



SICHAH 60

Protecting Hidden Wisdom

A young girl was once injured in an excavation where they were building new houses in Breslov. Several other people were also endangered. The Rebbe then had a long discussion with us regarding building. Following are his words:

I have thought deeply about the concept of building, and I see that no one involved in it remains unharmed. This is true of both Jew and non-Jew. People are involved in building because the world cannot do without it. Therefore people choose this trade.

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This may be a complex matter, but still, no one involved in building remains unharmed.

The Gemara teaches, "Whoever engages in building becomes poor" (*Yevamos* 63a; *Sotah* 11a).

The Hebrew word *mitmaSKeN* (becomes poor) comes from the word *miSKeN* (poor man). It also shares the same root as *SaKaNaH*

(danger). A person involved in building is subject to both poverty and danger.

It is written, "They built storage cities (*arei miskenot*) for Pharaoh" (*Shemos* 1:11). *MiSKeNot* (storage) has the same root.

The Midrash says that according to one opinion, these storage cities impoverished (*memaSKeNot*) the Jewish people. According to another opinion, these cities endangered (*meSaKNot*) their owners (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:14). Building can result in both poverty and danger.

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The most important thing is laying the foundation. It must be at the correct time [and place] and made of the correct type of wood. Not all types of wood can provide a true foundation. But it is not possible to know all this.

For the same reason [that people do not know about such things], many types of fruit do not grow in our lands.

The world has a Foundation Stone. Channels emanate from this stone, reaching every land. The Midrash says that the wise Shlomo Hamelekh knew the details of these channels and was therefore able to plant all types of trees (*Koheles Rabbah* 2:5).

If people knew the exact location of these subterranean channels, they would be able to grow in our lands many fruit trees that never grew here before.

Each channel has the power to stimulate a particular species. Even if a particular channel does not pass through our land, all the channels are intertwined and flow into each other. If one knew the exact place, he could plant any type of tree.

If a person knew the location of the channels, he could dig a well in the proper place, and if he knew where to plant trees around it, he could then make any type of tree grow there.

The Foundation Stone of the world constantly rises and descends. If one knows its position, he knows what to plant at a particular time. All these things are concealed from the world, for some things may not be revealed.

People say that the world is gaining knowledge. But earlier generations made the primary discoveries, and this took the greatest wisdom. Later generations make discoveries only because earlier ones prepared the way. One generation makes the basic discoveries and later generations apply them. But the latter contribution is really the smaller.

The Gemara states, "If you would not have removed the piece of clay, you would not have found the jewel under it" (*Yevamos* 92b; *Bava Metzia* 17b).

Earlier generations may not have found the jewel. But they did remove the piece of clay. They uncovered the basic principles, allowing others to apply them with little ingenuity.

There are things that may not be revealed, for if they were revealed, later generations would make them objects of worship.

If this original knowledge were to be revealed, later generations would use it and add to it, making grave mistakes. They could then develop concepts leading to heretical conclusions.

If some things were revealed, each succeeding generation would add on to them and be led astray. This would eventually lead to great destructiveness, promoting heresy. Therefore the world is not permitted to know about these things at all.

It is written, "When you enter your land and plant any tree... three years shall its fruit be forbidden to you" (*Vayikra* 19:23). The *Zohar* teaches that the evil forces of the *kelipah* dwell in trees during these first three years.

Earlier generations misunderstood this and thought that they were obliged to worship a tree during the three years that it was under the influence of the *kelipah*. According to their error, it was a logical necessity to make such a tree an object of worship.

For this reason, many such things may not be revealed.

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An accident in Breslov

IN THE CITY OF Breslov they were once building a house when the structure collapsed. A little girl was hurt, and a number of people were also in grave danger. Whenever something unusual like this would happen, Rabbeinu zal would relate to it in his conversations.

With reference to construction in general, Rabbeinu zal stated that he studied it very carefully, meaning that he delved into the heavenly origin of the topic. Rabbeinu zal says that anyone who participates in construction cannot come out unscathed; he will be harmed either physically or financially. It is also stated in the Gemara that builders who erect tall buildings will find themselves in danger, physically or financially.¹ It would seem, therefore, that this field would be shunned; nevertheless, certain people are drawn to it. This is because buildings are a necessity. It seems, also, that there is profit in it. We must have buildings, and so we must have people who are drawn to construction; they will eventually suffer but they cannot abstain from it.

