YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**The Philosophy of Prayer**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #38: The Reason for Prayer According to Chabad *Chassidut* (1)**

Before we consider the teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi about prayer, we must first understand the foundational principles of his fundamental book, *Sefer Ha-Tanya.* These foundations will allow us to understand the essence of prayer according to the *Tanya*, and in particular, the manner in which its author applies the ideas of raising the worlds and clarifying sparks.

**The Book for the “*Beinonim*” [Average or Intermediate Jews]**

The opening section of *Sefer Ha-Tanya* is based on the words of Rabbi Chaim Vital in *Sha'ar ha-Kedusha*, and it provides a broad picture of the inner world of a person:

The explanation [in response to questions raised above] is to be found in light of what Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote in *Sha'ar ha-Kedusha* (and in *Etz Chaim*, Portal 50, ch. 2), that in every Jew, whether righteous or wicked, there are two souls, as it is written: "The *neshamot* (souls) which I have made," [alluding to] two souls. There is one soul which originates in the *kelipa* (husk) and *sitra achra* ("other side"), and which is clothed in the blood of a human being, giving life to the body, as is written: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood." From it stem all the evil characteristics deriving from the four evil elements which are contained in it. These are: anger and pride, which emanate from the element of Fire, the nature of which is to rise upwards; the appetite for pleasures, from the element of Water, for water makes all kinds of enjoyment grow; frivolity and scoffing, boasting, and idle talk from the element of Air; and sloth and melancholy from the element of Earth. From this soul stem also the good characteristics which are to be found in the innate nature of all Israel, such as mercy and kindness. For in the case of Israel, this soul of the *kelipa* is derived from *kelipat noga*, which also contains good, as it originates in the esoteric "tree of knowledge of good and evil." The souls of the nations of the world, however, emanate from the other, unclean *kelipot*,which contain no good whatever, as is written in *Etz Chaim,* Portal 49, ch. 3, that all the good that the nations do, is done from selfish motives. So the Gemara comments on the verse, "The kindness of the nations is sin" – that all the charity and kindness done by the nations of the world is only for their own self-glorification, and so on. (*Tanya*, *Likutei Amarim* 1)

According to Chapter 1 of the *Tanya*, man has an animal soul which is mostly evil; only a small part of it is good. The evil part contains four evil attributes, which, according to Rabbi Chaim Vital, parallel the four elements: the element of Fire parallels pride, Water parallels the appetite for pleasures, Air parallels frivolity and idle talk, and Earth parallels sloth and melancholy. Not all of these attributes will be discussed later in the *Tanya*; pride and frivolity appear less, and melancholy appears mainly in the context of the importance of joy in the service of God, while the preoccupation with pleasure and desire occupies a central place in the rest of the book.

Everything that exists within a person naturally, without his having worked on himself and shaped his personality, is part of his animal soul. When it comes to the people of Israel, the animal soul includes kindness and mercy. If, for example, we find among the people of Israel a phenomenon of mercy toward cruel people, this is a result of natural mercy. This does not mean that a Jew is inclined only to good deeds, but that this side is natural to him. This is a quality that has accompanied the people of Israel since the time of Avraham, for whom kindness was a natural drive.

The soul itself is divided into two levels – the intellect and the emotional attributes:

Similarly is it with the human soul, which is divided in two – *sekhel* (intellect) and *middot* (emotional attributes). The *sekhel* includes *chokhma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge) (*ChaBaD*), while the *middot* are: love of God, dread and awe of Him, glorification of Him, and so forth. *ChaBaD* [the faculties of the *sekhel*] are called "mothers" and the source of the *middot*, for the *middot* are "offspring" of *ChaBaD*. (*Tanya, Likutei Amarim* 3)

In addition to the *middot,* the soul contains a contemplative dimension. This is a central point in the *Tanya* – and according to the *Tanya*, it is the core of Divine service –because the most influential processes that can occur in a person take place by way of contemplation; it is the central tool that can lead to a change in the world of the *middot*. This idea is also what gave Chabad *Chassidut* its name – after the *sefirot* of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

The goal of these processes is to serve God out of love and fear. That is where all repair of the attributes should lead. With respect to the process, the intellect is higher than the *middot*; however, respect to the goal, the main thing is to achieve love and fear by way of intellectual contemplation.

