

Compassion for Reality

(Based on Rabbi Ginsburgh's 19th Kislev farbrengen last year, 5780)

Jews seem to naturally have a critical view of the world. That is no wonder. The soul descended from the illuminated Garden of Eden, from a world of pure good and truth, to its imprisonment in the material body, in the dark, cynical world of falsehood. In truth, our critical perspective on reality reflects God's first will to create the world with the attribute of severe judgment.

After God descended from delight in Himself (called *sha'ashuim atzmi'im*) to the "judgment" of creating a contracted world, He saw that the world could not exist strictly on the basis of the attribute of judgment or severity. He then included the attribute of compassion and even gave it precedence over the attribute of severity (as in the verse in Creation, "on the day that *Havayah* [God's Name of compassion, prior to] *Elokim* [God's Name of judgment] made the earth and the heavens").¹

God's ascent from the initial thought of employing the attribute of severity exclusively to the attribute of compassion plays out on every *Rosh Hashanah*, as we say in the *Rosh Hashanah* prayers, "This is the day, the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day." On this day, God rises and ascends from the throne of severe judgments and sits on the throne of compassion. For every Jew, as well, the ultimate purpose of the descent of the soul to the world is for the sake of its subsequent ascent—to ascend from the perspective of severity and criticism to a perspective full of compassion on reality.

Let us delve into the intrinsic meaning of judgment as opposed to compassion: When still in heaven, the Jewish soul naturally 'turns its back' on mundane reality. Even if it agrees and even wishes to descend to the mundane world, understanding that it can gain a lot from its sojourn here, its face is always turned upward, to its Divine source and the Divine pleasure that it will gain. The soul approaches reality from behind as it were—as a lowly necessity that must be dealt with and accommodated in order to achieve its lofty, Divine goal. As a result, it is impatient with the blemishes of reality and even harbors a concealed sense of 'hostility' towards it.

This can be likened to a young man who studies Torah all day in *yeshivah*, who understands that he must get married in order to actualize everything that he has studied. With that type of understanding, he initially may relate to his wife, however, only as a means, as it were, by which he can perform his *mitzvot* and achieve his lofty aspirations, without showing any true interest in her and her emotions. His face is lifted to God, while he turns his back towards his wife. Even if he perfunctorily 'goes through the motions' of what he was taught about how to relate to his wife, his

¹ Genesis 2:4.

relationship with her will be superficial and necessarily critical and impatient with her unique personality and traits.

This is how the soul relates to the world. Metamorphosis to a perspective of compassion depends upon turning one's face towards reality itself, with the understanding that God's own deepest wish is to dwell in mundane reality. Thus, the soul relates congenially to the minutiae of reality, employing compassion that strives to rectify reality in the face of all its shortcomings.

This is how we can explain the meaning of "The world stands on three things, on Torah, on service of God, and on acts of loving kindness."² Like God who stands up from the throne of judgment to sit on the throne of compassion, by means of Torah, service of God, and acts of loving kindness, the world stands up from its seat of judgment and sits on the seat of compassion.

Initially, it may seem that the Torah, which preceded the world, causes those who study it to express harsh criticism of reality.³ A person who learns Torah for its own sake, however—for the sake for which it was given, as the Divine plan for creation and the ultimate guide for its rectification—becomes increasingly compassionate toward reality. Motivated by a will for true rectification of reality, he sees it as it is and knows how to judge it with righteousness and to give it the benefit of the doubt. Then a person learns to awaken compassion on reality by means of his service of prayer to God and to express his compassion through acts of loving kindness.

² *Pirkei Avot* 1:2.

³ *Ta'anit* 4a: "A Torah scholar who boils with anger, it is the Torah that boils him."