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Yud Tet Kislev Farbrengen

Part 4 of 4

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

One of the greatest masters of Chassidut, Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Izhbitz, has a theme that runs throughout all of his teachings: in the end it will be revealed that everything that a Jew has ever done, even when he followed his evil inclination, everything has been elevated to a state of holiness. The Izhbitzer is not unique in this theme. There is a discourse from the Lubavitcher Rebbe that explains the same principle in the language of Chabad.

The Izhbitzer does have special terminology. When a person does what he feels like, without thinking about anyone else, not even the Almighty, he calls this an act of extension or certitude. The best example of this type of person is Esau himself. He does whatever he wants without feeling accountable to anyone. But, whereas we may normally think that this is a negative state, in the Izhbitzer's teachings this is considered an ideal state; it is the state that we will reach in the times of Mashiach. We call this state natural consciousness.

What is natural consciousness? It is when that which was forbidden becomes permissible, that which is permissible becomes a *mitzvah*, and the *mitzvah* becomes a necessity. So far this evening we have only talked about the first of these transformations, when that which was negative becomes positive, when something that until now was considered to be forbidden becomes permissible. This is the no-yes axis.

There is a verse that says: **לֹא כֵן עֲבַדִּי מֹשֶׁה**. The meaning of these words is, "not so my servant Moshe." But, in Hebrew the first two words are really: "no, yes," implying that the "no" for Moshe Rabbeinu is a "yes" (or naturally transforms into a yes)! How can a no be a yes? This is what the sages say regarding the Ten Commandments. Some of the commandments are positive and some are negative. After each commandment, we voiced our acceptance. According to Rabbi Yishma'el after a positive commandment the reply was "Yes!" After a negative commandment the reply was "No!" in the sense of we also negate such and such an action. But, Rabbi Akiva says that even when we heard a negative commandment, such as "Do not murder," the reply was "Yes!" in the affirmative. In Chassidic terminology, Rabbi Yishma'el is describing the state of living



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after the contraction of God's infinite light, where there is a difference between yes and no. But, Rabbi Akiva is describing a state of living before the contraction.

Let's give an example so that the idea is clear. If you live after the contraction then you say: "In our Holy Land, I don't buy from Arabs, because the Torah forbids it." If you live before the contraction you say: "I buy only from Jews, because I enjoy spending more money on my brothers." In short, to say that what was forbidden becomes permissible is does not mean that you the go and act in what used to be a forbidden way. Rather, it means that a person relates to the positive side of that which was forbidden. For instance if you have a black and white photograph where the black represents the prohibited and the white the permitted then a person who has natural consciousness does not see the black, but rather feels free to act in the white!



We mentioned that there are four levels of reference. Something is forbidden (אסור), or permissible (מותר), or a *mitzvah* (מצוה), or a necessity (חובה). Let's give an example of how something that is forbidden turns into something that is permissible and then into something that is a *mitzvah*. Lying is a very serious grievance against another person and is of course prohibited. There are 13 different teachings learnt from the verse that appears in the Torah: "From speaking a lying word, keep your distance" (the source of prohibition of lying is thus related to the 13 Principles of Mercy). But, in the Talmud (*Yevamot* 65b) there is a question about altering what we say from the exact truth in order to bring peace. Rabbi Illa'a says that it is permissible, while Rabbi Natan says that it is a *mitzvah* to do so. We see that the *Rif* (Rabbi Isaac of Fez, one of the greatest legal sources of the Middle Ages) and the Alter Rebbe rule that indeed not only is it permissible to alter what one says in order to attain peace, to add peace in the world, but it is necessary to do so. Thus it becomes a *mitzvah*.

But, what is an example of something that not only becomes a *mitzvah*, it even reaches the highest level: it becomes a necessity (חובה). The example is what the sages call a "necessary war" (מלחמת חובה), one that must be fought, as, for example to defend the Jewish people from attack by enemies. Another example is the war conducted by Shimon and Levi against the people of Shechem; it was not a *mitzvah*. How do we know? Because, Jacob their father not only did not command them to do what they did but actually opposed it! And yet, we find in the *Midrash* that God praised them for their actions. In a discourse (*Likutei Sichot* v. 5) the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that for Shimon and Levi, to kill all the men of Shechem for what they did to their sister Dinah was not a *mitzvah*, it was a duty, a necessity (חובה). We might have thought that a necessity, a duty (חובה) is just a very strong *mitzvah*, one that you really have to do. But, here we see that what is a necessity may not always be a *mitzvah*; that these two categories can even contradict. Something can be a necessity, yet not be a *mitzvah*. The duty, or necessity is something that goes back to a person's soul root, it originates in the

level of the “singular one” (*yechidah*), the highest aspect of the soul. In the end, Jacob acknowledged their actions, understanding that for them it was a duty.

