

LESSON ONE

SIN, TESHUVAH AND THE YETZER HA-RA; TIKKUN

TEXT ONE --- Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 9:7; Talmud, **Sukkah** 52a

Were it not for the **yetzer ha-ra**, a man would not build a house, take a wife, procreate, or engage in business.

The greater the man, the greater the **yetzer**.

TEXT TWO --- Talmud, **Shabbat** 146a; **Yevamot** 103b

When the serpent came upon Eve, he injected into her a **zohama** (here meaning some kind of moral impurity, sensual passion). When the Israelites stood at Mount Sinai, their **zohama** departed; but the idolaters who did not stand at Mount Sinai, their **zohama** did not depart.

TEXT THREE --- Zohar I, 36b

At first they wore garments of light, and he (Adam) was waited upon by the highest beings...Now that they sinned, (they wore) garments of skin, soothing the skin, not the soul.

TEXT FOUR --- Zohar III, 80b

When God came to create the world and to reveal what was hidden in the depths, and disclose light out of darkness, they were all wrapped in one another. Therefore, light emerged from darkness, and from the impenetrable came forth the profound. Similarly, evil comes forth from good; from mercy comes judgment. And all are intertwined, the good impulse and the evil impulse...

TEXT FIVE --- Zohar I, 53b

*The Lord God expelled him from the Garden of Eden...He drove out **et Adam**.*
(Gen. 3:23-24)

Rabbi Elazar said: We do not know who divorced whom: if the Holy One, Praised be He, divorced Adam or not. But the word is transposed: *He drove out et. Et*, precisely! And who drove out **Et**? Adam – Adam drove out **Et**! Therefore it is written: *The Lord God expelled him from the Garden of Eden*. Why did He expel him? Because Adam drove out **Et**, as we have said.

TEXT SIX --- Joseph Gikatilla, **Sha'arei Orah**, p. 15.

You must realize a fundamental principle. Know that at the beginning of Creation, the essence of the **Shekhinah** dwelled in the lower realms, for the plan for Creation was to mirror the upper and lower worlds; higher entities of the higher realm would be parallel to higher entities of the lower realm, and it would be the same with the lower entities of each realm. Therefore, **Shekhinah** dwelled in the lower realm, and since **Shekhinah** dwelled below, the heavens and the earth were united...each perfected the other; each filled the other. The channels and their sources worked perfectly, drawing (the flow) from above to below, as the blessed God filled from above to below...the blessed God was present equally in the upper and lower spheres. Then Adam came and sinned. The lines were ruined, the channels broken, the pools cut off; **Shekhinah** withdrew, and the bond was severed.

TEXT SEVEN --- **Zohar** I, 35b

Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts. (Gen. 3:1) Of the serpent, Rabbi Yitzchak said: This is the **yetzer ha-ra**. Rabbi Yehudah said: This was an actual serpent. When they came before Rabbi Shimon, he said to them: They are indeed one and the same thing, for this was Samael, who makes his appearance riding on a serpent. The form of the serpent is Satan, and they are one and the same thing...

Now the serpent was the shrewdest... This is the **yetzer ha-ra**, the angel of death. Being the angel of death, he inflicted death upon the whole world. This is the mystery of the words, *I have decided to put an end to all flesh* (literally, *the end of all flesh has come before Me*; Gen. 6:13): the one who ends all flesh, who takes the soul from all flesh...

TEXT EIGHT --- Talmud, **Baba Batra** 16a; **Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer** 13

Resh Lakish said: Satan, the **yetzer ha-ra**, and the angel of death are one and the same.

Samael took his band and descended and saw all the creatures ...He determined that the most cunningly evil was the serpent, as it says: *Now the serpent was the shrewdest...* (Gen. 3:1) The serpent looked like a camel, and Samael mounted and rode him.

TEXT NINE --- **Zohar** II, 163a-b

Everything which the Holy One, Praised be He, has made, both above and below, is for the sake of revealing His glory, and everything is for the sake of His service. But did you ever see a servant who accuses his Master, opposing everything that his master wishes? The will of the Holy One, Praised be He, is that man serve Him at every moment, walking in the path of truth, so that He can merit many benefits. Since this is His will, how can an evil servant come and oppose, by his Master's will, luring people to an evil path, distancing them from the good path, and causing them to disobey the will of their Lord?

But indeed, it is doing the will of its Master. This may be compared to a king who had an only son, whom he loved greatly. Because of his love for him, he commanded his son never to approach an evil woman, for whoever approached her would be unworthy of entering the king's palace. The son consented that he would lovingly do his father's will.

