

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF SIN

“The idea that our sins are within the realm of the Almighty’s master plan was affirmed in the most unequivocal manner by the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. His words can be perceived as revolutionary, perhaps even prophetic.

“In a talk delivered in 1992, on the Shabbos of Ki Sisa—the portion containing the sin of the Golden Calf—the Rebbe portrayed sin as part of the Almighty’s master plan.

“The Rebbe advances this idea in pondering the connection of the three main events in the Parsha, which are, seemingly, paradoxical. First, the children of Israel are awarded the original Tablets. Then they commit the sin of the Golden Calf, leading to the loss of the Tablets. Finally, a second set of Tablets is granted. How are these three, ostensibly opposite events, connected to each other?

Sin is part of
the Divine
master plan
of creation.

“Our Parsha, says the Rebbe, alludes to three essential elements inherent in creation: The conceptual ‘idea’ state, followed by the state of implementation, preceded by the fruition of the original intent—the end state. Every facet of creation comprises these three essential elements.

“For example, let us use the process of building a house. First, there is the desire and conception, followed by the actual construction and finished product. Finally, the house becomes occupied and used, which brings about the fulfillment of the original intent.

“These three elements constitute the very components of our Parsha, which answers the Rebbe’s question regarding their connection:

- 1) *Torah/Conception*: The first tablets, represent *Torah*, for, according to our sages, the entire *Torah* is encrypted within the ten commandments of the tablets. *Torah*, in turn, we're taught, preceded creation and often is referred to as its blueprint and purpose.
- 2) *Sin/Teshuvah*: The shattering of the tablets, due to the sin of the golden calf, which resulted in Teshuvah. This component personifies life during the 6 thousand years of world existence.
- 3) *Moshiach/Fruition*: The second set of Tablets, signifying the Messianic era—the ultimate redemption—rooted in the origins and purpose of creation. This stage represents the bounty harvested as a result of the descent-sin and repentance.

“We see here, Jay, how the Rebbe weaves transgression into the very purpose of creation, as an inevitable means of transforming the secular into holy and sin into virtue, via the power of Teshuvah.

“The highest levels of spirituality and world transformation are reached when sin itself is reversed, in the words of the Rebbe, ‘for sin, too, is needed, because that’s the order in which G-d created the world. To quote the words of Rashi: “This was decreed by the King.”

“In this particular talk that, incidentally, was one of the last before the stroke that took away his ability to speak;⁹³ the Rebbe describes this delicate idea in unusually blunt terms. In all of Chassidus, such words are hardly ever spoken. The role of sin, and where it fits in, is commonly addressed in abstract philosophical terms. Yet, in this particular Sichah—talk—the Rebbe chose to spell it out in the most literal and blatant terms.

“The latter is extraordinary. Perhaps, it is because the Rebbe, acting in the capacity of a prophet, was indicating that this particular way of service, e.g. transforming sin into virtue through Teshuvah, is especially

⁹³ On March 2, 1992, the Rebbe suffered a disabling stroke and was unable to speak in public ever since. A second stroke, on the very same date in the Hebrew calendar (Adar 27—March 10) two years later, left him in critical condition. His soul ascended on high on the 3rd of Tammuz 5754 (June 12, 1994).

relevant to our generation; the last vestige of exile, commonly called the ‘Heel of Moshiach.’”

“‘Heel of Moshiach?’ What’s the meaning of that, Danni,” muses Jay.

“The end of the exile, Jay. The era heralding the coming of Moshiach,” I explain, “is called by our sages ‘Ikvesa D’moshichah’—the ‘Heel of Moshiach.’⁹⁴ This is because of its spiritual lowliness due to the ‘descent of the generations.’

“Yet, it is also the generation that is specifically connected with Teshuva, as Maimonides states: ‘The *Torah* already promised that the people of Israel will return to G-d at the end of their exile and will be immediately redeemed.’⁹⁵ Ours is indeed the generation of Teshuvah.

“The prophet Amos’ words elegantly describe the proclivity for Teshuvah in the era before the redemption: ‘Behold, days are coming, says G-d the Lord, when I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine for bread and not a thirst for water, but to hear the words of G-d.’⁹⁶ Indeed the Lubavitcher Rebbe proclaimed our generation to be the Messianic era (the era that will usher in the Messiah).⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Rashi, Talmud Sotah 49b. Literally: the heel of Moshiach, an expression borrowed from Psalms 89:52. The simile refers to the final period of Exile (Rashi), when Moshiach will not yet have come; but signs of his imminent arrival will be discerned, as though his approaching footsteps were already audible. Alternatively, a heel, the lowest extremity of the human body, may be used as a synonym for end (see Rambam Deuteronomy 7:12), so that the wording used simply denotes the end of [the period that will usher in] Moshiach (see Rashi to Sanhedrin 97a and to Psalms *ibid.*).

According to Radak on Psalms (*ibid.*), the wording used may mean while Moshiach delays. See also Talmud Avodah Zarah 9a and Rabbenu Ephraim al HaTorah, Deuteronomy 7:12.

“The final period in Jewish and world history is referred to in Jewish sources as the era of Acharis Ha-yamim—the End of Days. The period at the end of the Exile, before the Messianic era, is called Ikvesa D’moshichah—on the heel of Moshiach, or Chevlei Moshiach—the birth pangs of Moshiach’s coming. The concept of Acharis Ha-yamim includes the eve of the Redemption, as well as the Redemption, itself; whereas the Term ‘On the heels of Moshiach’ or ‘Birth pangs of Moshiach,’ denotes only the final days of subjugation— Ikveta D’Meshicha—R. Elchanan Wasserman.

⁹⁵ Yad Hachzaka Hilchos Teshuva 7:5. And as stated in Deuteronomy 30:10: “And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have put before you and you shall return unto G-d your Lord and shall obey His voice according to all that command you this day. And G-d your Lord will return your captivity and will have mercy upon you.”

⁹⁶ Amos 8:11.

⁹⁷ It is noteworthy that other recent Jewish leaders, including the Chafetz Chaim, have declared that we are living in the period of Ikvesa D’Moshicha. See Chafetz Chaim, *Shem Olam*, part II, chapter 2; Tzipita L’yeshuah, *Letters of the Chazon Ish*, part I, letters 96 and 111; R. Elchanan Wasserman, *Ikveta*

WHAT CHABAD REALLY BELIEVES

“Be that as it may, the Rebbe goes much farther than to merely acknowledge the human’s misdeeds as having a place in the greater Divine master plan. He actually presents it as an inevitable part of mankind’s journey towards self-perfection and world refinement, the very intent of creation.”

“Wow, that’s heavy stuff, Danni,” Jay declares. “I’m not going to say I fully understand the concept because it is definitely somewhat complex. Nevertheless, in some higher form of consciousness, it seems right to me. For, if G-d sought perfection, He already has the angels; for that He didn’t need a lowly and physical universe.”