

Alter Rebbe
Likkutei Torah
Parshas Chukas
ויעש משה נחש נחשת

Introduction

This profound discourse by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad and author of the *Tanya*, explores the hidden goodness embedded within suffering and evil. Living from 1745 to 1812 in White Russia, the Alter Rebbe was a disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and became the first Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch. His teachings laid the foundations of intellectual Chassidus, emphasizing deep contemplation and emotional refinement. This discourse presents a powerful mystical and psychological framework for understanding suffering, evil, redemption, and prayer, drawing on Kabbalah, the Zohar, and the metaphysics of Divine vitality. At its core is the principle that even what appears to be evil is rooted in Divine goodness—waiting to be uplifted through fiery devotion and inner transformation.

And Moshe made a copper serpent and placed it on the pole, and it was, if the serpent bit a man, then he looked upon the copper serpent and lived. And it is taught in the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 3:8) regarding this: “When the Jewish people looked upward and subjugated their hearts to their Father in Heaven...”

ויעש משה נחש נחשת וישמהו על־הנס והיה אם־נשך הנחש את־איש והביט אל־נחש הנחשת וחי. ואיתא במשנה (ספ"ג דר"ה) על זה בזמן שישראל מסתכלין כלפי מעלה ומשעבדין את לבם לאביהם שבשמים כו'.

And it is difficult: why was the serpent needed at all? Let him simply look upward if bitten by a serpent! And furthermore, what is this looking upward? For it is explained regarding prayer that one's eyes should be downward and the heart upward.

וקשה למה ליה לנחש כלל אלא והיה אם נשך הנחש יסתכל כלפי מעלה. ועוד מהו ההסתכלות כלפי מעלה הלא מבואר בענין תפלה שיהיו עיניו למטה ולבו למעלה.

And to understand this, let us preface with an inquiry regarding the descent of the soul into this world. For its primary purpose is to cleave to its Creator with love and fear. And the main cleaving is in prayer, for the words are more accessible to human understanding.

ולהבין זה נקדים לחקור בענין ירידת הנשמה בעולם הזה כי עיקר תכליתו לדבקה בקונו באהבה ויראה ועיקר הדבקות הוא בתפלה שהתבות הם יותר קרובים להבנת האדם.

And certainly, before the soul comes into this world—and even after it departs from the body—it cleaves more in inward love and fear, for the body hinders it from serving Hashem.

ובודאי קודם צאת הנשמה בעולם הזה וגם אחר הסתלקותו מן הגוף הוא מתדבק יותר באהבה ויראה פנימית שהגוף אינו מניח לו לעבוד את ה'.

And on the contrary, due to its material nature, the body forces the soul to derive benefit even from physicality. And even though the soul does not want this, since its source is carved from Above—a portion of God from on High—its desire is to cleave more to its Creator.

ואדרבא מחמת חמרותו יכריח את הנשמה להנות אף מגשמיות, ואף כי הנשמה אינה רוצה בזה כי מקור חוצפה חלק אלוה ממעל ורצונה להדבק בבוראה יותר.

