

# The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

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## NO REASON TO FEAR

Beginning with Rosh Chodesh Elul, we recite the chapter of Ledovid Hashem Ori twice daily. This *kapitel* starts with the *possuk*: "By Dovid: Hashem is my light and deliverance, whom shall I fear? Hashem is the strength of my life, whom shall I dread?"

Who is this anonymous enemy from whom one might fear, if not for Hashem's assistance? And why does the *possuk* use two expressions, fear and dread?

Furthermore, the *possuk* is divided into two parts: (1) "Hashem is my light and deliverance, whom shall I fear"; (2) "Hashem is the strength of my life, whom shall I dread." Seemingly, both parts could have been combined into one: "Hashem is my light, deliverance, and the strength of my life, whom shall I fear or dread." From the fact that they are split into two, with Hashem's name repeated in each part, it is clear that the *possuk* is expressing two separate ideas. What are they?

### CLARITY AND STRENGTH

The two names of Hashem mentioned here correspond to the first two of the thirteen *midos harachamim*, *Hashem Hashem*, which the Zohar explains as being two distinct levels: *Havaya Delesata* and *Havaya Dele'ila*. Rashi explains that the first of these two *midos harachamim* is for someone who has not yet sinned, while the second is for one who has sinned and repented. Accordingly, the two halves of the *possuk* correspond to before and after sinning, respectively.

Our greatest enemy is our *yetzer hara*. It is he whom we may fear or dread. Rashi explains that the difference between these two expressions is that fear—*mora*—is used when the enemy is distant, while dread—*pachad*—is used when he is close. Before a person sins, the *yetzer hara* is distant; therefore, the first half of the *possuk* uses the word "fear." Conversely, after he sins it is close—in fact, it is *inside* him; hence the term "dread" in the second half.

There are two ways the *yetzer hara* may attempt to cause a person to sin:

1. The *yetzer hara* convinces him that the *aveirah* is not as bad as it appears; in fact, it may even be a mitzvah! He is confused and his vision is clouded, so that he is unable to perceive what is truly right and wrong.
2. Even if he knows a certain act is wrong, the *yetzer hara* can strengthen his desire for the forbidden item until he is unable to resist.

A person who has not sinned may be apprehensive that the *yetzer hara* will confuse him or tempt him, thus leading him to sin. The first half of the *possuk* describes why we have no reason to fear. This is because "Hashem is my light"; He provides us with clarity, so we know what is right and what is wrong. When it comes to *halachah*, we consult the Shulchan Aruch and its commentators and heed their directives. Regarding proper conduct and *middos*, we follow the guidance given to us in works of Mussar and Chassidus.

Furthermore, Hashem is "my deliverance." He saves us from the *yetzer hara* and gives us the strength to overcome any temptation that may be placed before us.

### RETURNS ACCEPTED!

This is all before a person has come to sin. Once he has already sinned, the *yetzer hara*, who previously convinced him that the

*aveirah* wasn't that terrible, now tells him the exact opposite. "Do you know what you just did?!" he says. "An *aveirah* separates a person from Hashem. You've gone off the deep end. It's too late; you're finished!"

Here, too, the *possuk* assures us that we need not dread. We must know that it is never too late to do *teshuvah*. In fact, *lo yidach mimenu nidach*—everyone will eventually return; the question is only if we will do so now or push it off for later.

The reason this is possible is because the separation caused by an *aveirah* only affects the revealed aspects of the *neshamah*, the parts we identify with in a conscious way. The *neshamah's* essence, by contrast, always remains intact.

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## TWO TYPES OF FIRE

Let's take fire as an example. With a standard flame, a number of provisions must be in place for it to burn. First, a combustible item is required upon which it can take hold, be it a wick, a pile of twigs, or the like. Furthermore, it must stay clear of water, which has the potential to extinguish it.

But there is another type of fire—the capacity hidden within a flintstone to ignite a flame. Here, no conditions are necessary: the stone can lie in a pool of water for decades, yet its ability to produce fire will not diminish. All that is needed is to strike it, and the stone's latent power will be actualized.

Every Jew has a G-dly fire within him. The revealed aspect of this flame requires mitzvos upon which it can “take hold” so that it will continue to glow. Additionally, care must be taken to avoid *aveiros*, which have the ability to extinguish it.

However, we also possess a concealed fire, which exists no matter the situation in which we are found. The word *tzur*, stone, can also mean “source” (as in the *possuk*, “Look at the rock from where you were sculpted...” which refers to the Avos and Imahos). Our essence and source always remain intact; all we must do is reveal it.

## POWER OF THE ROCK

These two fires within us stem from two levels Above—the two levels of *shem havayah*, as mentioned earlier.

The “standard” way in which we connect to Hashem is via Torah and mitzvos. Hashem limits himself, so to speak, in that this is the specific way through which we can connect to Him. This is the lower level of *shem havayah*—*havayah delesata*. From the perspective of this level, if one sins and breaches this connection, it cannot be rectified.

The Yerushalmi relates a heavenly conversation that took place with Divine Wisdom, Prophecy, and Torah. When each was asked

what should be done to a sinner, they all responded harshly, leaving no room for recourse. These divine entities represent a level where Hashem limits himself, so to speak, in a specific method via which we can connect to Him.

But then there is a higher level—the level of *havayah dele'eila*. This is the level where Hashem transcends all limitations, where even if one severed the connection through Torah and mitzvos, he can still make amends by doing *teshuvah*. As the Yerushalmi

continues: “They asked Hashem: ‘How shall a sinner be punished?’ He replied: ‘Let him do *teshuvah* and his sins will be atoned.’”

This idea is hinted to in an event that took place after the *chet ha'egel*. Hashem then said to Moshe: “And it will be when My glory will pass, I will place you in the cleft of the rock...” The Alter Rebbe explains that this *possuk* has a deeper meaning. After a sin as horrific as the *chet ha'egel*, Hashem “placed Moshe in...the rock.”

This relayed the message that by tapping the unlimited powers lying within the “rock”—both the “rock” within the Jewish nation and the “rock” Above—they will have the power to do *teshuvah* and erase the effects of their terrible mistake.

This is the message we can take from the first *possuk* of Ledovid Hashem Ori. If we have not yet sinned, as long as we truly desire and ask Hashem for His assistance, He will provide us with clarity and strength so we can overcome the *yetzer hara*. And even if we have sinned, Hashem gives us the strength to do *teshuvah*.

This is the meaning of the words, “Hashem is the strength of my life.” *Life* refers to Torah, and *strength* represents the divine Rock, the source of Torah. From this level we derive the strength to mend our ways and know that we can and will do *teshuvah*. All we must do is to unleash the “rock” within us and the “rock” Above, to kindle the connection that can never be broken.

For additional study, see *Lekutei Sichos* vol. 14, pp. 172 – 173.

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