinely ordained?**

Divine Providence – Questions and answers

Chassidic thought focuses very much on events which happen by Divine Providence, what does this constitute in simple terms?

Basic Jewish belief is that the world was created by the Creator 'something from nothing.' The first Rebbe of Lubavitch, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, explains in the Tanya (basic text of Chassidic thought), in the section 'Gateway to Unification and Belief', that the process of creation is not a one-time act, but an ongoing one. At every moment the Creator is recreating all the creations from the start – in a manner of 'something from nothing' (Yesh miAyin). As we say in our daily prayers: "Who in His goodness renews every day the original act of creation."

Since the Creator invests all His powers (as it were) in creating the creations in a manner of 'something from nothing' at the current moment, it is clear that He relates to them and supervises them, and that everything that happens to them is not incidental, but happens because the Creator in His goodness is currently creating it.

And if we say (G-d forbid) that things happen by coincidence and not by Divine Providence, it means that creations can exist in some way other than through the Creator, who creates them 'something from nothing'.

As the Rebbe writes in the "Yom Yom" (on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Sivan,): "The service of man according to the teachings of Chassidut, is to train himself to observe the Divine Providence, how G-d in His goodness renews the world and the creations every moment in Divine Providence, and this and only this (accounts for) the existence and vitality of created beings.

In other words, providence is *relationship*. The Creator relates to the created being by the very fact of giving him existence.

#### **10. What is the emphasis on (Specific) Divine Providence? How is it different from 'General Providence'?**

When we say that providence is 'General', it means that G-d is relating to the generality of the creation alone, and not to all of its details. For example, perhaps G-d is interested in having a certain species of bird in existence, but it is not important to Him what happens to a particular bird within the species. (Specific) Divine Providence means that there is interest and attention on G-d's part, in every detail of the creation.

Is this concept an accepted Jewish concept or only a Chassidic concept?

The idea that the world carries on under G-d's supervision is one of the basic tenets of the Jewish faith. However there have been differing opinions among the prominent scholars as to how much Divine Providence relates to each creation.

There were those who maintained that the Divine Providence is only on the human race and whatever is involved with it, but the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and how much more so the inanimate kingdom, are supervised by G-d only in a general manner, as explained above.

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chassidut, determined that the supervision of the Creator is on all the created beings, including the vegetable and inanimate kingdoms. The reason for this is that the Divine supervision stems from the Creator bringing the world into existence on a constant basis. Since all the created beings are constantly being recreated at every

moment, it means that the vegetable and inanimate kingdoms are also part of G-d's knowledge and supervision.

Is this approach really an innovation of the Baal Shem Tov?

This idea had been written before the period of the Baal Shem Tov. The Rebbe in one of his talks quotes the Sages in Chulin (63): "Rabbi Yochanan (says) 'He presides over the pelican' (a bird which preys on fish in the sea) he said: "Your statutes are as a great abyss", and Rashi comments there: "G-d appoints the pelican (or cormorant) to judge and revenge the fish in the sea and to kill those who are destined to die." So it is clear that there is law and judgment also on specific fish in the sea, to the point where G-d appoints a specific bird to kill the specific fish which is destined to die.

The novelty in the Baal Shem Tov's approach is in highlighting the concept and revealing the repercussions of it on our daily lives. The Baal Shem Tov emphasized very clearly and sharply that (specific) Divine Providence is on each and every detail of creation, not only on righteous people, and not only on the human race, but also on the vegetable and inanimate in His specific Divine Providence. Put simply; G-d relates to each and every detail and it is all important to Him. Moreover, since this is so, we see that all these details are important to the goal of creation.

As the Rebbe writes in "HaYom Yom" 28<sup>th</sup> of Cheshvan: "The concept of Divine Providence is, that not only are all the movements of the various creations supervised by Divine Providence, which is their very vitality and existence, but each specific movement of a creation has a general relationship to the general intent of the whole creation... by joining and uniting all the specific movements... the Supernal intention (aim) of the whole creation becomes completed."