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And behold, it is explained in the Zohar: “Whoever does not transform bitterness to sweetness has no portion in this world at all” (see Zohar Bereishis 4a and commentary of the Ramaz there).	והנה מבואר בזהר מאן דלא מהפך מרירו למיתיקא לית ליה חולקא בקאי עלמא כלל (ע' בזהר בראשית (דף ד' ע"א ובפירושו הרמ"ז שם).
For this is the entirety of man—he was created only for this. For behold, in the First Temple they did not pray at all, and even in the Second Temple, the Men of the Great Assembly instituted only a short prayer.	פי זה כל האדם לא נברא אלא בשביל זה, שיהי בבית הראשון לא היו מתפללין כלל גם בבית שני תקנו אנשי כנסת הגדולה תפלה קצרה.
And certainly, all their service was only in this mode—to transform bitterness into sweetness.	ובודאי כל העבודה שלהם לא הייתה כי אם על דרך זה להפוך מרירו למיתיקא.
And the matter is that judgments are sweetened at their root. For behold, all evil and judgments, Heaven forbid, that were formed in the world—their root and life-force that sustains them is good.	והענין הוא כי הדינין נמתקים בשרשן. דהנה כל רעות ודינים ר"ל שנתהוו בעולם שרשם ומקורם המחייה אותם הוא טוב.
Like the parable of the harlot with the prince, explained in the Zohar (Terumah 163a)—that all her desire and intent is that he should not heed her, and thereby she will be more beloved to the king. Not so when she entices him and succeeds—that is not the king's will.	כמשל הזונה עם בן המלך המבואר בזהר (תרומה דקס"ג ע"א) שכל רצונה וחפצה שלא לציית אותה ובזה תתענג יותר שתהיה אהובה למלך מה שאין בן כשמתה אותו ותוכל לו אין זה רצון המלך.
And this is the teaching of our Sages: “Satan and Penina had pure intentions.” And elsewhere (Sukkah 52a), it is said that he “set his eyes upon the First Temple and destroyed it,” implying jealousy.	וזהו מאמר רז"ל שטן ופנינה לשם שמים נתכוננו ובמקום אחר (ספ"ה נ"ב א') אמרו נתן עיניו במקדש ראשון והחריבו משמע שנתקנא בו.
And the matter is that the root of evil that sustains it is good, as explained in the Zohar there: “Is there a servant who rebels against his master?”	והענין הוא ששרש הרע המחייה הוא טוב כמו שמבואר בזהר שם וכי יש עבדא דמרד במריה.
Though there are many servants who rebel against their masters, they are of flesh and blood and their life-forces are separate from one another.	הגם שיש כמה עבדים המתפרצים מאת אדוניהם אף על פי כן הם בשר ודם וחיותם נפרדים זה מזה.
But the servants of Hashem, who receive their life-force from Him, and He gives life to all—how can there be life-force to something that opposes Him? And the answer is: it is like the parable of the harlot and the prince.	אבל עבדי ה' שמקבלים חיותם ממנו יתברך והוא המחיה את הכל איך יש חיות לדבר שכןגדו ומשגי שהוא עדמה דמשל הזונה עם בן המלך.
And this is what gives vitality to all evils—and their root Above is good. But when they descend below via the chain of descent,	וזהו דבר המחייה את כל הרעות ושרשן למעלה הוא טוב וכשהן יורדים למטה על דרך ההשתלשלות נעשה

