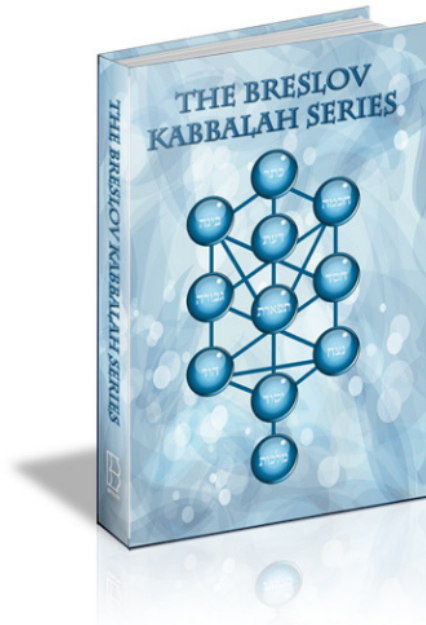


Breslov Kabbalah: Part 7 – The Shattering Of The Vessels

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In Part Seven of Breslov Kabbalah, we explore the act of the shattering of the vessels containing Holy light and how this teaches us to “redesign” our thought processes in order to tackle what lies ahead.

As the next stage in Creation, God formed Ten Sefirot to act as channels or filters to convey His Light and Bounty. These Ten Sefirot were necessary tools in His plan, for without them, God’s Infinite Light would have overwhelmed and obliterated worlds and creatures that were placed at lower levels of holiness and spirituality.

One more step was necessary, though, before the creation of the lower worlds could proceed apace. The prospect that these lower worlds would receive a continuous supply of Divine Light ran counter to another goal of Creation, which was that man should have free will. As the ARI explains (*Etz Chaim* 8:6), were God’s Infinite Light always manifest, man would not have

free will. If a person were always aware of God's presence, transgressing His Will would be impossible. God therefore concealed His Light, and in so doing allowed man to choose freely between doing good and doing evil.

Towards this end, God designed the original Ten Sefirot with a built-in flaw. A Sefirah consists of both light and a vessel (a lesser light that acts as a receptacle for the greater light). God designed the original Sefirah-vessels as separate entities that were incapable of giving support to one another. When He shone His Light into these vessels, the vessels could not bear the intensity of that influx, and shattered. Some of the shards were thrown far afield and formed *kelipot* (forces of evil), giving rise to an outside realm in which God's presence is almost totally hidden. The existence of these *kelipot* creates a balance of good and evil in Creation, enabling man to have free choice in his life.

After the Shattering of the Vessels, God "redesigned" the Sefirot so that the vessels would not be overwhelmed by the Light, but would be able to contain and filter the Light down to our world. At the same time, some of the shards of the shattered vessels descended to the lower realms in which the lower worlds—including planet Earth—were to be created. These shards, known as "sparks of holiness," were scattered throughout the creation. Later, when Adam ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he caused further blemish to these sparks of holiness, casting them even farther away. One of man's spiritual missions is to gather up those sparks from wherever they may be and elevate them to their original level. We accomplish this mission by means of Torah study, prayer and the performance of good deeds.

Just as the Shattering of the Vessels took place on a macrocosmic level, it also takes place on a microcosmic level in every individual. Each new beginning creates its own *tzimtzum*. And each *tzimtzum* is followed immediately by a "drawing of the light" and a "shattering of the vessels."

Moreover, each person possesses sparks of holiness that are unique to his psyche and that are affected by his environment, upbringing and education. With the “good” in Creation represented by accomplishing our goals and the “evil” in Creation represented by the challenges and frustrations we face along the way, let us apply the lessons of the Shattering of the Vessels to our daily lives.

How many times do we begin anew, making a fresh start with new zest and great confidence? Yet before very long, our resolve weakens and we find ourselves losing those great intentions? If we strengthen our resolve and take the first steps towards our goal, the realization that we can't achieve that goal immediately tends to break our resolve again. All this indicates that the “light” of potential is too “intense.” We haven't prepared ourselves properly with the necessary “vessels”—i.e., the complete resolve to see our goal through to completion.

Moreover, the frustrations, challenges and obstacles that crop up on all sides put a damper on our plans, as if to say, “The shards and broken pieces of the shattered vessels—of my past mistakes and faulty judgments—keep getting in the way.” Of course there will be obstacles to any worthy goal, and it is true that they stem from our mistakes, but we cannot let them deter us from achieving what is rightfully ours. Rather than view them as problems, we should view them as challenges that can rejuvenate our resolve to propel ourselves to greater heights. Whenever we see our good desires petering out, we must “redesign” our thought processes to tackle what lies ahead.

Additionally, the “sparks of holiness” teach us how to strengthen ourselves and succeed in our efforts. Since these sparks exist as a part of our psyches, we eventually come into contact with more and more of them at different stages of our lives. These sparks provide us with new insights and ideas for moving forward in life. Whenever we experience a “shattering”

(i.e., confront an obstacle that throws us off course), we can rethink our approach, reevaluate our attempts, and either strengthen our resolve to continue in our original quest or conceive a fresh approach to the same problem.

Reb Noson notes that the story of Adam eating the forbidden fruit and causing more damage to the sparks of holiness carries an important personal message. During the course of our lives, we will do many good deeds; it's also more than likely that we'll "mess up" here and there. Whenever we do something wrong, we cause a microcosmic "shattering of the vessels" and a further spreading-out of the sparks of holiness.

This seems like a never-ending problem, with each mistake or intentional misdeed breaking our vessels into even more and tinier pieces. Yet it can also serve as a great source of comfort for those who truly desire to make something of their lives. From failure we learn that the goals we sought were too big or beyond reach. Each "shattering" serves to break those attempts into smaller goals— into attainable goals! Eventually, despite many upsets, those who continually seek to achieve will reach a low point that will then catapult them to great heights of success in their endeavors (*Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaReiach* 4:45).

In this way we can mirror the Act of Creation, rebuilding and restoring our "shattered vessels" in our attempt to realize our goals.

This series is based on the book: ["Hidden Treasures"](#) by Rabbi Chaim Kramer.