

Reaching The 50th Gate: Week 6 – Yesod

written by Chaim Kramer

May 25, 2014



The Light of Foundation and Righteousness – *Yesod* translates as foundation and corresponds to the male reproductive organ. Explaining this connection, the Kabbalah refers to *Yesod* as *Chai Olamim* (Life of the Worlds) (Zohar I, 193b). Life—because *Yesod* serves the very essence and purpose of life, and also because it is said to be “alive” (that is, instrumental in

bringing forth life). Worlds—because Yesod sparks the interaction between the Upper Worlds and this world (which is represented by Malkhut, the Sefirah below it). Like the sexual act that gathers and channels all the male's energies into union with the female, Yesod pools the energies of all the preceding Sefirot and channels them into Malkhut, culminating in the realization of our desires, efforts, struggles and successes.

Kabbalistically, the energies which Yesod collects and transfers are called Light. God interacts with the world, and the world with Him, through the agencies of Or Yashar (Direct Light) and Or Chozer (Reflected Light). As the ARI explains, God sends us His direct bounty to sustain us and allow us to live and perform good deeds. Reciprocally, our good deeds bring God a certain pleasure. Like a loving parent, God rejoices when His children “grow up” and become capable of emulating Him. This is the nachat (pleasure) He receives from all the mitzvot that we do. When we strive to emulate God, it is considered as if we are giving something back to Him.

Yesod is the relay station for these two types of Light. In one direction, this Sefirah gathers the energy and bounty from the Sefirot above it and transfers them to Malkhut, from where they are channeled to this world. In the other direction, it receives from Malkhut the offerings of God's creations and sends them back Above. (Malkhut is therefore said to be the “mate” of Yesod.)

Yesod represents one of the greatest human pleasures that exists, touching the deepest levels of the psyche. Pleasure can be either good or evil, as it can lead one in either direction. Our personal level of Yesod can indeed be one of holiness and propel us to search for ever greater levels of Godliness, or it can be redirected into mindless sexual pursuits that lead us away from spirituality.

The Zohar teaches that the person who is very moral deserves

the accolade of Tzaddik (Zohar I, 59b). Yesod is also connected to the Tzaddik in the verse (Proverbs 10:25), "The Tzaddik is the yesod (foundation) of the world." The Tzaddik represents the highest levels of moral purity, through which he helps to keep the world morally righteous, teach others about God, and bring God's message to mankind. The energy of Yesod elevates him beyond his material desires to the point that he attains his goals and, in so doing, brings joy and pleasure to God.

This Sefirah can help us develop our potential depending on the degree to which we embrace moral values. Like the foundation upon which every building stands, morals are the foundation upon which stand all that we strive to build and accomplish in life. If our morals are upright, our building will stand tall and proud. If our values are corrupt, our life's building will be crooked and marked with blemish.

Interestingly, one usually builds a building from the ground up, so Yesod should have been the first Sefirah upon which our subsequent efforts to realize our potential rest. However, Keter (will and purpose) is the first step. Only after a long process do we get to the foundation, to Yesod! (Moreover, our efforts do not reach completion until we access Malkhut.) So what kind of "foundation" is this?

The structure of the Sefirot—both in the traditional ordering and in the three-column arrangement—hints at the answer: Yesod is at the bottom to receive all the energies that are transmitted from above. Every energy, starting at the top in Keter, must find its way into Yesod before it can be of benefit to man. So too, every one of our actions reflects the structure of our lives. If we are moral and upright, then our energies will be properly received and directed. If we choose to damage that foundation with amoral thoughts or behaviors, all our energies go to waste, God forbid. If there is no foundation upon which to stand, everything goes to the forces of the Other Side—to our opposition—producing challenges and

obstacles that thwart us from creating a fuller and more contented life.

Thus Yesod, a solid foundation, is predicated on living a life as free of sin as possible. If a house has a solid foundation, we are not afraid that it will collapse. By building a strong moral foundation, we keep our lives on solid footing. Yesod implies keeping things together, not living a “loose” life.

In Rebbe Nachman’s teachings, the Tzaddik exemplifies the ultimate in morality and Godliness. By describing the Tzaddik’s power and accomplishments, Rebbe Nachman shows us how we too can develop our own potential to the maximum levels possible. Let’s begin with a glimpse into the Future:

Every good deed that a person does is made into a lamp. [After death, those who performed good deeds] have lights that burn for a short time, and while they burn, they can use them to explore the King’s treasury. But then they burn out, and they can no longer search. Some have many good deeds, which burn longer. These people have more time to probe the celestial treasury. Still others may have lamps that blaze for an entire day or even longer. But there is one person who possesses the most wonderful lamps of all. These are never extinguished, but burn and shine forever. The owner of these lamps can delve into the King’s treasury for as long as he wishes (Likutey Moharan I, 275).

After relating this lesson, Rebbe Nachman commented:

From this we can understand that even an ordinary religious person can explore the King’s treasury, but only for a given time, as determined by his good deeds. Even this is certainly a most wonderful privilege. You can find wonderful treasures even in this short time and then enjoy them in the Future World forever. All of your Future Life is determined by what you find during that time of exploration. If you are worthy of more time in which the lamps created by your deeds shine, you

will certainly find more good in the King's treasury. It all depends on how long your lamps can burn. The light of a great Tzaddik is never extinguished. His exploration of the King's treasury can go on forever (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #134).

A Tzaddik does not live for himself or his own glory, but to serve God and to draw others close to Him. His "lamps" are filled with Torah study, prayer and good deeds, which he possesses in abundance. He helps others understand that everyone has a purpose in life and there are rewards for our efforts, no matter how infinitesimal they may seem. The Tzaddik always encourages people to establish goals and pursue them, as illustrated in this story:

Rebbe Nachman once told us that in Jerusalem there is a synagogue to which all the dead people on earth are brought. As soon as someone in this world dies, he is brought there at once to be judged as to where his place should be. In this synagogue sits the court that hands down these judgments and allocates each person the place he deserves.

When the dead are brought there, they are brought in clothing. Sometimes a dead person's clothing is missing something. One person may be missing a sleeve, another a piece from the edge of his garment, and so on. Everything depends on a person's actions in his lifetime [because his clothing after death corresponds to his deeds]. The verdict depends on the clothes he has when he is brought there, and his place is allocated accordingly.

Once, a dead person was brought there completely naked. He had no clothes whatsoever. The verdict was that he should be cast into the hollow sling and destroyed, God forbid, because he was completely naked. However, a certain Tzaddik came with one of his own garments and threw it over the person.

The court asked, "Why are you giving him one of your own garments?" The court took exception to this, because why

should the dead man be given a garment and be saved with clothing that was not his? The Tzaddik answered: "I have to send this man on a mission for my own purposes, and for this reason I am entitled to dress him in one of my own garments." This is how the Tzaddik saved the dead man from the bitter penalty of the hollow sling. The Rebbe told this story to demonstrate the tremendous power of the true Tzaddik to save his followers in the World of Truth (Tzaddik #228).

Each person performs some good deed in this world; some perform many. Each has his Future Reward waiting for him, plus the additional treasures he can search for in the King's treasury. But as we have seen, the Tzaddik has "lamps" that burn forever. If the Tzaddik can spare a lamp or a garment for one who is naked and undeserving, he can also share the light of these lamps with those who attach themselves to him. One who comes close to the Tzaddik, learning from him how to do the right things and how to serve God altruistically, reaps rewards well beyond his own efforts.