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Returning the World to Nothingness and Bringing Mashiach

On the 25th of Tishrei we commemorate the Yahrzeit of one of the greatest tzaddikim, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. The great tzaddikim would say that just mentioning his name sweetens all harsh judgments. When Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was born, the Ba'al Shem Tov celebrated with a feast for all his disciples, telling them that just now the Advocate of Israel (סניגורן של ישראל) was born.

The Earth and the Name Havayah

In Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's book, *Kedushat Levi*, there are many teachings on Parashat Bereishit. One of them is on the second account of creation.

After the first account of creation, where God created the heavens and the earth in 6 days and rested on the Shabbat, the next verse begins: "These are the chronicles of the heavens and the earth upon their creation, on the day that Havayah Elokim made earth and heaven." This is the first time these two Names of God (Havayah and Elokim) are juxtaposed.

Elokim in numerical value equals הטבע, the Hebrew word for "nature", and therefore symbolizes the manner in which God enclothes himself in the world, within the limits of nature. Havayah is God's essential Name, referring to His being above everything. Havayah is the name of miracles, describing God as timeless.

In addition to this special juxtaposition, we see another special phenomenon in this verse:

The heavens and the earth are the two great principles of Genesis, which include all creation. More often than not, when appearing in a verse, the heavens are mentioned before the earth. But, in this verse, the order is reversed, "on the day that Havayah Elokim created earth and heavens." Why is this order used? Why does the earth come first, and how is this related to the appearance of Havayah?

This is the topic of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's teaching. He says that the heavens are the angels, the army of heaven. The earth symbolizes the Jewish people, whom God created to rectify the earth. The Jews are God's army on earth.

This verse elucidates that there is something in the lower realm that is greater than the upper realm and this is thanks to the revelation of Havayah, God's essential Name, which represents the supernatural. It reveals that there is something even greater in the earth, in the Jewish People.

The Masorettes (the groups of Sages who specialized in the intricacies of the Torah text) note that this order, earth and then heavens, actually appears only twice. The second time is not in the Pentateuch, but in Psalms.

יְהַלְלוּ | אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה כִּי־נִשְׁגָּב שְׁמוֹ לְבַדּוֹ הוֹדוּ עַל־אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:

Praise the name of Havayah for his name alone is powerful, his splendor is on the earth and the heavens.¹

The fact that this is noted in the Mesorah suggests that this is an important point. This verse is saying that we need to exalt the Name Havayah, for His Name, this Name, Havayah, has risen above alone, His splendor is (over) earth and heavens.” This entire verse reflects a reality in which the earth is above the heavens.

What then is the connection and what does it teach us? Says the Kedushat Levi, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev:

In this world the angels are spiritual while the souls are encloded in physical matter. Physical matter receives from the spiritual. So in this world, our present reality, the angels are higher than the souls. But actually, the souls are much higher and this will be revealed with the coming of Mashiach. So much so, that the angels will be the beings asking the souls—who will be standing inside the heavenly chambers, near the Almighty—“what has God done”, what is God’s will for the world.

All Jews are tzaddikim, and although this is not yet apparent, it will be revealed soon with the coming of Mashiach. The place of tzaddikim is closer to God than that of the angels. This verse, “What has God done” (מה פעל אל) is part of Balam’s prophecy. It says there that when there are no longer false superstitions among the Jewish people, then the angels will need to ask us what God has done.

This phrase, “What has ... done” (מה פעל) appears only twice in the entire Tanach. Once in Balam’s prophecy as mentioned and once again in Psalms, מה פעל צדיק, “What has the tzaddik done”. The tzaddik too is “doing.” The Tzaddik is acting to imbue the מה ,the what, the nullification to God, the sense that everything is part of God, into reality.

Our task is to reveal this in the world, to show that all is God. We are entrusted with this task. While the angels are only messengers to build God a palace, as it were, the souls reveal God’s omnipresence in our lower reality. To reveal this type of nullification to G-d is the task of the tzaddikim.

Looking at the gematrias here, ,פעל/act, is a general root in Hebrew, it equals 180 in numerical value, which is 4 times מה/what. The ratio is 1:4. This is the most important ratio in the Torah.

This is the relationship between God’s oneness, and the four letters of His essential Name. The four letters describe a continuous process of recreation: contraction, expansion, drawing down (from the concealed to the revealed), and second expansion (within the revealed dimension).

Even though there are 4 letters, God remains of course One, essentially one. The idea here is that the מה, the nullification to God, (represented by the One,) has to be imbued through all four Worlds, from Emanation through Action.

As above, the Sages say that in the future the souls will be more internally and openly before God than the angels. The souls will reveal God’s intent and purpose, and since they know this, it will be they who will execute God’s will.

¹ Psalms 148:13.

Man was Nothing

When will we, the tzaddikim, the souls, the earth, be before the heavens? “On the day that Havayah Elokim makes (...the earth and heaven)”.

How do we make this happen?

The verses that follow are surprising: “All shrubs of the field did not yet grow, and no grass grew because God had not yet rained on the earth, and there was no man to till the land.” The next verse reads, “And a mist ascended from the earth and watered the entire land.” Only then does it say that God created man.

Rebbe Levi Yitzchak says that the way to reach this state of Mashiach where earth is before the heavens, a state in which God’s kingdom is all over the world, there must be a state of “there was no man,” “man was nothing”.

At first this verse may sound negative, that there was no human yet to pray, as Rashi explains, therefore nothing grew. But Rebbe Levi Yitzchak says that this phrase, “man was nothing,” is the key to redemption. It shouldn’t be read as a state that was, but rather, as our destiny.

When a person reaches a state of nothingness, he is able to imbue reality with nullification, with selflessness. When a person reaches this state, he can enact the same state of not being separate from God in all reality.

When this happens, all of creation goes into a state of טרם, which literally means “before”, “pre”, or “not yet”, a rare word in the Bible. The holy Zohar says that the shrub of the field alludes to the Mashiach son of Joseph and the grasses are the Mashiach son of David.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak says that thanks to the טרם, the “not yet”, the Mashiach grows. The role of man is to imbue reality with a sense of טרם, which is “pre” as in pre-consciousness, the level in psychology between, and bridging, the super-consciousness and the consciousness.

Within the keter, the crown, where the super-consciousness lies, there is a level called the “head of nothingness”. (The animal soul enjoys somethingness, being something, but the Divine soul enjoys the state of not being, being nothingness).

As long as we do not reach this state of nothingness, the Mashiach cannot come, says Rabbi Levi Yitzchak.

Perhaps he learnt this from his master, the Magid of Mezritch, who said that God created the world something from nothing so that the tzaddikim could be given the task of returning the world from something to nothing, but without returning it to chaos – instead, bringing it to a state of selflessness.

Thus, we see that there are two states, אין and טרם, nothingness and pre. When a person reaches a state of nothingness, he imbues all of creation with a state of “pre.”

When this happens, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak continues, a mist, actually more like a drop of wetness, alluding to pleasure, descends upon the earth. All the pleasure that God has comes from the earth. This is the pleasure that the Almighty receives from a person making himself as naught, and this pleasure brings rain over all of reality.

Following this, God creates man out of the earth. And when the Mashiach comes, there will be new souls, a completely new first man, a first Adam, who is also Israel, a higher level of man. And the Name of Havayah will be praised, "His splendor on the earth and the heavens".

But this all depends on this nullification in us that must come first.