YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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

**THe Purpose of creation and the Mission of man**

**In Jewish thought**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur 23: The Purpose of Creation in the Thought of the Admor Ha-Zaken (1)**

**The Disciples of the Maggid of Mezeritch**

We will not examine all of the writings of the disciples of the Maggid of Mezeritch about the purpose of creation, but will briefly discuss their place with regard to the overall topic and then consider in detail the words of the Admor ha-Zaken, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, one of the disciples of the Maggid of Mezeritch and the founder of Chabad *Chasidut*.

The disciples of the Maggid continued to concentrate on the principle of pleasure in different ways. Some of them subordinated the element of pleasure to the element of benefaction – which was the purpose of creation according to some of the earlier thinkers that we have seen. In a certain sense, this diminishes the novelty in the position of the Maggid, placing it in a familiar framework. It is also simpler to maintain from a religious perspective; it is easier to accept that the world was created for our benefit than that God created the world for His own pleasure. Such approaches are found in the books *Ma'or Einayim*, *Kedushat Levi*, *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, and others.

We also find discussion, in the writings of some of the Maggid's disciples, around the principle that "there is no other besides Him" – whether there really exists a world apart from God, or whether there is only God. The Maggid (in his comments on the words, "Make yourself two trumpets of silver," *Bamidbar* 10:2) emphasizes the existence of two sides – God and man – and says that the purpose of the world lies in the "togetherness" of the two. At the same time, through this unity, a central idea in *Chasidut* is realized, one that is related to the principle that "there is no other beside Him" – the aspiration to bring the world into a single unity. The thought about the righteous entered God's mind prior to creation, and there was unity between them. The purpose of creation is that this thought should be realized, and that there should be unity in actuality, between God and the righteous who do His will.

We will now move on to focus on the Admor Ha-Zaken.

**About the Admor Ha-Zaken**

The Admor Ha-Zaken, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, was one of the youngest disciples of the Maggid of Mezeritch. According to Chabad tradition, he was uncertain where he should go for his spiritual growth – whether to Vilna to learn from the Gra how to study Torah, or to Mezeritch to learn from the Maggid how to pray. Ultimately, he decided: "I know a little about studying Torah, but I don't know anything about how to pray," and went off to the Maggid.

Within a few years, a number of Torah scholars emerged who spread the Maggid’s teachings throughout Europe, including Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak, the Chozeh of Lublin in Poland; Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizhensk, in Galicia; Rabbi Menachem Nachum, author of *Ma'or Einayim*; and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, in the Ukraine. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk remained with the Maggid in White Russia, but four years after the Maggid's death, they chose to move to Eretz Israel as part of a spiritual awakening for redemption. The Admor Ha-Zaken stayed in White Russia and was one of the organizers of a fund to support the *Chasidim* in Eretz Israel. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Rabbi Avraham of Kalisk were considered the leaders of the Chasidic movement to a certain extent, even though they filled this role from a distance, but over time, maintaining the connection became more difficult. Eventually, they asked the Admor Ha-Zaken to lead the *Chasidim* in his area in their place. At first, he refused, arguing that unlike the righteous men of the previous generations, he did not know how to perform miracles. They continued to appeal to him until he finally relented and agreed to lead the *Chasidim* in White Russia.

This was ten years after the publication of his book, the *Tanya*, and about twenty-five years before his death. The *Tanya* was written against the backdrop of a remarkable increase in the number of the Admor Ha-Zaken's disciples. Within ten years, thousands of followers had flocked to him, and perhaps even tens of thousands. Since he could not receive all of them in private encounters and offer personal guidance, he wrote the *Tanya* for them as a guide for serving God. After doing so, he cut down on his meetings and parameters were established regarding who could meet with him and when, because a personal meeting with everyone was utterly impossible. The writing of the *Tanya* created the first systematic book in the history of *Chasidut*; neither a collection of sermons, nor answers to questions, but a broad and orderly layout of the basic principles that every *Chasid* needs to know.

It should be noted that the Admor Ha-Zaken was involved in attempts to bridge the gap between the *Chasidim* and their opponents, the *Mitnagdim*. In 5532 (1772), a year before the Maggid's death, an excommunication of the *Chasidim* was declared in Vilna. The Admor Ha-Zaken went to Vilna with Rabbi Menachem Mendel from Vitebsk, on behalf of the Maggid, to meet with the Gra and explain that some of the rumors being spread about *Chasidut* were slander. The Gra heard they were coming and ran away from his home, returning only after they had left Vilna. During his time as the leader of *Chasidut* as well, it was important to the Admor Ha-Zaken to avoid confrontations with the *Mitnagdim*; he instructed his followers to respond with restraint to the claims and actions against them, even at high cost.