Outside of the palace lived a harlot of great beauty and charm. One day, the king said, "I want to see my son's devotion to me." He sent for the harlot and said to her, "Go and seduce my son," to see his son's devotion to him. What did the harlot do? She went after his son and began embracing him, kissing him, seducing him with all kinds of enticements. If the son is worthy and obeys his father's command, he will rebuke her; he pays no heed to her and thrusts her away from him. Then the father rejoices in his son and brings him into the palace, giving him gifts and presents and great honor. Who caused all this honor for the son? You must admit: that harlot!

And that harlot: does she deserve praise for this or not? Surely, she does in every way. First, because she carried out the king's command; second, because she

brought upon the son all this honor, all this goodness, all this love of the king toward him. Therefore it is written, *And behold, it was very good* (Gen. 1:31). *Behold, it was good* – this is the angel of life; *very good* – the angel of death. It is certainly very good for one who fulfills the will of his Master!

Come and see: if not for this accuser, the righteous would not inherit those supernal treasures reserved for them in the World to Come. Happy are those who have encountered this accuser, and happy are those who have not encountered him. Happy are those who did encounter this accuser and escaped his clutches, for through him they inherit all that goodness, all that bliss, all those delights of the World to Come, of which it is written, *No eye has seen (them), O God, but You* (Is. 64:3). Happy are those who did not encounter him, for through him they would have inherited **Gehinnom**, and been banished from the land of the living, those wicked people who do not heed their Lord and are drawn after him. Therefore, the righteous should be grateful to him, for because of him they inherit all the goodness, bliss, and delight in the World to Come.

What is the benefit for this accuser when the wicked obey him? Even though he has no direct benefit, he fulfills the will of his Master. Furthermore, he grows more powerful because of this. Since he is evil, he grows stronger when evil is done, like a wicked person whose wickedness does not intensify until he kills a man. Once he has killed people, he grows stronger, becomes more powerful and has pleasure. So too the accuser grows stronger after he entices people, accuses them, and kills them. Then he is pleased, grows stronger and becomes more powerful.

Just as the side of life grows stronger when men are good and walk on the straight path, similarly, this accuser is strengthened and becomes more powerful when the wicked obey him and are dominated by him, may the Merciful One save us. Happy are those who are worthy to defeat him and overturn him.

TEXT TEN --- **Zohar** I, 144b

Rabbi Shimon opened: *When a man's ways please God, He causes even his enemies to be at peace with him* (Prov. 16:7). Come and see how carefully one should align his paths toward the Holy One, blessed be He, in order to fulfill the commands of Torah! For they have established that a person has two angelic messengers from above to couple with him, one on the right and one on the left, coupling with him, appearing wherever he does anything, called **yetzer tov** and **yetzer ra**.

If one comes to purify himself and engage in commands of Torah, that **yetzer tov** coupled with him overpowers the **yetzer ra**, who then makes peace with him, turning into his servant. But when a person relapses, setting out to defile himself, that **yetzer ra** overpowers and overwhelms the **yetzer tov**, as we have established. Indeed, when that person comes to purify himself, how strongly he is empowered as the **yetzer tov** prevails. (In so doing,) *He causes even his enemies to be at peace with him*, for the **yetzer ra** is overturned by the **yetzer tov**. Therefore Solomon said, *Better to be lightly esteemed and have a servant* (Prov. 12:9). What is the meaning of *and have a servant*? The **yetzer ra**. So when a person follows the commands of Torah, *He (God) causes even his enemies to be at peace with him*, i.e., the **yetzer ra**.

Come and see: since Jacob trusted in the Holy One, Blessed be He, and all his ways were for His sake, *He causes even his enemies to be at peace with him*; (this is) Samael, the power and strength of Esau, who made peace with Jacob. Since he made peace with him and confirmed those blessings, Esau made peace with him, and until Jacob was at peace with that official appointed over him (i.e., over Esau), Esau did not make peace with him. So everywhere, power below depends on power above.

TEXT ELEVEN --- Zohar III, 122

Rabbi Yehudah opened: *When a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or an ass falls into it, the one responsible for the pit must make restitution...* (Ex. 21:33-34) If so, how much more responsible is the one who harms the world through his sins! And yet, surprisingly, even though he harms the world, he can repent, as it is written: *When a man or woman commits any wrong...he shall confess the wrong he has done. He shall make restitution...* (Num. 5:6-7) This is truly of benefit to them, because he has made repentance. He has actually made her, as it were, for he has restored that which he had damaged in the world above. How? Through repentance, as it is written, *When a man or woman commits any wrong...he shall confess the wrong he has done. He shall make restitution...* (i.e., repentance) Repentance repairs everything, repairs the world above, repairs the world below, repairs the person himself, repairs the whole world.

