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THE RENEWAL OF THE WORK OF CREATION: AN ACT OF KINDNESS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

AS we know, the work of Creation renews itself every day, and we mention this fact in the Morning Prayer: "In mercy He gives light to the earth and to those who dwell thereon, and in His goodness He renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation." It is a permanent miracle that is renewed every day.

It seems necessary to explain the language of this blessing. Four questions immediately arise.

1. What is the sense of the expression, "He gives light to the earth and to those who dwell thereon"? For in the final analysis, if G-d gives light to the earth, if necessarily follows that the inhabitants of the earth also benefit from this light. Why, then, add the term "and to those who dwell thereon"?

2. If light is destined to the inhabitants of the earth, it would have been enough to say, "He gives light to those who dwell on the earth." What need is there to state, "He gives light to the earth"?

3. In addition, the word "mercy" must be explained. How is giving light to the inhabitants of the earth an act of mercy on G-d's part?

4. Furthermore, why specify that in His goodness G-d renews each day the work of Creation? Is it not obvious that this demonstrates G-d's goodness?

With G-d's help, we will answer these questions.

The Sages tell us that at the time of Creation, not only the angels, but also some of the midot (virtues) pleaded before G-d against the creation of man because he would inevitably sin. They asked, "What is man that You are mindful of him?" (Psalms 8:5). Yet G-d in His goodness and infinite kindness silenced these dissenting and accusatory voices and He gave light to the earth despite them, in particular the light of which it is said, "G-d saw that evil men did not merit the light, since by their wicked acts they only spread darkness upon the earth. As it is written, 'their deeds are done in darkness' [Isaiah 29:15]. This is why G-d hid the primordial light. He separated it and reserves it for the righteous in the future" (Bereshith Rabba 12:6). If such is the case, the entire world should at present be plunged into darkness because of the sins of men, as was actually the case in Egypt during the plague of darkness. Concerning that plague it is written, "No man could see

his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place for a three-day period" (Exodus 10:23). Nevertheless, "for all the Children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings" (ibid.), for G-d in His goodness continued to give light to the Jews. He performs this miracle for us every morning and gives light to the world and to those who dwell thereon.

Concerning the verse that states, "In every place where I cause My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you" (Exodus 20:21), the Sages have said that if someone commits a sin in a particular place, that place will be destroyed forever; it can never be rebuilt (Zohar II: 28a). Blessing is only found in a place where G-d's Name is invoked and His will performed. However a place where one commits a sin, where one transgresses the Divine will, is cursed and merits destruction. We learn in the Mishnah: "If two sit together and no words of Torah are exchanged between them, this is a company of scorners" (Perkei Avoth 3:2). Why is the expression "this is" used? The book Beit Aaron explains as follows: "This is" is like a sign that forever designates that this place is one where scorners congregate. If others want to use this place, they cannot study there, for this area is not blessed; on the contrary, there hangs over that place a harmful influence and a curse.

We have numerous proofs to support the fact that our senses are capable of perceiving places where sins have been committed or that are stained with impurity. This being the case, we must distance ourselves from these places. The warning to distance ourselves from places where idolatry is practiced is often repeated (see Avodah Zarah 17a). Even the one who only passes by such a place suffers from its influence and the practices performed there, and (may G-d protect us) an impure spirit attaches itself to him.

The book Lev Eliyahu relates a terrible fact from which we can all draw an important lesson. In a certain hospital, many sick individuals were suddenly struck by a grave illness, unknown until then. The hospital's administration began an inquiry and finally discovered that certain microbes had been causing all these ills, yet they were not able to isolate and eliminate them. After having discussed the problem for a long time, the administration concluded

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that the only solution was to destroy the building from top to bottom and to burn the rubble. That a place could have a harmful influence on everything it contains gives us pause to think and invites us to undertake a deep introspection.

The earth does not merit receiving the Divine light, since men, through their unnatural acts and the damage that they cause, have a harmful influence on the earth, the place where men commit their sins. Consequently, the earth should have darkened mornings and be deprived of light. Yet despite this, G-d in His infinite goodness illuminates the earth and the entire world, including the sullied areas that do not merit light. This is why the blessing specifies that, aside from illuminating the earth's inhabitants, G-d "gives light to the earth." This is an admirable and fantastic thing, which moreover happens every day without stop.

In fact, we are witnesses every day to another miracle of Creation. It is written, "In the same way that G-d makes peace in the Heavens, thus will He make peace for us." What is meant by "peace in the Heavens"?

Each commandment is limitless with regards to the possibilities that we have to carry it out to perfection. Yet this is not the case with light and darkness, which are limited by G-d's will itself, as it written, "And G-d called the light 'Day', and the darkness He called 'Night'" (Genesis 1:5). Commenting on this subject, Rashi states: "He saw that the light was good and that it was not proper for light and darkness to operate together and become mixed with one another. And so He fixed limits to them, to one the day, and to the other the night." As our Sages say, "G-d brought the light forth and put it in charge of the commandments of the day, and He brought the darkness forth and put it in charge of the commandments of the night" (Pesachim 2a). He limited them in time, forbidding each from encroaching on the domain of the other. Yet light and darkness would have continued to oppose one another if G-d had not made peace between them, which is an additional miracle.