As part of the dispute between the *Chasidim* and the *Mitnagdim*, the *Mitnagdim* told the gentile authorities about the Admor Ha-Zaken, which led to his imprisonment and interrogations, partly on the suspicion that the Chasidic movement was liable to undermine society and endanger the government. Chabad *Chasidut* sees the Admor Ha-Zaken's imprisonment as an accusation directed against the Chasidic movement, and his release from prison as a favorable sign from heaven for the further spread of the wellsprings of *Chasidut*.

The Admor Ha-Zaken’s teachings make broad use of *Kabbala*. The question of engagement with *Kabbala*, especially with regard to the general population, was a subject of dispute among Chasidic leaders. The Maggid of Mezeritch certainly engaged with the hidden Torah, but mainly with particular righteous disciples who were close to him.

The name Chabad stands for *Chokhma*, *Bina*, and *Da'at* [Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge], indicating that it is a *Chasidut* that is built on intellectual study and clarification, not only on emotion. This characteristic sparked a debate within the Chasidic world regarding whether service of God should be based on study and contemplation or on simple faith. One of the expressions of this is in prayer, which in some Chasidic groups is full of emotion and enthusiasm, while in Chabad, it is built on intellectual contemplation. Chabad *Chasidut* also assigned an important place to Torah study, seeing it as leading to the service of God with devotion. In Chabad, observance of the *mitzvot* is also based on study and understanding, through which it becomes possible to adhere to the will of God. The Admor Ha-Zaken emphasized that the proper observance of a mitzvais no less important that the intention and emotion that accompany it. The importance of study and observing the *mitzvot* finds expression in, among other things, his *Shulchan Arukh ha-Rav*, one of the great books of *halakha* that issued from *Chasidut*.

**The Purpose of Creation; Service of God by Average Individuals**

The topic of the purpose of creation appears in the middle of the *Tanya*, primarily in chapter 36, although the question arises already at the beginning of the preceding chapter:

Let us also understand, in a very small measure, the purpose of the creation of the "intermediates" [*beinonim*]and the descent of their souls into this world, to be clothed within the animal soul which is derived from the *kelipa* and *sitra achra.* Since they will not be able to banish her [the animal soul] throughout their lives, nor to dislodge her from her place in the left part of the heart, so that none of her impure fancies should rise to the brain, inasmuch as the very essence of the animal soul derived from the *kelipa* remains [in the intermediates] in her full strength and might as at birth, except that her "garments" do not invest their bodies, as discussed above – if so, why have their souls descended into this world to labor in vain, God forbid, to wage war throughout their lives against the [evil] nature which they cannot vanquish? (*Likkutei Amarim*, 35)

In order to understand the question and its location, it is necessary to briefly explain how the *Tanya* is structured.

The *Tanya*, as mentioned, is a book of instruction in the service of God. The book opens with an attempt to understand the inner structure of man, based on the principle that man has two souls, Divine and animal. This leads to the question of what man's mission is; where is he supposed to go from this situation? A person's fundamental service is, of course, Torah study and observance of the *mitzvot*, which bring him to devotion to God. However, beyond that, the Admor Ha-Zaken distinguishes between two types of people: there are the "righteous," who do not have to wage any internal war against evil, and there are the "intermediates," who are constantly at war with the animal soul – and this is their service. An intermediate is not necessarily someone whose record contains merits and transgressions in equal measure, as the term is used in other contexts, but rather one whose mental state involves constant struggle. The mission of such an individual is to decide in favor of the Divine soul in every situation that arises.

After a long explanation of this matter, the Admor Ha-Zaken begins to explain the purpose of the creation of the intermediates. Why take a soul from above, and place it in a position of endless struggle? This is how the Admor Ha-Zaken arrives at the question of the purpose of creation; he does not move from the purpose of creation to the question of man's mission, but deals at length with man's mission and from there comes to the question of the purpose of creation:

It is a well-known Rabbinic statement that the purpose of the creation of this world is that the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to have an abode in the lower worlds. But surely with Him the distinction of "upper" and "lower" has no validity, for He pervades all worlds equally. The explanation of the matter, however, is as follows: Before the world was created, He was One alone, One and unique, filling all space in which He created the universe. It is still the same now insofar as He is concerned. For the change relates only to those who receive His blessed life-force and light, which they receive through many "garments" which conceal and obscure His blessed light…. (Ibid., 36)

The position that explains the purpose of creation based on God's desire for a dwelling place in the lower worlds appears already in *Midrash Tanchuma*, but interestingly, it was not counted among the reasons for creation by Jewish scholars who preceded the Admor ha-Zaken. In the coming *shiurim*, we will explore the meaning of this reason and its ramifications.

(Translated by David Strauss)