Afterward Rabbi Yitzchak opened: *When you are in distress because all these things have befallen you (and in the end, return to the Lord your God and obey Him. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God. Deut. 4:30-31) When you are in distress:* from this we learn that repentance is best before **Din**/Judgment dwells in the world. For once **Din**/Judgment resides, its power becomes stronger, and then who can remove it from the world or drive it away? Once it is present, it does not depart until its task is completed. But after it has been completed, and a man repents, he restores all the worlds. This is indicated by *all these things have befallen you, and in the end.* And it is also written, *return to the Lord your God...For the Lord your God is a compassionate God.*

What is the significance here of *and in the end*? It is meant to include the Assembly of Israel which is in exile and shares their sorrow, never forsaking them. Therefore, even when the Holy One, Praised be He, brings judgment upon the world, He wants Israel to return in repentance so that He might benefit them both in this world and the next; and nothing can stand in the way of repentance.

Come and see. Even the Assembly of Israel is called “Repentance.” And if you would say that upper Repentance is nowhere to be found, nevertheless this is called “Repentance,” when (the penitent) brings mercy (**Rachamim**) back towards her, and she returns as head of all that company and nourishes them. And Repentance is at her highest when the soul surrenders itself to her, and she takes it when it is in a state of penitence. Then all is restored both above and below. He is restored together with the whole world. One wicked man in the world causes damage to countless others. Woe to the wicked; woe to his neighbor!

TEXT TWELVE --- **Zohar** III, 69b-70a

Rabbi Yehudah opened: *A Song of ascents. Out of the depths I call you, O Lord. (Ps. 130:1) We have learned that when the Holy One, Praised be He, created the world, He wanted to create man. He consulted the Torah, who said to Him: “You want to create man? He will sin against You, and will act presumptuously against You. If You treat him as he deserves, the world cannot possibly survive, let alone man himself.” He said to her, “Is it for nothing that I am called a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger (Ex. 34:6)?*

And so before the Holy One, Praised be He, created the world, He created Repentance. He said to Repentance, “I want to create man in such a way that if

they return to you from their iniquities, you will be prepared to wipe out their sins and forgive them.”

Thus, repentance is available to mankind at all times. When men return from their sins, Repentance returns to the Holy One, Blessed be He, and He forgives them all, the judgments are all tempered and subdued, and man is purified of his sin. When is a man purified of his sin? When he enters properly into Repentance.

Rabbi Isaac said: When he returns to the supernal King, and utters his prayer from the depths of his heart, as it is written, *Out of the depths I call you, O Lord*.

Rabbi Abba said: *Out of the depths I call you, O Lord*. There is a hidden place above; it is the depth of the well. And from it streams and fountains flow on all sides, and this profoundest of depths is called Repentance. And whoever wishes to repent and cleanse himself of his sins must call to the Holy One, Blessed be He, through this depth. This is the meaning of *Out of the depths I call you, O Lord*.

It has been taught that when a man sins against his Master and brings his offering to the altar and the **Kohen** seeks atonement for him, Mercy is aroused, judgments are tempered, and Repentance, pours out blessings through fountains and streams, and all the lights emerge and receive blessing together, and the man is purified of his sin.

TEXT THIRTEEN --- Elijah de Vidas, **Reishit Chokhmah**, *Sha'ar ha-Teshuvah*, ch. 2, sect. 2

We have already explained that one who sins causes the withdrawal of the supernal mother from her children, or the removal of the lower mother from the lower worlds. The greater the flaw, the greater the resulting withdrawal. The word **teshuvah** refers to the intention to restore previous levels and repair them to their original status. This can be compared to the removal of water flowing from a fountain, in order to nourish various gardens, orchards, fields and vineyards; along comes some fool who diverts the (channel of) water towards the trash, or to some empty place where it will serve no purpose. The owner of the fountain will be angry at him, first because he caused this watering of his fine gardens to be stopped, and secondly because he spoiled and broke the (original) channel.

The consequences of actual sin are much more grave than in this case. For if one spoils the channels of the Divine **shefa** (flow) from coming to their appropriate

places, by diverting them he has angered the King, the Lord of Hosts; he takes holiness and diverts it to impurity; he causes a place which should be dry and barren (of support) and waters and saturates it... **Teshuvah** repairs the broken channels, restores the **shefa** to its proper place, everywhere according to the flaw within him.