The question is: Could it be done without causing harm? Rabbeinu zal says: It depends on the foundation. If the foundation is laid properly, it could possibly be a successful venture. You must have the knowledge of how to lay the foundation and at exactly what time to lay it; otherwise, it could cause a catastrophe or a loss. How do we know the secret behind this? The answer is that we don't; the layman does not know.

Where vegetation grows

RABBEINU ZAL SAYS THAT this secret is similar to that of knowing how to grow different types of fruit, vegetables, or crops. We assume that different lands have different climates

¹ *Sotah* 11a.

which are conducive to certain types of fruit and that those fruits cannot grow in a different land with a different climate. For example, tobacco, cocoa, and coffee are grown only in certain countries, and so we have a whole system of exports and imports to ship them all over the world.

Rabbeinu zal says, however, that this assumption is not true. The fact is that a fruit can grow anywhere. Let's consider, for example, a fruit that is most desirable, the *esrog*. Imagine how beneficial it would be if *esrogim* could grow in Brooklyn! Of course, we'd lose out on the *mitzvah* of using a fruit from Eretz Yisrael for Yom Tov, but it would be beneficial for those who can't afford the expense. Still, it is an accepted fact that an *esrog* can grow only in Eretz Yisrael or in certain other places.

Origins of Creation

WHAT ARE THE FACTS? Rabbeinu zal says: I will reveal this to you. The first word of the Torah is *Bereishis*. *BeREiShIS* (בראשית) is made up of two words, *BaRA ShIS* (ברא שית), HaShem created *shis*. *Shis* means the Foundation Stone. The Gemara says very clearly that when HaShem created this world, He did not say special words such as, "Let there be a world," but rather, He created a central stone² which then stretched out in all directions to form the rest of the world. The stone is hard, as a stone is, but at Creation it was soft enough to be stretched out to cover the entire globe. The root of that stone is located underneath where the Holy Ark stood in the Beis HaMikdash.

Emanating from that stone are actual veins, which are like channels. For example, when digging for gold in a mine, you search for a vein. That means an extension, a stretch of metal or earth of a certain type that extends to a certain length. The

² *Yoma* 54b.

veins coming from the Foundation Stone, however, extend under the earth and reach throughout the entire globe.

There is land everywhere. Even the bottom of the ocean is earth. The land is actually one long, extended vein that reaches everywhere. There are untold numbers of veins that originate from this stone, each with a different capacity for growing a certain type of fruit or vegetation.

Shlomo HaMelekh's wisdom

WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE, A person could know exactly which type of fruit to grow near each vein. Since these veins extend everywhere, he would be able to grow any type of food in any climate, in any land. Rabbeinu zal says that Shlomo HaMelekh had this knowledge and could grow whatever he wanted.³

The point is to know the exact location of each vein and also to know the exact distance needed from that vein to grow a certain type of fruit. For example, in South America, tobacco, *Rachmana litzlan*, or coffee is grown at a precise distance from a vein. If people knew the exact location of this vein and the necessary distance, those crops could be grown in other parts of the world, too.

Rabbeinu zal's mastery

RABBEINU ZAL SAYS THAT this fact was known only by Shlomo HaMelekh and was not revealed to the rest of the world. Naturally, Rabbeinu zal also had this knowledge. He had a clear mastery of all the types of wisdom in the world, including the Kabbalah, the secrets of Heaven.

The wisdom of previous generations

RABBEINU ZAL STRESSES THAT people have the false impression that we are much wiser today than our predecessors were. In

³ *Rashi* on *Koheles* 2:5.

the olden days, they had no knowledge of science; they had no modern inventions, and were not advanced in medicine. (They also couldn't kill as many people with their different types of medicine as is done today!) However, Rabbeinu zal says, in terms of intelligence, they were far superior. As it states in the Gemara, it takes a powerful effort to be able to raise a big rock under which lays a treasure. Rabbeinu zal states that the wise men of the past had the ability to raise and elevate this rock. Moreover, there are an infinite number of rocks, but they had the knowledge to pick up the right one, under which lies the treasure, meaning that they revealed the means to discover all the new inventions and modern ideas we have now.⁴

Today's scientists are dwarves compared to the *chakhamim* of the past; the wise men of previous generations paved the way for them. The question, of course, is why now? Clearly, it is the will of HaShem that these things should be revealed in our time, and therefore HaShem enabled the mini-micro minds of today's scientists to come up with these new inventions.