We must think about this: If the movement of a blade of grass is supervised by G-d and has relevance to the goal of creation, how much more so can we say that the human race in general and the Chosen Nation specifically, are supervised by G-d!

Each leaf that is tossed by the wind, every such detail, affects the general aim or goal of G-d's creation. When G-d first created the world He had a certain goal, and this goal is achieved by means of each and every detail in the creation. How much more so, what happens to every individual Jew is a matter of prime importance to G-d.

Regarding the various opinions of respected Torah scholars that we mentioned above, it is important to clarify another point: The Rebbe explains that actually, there really is no conflict of opinion! Those like the Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon) who are of the opinion that G-d supervises the animal, vegetable, and inanimate kingdoms in a general manner but not on the level of specific detail, mean to say that the supervision is *hidden*. The interest that G-d has in them is not really seen, whereas with people, especially the righteous, G-d's supervision can be seen. On the other hand, when the Baal Shem Tov says that there is supervision on all the levels of creation, he agrees that it is not seen.

Although at face value it seems like a serious conflict, in truth, there really is no conflict. All agree that there is supervision on everything, but there is a difference in the level of revelation of this supervision. Supervision on people is revealed, but on the other levels of

creation, animal vegetable and inanimate, when they are not in direct involvement with humans, the supervision is hidden.

The aim of Chassidut is to reveal the inner dimensions - so it emphasizes the hidden supervision (Divine Providence) also, that we must (and can) accustom ourselves to seeing in a revealed manner.

#### **11. Is it not *trivial* for G-d to be involved with minor aspects of the creation?**

There is a well-known Chassidic commentary on the sentence "Raised above the nations is G-d", - the nations of the world may think that G-d is supernal and therefore not involved with the lowly matters of the world. We know that G-d does not have a problem occupying Himself with even the lowliest aspects of creation. Nothing is "beneath His dignity". Those things which seem 'big' to us, are not necessarily so for G-d, as it is written "he brings me down to see the heaven and the earth." To the Creator even elevated things like the heavens are as lowly as the earth.

On the other hand, the main goal of creation was this lowly and physical world. The Midrash says "G-d wished to have a dwelling place in the lower worlds". Thus, whatever happens here is of great importance to G-d!

If G-d invests energy in each detail to create it, then certainly there is an aim in its creation. G-d does not do anything without a reason. Our finite minds may have difficulty in fathoming a reason for certain things, but the very fact that something exists proves its importance to G-d.

What kind of feeling should all this leave me with? Is G-d keeping track of me? Watching for my downfall?

The expression 'watching for my downfall' would mean that G-d is standing over me with a stick, only waiting to catch me out. This could not be further from the truth. It is truly not the case. The Creator loves us and all He wants is for our own good. Certainly, everything that happens to us is with G-d's knowledge and under His supervision. "The eye sees and the ear hears", and this strengthens the necessity to do G-ds will and when we don't live up to it, to rectify our deeds and come closer to G-d.

The main feeling we should have when we internalize that everything is under G-d's supervision is that the Holy One Blessed be He is interested in me, and that everything that happens to me is supervised by Him, and therefore of necessity it is for the good. Since the Creator is the essence of good, and the nature of good is to do good, and everything comes from Him, so it is all good. Even though we don't always perceive how it can be good.

#### **12. If G-d is supervising everything, what difference does it make In any case to G-d what I *choose*? In any case G-d is directing everything?**

Every detail that happens to us comes from Him, but one of the basic tenets of faith is that a person has free choice as to how to behave in a given situation. That is up to us. For example; I was walking, I bumped into something and I fell. I didn't fall by coincidence, I fell by Divine Providence. How I react – will I curse the stone that tripped me up or will I

remember (as Rabbi Akiva used to say) "All that The Merciful One does is for the good" – this is my personal free choice.

