

The Plague of Promiscuity: What is its Message?

One of the most painful banes of our generation is promiscuity. The world around us is a permissive world. It seems that all the barriers of modesty have been breached and that everything that once was unthinkable is now accessible with the touch of a screen. The excuse for this permissiveness is the ideology of “openness,” of removing all censorship, and disbanding all self-control. In truth, however, the brazen lack of modesty in the world does not signal that humanity has reached a state in which cherished principles such as openness and honesty have torn down barriers, instead it indicates that cloaks of darkness and disingenuity. What has actually happened is that the superficial and shallow has captured the limelight and our focus is enticed to consider only the most external, physical, and profane parts of our existence. At the same time, inner worlds and experiences are shut out and the way to encountering the soul within the body is obstructed. Lost is the path to true love that goes beyond physical desire.

In a world in which everything is external and externalized, it may seem that if we want to merit true, inner modesty, we have to flee the reality that surrounds us and lock ourselves in a room with no access to the internet. Clearly, however, that is not a realistic option, and it seems that in the final analysis, it is also not the will of God. Reclusion causes both practical and emotional estrangement from all those left outside who now, more than ever, need to hear the voice of humanity, of spiritual experience, and of commitment to a higher standard. How then should we approach and understand the promiscuous reality we live in and what can we do to rectify it?

The Ba'al Shem Tov explained the difficult to understand words of Psalms 144:14 (whose literal meaning can be rendered, “our oxen are laden”) in the following manner. He who knows that the “*Aluf* of the world”—a connotation for God, which otherwise could be rendered as “oxen”—is everywhere and knows that there is no place void of Him is able to withstand all the hardship and concealment that life in the world is laden with. He is able to overcome all the enticement and threats in external reality when the permissive world threatens to “swallow up” anyone who dares express a different approach and strive for inner meaning.

The goal, however, is not only to increase our capacity to carry the burdens of life. When we adopt the approach that there is no place void of God—which would be a good way to state the Ba'al Shem Tov's main point—then, the second part of this verse is also fulfilled. The second part's literal translation is something like, “there is no breaching and no sortie, and no wailing in our streets.” But, following the Ba'al Shem Tov's direction, when one is aware that God is everywhere, then there is no erasure of borders and limits (“no breaching”) and no immodesty and promiscuity (“no

sortie”) and finally, there is no sorrow or cries of grief in our streets (“no wailing in our streets”).

How can the consciousness of God’s omnipresence provide a remedy to promiscuity and its associated ills? Promiscuity, which cloaks and obscures inner being, stems from a consciousness of darkness—from the false belief that God does not care, is not looking at us, and that we, being left to our own devices, can do as we please. Chassidut teaches that as a result of feeling alone and uncared for, we experience ourselves as distant from all that is good (i.e., God) and eventually despair of ever attaining a true state of heartfelt and meaningful love—that which is called “inner love.”

By strengthening the recognition that there is no place void of God and that in every place, “there is an eye that sees and an ear that hears, and all your actions are written in a book,” combats this feeling of having been left alone. Externally, people interpret these statements (an eye that sees, an ear that hears, etc.) as a type of “Big Brother” reality in which someone is watching you in order to entrap you. But the real meaning of these statements is to express the simple fact that God is everywhere because God cares about everything—nothing is too small or inconsequential. Of course, the more simplistic meaning that we are being watched also contributes to helping us maintain our best behavior.

The recognition of the fact that all the walls that conceal God are not real and that He is everywhere has the power to realign our perspective. Instead of external reality threatening our internal reality, our internal reality can flow outward. Then, the most inner thoughts we have about God and the most heartfelt emotions about our connection with holiness can pour out into the external world, which will absorb them with thirst. The “wailing in our streets” can be rectified only by what the Mashiach said to the Ba’al Shem Tov—that the redemption would come, “when your wellsprings will burst forth” and “springs of water through the streets.”¹

Linguistically, “promiscuity” (פְּרִיצוּת) in Hebrew is cognate with the verb “to burst forth” (וּפְרָצְתָּ). Thus, the rectified form of promiscuity is through spreading knowledge of our inner connection with Godliness and with all that is holy, recalling the verse, “You shall burst forth to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and all the families of the earth will be blessed by you and your offspring.”² They will be blessed on both the physical and spiritual planes. On the physical plane, this expresses the birth of righteous generations, modest and happy, with a consciousness of the mission to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it.”³ On the spiritual plane, this expresses the dissemination of the most inner wellsprings of the Torah to the very most external places on earth.

¹. Proverbs 5:16.

². Genesis 28:14.

³. Ibid. 1:28



Gal Einai

*Revealing the Torah's
Inner Dimension*