Why certain things remain hidden

RABBEINU ZAL SAYS THAT certain things are dangerous to reveal. We don't understand why some things are kept secret — for example, the vast knowledge about how to grow things in any location in the world. One reason is that revealing this knowledge could cause great harm, the greatest harm being the loss of faith in HaShem. If people would become too knowledgeable, they would lose faith in HaShem completely and believe only in themselves.

The *Zohar HaKadosh* says that this was the trouble with the Generation of the Flood. They were so tall, so powerful, and so clever that they felt there was no reason to believe in anything

⁴ *Bava Metzia* 17b.

but themselves. It was a case of self-worship. They abandoned faith in HaShem and brought about the destruction of the world.⁵ Therein lies the danger of having certain types of wisdom revealed.

Rabbeinu zal brings the Torah law of *orlah* as an example. Any time you plant a tree, the fruit that grows on this tree during the first three years is called *orlah*. It is not kosher; it is unfit to eat. It is so unfit that you cannot even bring it to the Beis HaMikdash as an offering to HaShem or to the Kohen. Only in the fourth year is it fit to offer the first fruit of this tree, by bringing it to the Kohen in the Beis HaMikdash. In the fifth year, you can eat the fruit yourself.⁶ Why is that?

Rabbeinu zal explains that the *Zohar HaKadosh* says that in the first three years, an evil spirit hovers above this tree, nourishing itself from the tree.⁷ This is something we cannot see, sense, or feel. But in the olden days, the people were so great and wise that they had the heavenly power to sense this spirit over the tree, and they began to worship it. It became a type of idol worship — that's how dangerous it is.

Rabbeinu zal says: Just as it happened then, it could happen at any time. The dangers inherent in new inventions and new ideas could be so damaging that it is best for them not to be revealed. To this day, there are many types of wisdom that, for our own salvation, are kept hidden.⁸



⁵ *Zohar Noach* 75a.

⁶ *Vayikra* 19:23-25.

⁷ *Zohar Pekudey*, 244b; cf. *Eitz Chaim*, *Sha'ar HaNesirah* 3; *Likutey Moharan* 1, 82.

⁸ See *Eiruvim* 13b, "It would have been better had it not been created."



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The Teshuvah of the Tzaddik

We frequently find the expression "*Hadri bi*" (I reversed myself), in the Gemara when a Sage reverses his opinion. [However, the expression implies that he reversed himself rather than his opinion.]

When the Gemara says, "*Hadri bi*," it is speaking of repentance. The Sage had interpreted the Torah incorrectly and was now repenting for it. As soon as he was questioned about this, he became aware of his error. He knew that it caused a blemish in the Torah for which he must repent.

Sometimes a person may have the potential for repentance, but it is not brought out into actuality. He may then try to perceive something above his level, and this will lead him to make his repentance actual.

Thus, the Gemara says, "*Hadri bi*" (literally, "I reversed in me"). For the repentance was in him, but only potentially. Only now can it be expressed. ➤

[He reached above his ability, thus causing him to make this mistake. When his companion made him aware of his error, he immediately repented. In this manner, his potential for repentance was made actual.]

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The language of teshuvah

THE RABBIS IN THE Gemara were so great, every one of them was holy enough to perform the miracles of Eliyahu HaNavi. Every Rabbi in the Gemara had the power of *techiyas hameisim*⁹ and could visit Heaven at will,¹⁰ just as the Arizal and the Baal Shem Tov used to visit Heaven regularly. Their statements in the Gemara are words of Torah, words of HaShem.

Yet we find in the Gemara cases where a Rabbi will make a statement, and then other Rabbis question him and attack his statement. His reply will be, “*Hadri bi*,” I retract my words, meaning, “I was wrong, I take back my statement.”¹¹

Rabbeinu zal says the word *hadri* refers to *teshuvah*. *Bi* means “within me.” The Rabbi is basically saying, “I’m doing *teshuvah* within me. By attacking me, you have aroused within me a desire for *teshuvah*. I want to repent for what I said.” The *bi* means, “There was *teshuvah* in me, and it could be that I said this statement in order to bring out the *teshuvah* that was lying unused, inactive within me.” The attack on his words brought out the *teshuvah* that was within him.

