



***Klipah* Precedes the Fruit**

Tu B'Shvat 5779 / 2019

An Elaborated Translation of *Leshem SheVo V'Achlama*⁴

“If the Torah had not been given, we would still have learned modesty from the cat, industriousness from the ant...” and many important instructions-by-example from the plant kingdom. [TB Eruvin 100b] For example, fruit trees teach us that a “*klipah* precedes the fruit and serves to guard it” (הקליפה קודמת להיות משמרת לפרי) [Ari, Likutei Torah, Bereshit and numerous other places]. The *klipah*’s tough (and often green) husk protects the immature fruit from predators, freezing weather, infestations and the like.

Kabbala operates from the premise of: as below, so above.¹ Anything true on one level of reality has a corresponding truth on every other level. So let’s see how this feature of the plant kingdom plays out on the human scale.

The first step is to define terms. *Klipah* (literally, husk or shell) is a synonym for evil which, in kabbala, is not a moral verdict but a metaphysical observation. Evil is the “illusion of other-than-God.” The world “illusion” being significant, since nothing is actually apart from God for “God is one.” The entirety of creation is nothing but Divinity in a state of concealment and contraction. Unconcealed and uncontracted Divinity manifests as an Infinite (oneness of) Light.² Yet, concealed and contracted Divinity manifests as the vibrant multiplicity of our created world.

When something presents the *appearance* of self-containment and *other-than-God* it partakes of the quality of evil. Conversely, when it presents the truth of Divinity’s one-and-onlyness, it partakes of the holy. Everything in our post-Edenic world contains both, to varying degrees. It follows that evil manifests on the physical plane as the opaque skin or shell (ie *klipah*) that surrounds each sliver of soul and separates it from everything else. This creates the appearance of *many* which supports the illusion of other-than-God. This is not a moral judgement but a simple fact.

The *Leshem* explains how this principle (of “the *klipah* preceding the fruit”) applies on the human scale. His teaching revolves around a mysterious component of our universe called, *gevurot*, defined as “dark knots of unactualized potential.” These imploded cinders of black fire are precious debris from the era of shattered vessels—the sparks and shards of those ancient worlds. The *gevurot* (passion lights) and the *chassadim* (lucid lights) are soul mates. Yet in that cosmic cataclysm the *chassadim* withdrew back up to their root while the *gevurot* tumbled and collapsed until barely a trace of the *chassadim* remained with them. These *gevurot* (aka sparks) are the soul-stuff of creation, including the *nefesh chiyunit* of human beings. Our

This Tu B'Shvat teaching is dedicated by Avroham Feldman to the *ilui neshamos* of his beloved parents: **Shimon Nossan ben Yakov and Michla bat Yosef**. "Their souls should be bound in a bundle of life with HaShem." And they should be filled with *nachas* from the merits that are done by the line of transmission that succeeds them.

...And it is dedicated to the *ilui neshamah* of our beloved friend **Brucha At - Brucha Schwartz**. May you enjoy wave after wave of delight from the ripening fruits of the love that you sowed.

mission is to raise, unpack and enlighten these *gevurot* by infusing them with *chassadim*, ie consciousness.³ On one hand, this happens naturally, for in the course of life we can't help but accumulate some wisdom. Yet the point of a spiritual path is to maximize this process.

The Leshem provides a fascinating perspective on this subject:⁴

...כל הנועם והזיו והזוהר דלעתיד שהוא תכליתם האחרון אשר לזה היה כוונת כל הבריאה כולה ... הוא רק ע"י הגבורות.

These *gevurot* contain all the bliss, glory and radiance that awaits us in the reward phase of history. That "happy ending" is the very purpose of creation as well as its destiny.⁵

וכן כל צורתם שהם עתה והוא מה שהם בריבויים רבים...וכן הגבול ומדה שבהם. ...וכן כל העביות שבהם וחומריותם הרי כ"ז הוא רק ע"י הגבורות.

