

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

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THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF CHASSIDUS

In the letters the Alter Rebbe wrote after he was released from imprisonment, he writes that his release took place “as I said the words *padah veshalom nafshi*, before I began the next *possuk*.”

It is self-evident that the Alter Rebbe wasn't just relating a story. There must be a connection between this *possuk* and the release of the Alter Rebbe, which represented the victory of the path of Chassidus.

TWO TYPES OF REDEMPTION

Padah veshalom nafshi means “My soul was redeemed with peace.” A person can achieve redemption through conflict, or he can be redeemed with peace.

A prisoner can gain his freedom through conflict—by overpowering the prison guard. Similarly, if a person is brought to court, he can immerse innocent because the advocate was successful in refuting the accusations of the prosecutor. However, this does not mean that the prosecutor had no place at court. His accusations carried weight and required a response.

But there is another way the defendant can be vindicated—if the king enters the courthouse. A genuine king is infused with kindness. When the prosecutor sees that the king has entered, he loses himself entirely. He immediately lays his accusations to rest and the defendant is free to go.

CONQUERING THE NEFESH HABAHAMIS

These two methods of redemption similarly apply to the conflict between the *nefesh ha'elokis* and the *nefesh habahamis*.

The *nefesh habahamis* tries to convince a person that pursuing

the physical pleasures of this world is a worthwhile endeavor. One way to vanquish him is by demonstrating that these claims are baseless. The *nefesh ha'elokis* counters the claims of the *nefesh habahamis*, explaining that there is nothing real about physical pleasures; *taamu ure'u ki tov Hashem*—taste and you will see that Hashem is good!

However, even though the *nefesh habahamis* has been subdued, this doesn't mean that he had no place. His claims were taken into account and needed to be refuted. This is because the refutations of the *nefesh ha'elokis* stem from a level that still leaves room for the opposition of the *nefesh habahamis*.

“The *nefesh ha'elokis* demonstrates how the claims of the *nefesh habahamis* are baseless. *Taamu ure'u ki tov Hashem!*”

Another way of conquering the *nefesh habahamis* is by experiencing something that is completely beyond this physical world and its temptations. When a person is in touch with such a reality, there is no room for any of the claims of the *nefesh habahamis*. He has tapped into a deeper level of his *neshamah*, a place that leaves no room for an opponent.

(This idea is not limited to great *tzaddikim*; it can exist by a simple Yid as well. Sometimes there are certain aspects of

Torah and mitzvos that are engrained deeply within a person, to the extent that no room is left for discussion or debate.)

TANYA: STRONG AND OLD

The word Tanya shares the same letters as *eisan*, which the Gemara explains as having two interpretations: (1) strong and hard, (2) old. What does this mean?

Every Yid is faced with numerous tests and temptations the *nefesh habahamis* throws in his path. Sometimes the *nefesh habahamis* goes a step further, asking questions and planting doubts in his brain. In a certain way this is worse, as it penetrates his thought process instead of merely stirring his passions.

The fact is that every question has an answer. *Gedolei Yisrael* have refuted each claim and brought strong, irrefutable proofs to the veracity of Torah and mitzvos, and trying to disprove them is mere chutzpah. However, there is still room for the opponent, and his questions must be answered.

But then there is another aspect: a Yid has a certain strength—*eisan*—deep within him that leaves no room for debate. This is similar to the concept of *mesiras nefesh*. The reason a Yid will sacrifice his life rather than serve *avodah zarah* is not because he makes a calculation that it is worth being killed to avoid being separated from Hashem. It comes from a level where there is no other option.

From where does a Yid derive this strength? This is where the second translation of *eisan* comes to play—old. The *neshamah* preceded the creation of the world (as the Midrash says that Hashem consulted with the *neshamos* before creating the world). The world isn't truly old—it has yet to reach the age of 6000 years—but the *neshamah* has been around long beforehand! Obviously, this doesn't refer to actual time but to precedence in level: the *neshamah* completely transcends the creation of the world.

When this level of the *neshamah* is revealed, a Yid receives a strength that leaves no room for the opposition of the *nefesh habahamis*. Although it comes to the fore on its own when one is faced with a test that affects the essence of Yiddishkeit, it is up to us to arouse it so that it will play a role in our daily lives.

This is one of the *chiddushim* of Chassidus. Tanya, the foundation of Chassidus, shares the same letters as *eisan*, because Tanya teaches us how a Yid and a *neshamah* are (old—) completely higher than the existence of the world, which gives us a special strength.

This is the meaning of *padah veshalom*: when there is no room for the opponent, there cannot be a conflict, and the redemption is achieved in a peaceful manner.

THE ENEMY IS ON OUR SIDE!

Notwithstanding the disadvantages of debating with the prosecutor, there is a certain advantage to it as well. When the king enters, the prosecutor hasn't agreed that the defendant is innocent; the sight of the king has silenced him. However, when

the advocate refutes his accusations, if the prosecutor is just a bit honest, he himself will see the truth in his words and agree that the defendant should be acquitted.

It follows that there are two aspects in *padah veshalom* itself—when the opponent has no existence, and when the opponent himself gives his consent.

This similarly applies to the redemption from the temptations of this world. One way of accomplishing this is as explained above, by revealing the depth of the *neshamah* that transcends the existence of this world. But then there is another way—by reflecting on what the world is truly about.

In the second section of Tanya, the Alter Rebbe explains that the world is not an independent existence; its existence is dependent on the constant uttering of the *asarah maamaros*. As long as Hashem continues saying that the world should exist, it exists; if He were to cease saying this, the world would revert to nothingness. When a person will think about this concept, he will come to the realization that

the world is not really an opponent; deep down, it itself “agrees” to the *nefesh ha'elokis*.

This idea as well is accomplished through Chassidus. In addition to explaining the greatness of a Yid and a *neshamah* and how they transcend the world (as explained in the first part of Tanya), Chassidus explains how Hashem creates the world every moment and watches over every detail with *hashgachah pratis* (as explained in the second part of Tanya).

This is articulated in the second half of the *possuk*—“*ki verabim hayu imadi*, because the many were with me.” The Yerushalmi explains that even Avshalom's men prayed for Dovid Hamelech's success. In our context this means that even the *rabim*, the division and strife of the world, are not truly separate, but are constantly being created and watched over by Hashem, resulting in the second type of *padah veshalom*, where the opponent himself gives his consent.

“Tanya teaches how a Yid is completely higher than the world, giving us a special strength.”

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