Another fundamental principle based on the teachings of the kabbalists is that of the four *kelipot*:

However, the vitalizing animal soul in the Jew, that which is derived from the aspect of the *kelipa*,which is clothed in the blood of a person, as stated above, and the souls of the animals, beasts, birds, and fish that are pure and permissible for [Jewish] consumption, as also the existence and vitality of the entire inanimate and entire vegetable world which are permissible for consumption, as well as the existence and vitality of every act, utterance, and thought in mundane matters that contain no forbidden aspect – being neither root nor branch of the 365 prohibitive precepts and their offshoots, either on the explicit authority of the Torah, or by Rabbinic enactment – yet are not performed for the sake of Heaven but only by the will, desire, and lust of the body; and even where it is a need of the body, or its very preservation and life, but his intention is not for the sake of Heaven, that is, to serve God thereby – all these acts, utterances, and thoughts are no better than the vitalizing animal soul itself; and everything in this totality of things flows and is drawn from the second gradation [to be found] in the *kelipot* and *sitra achra,*namely, a fourth *kelipa,*called *kelipat noga.* For in this world, called the "World of *Asiya* (Action)," most, indeed almost all, of it [the *kelipat noga*]is bad, and only a little good has been intermingled within it (from which come the good qualities contained in the animal soul of the Jew, as is explained above). This [*kelipat noga*]is an intermediate category between the three completely impure *kelipot* and the category and order of Holiness. Hence it is sometimes absorbed within the three impure *kelipot*(as explained in *Etz Chaim,*Portal 49, beginning of ch. 4, citing the *Zohar*)*,*and sometimes it is absorbed and elevated to the category and level of Holiness, as when the good that is intermingled in it is extracted from the bad, and prevails and ascends until it is absorbed in Holiness. Such is the case, for example, of he who eats fat beef and drinks spiced wine in order to broaden his mind for the service of God and His Torah; as Rava said [*Yoma* 76b]: "Wine and fragrance [make a man's mind more receptive]," or in order to fulfil the command concerning enjoyment of Shabbat and Festivals. In such a case, the vitality of the meat and wine, originating in the *kelipat noga,*is distilled and ascends to God like a burnt offering and sacrifice. So, too, when a man utters a word of humor in order to sharpen his wit and rejoice his heart in God, in His Torah and service, which should be practiced joyfully, as Rava was wont to do with his pupils, prefacing his discourse with some witty remark, to enliven the students thereby [*Pesachim* 117a]. On the other hand, he who belongs to those who gluttonously guzzle meat and wine in order to satisfy their bodily appetites and animal nature, derived from the element of Water of the four evil elements contained therein, from which comes the *midda* of lust – in such a case, the energy of the meat and wine that he consumes is degraded and absorbed temporarily in the utter evil of the three impure *kelipot,*and his body temporarily becomes a garment and vehicle for them, until the person repents and returns to the service of God and His Torah. (*Tanya, Likutei Amarim* 7)

There are four *kelipot* in the world of impurity: three belong to the realm of forbidden things, and the fourth *kelipa* stands in the middle between the world of impurity and the world of holiness. There is no way to struggle against the three *kelipot*, but the fourth *kelipa –* the *kelipat noga* – depends on the service of man. To this *kelipa* belongs the entire realm of things that are permitted. The realm of the permitted is on the border between impurity and holiness. If a person uses it for good, he raises the *kelipa* to holiness, but if he uses it for evil, he feeds the impurity. In such a case, even something that had belonged to the realm of the permitted will enter the world of impurity. However, even if the person used the realm of the permitted in a negative way, there is still a possibility of repair since nothing prohibited was done.

The realm of the permitted is a broad topic for Jewish thinkers. Many view it in a neutral manner, subject to each person's decision. In contrast, for the author of the *Tanya,* the realm of the permitted has no independent meaning: If you are involved with the realm of the permitted for the right purposes, such as eating for the sake of delighting in Shabbat or speaking words of humor for the sake of learning Torah, that is positive; if not, the permitted act is negative.

**Two Kings Fight Over a City**

The author of the *Tanya* says (as discussed in the previous *shiur*) that a person must recognize that he is in a war between his animal soul and his Divine soul, between his low side and his elevated side:

It is written, however: "One nation shall prevail over the other nation" [*Bereishit* 25:23], for the body is called a "small city" [*Kohelet* 9:14], and just as two kings wage war over a town that each wishes to capture and rule, that is to say, to dominate its inhabitants according to his will, so that they obey him in all he decrees for them – so do the two souls, the Divine soul and the vitalizing animal soul that comes from the *kelipa*, wage war against each other over the body and all its limbs. It is the desire and will of the Divine soul that she alone rule over the person and direct him, and that all his limbs should obey her and surrender themselves completely to her and become a vehicle for her, as well as a robe [instrument] for her ten faculties and three garments mentioned above, all of which should pervade the organs of the body, and the entire body should be permeated with them alone, to the exclusion of any alien influence, God forbid. That is to say, that the three brains in the head [physical parallels to the three intellectual faculties: wisdom, understanding, and knowledge] shall be permeated with the *ChaBaD* of the Divine soul, namely, the wisdom of God and the understanding of Him, by pondering on His unfathomable and infinite greatness; and from them shall be born, through *da'at* (knowledge), awe in his mind and dread of God in his heart, as well as love of God that shall flare up like a glowing fire in his heart, like flaming coals, so that his soul shall yearn and long, with passion and desire, to cleave to the blessed *Ein Sof,*with his whole heart, soul, and might, from the very depths of the right ventricle of the heart [which is explained above to be empty of blood and connected to the Divine soul] – which would be so thoroughly permeated with overflowing love as to inundate the left side [which is filled with blood and is the seat of the animal soul] as well, to the extent of **subduing** (*akhpaya*)the *sitra achra*with its element of the "evil waters," namely, the lust stemming from *kelipat noga*, changing it and **transforming** it (*hapkhah*) from seeking the pleasures of this world to the love of God. Thus it is written: "With all your heart – with both your natures." That is to say, that the person shall steadily rise to attain to level of "abundant love," a supreme affection surpassing that of "ardent love." (*Tanya, Likutei Amarim* 9)