TEXT FOURTEEN --- Isaiah Horowitz, **Shnei Luchot ha-Brit**, **Toledot Adam, Beit Chokhmah** (II), sect. 22-24

The Name **YHWH Elohim** is united above in its root, which is in **Binah**. This is the mystery of the **du-partzufin**, which we explained earlier. From there, the mystery of 365 is extended...for the year (**shannah**) is in **Binah**. Even though the (days of the) year are calculated by the sun, which is associated with **Tiferet**, nonetheless its root is in **Binah**, which is the root of the six extremities which are composed of compassion and judgment, which is the mystery of the twelve months. We find that New Year's Day is associated with that day itself and also with **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement), which is also referred to as **Rosh Hashanah** in Ezekiel (40:1): *On Rosh Hashanah, on the tenth of the month...*

The meaning of this is: it is known that the mystery of **teshuvah** (repentance) is **Binah**. Whatever one has spoiled through sin, related to the governance of the six days of the week, the mystery of the (six) extremities. From there, all life will return to its root and find its **tikkun**. From **Yom Kippur**, which is referred to as **Rosh Hashanah**, until (the next) **Rosh Hashanah** is 355 (**SH-N-H**) days. It is called a year (**shannah**) on account of the 355 days, even though some years have 353, 354, or 355 days, depending on the cycle; these are differences in the calendar which are made up. But the solar year is always 365 days, and this alludes to **Binah**.

On the revealed level, the calculation is determined by the intercalations we make to equalize the lunar and solar years. But on the concealed level, **Binah** is the root and source for everything. The number of the days of the year are 355, like the value of **shannah**. There are ten additional days, since the solar year has 365 days, ten more than the lunar year of 355. These 355 plus the ten days of repentance form the correct total. All the 355 days (return) to their root and source from which they emerged. In other words, **teshuvah**, which returns and restores things to their root and source, alludes to the **sefirah Binah**, which is called **teshuvah**. It contains the ten **sefirot** which are called the ten days of repentance. They are the root and source, since the year emanates from them, as has been explained. Every year, the

year with all of its 355 days returns to their root and source, according to the mystery of **Binah**, which is the mystery of **teshuvah**. As we explained, (this is) the return of things to their root and source in which they rest in peace, tranquility and quiet. After these ten days of repentance in **Binah**, that is, after all the days of the year return to their source and rest there, a new and different year is emanated from its source, the mystery of **Binah**. This new year is created after **Yom Kippur**. Thus during these ten days between **Rosh Hashanah** and **Yom Kippur**, a person may rectify what he spoiled throughout the year.

The end of the ten days of repentance, the tenth day, is the day which gathers and includes all of the (355) days of the year, together with the nine days of repentance which belong to it. This is **Yom Kippur**, which is **Binah** itself, along with the nine sefirot of **teshuvah** which are within it. This is alluded to by **Yom Kippur**, which is the seal and source for every year. It is a particular day of rest, tranquility and quiet, in which all the worlds which have emanated from it, through the mystery of “world, year, and soul,” as explained in **Sefer Yetzirah**, are at rest. Therefore, before coming before the great Source to see the face of the Lord God of Hosts, during the ten days of repentance, every person should correct whatever he has spoiled. If he has not done so, God forbid, he must at least do so on **Yom Kippur**, for it is the seal and source for everything. For each of these ten days of repentance is a source for the previous one, and the closer each day is to **Yom Kippur**, the more inclusive a source it is, until **Yom Kippur** (itself) which is the source of all sources, according to the mystery of **Binah** which contains nine sefirot called **teshuvah**, and she herself is the tenth, the source for all of them. If one has even failed to correct (their sins) even on **Yom Kippur**, God forbid, then there is no possibility to rectify them. For now, after **Yom Kippur**, another year is emanated, and the year is a branch emerged from its source. How can one repair on the branch what has been revealed before the source, the Lord God of Hosts, on **Yom Kippur**? Therefore one must make the repair in **Binah**, which is **Yom Kippur**. Thus the mystery of the year with the 365 days of the solar year emanates from **Binah**, from which forces of judgment are aroused. For it is the root on the line of judgment. They are united, according to the mystery of **Tiferet** which is called the sun. It inclines towards **Chesed**, and everything is according to the mystery of the unity of the **du-partzufim**.

TEXT FIFTEEN --- Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Meaning of Repentance” (published in Berlin, eve of Yom Kippur, 1936); Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, p. 69

The deepest human longing is to be a thought in God’s mind, to be the object of His attention. He may punish and discipline me, only let Him not forget me, not abandon me. This single desire which links our life and our death will be fulfilled on the Days of Awe. The “Holy King” is a “King of Judgment.” The season of **Rosh Hashanah** is the “Day of Memory,” the “Day of Judgment.”

Before the judgment and memory of God we stand. How can we prove ourselves? How can we persist? How can we be steadfast?

Through repentance.

The most unnoticed of all miracles is the miracle of repentance. It is not the same thing as rebirth; it is transformation, creation. In the dimension of time there is no going back. But the power of repentance causes time to be created backward and allows re-creation of the past to take place...God brings about this creation for the sake of humanity when a human being repents for the sake of God...