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they become truly evil and harsh judgments, both in worldly matters and in spiritual matters.	בְּאֵמֶת רַע גָּמֹר וְדִינִים גְּמוּרִים הֵן בְּמִילֵי דַעְלָמָא וְהֵן בְּמִילֵי דְשִׁמְיָא.
And behold, when some suffering, Heaven forbid, comes upon a person, he should not judge it according to what his eyes see as being bad, but in truth, its root is good. For from Him, blessed be He, evil does not emanate—only absolute good. However, this good is not graspable, because it cannot descend into the lowly world and remains above. (See Tanya, chapter 26, and Iggeres HaKodesh, beginning of “Lehaskilcha Binah.”)	וְהִנֵּה כְשֶׁבָא לְאָדָם אִיזָה יְסוּרִים ר"ל יְחֻשׁ כִּי לֹא לְמַרְאֵה עֵינָיו יִשְׁפּוּט שְׂרַע הוּא אֲלֵא בְּאֵמֶת שְׂרִישׁוֹ הוּא טוֹב כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ יִתְבָּרֵךְ לֹא תֵצֵא הֲרַעוּת כִּי אִם רַק טוֹב גָּמֹר רַק שֶׁהוּא אֵינוֹ מוֹשֵׁג בְּשִׁבִּיל נִשְׁלָא יוֹכֵל לִירֵד לְעוֹלָם הַשְּׁפִל וְנִשְׁאָר לְמַעְלָה (ע' בִּסְש"ב פ' כ"ו). (וּבִאג"ה ד"ה לְהַשְׁכִּיל בִּינָה.
And this is called “a subtle thread of nourishment” (michla dekik), which is truly His vitality (see Zohar Bereishis 8b, “like a fine thread...”).	וְזֶהוּ נִקְרָא מִיכְלָא דְקִיק שֶׁהוּא בְּאֵמֶת חַיּוּתוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ (וַע'). (בְּזֶהֱרָה בְּרֵאשִׁית ד"ח ע"ב פְּחוּטָא דְקִיק כו').
And this is [the phrase] “with all your might” (b'chol me'odecha), as in the saying: “Good”—this refers to the Angel of Life; “very good”—this refers to the Angel of Death, which is very good—without measure or limit. However, it has not yet come to revelation and is not perceived (see Zohar beginning of Yisro 68b, and the Ramaz there; and also what is written on the verse “Eileh Masei”).	וְזֶהוּ בְּכָל מְאֹדָה כְּמֵאמָר טוֹב זֶה מְלָאךְ הַחַיִּים מְאֹד זֶה מְלָאךְ הַמָּוֶת שֶׁהוּא טוֹב מְאֹד בְּלִי שְׂעִיּוֹר וּגְבוּל אֲלֵא שְׂעִידִין לֹא כָּא לִידֵי גִילּוּי וְאֵינוֹ מוֹשֵׁג (וַע') בְּזֶהֱרָה ר"פ יִתְרוֹ דס"ח ב' וּבְהִרְמ"ז שֵׁם וַעֲמ"ש עַל פְּסוּק אֵלֶּה (מִסְעִי).
And this is the meaning of the verse: “Y-H has afflicted me with suffering” (Psalms 118:18)—referring to the beginning of the Divine Name, the beginning of His revelation, which has not yet come to full disclosure and is not graspable—for the full revelation has not yet arrived.	וְזֶהוּ יִסֵּר יְסָרֵי יָהּ שֶׁהוּא בְּתַחֲלַת הַשֵּׁם תַּחֲלַת הַתְּגִלּוֹתוֹ שְׂעִידִין לֹא כָּא לִידֵי גִילּוּי וְאֵינוֹ מוֹשֵׁג שְׂעִידִין לֹא נִתְגַּלָּה הַכֹּל.
And this is the matter of Nachum Ish Gamzu, who would say, “This too is for the good,” because he would truly contemplate that the root of evil is good, and he would bring [the event] upward to its root—to the place of Ayin (Nothingness), and there he could enact transformation.	וְזֶהוּ עֲנִין נַחוּם אִישׁ גַּם זֶה שֶׁהָיָה אוֹמֵר גַּם זֶה לְטוֹבָה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיָה מִתְבּוֹנֵן בְּאֵמֶת שְׂשִׁרְשׁ הֲרַע הוּא הַטוֹב וּמִבִּיאוֹ לְמַעְלָה אֶל שְׂרִישׁוֹ לְמָקוֹם אֵין וְשֵׁם הָיָה יָכוֹל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַשְׁתַּנּוּת.
Like the statement of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa: “He who said to oil to burn, may He say to vinegar to burn” (and see also what is written in the discourse <i>Zos Chukas HaTorah</i> regarding ‘Who will give pure from impure’).	כְּמֵאמָר ר' חֲנִינָא בֶן דּוּסָא מִי שֶׁאָמַר לְשֶׁמֶן וְיִדְלַק כו' (וַעֲמ"ש סד"ה זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה בְּעֲנִין מִי יִתֵּן טָהוֹר (מִטְמֵא).