These *gevurot*, in their present (imploded) form produce the illusion of multiplicity (which is our working definition of evil). They are the source of all the boundaries, limits, measures, opacity and materiality of our world.

והרי נעשה ע"י הגבורות כל החסרונות והקלקולים וכן יעשה לעתיד על ידיהם כל התיקונים וכל העינוגים.

Consequently, at present, the *gevurot* are the source of all that's lacking and broken in creation. But in the future [when they've matured and enlightened] they'll become the source of all perfections and spiritual bliss.

כי כשהם מתייחדים עם החסדים ומתמתקים ומתבסמים אין בטובה למעלה מהם וכשהם שולטים לבדם אין ברעה למטה מהם. ... ושניהם הם מצד הגבורות.

Over time, and millennia, the *gevurot* gradually unite with their long lost soul mates, the *chassadim*, and in so doing, they are sweetened and aromatized. There is no "good" greater than *gevurot* infused with *chassadim*, and there is no "bad" worse than *gevurot* emptied of *chassadim*.

והאמת הוא כי הרעה הוא סבת הטובה...

[And these two poles, the "good" and the "bad," are connected by their shared root in the *gevurot*. In fact, upon closer inspection, it's clear that they are causally linked,] that "bad" is actually the "agent" of "good"...

כי ע"י הרעה יוצאים מציאות הגבורות על מציאותם היותר אפשרי שבהם. ואין תקנה להוציא את כחות ותכונות הגבורות בכל תוקפם שהוא בהתגברות יתירה היותר אפשרי שבהם. אלא ברעה דוקא.

The Leshem focuses now upon the *gevurot* in their role as the *nefesh chiyunit* (or ego identity) of human beings (as opposed to their *nefesh Elokit*, or Divine soul, which derives from the *chassadim*). The idea is that the *gevurot*, stripped of *chassadim*, are stiff-necked, arrogant and self-indulgent. They ignore signs of heavenly censure, scoff the law, and flaunt propriety. That's called "bad" because it perpetuates the illusion that God's will can be defied with impunity, which implies that He/She/It does not rule the world, which perpetuates the illusion-of-other-than-God, which is our working definition of evil. And yet...

The reality is that it takes mulish tenacity to actualize potential to the n^{th} degree. Its an energy-intensive labor, for the resistance (both inner and outer) is massive.

Each of our lives is a puzzle piece with a unique shape of protrusions and grooves that must be fully pressed out in order to fill our place in the final merger. Yet if the ego does not push through the obstacles, and there's potential that remains unactualized, then there will be gaps in the space that was our puzzle-piece's job to fill.

Apparently, says the Leshem, there is no way to press out every last drop of potential without lapsing into pride and other unrectified ego states that squeeze God out of picture.

כי בהיות בו איזה בחי' מתכונת הטובה והקדושה הנה מכניע את עצמו בזה למעלה ואז אינו יוצא בכל כחו כי מתכונת הטובה הוא לבטל את עצמו ולהסתכל על זולתו להתקרב אליו אבל תכונת הרע הוא להיפך.

Strangely, all the things that make “good” good (and even holy), ie, its willingness to compromise, and to submit itself to HaShem’s will and to instantly back off at the slightest hint of heavenly disapproval—all these things are detriments to fully actualizing potential (at least at its extremities where the resistance is greatest.) “Good’s” priority is to please the “other” (ie, HaShem) so as to maintain closeness to Him/Her/It. “Bad’s” nature is the opposite. Its priority is *self-interest* and it is unyielding in that pursuit.

והרי אי אפשר שיוצא מציאות הגבורות על מציאות היותר אפשרי שבהם אלא ברעה דוקא כי רק בזה הם מתגלים ויוצאים בכל תוקפם באין מנוע.

And yet, the individuation that is the task of life, that requires us to press out every last drop of potential crammed within our *gevurot*, that necessitates an ego that stops at nothing—that walks to its own drum, that pushes through all resistance including (sometimes) the intimation of Heavenly displeasure.