Rabbeinu zal says that even the greatest tzaddik does *teshuvah*. It is a different type of *teshuvah*, where he ends

⁹ *Avodah Zarah* 10b.

¹⁰ *Chagigah* 14b.

¹¹ *Eiruv* 52a, et al.

up returning to HaShem in a greater measure than before. He does *teshuvah* for the fact that until now, even though he was the greatest tzaddik in the world, he was still on a lower level than he could have been. By doing *teshuvah*, he rises to a higher level. When he gets to that higher level he does *teshuvah* for the fact that he wasn’t on this higher level previously. He progresses to an even higher level and, again, he does *teshuvah*. It is a continuous cycle, which keeps the tzaddik moving higher and higher, but always in a state of *teshuvah*.¹²

Life in Gan Eden

RABBEINU ZAL SAYS THAT this process actually describes life in *Olam HaBa*. Life in Gan Eden is a constant cycle, because by doing *teshuvah* in that manner there will always be new types of knowledge, wisdom, and holiness that enter into a person’s mind. But there is an additional, vital point. Although Rabbeinu zal is speaking about the Rabbis of the Gemara, this idea applies to every leader, every *talmid chakham*, and every tzaddik in each generation who does *teshuvah* over their statements.

Rabbeinu zal states elsewhere that if a tzaddik states that he was wrong, or if he does something questionable and then retracts it in the form of *teshuvah*, you must know that nothing can be held against this tzaddik. After the *teshuvah* is done, he remains the same pure tzaddik as before. No matter what he did, if he does *teshuvah* immediately afterwards, the misdeed is completely erased. There is no wrong held against him in Heaven and surely there should be no wrong held against him on Earth.

¹² See *Likutey Moharan* I, 6:3.

Two theoretical statements

RABBEINU ZAL GIVES TWO important lessons on this topic. First, he once said about himself theoretically, but not actually, that it is possible for a tzaddik to commit a sin. Even a tzaddik can commit a sin. Second, but more importantly, we must know that when a tzaddik does *teshuvah* and states his regret over the sin, the tzaddik returns to his former status. The tzaddik does not fall from his high level because of the sin. He can correct that sin simply through a sincere statement of *teshuvah*.

Therefore, the Gemara states very clearly that even if the lowest person sees the highest person commit a sin, he is not allowed to suspect that tzaddik of a wrongdoing, nor may he harbor any ill will towards him. The Gemara says: "You must know that surely this tzaddik knows he did wrong, regrets it immediately, and then says, "*Hadri bi*," within me there is the power of *teshuvah*, surely as much as within you and anyone else."¹³ The tzaddik immediately does *teshuvah*, and does not allow the sin to remain on his record. He is to be regarded immediately as the same pure, holy light.

Moshe Rabbeinu and David HaMelekh's teshuvah

THIS WAS THE CASE of Moshe Rabbeinu. He *davened* to HaShem, asking to be allowed into Eretz Yisrael. "Even if I did something wrong, for which I'm being punished not to enter Eretz Yisrael, surely I'm entitled to that rule of *teshuvah*. I can repent as well as any other Jew. So, therefore, if I've done anything wrong, no matter what it is, I hereby repent and do a general *teshuvah*. It is erased. Why then am I not permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael?"

¹³ Berakhos 19a.

HaShem's reply, of course, was that his denial of Moshe Rabbeinu's entry into Eretz Yisrael was for an entirely different reason that had nothing to do with any wrong done.¹⁴

The point is that "*Hadri bi*" teaches us about the power of *teshuvah* for the greatest tzaddik as well as for the lowest person. As David HaMelekh said, "If the greatest person, the king of the Jews, can do *teshuvah*, then surely the smallest person should never lose hope within himself."¹⁵ Anyone can return to HaShem. One should always nurture that hope. Maintain a strong desire to return to HaShem, and do *teshuvah* over your original *teshuvah* so that you will always be close to HaShem.



¹⁴ See Rashi on Devarim 3:26.

¹⁵ Avodah Zarah 4b.