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And this is the idea of prayer, which occurs in the human body in this world: the soul within the body suffers pain and affliction because it desires to cleave to its Creator, and the body does not permit it.	וזהו ענין התפלה שגוף האדם בעולם הזה שהנשמה בתוך הגוף סובלת צרות ויסורים ושרצונה להדבק ביוצרה והגוף אינו מניחה.
And this is like the exile of the Shechinah, which is forced to give life even to the wicked. So too, the soul is forced to sustain the body. And all her intent is not for herself, but only to elevate the body from the dust.	וקמו גלות השכינה שהיא מכרחת להחיות גם את הרשעים, כך הנשמה מכרחת להחיות את הגוף וכל פונתה אינה בשביל עצמה רק בשביל להעלות הגוף מן העפר.
And it must be refined like silver in the hand of the silversmith. The more impurities there are, the more it needs to be refined and purified with a greater flame of fire. So too must the body be refined from the evil inclination and brought back to its root—like the parable of the prince and the harlot mentioned above.	וצריך לבררו ככסף ביד הצורף כל מה שיש תערובות יותר צריך לברר וללבו בלהב אש היותר גדול כן צריך לברר הגוף מהיצר הרע ולהביאו אל שרשו כמשל כן המלך עם הזונה הנ"ל.
And the more mixed-in evil there is, the more it must be separated with a stronger and greater fire through prayer to cleave to its Creator (see also what is written on Parshas Emor on the verse “And I shall be sanctified”).	וכל מה שיש תערובות רע יותר צריך להפריד על ידי אש יותר גדול וחקק בתפלה לדבקה בקונו (ועמ"ש בפ' אמור על פסוק ונקדשתי).
And therefore, in the First Temple, since there was not so much evil, they did not need fiery prayer. For all their deeds were to return evil and judgments to their root through sacrifices—and that was sufficient.	ולכן בבית הראשון שלא היה הרע הרבה לא היו צריכין לתפלה בהתלהבות כי אם כל מעשיהם היה להביא הרע והדינין אל שרשם על ידי הקרבות היה דים.
But in the Second Temple, they began to establish prayer, and it was short—relative to the extent of fire and the mixture of evil that was among them.	אבל בבית שני התחילו לתקן התפלה והיתה קצרה לפי ערך הצטרפות האש ותערובת הרע שהיה בקרבם.
And we need to pray more and more with great enthusiasm. And so in every generation below, one must pray with great fiery passion—not because the generations are more virtuous, but on the contrary: due to the immense evil that has become intermingled and increased in every generation, we must separate it with strong fire through prayer, and refine the evil within, and bring it to its root—like the parable of the prince and the harlot mentioned above.	ואנחנו צריכין להתפלל יותר ויותר בהתלהבות מאד. וכן בכל דור ודור למטה צריך להתפלל בהתלהבות גדולה ולא כי אכשר דרי אדרבא מפני גודל הרע אשר נתערב ונתרבה בכל דור ודור צריך להפרידו על ידי אש חזק בתפלה ולברר הרע אשר בקרבו ולהביאו אל שרשו כמשל כן המלך עם הזונה הנ"ל.