Light as much as darkness depends on the actions of men. If men are good and act correctly, they produce light; if not, darkness. The blessing, "In mercy He gives light to the earth and to those who dwell thereon" means that the light on earth stems from the merit of the good acts of those who dwell thereon, and G-d, "in His goodness renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation." Each day He reconciles the light with the darkness in order to illuminate Israel in this world.

We need to say a few words of censure here concerning the subject of mixed dancing during celebrations. How many sins are caused by promiscuity? How much is the power of evil increased when, during mixed dancing, men and women make impure physical contact with one another? This is extremely detrimental. It is the same with a husband who can, during normal times and in private, abstain from all contact with his wife when observing the laws of family purity, yet when a celebration involving mixed dancing occurs, he will by necessity touch his wife if they dance together. It is an extremely serious matter to transgress the laws of family purity.

Today, we are witnesses to the fact that the sins of the generation and the spreading of impurity have rendered

us unworthy of the Divine light. Without this light, we would not be able to exist if it were not for G-d ignoring people's evil ways and renewing, in His infinite goodness, each day the work of Creation and illuminating the earth and its inhabitants. Yet we rejoice in His light, whether we merit it or not. That being said, we should on our own correct our ways in order to merit, in all fairness, the beneficial influence of the Divine light, and not to profit from it as a result of His great leniency, each day, always.

On this basis, we can understand the continuation of the verse that states, "and it was evening, and it was morning, one day" (Genesis 1:5). The word *vayehi* ("and it was") connotes affliction (Megillah 10b). What affliction could there be in Creation, to the point that this expression is repeated on each day of Creation?

The Sages say that each day that passes, the attribute of Justice presents its grievances before the Creator, asking Him not to continue the work of Creation because of the sins committed by Israel. At the end of each day of Creation it is stated "*vayehi* [and it was] evening and it was morning" in order to express that G-d had displeasure, as much during the day as during the night, because of the grievances brought forth by the attribute of Justice. However, G-d did not pay attention to the words of this attribute, and He nevertheless created the world, day after day, which is why the word "day" is repeated. The word *yom* ("day") designates the light of day, and this light is the Torah, as it is written, "For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light" (Proverbs 6:23). Likewise, in the Midrash it is said that light represents the good deeds of upright men (Bereshith Rabba 1:16). This means that G-d created the world for the light of the Torah and for the righteous, and to create it He connected the attribute of Mercy to the attribute of Justice. The day also alludes to the Torah, as it is written, "even today, if we but heed His call" (Psalms 95:7). In the same way, it is written, "you are all alive today" (Deuteronomy 4:4) and "The Torah of the L-RD is perfect, restoring the soul" (Psalms 19:8). The Torah guides the heart of man towards G-d and it gives life to those who make it the foundation of their actions.

Despite the pain that Creation causes Him, G-d connected Justice to Mercy. He connected Justice to light – to Torah – and He created the world with these two attributes, for Justice is necessary in order to properly punish those who scorn Torah.

The blessing, "Who in His goodness gives light to the earth and on those who dwell thereon" is accurate to the greatest degree, for light is nothing but Torah. Moreover, for the righteous, G-d in His goodness "renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation" despite the objections of the attribute of Justice. The goal of the world's creation is that Israel follows the paths of the righteous, as it is written, "in order that you may walk in the way of the good and keep the paths of the righteous" (Proverbs 2:20). This is done through obedience to Torah, and thus the work of Creation is allowed to renew itself day by day, continuously, according to His will.

IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

RABBI ELIMELECH OF LIZENSK “*the Noam Elimelech*”

The author of Noam Elimelech performed many miracles during his lifetime, as well as after his death, for we know that Tzaddikim are greater after their deaths than during their lives. What follows are two stories of miracles that occurred to those who had prayed on the Tzaddik’s tomb, miracles that took place on account of the Tzaddik’s merit.

The Gaon Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum of Ouhl, author of Yismach Moshe, had a son who fell gravely ill at the age of nine, to the point that his life was in danger. He prayed to G-d with all his soul in order to awaken His mercy. Realizing that his son was being threatened by this great danger, he sent pious individuals to pray on his behalf at the tomb of the Tzaddik Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk. He commanded his envoys to make the following declaration when they arrived at the gate of the cemetery: “We make a vow to give this perouta to the Tzaddik for the soul that will go and tell Rabbi Elimelech that we have come to his grave to pray to G-d.”

When the envoys went and did this, all the souls there went rushing to announce their declaration to the Tzaddik, for the soul of someone is not always found near his tomb. However there, in the world of truth, it is a special thing for the souls of the departed to be able to “earn” a perouta that one gives for their elevation, which is why all the souls made haste. The envoys then went to the tomb of the Tzaddik, prayed for Rabbi Moshe’s son, and carefully checked their watch to see at exactly what time they had prayed. The envoys had thus done everything they had been instructed to do.