In any event, what we have just explained is that there is a progression in a person’s psyche and consciousness of his actions. The progression goes from something that is forbidden, to permissible, to *mitzvah*, and finally to duty. And, when something reaches the level of being a necessity, it becomes part of our natural consciousness.

Further, the two categories of permissible and forbidden (אסור מותר) are possible only when a person has self consciousness, only when a person is aware of himself and involved with himself, because it is either permissible for **me** or forbidden to **me**. It’s all about me! This is what the *Zohar* means when it says that the source of permissible and forbidden as categories is found in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is really the source of self-consciousness and self-involvement. The *mitzvah* category is already a Divine consciousness, because it is God that is commanding me to do a *mitzvah*. The source of the *mitzvah* category is in the Tree of Life. But, once something becomes a necessity, a duty, its origin is in the *yechidah* of the soul (above the two primordial Trees, as explained in Chassidut) and it has attained the state of natural consciousness.

Duty and necessity are thus the ideal holy “extension” of the singular level of one’s soul that the Izhbitzer is referring to. But, as long as something has not reached such a mature level where it is a necessity, a holy duty, then it is still just the extension התפשטות of Esau. Nonetheless, the sages teach us that even when a Jew sins he is still a Jew, which means that even those things which are extending from a lower level, not from holiness, in the end their source is somehow in the highest level and in the future it will be revealed that they extended out of the highest level of the Jewish soul. In the end you will do *teshuvah*, and you will get a great profit from the transgression, from this seemingly lower-source extension, which you would not have gotten if you would have followed only the legal ruling of the Torah and refrained from it. Without a doubt, this is a very heavy thing to say, but this is the idea that the Izhbitzer teaches and which was repeated by the Lubavitcher Rebbe using Chabad terminology.

Nonetheless, it should be very clear, that until you get to the times of the Mashiach, when the source of all your actions that were done out of what was lower extension will be revealed, until that time you will suffer awfully, you will experience tremendous pain and hardship for your transgression, because in this world, in our present reality, the source is still hidden and therefore you are judged guilty for these actions. This is what the end of the verse in Ecclesiastes is saying: “But, know that for all these [acts where you followed your heart and eyes] God will bring you to judgment.” And yet, the beginning of the verse says that you should follow your heart and your eyes and the sages do not say that the two halves of the verse are one thing, so just go to the end to learn that you will be judged for doing this. Rather, these are two different rulings given at two different epochs. What seems like a lack of justice and a Judge refers to the times

of Mashiach, when even acting upon the inclination of one's heart and eyes will be shown to have originated in the *yechidah* of the soul. But, in the meantime, there is definitely a Judge, there is definitely justice, and don't think for a moment that the lash has been slackened! In the meantime such actions carry difficult consequences. So, there is still justice and the Book of Ecclesiastes is still in the Bible.

Again, the value of the first half of the verse, which is related to the times of the Mashiach is exactly 768 תשס"ח, our present year!



The second appearance of the idiom "the lash has been slackened" is in the *Yerushalmi*, which parallels a similar passage in the Babylonian Talmud. The context of the discussion is the verse: "The concealed [transgressions] are the interest of *Havayah* our God, and the revealed are for us and our children forever." This verse describes the collective responsibility that we have as a nation for the sins of individuals. It states that if the sin was concealed, i.e., it was done in private and no one knows about it, then it is God's responsibility to punish the person and we will not suffer for the sins of the individual. However, if the sin was revealed, i.e., it was done in public, and no one stopped the person or rebuked him, then we all share responsibility for the action.

The classic example that the Talmud brings for this is Achan who stole from the loot of Jericho even though Joshua sanctified all of it to God. In the Book of Joshua, this act is described as "Israel has sinned," indicating that the entire nation is collectively responsible. The mutual responsibility that we have for one another started on the 11th day of Nisan (the Lubavitcher Rebbe's birthday), a day after Joshua crossed the Jordan with the Jewish people. On that day they traveled to Shechem and there took vows that included accepting this mutual responsibility. From there, they traveled to Jericho and conquered it. Indeed, because collective responsibility was in place already, the result of Achan's act was that that 36 people (the majority of a Sanhedrin of 71) were killed in the next war with the city of Ai.