I was walking in the street and I met a poor person. It wasn't co-incidence, G-d caused it to happen that I should see him. Now I have the choice whether or not to help him or to ignore him. The situation is brought about by Divine Providence, but as the Ramban writes in 'Laws of Fasting' (Chap. 1) that if there is a difficult time for the Jewish people, it should arouse us to turn to G-d. As he phrases it: "For if they will not cry out, not shout out, but will say that this thing happened to us as is the way of the world for such things to happen – this is treacherous., and causes them to remain in their evil ways of behavior, and this will bring about increased difficulties. As it is written in the Torah 'If you walk with me (as if) in happenstance, I will walk with you in wrathful happenstance.' Meaning that I shall bring troubles upon you, so that you may return (to Me). If you say that it was (just) happenstance, I will increase the wrathfulness of the 'happenstance'."

If we already mentioned troubles, what happens when a person has a personal trouble, or when there is a general public time of trouble and people don't realize that it is Divinely ordained?

The Torah refers to the situation of exile; "And I shall surely hide My Face on that day". The Baal Shem Tov explains that even when the Holy One Blessed be He hides Himself, a Jew needs to know that this situation of hiddenness stems from the Divine statement "I shall surely hide ". Knowing that it is coming from G-d helps to reveal the Divine from amidst the concealment (the troubles).

When a Jew stands up to the trial despite the concealment and acknowledges that everything is supervised by the Creator and that there is a reason for the difficulty, as quoted above from the Rambam, this in itself causes G-d to reveal Himself more.

**13. It is accepted today to relate to every surprising event in life as a revelation of Divine Providence. How do we know which unexpected events are really signs of communication from Heaven?**

Not only unexpected events are Divinely supervised, but also predictable mundane events are orchestrated by Divine Providence. The Baal Shem Tov says that even a particular leaf that flies in the wind is directed from Above, and that is not an unexpected phenomenon – rather, it is a natural and predictable one.

The question is, is The Holy One Blessed-be-He signaling me? Is He hinting to me to which direction I should turn and which one not to turn to?

Truthfully it is not always possible to know, because obstacles and delays could be a test, and then my job is to overcome them, or on the other hand it could be a sign to refrain from doing a particular thing.

So the main thing is, to examine events through the eyes of the Torah. If the obstacles and delays are in the areas of keeping the Mitzvot and serving G-d, this shows that they must be overcome, because keeping the Mitzvot is definitely something that G-d wants from me.



The Baal Shem Tov says that from everything a person sees and hears he should learn something about serving G-d. It didn't happen by chance, it is coming to teach me something, to help me develop. Nothing is coincidence, but what is the significance of it? It signals us to understand that we have to look into the Torah. We cannot just make up interpretations.

So, if for example, all the 'signs' showed me something very specific, but my Rebbe or my logic tell me something else, what should I do?

The 'signs' don't show me that that is what G-d wants. If the Rabbi tells you – listen, this isn't what's good for you, then the 'signs' were a test for you, to be confronted with an enchanting possibility, but to choose to refrain from it because the Torah says not to do it.

It could be that the Rabbi will tell you to do a particular thing, and then you see 'signs', you can conclude that G-d is helping you. It is written 'In the way that a person wishes to go, there he is led', and the signs you saw are evidence of the process evolving by Divine Providence.

Everything must be examined according to what the Torah wants from me, because certainly everything is directed by the Creator, but part of the principles of Divine Providence is that sometimes we are tested with the possibility of choosing the opposite of what G-d wants us to do.

A simple example: If the evil inclination tempts us to do a forbidden act, and by Divine Providence we are presented with the possibility of committing it, certainly we cannot say that this is a sign that we must do the forbidden thing, rather it is a test we must overcome, that the Divine Providence brought about so that we would stand up to it.

In summary: The intent of Divine Providence is to bring G-d into our personal lives in a revealed way. To know that He is directing, and sees and hears what happens. The more a person brings G-d into his life, the more calm and correct his life will be, as he looks at it the right way.