Man's purpose is not only to inspire love and awe in the Divine soul within him, but to project this on the animal soul as well. To illustrate this, consider a person during the *Mussaf* prayer for Yom Kippur, in whom love and fear of God are likely to be strongly awakened. His animal desires have not been eliminated, but at the moment, love and fear of God are felt much more. The goal is not for two feelings to exist, one stronger than the other, but for the animal soul as well to fill with love and fear.

When the author of the *Tanya* talks about influencing the animal soul, he uses two concepts: subduing (*itkafya*) and transforming (*ithafkha*) – forcing love and fear upon it, or changing it so that it worships God out of love and fear. These are two different concepts, to subdue and to transform, and they belong to two different modes of serving God – that of the *beinoni*, the average or intermediate person, and that of the *tzaddik*, the righteous person. The *tzaddik*’s Divine service turns evil into good – but the *Tanya* is the book of the *beinoni*, and the *beinoni*’s worship comes only to subdue, not to transform. A person has no choice whether to be a *tzaddik* or a *beinoni*; every person is born as he is, and is given guidance in the service of God that is intended for him.

**Who Is a “*Beinoni*”**

Who is a *tzaddik* and who is a *beinoni*?

The *beinoni* is he in whom evil never attains enough power to capture the "small city," so as to clothe itself in the body and make it sin. That is to say, the three "garments" of the animal soul, namely, thought, speech, and action, originating in the *kelipa*,do not prevail within him over the Divine soul to the extent of clothing themselves in the body – in the brain, in the mouth, and in the other 248 parts – and thereby causing them to sin and defiling them, God forbid. Only the three garments of the Divine soul, they alone, are implemented in the body, being the thought, speech, and action engaged in the 613 commandments of the Torah. He has never committed, nor ever will commit, any transgression; neither can the name "wicked" be applied to him for even one hour, or even for a moment, throughout his life. However, the essence and being of the Divine soul, which are its ten faculties, do not constantly hold undisputed sovereignty and sway over the "small city," except at times that are prepared for it, such as during the recital of the *Shema* or the *Amida*, when the Supernal Intellect is in a sublime state; and likewise below, this is a propitious time for every man, when he binds his *ChaBaD* (intellectual faculties) to God, to meditate deeply on the greatness of the blessed *Ein Sof,*and to arouse the burning love in the right part of his heart. (*Tanya, Likutei Amarim*, 12)

In the *Tanya*, “*beinoni*” does not refer to someone whose actions consist of half *mitzvot* and half transgressions. The *beinoni* performs *mitzvot* only, but he finds himself in a constant battle between his animal soul and his Divine soul. The Divine soul within him succeeds in overcoming the animal soul, but there is still a constant struggle – unlike the *tzaddik*,who has no struggle at all. What causes the Divine soul to prevail over the animal soul? The explanation, according to the author of the *Tanya*, is that the mind rules over the heart. As we saw earlier, the intellect can decide the struggle being fought in the soul.

However, even with regard to the *beinoni*, there are situations in which the struggle is completely resolved, as it is for the *tzaddik*: "except at times that are prepared for it, such as during the recital of the *Shema* or the *Amida.*" Then, the animal soul within the person is nullified before the Divine soul.

Here we enter the topic of prayer. The moments of prayer are the moments when the *beinoni* can touch the level of the *tzaddik*. According to the author of the *Tanya*, it is understandable why the recitation of *Shema* is part of prayer: reciting the *Shema* involves contemplation; it is the moment when a person mentally accepts the burden of the kingdom of Heaven and achieves love of God. From this contemplation, he can awaken his soul to love of God.

\*

In the coming *shiurim*, we will try to understand, based on this introduction, the place of prayer and the recitation of *Shema* in the service of God, according to the author of the *Tanya*.

(Translated by David Strauss)