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That is, he should contemplate the vitality of the evil that sustains it—how does it receive life from the Holy One, blessed be He? For without Him, it could not live. And the Holy One, blessed be He, gives it life in the aforementioned manner. If so—there is truly no evil at all. And so it is with all suffering in matters of this world: when one thinks in this way, “all workers of iniquity will be scattered.”	שִׁיחֻשׁ הַחַיּוֹת שֶׁל הָרַע הַמְּחַיֶּהוּ אִיךָ יֵשׁ לוֹ חַיּוֹת מִהַקְבִּ"ה כִּי בִלְעָדֵיו לֹא הָיָה יָכוֹל לְחַיּוֹת וְהַקְבִּ"ה מְחַיֶּהוּ עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַנִּ"ל. אִם כֵּן אֵין רַע כָּלָל וְכֵן כָּל הַיְסוּרִים בְּעֵינֵינוּ עוֹלָם הַזֶּה כְּשִׁחֻשׁ עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַנִּ"ל יִתְפָּרְדּוּ כָּל פּוֹעְלֵי אָוֶן.
And just like the matter of Nachum Ish Gamzu, so too were all the righteous on this path. Only that Nachum Ish Gamzu had the ability to change the flow [of Divine influence] from Above to below, so that it was seen tangibly in the physical world to be truly good. And therefore he was called “Gam Zu” [“this too”]—because it was grasped.	וְכַעֲנֵן נַחוּם אִישׁ גַּמְזוּ גַם זֶה גַם כָּל הַצְדִּיקִים הָיוּ עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה רַק נַחוּם אִישׁ גַּם זֶה הָיָה יָכוֹל לְשַׁנּוֹת הַמְּשָׁכָה מִלְּמַעְלָה לְמַטָּה שֶׁהָיָה נִרְאָה בְּאַמֻּת לְמַטָּה שֶׁהוּא טוֹב בְּגִשְׁמִיּוּת וְלָכֵן נִקְרָא גַם זֶה שֶׁהוּא מוֹשֵׁג.
(See Eitz Chaim, Shaar Leah v’Rachel, ch. 5 on the concept of “Gam,” and in Ma’amarim there: “Ve’hinei HaGam Me’ir...”—for this is a drawing down from the Hidden World [Alma D’eiskasya] to the Revealed World [Alma D’itgalya], which is called “Zu.” And see further about the idea of “Gam” in Eitz Chaim, Shaar Arich Anpin, ch. 14, and what is written on the discourse “V’zeh Maaseh Hamenorah” on the verse “Ve’anochi a’alcha gam aleh”—that the aspect of “Gam” will also ascend. And from this comes the idea of Nachum Ish Gamzu.)	וְעַיֵן חַיִּים שֶׁעַר לְאֵה וְרַחֵל פִּ"ה בְּעֵינֵינוּ גַם, וּבְמַה"ב) שֶׁם וְהִנֵּה הַגַּם מְאִיר כּו', וְהוּא הַמְּשָׁכָה מִלְּמַעְלָה דֹּאֲתַפְסִיָּא לְעִלְמָא דֹּאֲתַגְלִיָּא הַנִּקְרָא זֶה, וְעַיֵן עוֹד מִעֵינֵינוּ גַם בְּעֵיץ חַיִּים שֶׁעַר א"א פִּ"ד וְעַמ"ש בְּד"ה וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמְּנוֹרָה בְּעֵינֵינוּ וְאֵנְכִי אֶעֱלֶה גַם עָלָה דְּהִינּוּ שְׂבָחִינָהּ גַם (יְהִיָּה לֹא גַם כֵּן עָלָהּ וּמִזֶּה הוּא עֵינֵינוּ נַחוּם אִישׁ גַּם זֶה).
But all the other righteous—even though their thoughts were along this same path—the [Divine] flow remained above as it was originally, and the goodness was not grasped.	אָבָל כָּל הַצְדִּיקִים אָפְלוּ שֶׁהִיתָה מְחַשְׁבָתָם עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה הָיָה נִשְׁאָר לְמַעְלָה כִּד כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָיָה בְּתַחֲלָה בְּלִי מוֹשֵׁג הַטוֹב הַהוּא.
And this is the matter of the copper serpent, which had to be placed on a pole—meaning the serpent had to be elevated upward, and they looked upward. That is, they should not think that the serpent is separate [from God]; if so, it would be truly evil and remain evil.	וְזֶהוּ עֵינֵינוּ נַחֲשׁ הַנִּחָשֵׁת שֶׁהָיָה צָרִיף לְשִׁימָה עַל הַגַּם שֶׁהָיָה צָרִיף לָהּ לְהַגְבִּיֵּאת הַנִּחָשׁ לְמַעְלָה וּמִסְתַּכְלִים כְּלָפִי מַעְלָה כְּלו', שֶׁלֹּא יִחְשַׁב שֶׁהַנִּחָשׁ נִפְרָד אִם כֵּן הוּא רַע מִמֶּשׁ וְנִשְׁאָר רַע.
But when one contemplates the serpent being raised upward to its root—that it is not separate from Him, blessed be He, and its life-force comes from there—then it is like the parable of the harlot and the prince mentioned above. If so, no evil descends from above.	אָבָל כְּשִׁיחֻשׁ אֵת הַנִּחָשׁ בְּהַגְבִּיֵּאתוֹ לְמַעְלָה בְּשִׁרְשׁוֹ שֶׁאֵינּוּ נִפְרָד מֵאֲתוֹ יִתְפָּרֵד וְחַיּוֹתוֹ מִשָּׁם הוּא עַל דֶּרֶךְ מְשַׁל הַזִּנְהָ עַם כֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ הַנִּ"ל אִם כֵּן אֵין רַע יוֹרֵד מִלְּמַעְלָה.