Regarding the scope of collective responsibility the Talmud brings a dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nechemia (in Hebrew "Rabbi Yehudah" plus "Rabbi Nechemiah" equals "Shne'ur" רבי יהודה רבי נחמיה = שניאור, meaning "two lights," two Torah perspectives, the Alter Rebbe's first name), two students of Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Yehudah says that collective responsibility *includes* acts done in private! Otherwise, he says, how can it be that everyone was punished for Achan's act? Achan stole the loot in secrecy. No one knew!

But Rabbi Nechemiah holds that collective responsibility does not include acts done in private, only revealed transgressions—sins performed in public. (Rashi in the Chumash writes like Rabbi Nechemiah, but most other commentaries write like Rabbi Yehudah. As an aside, we of course have to ask, how does Rabbi Nechemiah explain the event with Achan. According to Rabbi Nechemiah, it was not a hidden transgression, for his wife and children knew about it, which is enough to make it a public sin.)

The basis for their dispute focuses on how to interpret the 11 dots that are written over the words “And the revealed [transgression] are for us and our children forever” והגלות לנו ולבנינו עד עולם. Now collective punishment is also a lash. According to Rabbi Nechemiah, the lash only strikes in retaliation to revealed transgression, but according to Rabbi Yehudah, it also strikes us for hidden ones.

In any case, according to Rashi in his commentary to the Talmud, both Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nechemia hold that the collective responsibility has no time limitation. From the moment the oath of the Jewish people to God was taken in Shechem, it applies forever. But, in the Jerusalem Talmud we find something different:

Said Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: While in the Jordan River they accepted responsibility for the concealed transgressions. Joshua told them that if they do not do so, the waters will come and drown them. Said Rabbi Zavda, know that this is so, because Achan sinned and the majority of a Sanhedrin [36 people] were killed in the battle with the Ai. Said Rabbi Levi: In Yavneh, the lash was slackened. A voice from Heaven was heard stating: “You no longer have to deal with the concealed.”

Keren Orah, a commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, refers to this passage in the Jerusalem Talmud and says that the reasoning there is that in order for us to have collective responsibility over the private lives of individuals, their transgressions carried out in private, we have to be living in peace in our land. But, in the time of exile, and when the Sanhedrin arrived in Yavneh, as mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud, the lengthy exile that we are still in, had already begun. When we are in exile, not living peacefully in the Land of Israel, the lash is slackened. This is the lash as defined by Rabbi Yehudah that we saw, the lash that strikes also for private sins of individuals. So once the exile begins, the voice from Heaven says, you no longer can deal with concealed acts, with the private realm of other individuals.

The *Keren Orah*'s explanation is a very logical one. It is saying that God demands collective responsibility for the private acts of others only when the Temple exists and we are living peacefully and in harmony with one another. Since in exile we are not in a pacified state (and the very reason for the destruction of the Temple and the lengthy exile that we still suffer is due to hatred amongst our people), He does not want to punish us in this way. It is hard for us to understand how collective responsibility for private sins works even when there is a Temple, but all the more so when we do not have one. So, this is a type of leniency on the part of God—God is allowing acts that at another time would be punished, to slide by Him, as it were.

Let's return to the *Torat Chaim*. He writes that the lash or strip of leather of the idiom “the lash has been slackened” alludes to the knot of the head *tefilin* that God showed Moshe Rabbeinu when He revealed Himself to Him. Slackening, or releasing the strip of leather means that the head *tefilin* of the Almighty have been undone. The knot in the head *tefilin* symbolizes the connection between the souls of the Jewish people and the Almighty. When the Temple stood, this knot was very strong and the bond

between the Jewish souls themselves and between all the souls and God was very strong. When the Temple was destroyed, this knot lost its tightness, it slackened. As long as the knot/bond is strong, we can bear the burden of hidden transgressions as a collective. It is as if we have a common inner frequency that allows us to sense each other intimately—a type of telepathy. Each of us feels the hidden thoughts and feelings of the other.

We see from the discussion in the Babylonian Talmud that Rabbi Yehudah is living with the consciousness of the kingship and the Temple, because he understands all about this inner frequency and feels that it is possible for us to have collective responsibility over one another. This is not something new, as we have talked about this aspect of Rabbi Yehudah's teachings before.

Maimonides is the first to write that the “concealed things” referred to in the verse analyzed in the Talmud refers specifically to the concealed/hidden aspects of the Torah, which are the rationales, the reasons behind the commandments of the Torah. He writes that a person, like himself (as he discusses in length in the third part of his Guide to the Perplexed), who feels that he has a good grasp of the rationale behind the commandments, nonetheless should not feel free of the revealed aspects of the commandments, i.e., with their legal aspects—*Halachah*. Maimonides writes that this was the mistake of one of the religions that came out of Judaism, Islam. Its founders thought in their perverse minds that the true rationale behind the commandments had been revealed and that their simple meaning does not apply. But, says Maimonides, even if you have indeed grasped a bit of the rationale behind the *mitzvot*, you are still, always fully obligated by the revealed aspect, the *Halachah*. Rabbeinu Bechayei writes that Maimonides' interpretation does not follow the literal directive of the verses in the Torah regarding the concealed and the revealed, but there are other, later commentaries, that argue that it does.