ואחר שיצאו ונעשו על תכלית מציאותם ע"י הרעה. אז כאשר נמשך בהם אור החסד הנה מתמתקים ומתבסמים כי מתייחדים עם החסדים בתכלית היחוד יען שעיקר עצמותם הם משורש אחד ועי"ז הם יוצאים תיכף מרעה לטובה ואז הם מתגלים לכל טוב ואין בטובה למעלה מהם.

And, of course, HaShem has His/Her/Its ways. As the *gevurot* unfurl (under the ego’s authority), it still teases out space for the *chassadim* to now enter and enlighten—to sweeten and aromatize. This reunion of *chassadim* with their *gevurot* happens automatically because these two really do spring from the same root. They are truly soul-mates and so, as they unite, everything changes. The *gevurot* soften and unwind. They become less volatile and reactive. Their behavior shifts from “bad” to “good,” from defying truth to revealing it. There is no “good” greater than the consummate union of *chassadim* and *gevurot* (ie. embodied consciousness), wherein every part of one is met and matched by the other. In fact, every glimmer of “good” can be traced back to progress made in that direction.

וכל הרעה שנעשה מהם הוא נשרף וכלה עי"ז ג"כ כמו שיתבאר למטה ונשארים הגבורות נקיים וטהורים מכל סיג ופסולת ונעשים הם גופה לקודשא דקודשין שלהובין דרחימו...להעשות על ידיהם כל נועם זיו העתיד.

It’s strange but true that actualizing potential can happen via the high road or the low road. Becoming a successful thief takes smarts, persistence, research, observation, foresight, secret-keeping, and emotional intelligence, etc. These are quite similar to the skills cultivated by an honest accountant. Yet it is also true that a thief’s life of constant drama and mortal threat might force him to actualize these skills to the n^{th} degree, beyond what gets pressed out from the accountant’s more tranquil life. Yet it is also certainly true that although the thief is actualizing potential, he is also absorbing impurities and accruing a huge spiritual debt.

These impurities will absolutely need to be purged in a trial by fire that will, most certainly, entail discomfort. There’s no getting around that. Yet once the impurities are scoured, the *gevurot* are pure and pristine without a trace of blemish. Their actualized potential remains along with the huge space that’s now available to receive their *chassadim*. The *gevurot* are thus transformed into a holy of holies (a spacious sanctum) that unites with its *chassadim* in a passionate and consummate union...producing the bliss and rapture that is our promised destiny.

ועכ"פ הוא כי הרעה עצמה הוא סיבת הטובה. והוא סוד ענין הקליפה שקדמה לפרי :

Now it makes sense why HaShem built into the human life cycle a phase of life, called adolescence, where *chutzpah* abounds. As “bad” as it seems, the adolescent’s impudence is a clumsy (but effective) way to

individuate—to press out the extremities of his/her puzzle piece. When the dust settles and the dues are paid, the gains outweigh the losses. *Gevurot* were unpacked, which can now unite with their *chassadim*. Wisdom integrates, peace increases, and joy (eventually) prevails...(though it might take several lifetimes to get there).

In this way, “bad” becomes the enabler of “good.” The *passion lights* of the *gevurot*, when unpacked and enlightened by their matching *lucid-lights*, produce all the bliss of future times. This is what it means that “klipah precedes the fruit” not just for plants, but for humans as well.

On Tu B'Shvat, as the fruit trees celebrate their New Year, let us join with them in spirit, and thank HaShem for the gift of their delectable produce and for the lessons we can learn from the strategies they've devised to “work with” whatever life brings them. And may we take their lesson to heart, that wherever there is klipah, tasty fruit is around the bend.

¹ Zohar, Exodus 20a

² Aka: אור אין סוף ב"ה (*Ohr Ein Sof*).

³ “Light” in kabbala always refers to consciousness of one sort or another.

⁴ ספר לשם שבו ואחלמה - ספר הדע"ה חלק ב - דרוש ד ענף יז סימן ו

⁵ “The final [messianic] frame arose in thought at the beginning.” *Lecha Dodi*, Shabbat Hymn.