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And therefore it was made of copper (nechoshes), which changes into many colors—through <i>Ain</i> (Nothingness) and <i>Mem-Yud</i> (letters that allude to transformation). (See on the matter of the copper serpent in Zohar II, Terumah 148b, and brought in Eitz Chaim Shaar Mem-Tes ch. 3, and Emek Hamelech there.)	ולכן היה נחשת שמשתנה לכמה גוונים על ידי אין והמ"י. (עין מענין נחש הנחשת בזח"ב תרומה) (קמ"ח ב.) והובא בעץ חיים שער מ"ט פ"ג ועמק המלך שם
And this is the sweetening of the harsh gevurot [judgments] of the burning serpents—through the copper serpent, which is the attribute of Tiferes in the realm of the Klipah Nogah of Atzilus. And this is done by looking upward, to elevate the Klipah Nogah to its root in the World of Tohu, and thereby the good within it becomes dominant—because no evil descends from Above. And then, the goodness in the Tiferes of Klipah Nogah of Atzilus becomes bound with the Tiferes of holiness in Atzilus, etc.	והיינו שמיתוק הגבורות קשות דנחשים השרפים זהו על ידי נחש הנחשת שהוא תפארת דקליפת נוגה דאצילות והיינו על ידי שמסתכלים כלפי מעלה להגביה קליפת נוגה לשרשה שמעולם התהו ועל ידי זה מתגבר הטוב שבה שאין רע יורד מלמעלה ואז מתקשר הטוב שבתפארת דקליפת נוגה דאצילות בתפארת דקדושה דאצילות כו'
And behold, through the attribute of Tiferes of holiness (Tiferes d'kedusha), there is also a sweetening of the gevurot (judgments) of holiness by means of chassadim (kindnesses). And this is the matter of <i>shalom</i> ("peace") in the upper worlds (Pnimius Shel Ma'alah), as explained elsewhere in Iggeres HaKodesh on the verse "And the act of righteousness shall be peace," etc.—see there.	והנה על ידי תפארת דקדושה נעשה גם כן מיתוק הגבורות דקדושה בחסדים וזהו ענין שלום בפשמ"ע וכמשכתוב במקום אחר באגרת הקדש על פסוק והיה מעשה הצדקה שלום כו' ע"ש
And from this, it extends afterwards also to peace in the lower worlds (Pnimius Shel Matah) within the heichalos (heavenly chambers) of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, until even in the chambers of Nogah the good becomes dominant and the evil is sweetened.	ומזה נמשך אחר כך גם כן השלום בפשמ"ט בהיכלות דבי"ע עד שגם בהיכלות דנוגה מתגבר הטוב ונמתק הרע
And this too is through the Tiferes of Nogah—the copper serpent, etc. However, this is only achieved when one looks upward and subjugates his heart to his Father in Heaven.	והיינו גם כן על ידי תפארת דנוגה נחש הנחשת כו'. אבל היינו דוקא על ידי שמסתכלין כלפי מעלה ומשעבדין את לבם לאביהם שבשמים
And see further in Zohar II (Derech 129a, beginning of 160a and Derech 133a, 147a), and see Zohar, Parshas Miketz (104a), and see Bereishis Rabbah, Parshas Noach chapter 31 (33a), regarding the matter of the copper serpent. And something similar appears in the Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah chapter 3.	ועין עוד בזהר חלק ב' (דרככ"ט א' ריש ס' א' ודרל"ג א' קמ"ז א') ועין בזהר פרשת מקץ (דף ר"ד ע"א) ועין ברבך פרשת נח פ' ל"א (דל"ג ע"א) מענין נחש הנחשת וכעין זה הוא בירושלמי ספ"ג דר"ה

[NOTE Summary:

The discourse opens with the episode of the copper serpent (*nachash nechoshes*) and the Mishnah's statement that when the Jewish people "looked upward and subjugated their hearts to

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their Father in Heaven,” they were healed. The Alter Rebbe challenges the need for a serpent at all—why not simply pray to Heaven? To resolve this, he embarks on a metaphysical journey into the nature of good, evil, and Divine concealment.

The essence of the teaching is that all evil and suffering stem from a concealed good. The soul, being a Divine spark, naturally cleaves to God. Yet in descending into the body, it faces the resistance of materiality. The world presents concealments—harsh judgments (*gevurot*) and challenges—that obscure the Divine source.