One of the things that holds a person back from leading his life calmly and peacefully, more than anything else - is anxiety about the future, and concern about not being able to control the events that will happen to him. As soon as a person internalizes that everything is directed and supervised under complete control of the Creator, even in the smallest details of what happens to him, then even when he does not know the exact meaning of what is happening to him, the knowledge that it is all by Divine Providence will help him fulfill his mission in the world in a happy and peaceful manner.

**14. How is it best to behave towards people in the community, using the attribute of "Justice" or "Severity" when necessary without causing distance?**

Three suggestions:

We must not err to the side of severity (strictness, withholding,) because if the severity is misplaced or overdone the results are liable to cause strife and distance in the extreme.

In order not to misuse the attribute of severity and lose the ability to have positive influence on your environment, here are three practical suggestions:

- A. It is always worthwhile to use the attribute of severity in minimal dosage. Even if it is too weak, it can be increased if necessary. However if you start too strong, you will not have anyone left to deal with. If you begin with low dosage you are not risking distancing the other person or making him flee entirely.
- B. The attribute of severity should be used after thought and planning, and not G-d forbid out of heated negative emotions. By nature when a person is upset he spews out a lot of negative statements he wasn't planning to say in the first place, therefore it is especially important to plan in advance exactly what you want to say, when and how, in a manner of 'mind over heart'.
- C. Don't identify too strongly with anger and criticism, don't internalize them. Remain indifferent to the feelings of anger and criticism, and make only a show of anger in a case that really calls for it. The Rambam says that anger is an attribute that has no place at all, and when a person needs to be angry and rebuke his family in order to put perspective on a deed which has been done, he must remain collected in his thoughts and only make a show of anger. That is to say, one should not actually identify with the feeling of anger, only use it as an external tool. One's inner expression should be the attribute of kindness and mercy.

**15. Can you define the three souls in a person?**

Each person has three souls: animal, G-dly, and intelligent.

The animal soul is the awareness a person has whereby he feels only himself and 'sees' nothing outside of himself. He sees himself reflected in his fellow also. The individual is wrapped up entirely in himself. The main characteristic of the animal soul is feelings, sense of self.

The intelligent soul can see reality outside of the individual in a more objective way.

The G-dly soul has the ability to unite with the other (soul of other person) and feel what is above existence and above the self. It has the ability to extend to beyond itself. The intelligent soul also has the ability to be objective but the difference between the intelligent and the G-dly souls is that the intelligent soul is connected to the "I" while the the G-dly soul is entirely separate.

**16. Is there a connection between Chanukah candles and the lights of the Temple?**

The Chanukah candles were instituted by the Sages in memory of the Temple lights, but nevertheless we see several differences between them:

- The lights of the Temple numbered seven while there are eight Chanukah candles.
- The Temple lights were lit in the Azara (Temple court) on the right side, while Chanukah candles (or oil lamps) are lit on the left of the outside.
- Temple lights were lit while it was still day-time, Chanukah lights are lit after sunset.

Chassidut explains the significant differences:

The Temple lights represent limited light, and that is why there were seven, as the number seven signifies nature (seven days of the week and so forth), and since the light is a limited one it can illuminate only when there is additional light and only on the *right* side which signifies holiness. This is also the reason that after the destruction of the Temple, there was no more lighting of the Temple lights – they were limited from the beginning.

On the other hand, the Hasmoneans, through their unlimited self-sacrifice, revealed unlimited G-dly light. This is manifest in that there are eight Chanukah lights. The number eight represents the supernatural – above nature, and Chanukah lights are lit outside and after dark, because the unlimited light is capable of illuminating the darkness. Therefore they are lit on the *left* side, which nurtures the forces of impurity. (Klipot.) This is also the reason that we continue lighting Chanukah candles during Galut (exile from the G-dly revelations of the Temple eras,) and they will never be nullified. The light of Chanukah symbolizes the eternal connection we have with The Holy One Blessed be He, who is eternal and above all limitations of time and place.