Once more: we said that the rationales of the Torah reflect the Torah as it exists before the contraction of God's infinite light, they are the new Torah that the Mashiach will reveal and they have the power to make the forbidden permissible, or at least to make it possible for us to understand the positive, necessary aspect of the prohibitions allowing us to experience the fun and joy that exist in the positive and negative together. It is the Torah of Mashiach that does away with Amalek, the source of all doubt that perhaps the prohibitions are not so great, not so fun (in Hebrew, “Amalek” equals “doubt,” עמלק = ספק).

Let's recap the last teaching about the idiom “the lash has been slackened.” Our first reading would have told us that the slackening of the lash after the destruction of the Temple is a good thing, because we are free of collective responsibility for private transgressions, something that we cannot be responsible in our present state of exile. But, the *Midrash* about the Book of Ecclesiastes means to say that slackening the lash is a

very negative thing; if it were indeed the case, then the Book of Ecclesiastes would be taken out of the Bible, because the verse from it quoted above would be heresy.

But, now, what we are saying is that thanks to the Torah of Mashiach we understand that the exact opposite is the case. That in our exile we cannot take collective responsibility for the iniquities of individuals is a sad situation, and in this regard the slackening of the lash is a negative thing because it illustrates that we no longer have a direct connection between our souls. That God could hold us accountable as a collective is a great ideal according to Rabbi Yehudah; it is the result of the ideal state of connection with Hashem and with one another. The goal of Jewish kingship, *Malchut Yisra'el*, is to reach this state once more, when we are all as one, as we are truly before the contraction of God's infinite light. With the knot of the *tefilin*, we are with the King and with one another. We wish that it were so, that God could punish us for each other's hidden transgressions.

And, in regard to the *Midrash* about the verse in Ecclesiastes, the slackening of the lash represents natural consciousness, the consciousness we will attain in the days of the Mashiach. It refers to the holy and rectified state of extension and expansion of the highest aspect of our souls when we will dutifully perform whatever we feel to be right, all out of natural and perfect awe of the Almighty. This is the final goal of inserting the tremendously many and chaotic lights of Esau—who represents the ability to extend and expand one's dominion over the world—into the strong, rectified vessels of Jacob, allowing you to "...follow the paths of your heart and what your eyes see..." When this happens, indeed there is still judgment, but because your heart is 100% with God, you will always come out fine from the judgment, because everything you did will be revealed as fulfilling the sages dictum: "Make your will as His will, in order that He make His will like yours." This should be our goal. That our will be 100% aligned with God's will. If I achieve such alignment, then I can act like a young man, following my heart. The time to achieve this is the present year, 5768 (2007-8) the year when "I will extricate the spirit of impurity from the land" (from the verse whose numerical value equals $7 \cdot 768!$)



We conclude by expressing our hope that the Mashiach appear immediately in order to redeem us. We say that we are ready to be wed to the Almighty and to be "with the King in His work." We are ready to become full partners in the new creation that the King will create, through the new Torah, the Torah of the power of permissibility (כח (דהתירא), the Torah that does not threaten people with a lash.

When can our words be heard by Esau? Only when we no longer understand him as the lash that is poised to strike us! Why have we frum Jews felt for so long that it so taboo for us to speak to the representatives of Esau in the world about cultural issues, about things of common interest like the seven Noachide Laws? Because, for a frum Jew, even to speak to these people was like talking to the lash—the punishment for our

transgressions! Until now, Esau (Christianity) was the embodiment of the whip, it was the punishment itself (as mentioned, "Esau" equals "lash" עשו = הרצועה). But the moment that the world has changed and Esau has changed, the leader of the generation picks up on the change in the atmosphere of the world. That is why the Lubavitcher Rebbe told us that Esau is no longer the whip over our heads; he is no longer coming with 400 men to kill us. The lash has been freed from Esau, he is no longer the lash, and therefore for us it has also been freed. Now it is time to bring together the many lights of "I have plenty" of Esau into the rectified vessels of "I have everything" of Jacob. Then we will merit to worship God, "out of joy and a good heart with plenty of everything," with the coming of the redeemer to Zion with the true and complete redemption, immediately.