The boy, who was confined to bed and almost in a coma, suddenly awoke and cried out, “Daddy, Daddy!” As his father approached, the boy said,

“With G-d’s help, I’ll be better now. I just saw a Jew [he gave a description that corresponded to that of Rabbi Elimelech] who blessed me and promised that I would be healed.” The father immediately looked at his watch, and later, when the envoys returned and told him at what time they had prayed by the tomb of the Tzaddik, it happened that the boy had awoken at exactly the same time.

The next story involves a simple man from Jerusalem who was in the throes of death. He suffered terribly, yet was not able to die. When people came to visit, he asked only that they should pray to G-d that He take his soul in order that his suffering stop. He would seem to be on the verge of death at one moment, but later on a little better, and then again near death. So on and so forth went his life. Among his visitors was someone who asked him to recount everything that had happened to him from his youth until that time. The man did not remember much, but ended by saying that at a certain period of time he lived in Lizensk. When the man mentioned this city, an idea came to the visitor, who asked the man if he had ever gone to the grave of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk. The man responded with astonishment: “Is it possible to live in Lizensk without going to pray by the tomb of the Tzaddik?”

“If that is the case,” responded the visitor, “I understand everything now. Rabbi Elimelech wrote in his will that whoever would go and pray by his tomb would not die unless he repented. Therefore this is my advice to you: Confess your sins and repent!”

This is exactly what the man did, and he died immediately thereafter.

Rabbi Elimelech’s Hilloula is on Adar 21.

May his merit protect us. Amen.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

by the Maggid of Dubno

TO Adam He said, 'Because you listened to the voice of your wife ... cursed is the ground because of you ... until you return to the ground from which you were taken'" (Genesis 3: 17-19).

The Midrash states: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the man, 'The handful of earth from which you were taken, is it not because of theft that it is in your possession?'"

This is how the Sages explained the fact that G-d condemned the man to return to the earth. It was necessary for that handful of earth to not remain fraudulently in his possession. If such were the case, what would the Sages have said concerning the man if had he not sinned, had he lived eternally? Would that handful of earth not have illegally remained his forever?

Man is composed of fragments of all that live. He has the characteristics and the strengths of all living beings, beings that should enjoy the abundance of Divine blessing through him. This blessing runs through man in order to flow, by means of him, into the entire world. Since the time that G-d said, "Let us make man," the other creatures had rejoiced and mutually agreed to give man a little of everything that characterized them each. What's more, until now their joy was not mixed with any sadness, for it was through man and the merit of his actions that they obtained what was necessary for them to live.

However, in that which concerns the earth, after the sin it had to suffer Hashem's curse in order for man to repair that which he had damaged. This is why G-d told man that the handful of earth from which he was created was now fraudulently in his possession.

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us with the following parable.

A son was born to a wealthy man, who immediately went in search of a wet nurse. Now there was a poor woman asking for charity, and when she went to beg of the wealthy man, he noticed that she could breastfeed. He asked her if she wanted to feed his child for the time required, and she accepted, but only in exchange for a salary.

Hearing this, the father exploded in rage. How could it come into her mind to ask for a salary? Was the little money that she had collected in the past few days enough to provide her, by any chance, with enough to live on? In his service she could rest quietly, partake of everyday with his family, and sleep in a bed like a princess. Outraged, he promised not to hire her unless she calmed his anger by offering him something over and above the initial offer.

"All this is true," she replied, "but what can I give you since I have nothing!"

He asked her for a pledge, and so she gave him a beautiful dress that she kept for Shabbat and Yom Tov. She then entered into his service as a wet nurse.

One day, the child fell ill and the doctors were called in to give their opinion. They judged that the breast milk being fed to the baby was too heavy for him to digest. The solution was to deprive the wet nurse of all food that was too rich, such as meat, butter, and milk. For the child to regain its strength, she also had to, from then on, abstain from wine and other alcohol drinks, as well as to take medication to lighten her milk. She thus had the courage to reclaim her pledge, arguing that she was being prevented from having anything enjoyable, and that she was now having meals as meager as the poor!

All the created beings gave a part of themselves to man. They did this in order to rejoice, through his merit, and to know, through him, the abundance of Divine blessings. We have already said, today like yesterday, they lived in his shadow. But this was not the case with the earth, which was cursed by G-d because of man for the reasons that we mentioned. Therefore, it was only proper that man should henceforth return to the earth and render back to it the handful of earth from which he was created. He thus lives "until you return to the ground from which you were taken" (Genesis 3:19).

Let us now return to the Midrash: "The handful of earth from which you were taken, is it not because of theft that it is in your possession?" Not only does it derive no benefit from you, but in addition, G-d cursed it because of you and prevents it from giving forth its riches in abundance! The handful of earth from which you were taken is therefore now found fraudulently in your possession.