#### **17. What is the meaning of the name 'Av' of the Hebrew month?**

The name of the month of Av symbolizes the attribute of mercy, as it is written: ""As a father has mercy ..." (Av means father in Hebrew.) Aside from that, according to the Kabala, when a name is spelled with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, it represents mercy and loving-kindness. In contrast, when a name is spelled in the opposite direction, like the name of the month of Tishrei, where the letters are spelled from the end of the Hebrew alphabet towards the beginning, this represents the attribute of 'din', severity. Therefore, in Tishrei it is a time when the world is judged. The attribute of 'din' – judgment, rules.

Based on the above, it is hard to understand how so many troubles occurred during the month of Av. Terrible troubles that led to the destruction of the first and second Temples (Batei Mikdash).

Chassidut explains that on the esoteric level, destruction and exile stem from the attribute of Divine mercy and loving-kindness of the Creator. Aside from the fact that G-d allowed the destruction to fall on 'wood and stones' (the physical Temples) and not wipe out the (entire) Jewish people, every ascent and growth of a new thing comes after descent and destruction. In order to arrive at a completely new result, the old one must be nullified and left. Thus, the infinite revelation of the Creator which will be revealed in the Third Temple actually started at the time of the destruction. As the Midrash states; "Immediately at the time of the destruction, their savior was born."

#### **18. What is the meaning of the statement of the Sages "There is no 'chance' (happenstance) for Israel"?**

It is said about the (Hebrew) month of Adar: "It has a healthy Mazal" (luck, chance). Therefore the Sages recommend that if someone has a court case against a gentile, he should try to schedule it for the month of Adar because it is a 'lucky' month for the Jewish people. On the other hand, the Sages also say that astrology in particular, and the laws of nature in general, are relevant to the nations of the world and not to the nation of Israel,

because "There is no 'chance' for the nation of Israel". How do we reconcile this with the statement that "In the month of Adar the Mazal (luck) of Israel increases"?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that there are two levels in the Jewish soul (in this particular context. In other contexts there are other descriptions of the levels of the soul.) There is the soul as it manifests itself in its G-dly root and source, united with the Creator, and there it is on a level beyond any defining parameters of luck, chance, or laws of nature. Then there is the manifestation of the soul, encloded in a physical body within the laws of nature, in a material world, full of 'husks of impurity'. Since that level of the soul is here in the material world, there is an aspect of it which is bound by laws of nature and 'chance'. (Astrology.)

So here is the difference between the month of Adar and the rest of the months. During the other months of the year, a Jew is also somewhat subject to the laws of nature, but through prayer and other spiritual channels he can rise above it and reveal the inner level of his soul which is above 'luck'. The month of Adar however, is intrinsically less bound by the laws of nature, and therefore a Jew has less need for actions on his part to increase his 'luck'.

So the explanation of the Sages' statement: "There is no 'chance' for Israel" is that the level of "there is no" ('Ein' in Hebrew) represents a level of complete spiritual nullification. This is the true 'Mazal', 'luck' of Israel. During the rest of the year it is on an inner level, and during Adar- on a revealed level.

**19. How can we explain the difference between "supernal repentance/return to G-d", and "lower repentance/return to G-d"?**

It is written in the Zohar that the word 'repentance' (return to G-d) is comprised of two parts: 'Teshuva' 'Tashuv – Hei'. Teshuva – return, – Hei – to G-d. Return the letter 'hei' to its source. Which letter 'hei' are we referring to? In the holy name 'Havaya' (one of G-ds holy names) the Hebrew letter 'hei' appears twice. Once in the beginning and once in the end. The Zohar learns from this that there are two kinds of repentance/return. One is 'higher return' and one is 'lower return', and this corresponds to two kinds of Teshuva: higher Teshuva and lower.

The Alter Rebbe (founder of Chassidut Chabad and author of Tanya and Shulchan Aruch HaRav,) in his 'Letter of Teshuva' in book of Tanya, explains at length the difference between these two types of return to G-d. In one of the Hebrew names of G-d, the name of 'Havaya' (composed of the Hebrew words for past, present and future: 'haya, hoveh, veyihye', it is the name which represents the transcendental aspect of G-dliness,) has two of the Hebrew letters 'Hei'. One in the beginning of the word, and one at the end. The first 'Hei' represents the Sefirah (Divine Energy) of Binah. (one of the 'intelligent' soul powers, representing the stage of developing the initial flash of insight – Chachmah.) The final 'Hei' in the Holy name of Havaya represents the Sefirah of 'Malchut', (the Divine Energy of Kingship – the ability to receive the other Divine Energies and transmit them.) The Sefirah of Malchut represents the actual (Divine) rule over the worlds, and teaches us that lower Teshuvah means the actual rectification of a person's deeds.

A person who sinned G-d forbid and transgressed G-d's will in thought, speech or deed, must arouse G-d's Supernal mercy on his G-dly soul. (Everyone has a G-dly soul and an animal

soul) that has become distanced from the light of G-d as a result of its deeds, so he must regret his deeds and rectify them.

Higher Teshuva, on the other hand, is not about regret, rather it is about coming closer to G-d and cleaving to Him through contemplation (Sefirah of Binah), and through learning Torah keeping Mitzvot, and performing deeds of loving-kindness with great effort. This way is considered a higher way of repentance/return to G-d, as the Alter Rebbe explains. Higher Teshuva is relevant to everyone, regular people as well as righteous ones who never sinned! This is because even righteous people have become somewhat distant from G-d through the descent of the soul to the physical world in which we find ourselves. It is always possible to connect and unify the soul more to its source and root.

**20. Why is it important that everybody take upon themselves an additional 'beautification of a Mitzvah' towards Rosh HaShana, the Jewish New Year?**

Every Jewish festival and holiday is characterized by its own unique spiritual dimension. Pesach for example is the season of Redemption, while the festival of Shavuot is the time of the Giving of the Torah, Rosh HaShana is the time of receiving G-d's Kingship, and so on. Chassidut explains that on the day preceding Rosh HaShana, the Divine energy that sustains the world withdraws back to its source! Only the prayers of the Jewish people on the Holy festival itself: "Rule over the entire world in Your honor" and the blowing of the Shofar, have the power to arouse the Creator's desire to rule over us during the coming year.

The Alter Rebbe in the book of Tanya explains the sentence "the land upon which are the eyes of the Lord your G-d constantly, from the beginning of the year until its end." We could understand that if G-d's eyes are on the land from the beginning until the end of each year, then they are constantly on it, so why doesn't the sentence say: "forever"? From this we understand that the Divine energy which sustains and gives vitality to the world withdraws to its source, and with the beginning of the new year, there is new Divine vitality in the world which has never been there before!

This is the reason for the custom of taking upon oneself every Rosh HaShana the beautification of a Mitzvah and an additional custom that will serve as a vessel to receive the new Divine abundance that is being drawn down to the world. Happy New Year!

**21. What is the meaning of the concepts 'Arousal from Above' and 'Arousal from Below'?**

When a person lacks enthusiasm and motivation in the spiritual realm, there are two ways to refresh them. The first way is to receive an infusion of spiritual energy from 'above' without preparation on part of the person, and the second way is that the person arouses himself to carry out his task in the world.

The first method is called in Chassidut 'Arousal from Above'. Sometimes there is Divine mercy and even though the person has not necessarily earned it, he is given renewed vitality and arousal of his soul to return to G-d. The virtue of this method is that the person has a powerful spiritual experience. The drawback of this method is that because it came from above without previous effort by the person, it can be a passing experience that does not leave an impression.

The second method is called in Chassidic terminology 'Arousal from Below', which comes from the work the person does to arouse and motivate himself. It penetrates his being and leaves a lasting impression.

### **Is 'Love of G-d' a hereditary attribute among Jews?**

It is explained in the book of Tanya (Ch. 18) that every Jew has a hidden love for G-d that he received as an inheritance from the patriarchs, and that the spiritual root of this love in the soul is in the spiritual soul power of 'Chochma' (translated as 'knowledge', but explained as the initial flash of insight).

The level of Chochma in the soul manifests the source of intelligence and understanding, as opposed to the spiritual soul power of 'Binah', which is the power to understand and perceive. Chochma actually is the expression of a place that is beyond the parameters of intelligence and logic. The word 'Chochma' is composed of the two Hebrew words 'Koach' and 'Ma'. Koach means power, (in this context, it is potential as yet not perceived or apprehended), and when we attempt to identify it we ask 'Ma' – Ma means 'what'. *What is it actually?* The word 'What' also expresses the attribute of nullification and modesty, as Moses said "VeNachnu *Ma*" – we are *nothing*. Indeed at the level of Chochma there is the power of nullification to the Supernal Will, even if the intelligence does not yet understand completely, it becomes nullified to the infinite Will of the Creator.

Since the hidden love of every Jew has its roots at the level of Chochma, it exists in all Jews, regardless of whether the intelligence is currently being used for contemplation of or apprehension of the greatness of the Creator or not. Even someone who never studied these subjects in his life has the capability of nullifying himself to the Creator, and it comes to the fore under different circumstances, especially when there is a test of his belief in G-d.

## **22. What distinguishes Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai from the other sages of the Talmud?**

The Zohar tells us that the sages of the Talmud related to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as being on a much higher level than them and praises him with great and wonderful praises. The reason for this was that he was the source of the esoteric aspect of the Torah. Indeed his level was wondrous and mighty even compared to the other Sages.

The special thing about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (his acronym is 'Rashbi') was not just that he occupied himself with learning the internal and esoteric aspects of the Torah, because there were other sages who also occupied themselves with those things, but that he knew how to unify and connect all the aspects of the Torah. Other sages occupied themselves with either the revealed aspect of the Torah, (oral law), or the hidden or inner explanation. Rashbi, in addition to the fact that his learning itself was on a higher level than others, actually broke down the barrier between the revealed and hidden aspects of the Torah and illuminated the revealed Torah with insight from the esoteric Torah.

So on Lag BaOmer, the day of his passing, it is a very happy day. 'Simcha' – happiness, breaks boundaries. On that day (the anniversary of the passing) his soul rises up to higher and higher spiritual planes and this creates potential for us to break out of all the boundaries of exile and reveal the true and complete redemption!

**23. Why should one distance oneself from spiritual approaches like becoming a Nazir and separating oneself from worldly/mundane matters?**

Until the Torah was given, it was decreed that "The Heavens are heavens for the Lord." This meant that 'Heaven' represented spirituality, and 'Earth' represented physicality, and the two entities were separate and could not be connected.

Therefore someone who wished to achieve a spiritual ascent and connect to the source of holiness, of necessity had to disconnect himself as much as possible from everything physical. The Patriarchs and the tribes were shepherds and therefore were able to spend their time in solitude and spiritual contemplation, far from worldly and material matters. Although the Patriarchs performed the Mitzvot, it was on a spiritual level, not in a way that changed the nature of the physical environment.

The giving of the Torah changed the world: "And the Lord came down on Mount Sinai". The Holy One Blessed-be-He 'came down' and exuded Holiness – His Divine Presence – into the physical world, thus making it possible to connect and unite the upper and lower worlds. The Mitzvot that we were commanded at the Giving of the Torah have the unique ability to allow holiness to penetrate into physical objects. In this way the skin of an animal can become a holy object like Tefillin (phylacteries) or a Mezuzah.

So, since the Giving of the Torah, the true connection to spirituality or holiness is not through spiritual approaches that involve removing oneself from the physical world, but through living a Jewish lifestyle within the limitations of the physical world, and imbuing it with holiness through keeping Torah and Mitzvot.