Nevertheless, these very difficulties are rooted in higher goodness that is simply not yet revealed. The concept of “sweetening the judgments at their root” means realizing that even the forces that oppose holiness (e.g., the Yetzer Hara or suffering) derive their vitality from Hashem. Like the Zohar’s parable of the harlot and the prince, the opposition is a setup for deeper connection.

The symbol of the copper serpent, which changes color depending on light, represents this paradox—evil that is sourced in good. Only by *looking upward*—realizing that even harshness has Divine origin—can one sweeten and uplift it.

The discourse further explains that in earlier generations (e.g., during the First Temple), fewer inner defects required less fiery prayer. Offerings alone sufficed to sweeten judgments. But as evil became more deeply entangled, especially in later generations, fiery, passionate prayer became necessary to refine the soul and body.

Ultimately, this refinement process—through inner fire and devotion—elevates even the “copper serpent” of Klipas Nogah to its Divine root. Through Tiferes (Divine harmony), the sweetened *gevurot* join with kindness, leading to peace both above and below.

Practical Takeaway

When facing suffering, hardship, or even personal moral failure, don’t react at face value. Instead, *look upward*—search for the hidden Divine spark within the experience. Realize that even painful or negative emotions derive their vitality from a higher good. Train yourself to mentally reframe hardship as an opportunity for *elevation*. Through deep, heartfelt prayer and emotional passion, you can “sweeten the judgments”—transforming internal darkness into light. Your emotional fire becomes the spiritual flame that melts away the concealment and reveals the truth: everything is from Hashem, and everything, ultimately, is good.

Chassidic Story

When the Alter Rebbe was imprisoned by the Czarist regime for his support of sending funds to the Holy Land, he sat in chains awaiting judgment. His students were devastated. But the Rebbe remained calm. When asked how he could maintain such peace amidst such danger, he

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responded:

“I see not chains—I see the will of Hashem. If He wants me here, I am here with Him.”

This perspective mirrored that of **Nachum Ish Gamzu**, whom the Alter Rebbe discusses—seeing even suffering as “*Gam Zu L’Tovah*,” *this too is for good*. It was not just belief, but inner sight. Eventually, the Rebbe was freed, and this redemption was understood to reflect a deeper heavenly decree being sweetened and reversed—*not despite* the darkness, but *through it*.

(Source: Hayom Yom; Igros Kodesh HaRav)

TPX (Therapeutic-Psychological Integration)

At its core, this discourse by the Alter Rebbe provides a powerful therapeutic model for dealing with emotional pain, inner conflict, and trauma. It begins with a deep mystical assertion: **there is no such thing as evil that is independent of God**. Everything—even suffering, even failure, even the “bite of the serpent”—draws its vitality from a hidden good.

From a psychological perspective, this is a radical reframing of what we often call “dysfunction” or “brokenness.” Much like in Internal Family Systems (IFS), where even our most sabotaging parts are recognized as carrying protective roles, the Alter Rebbe invites us to see our pain not as a foreign invader, but as a messenger from within—a misunderstood signal that something higher is being concealed.

Take anxiety, for example. While it often appears as fear or dread, it can also be a disguised longing for safety, for control, for divine certainty. Depression, while paralyzing, may actually be the soul’s cry when it feels disconnected from its source. According to this discourse, these conditions aren’t inherently evil; they’re “copper serpents”—they look like the enemy, but if we “look upward,” we’ll find their root is divine.

This mirrors what trauma research has shown: when we reframe our symptoms as adaptations—when we shift from “What’s wrong with me?” to “What happened to me?”—we create the psychological conditions for transformation. The fire of passionate prayer, in the Alter Rebbe’s system, parallels the emotionally immersive therapies today: somatic healing, EMDR, cathartic movement—all of which involve intense engagement to rewire deeper energies.

Furthermore, his model is developmental: the earlier generations (less trauma, more clarity) needed gentler work—sacrifices were enough. But in our day, the density of confusion and brokenness demands **fiery emotional engagement** to break through the inner noise. Therapy

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today mirrors that evolution: insight alone is no longer sufficient; emotional processing, deep nervous system work, and spiritual reframing are essential.

When we stare directly at the “serpent” in our lives—be it addiction, shame, anger—we can choose to elevate it, not just suppress it. The serpent changes color in different lights. Our job is to lift it to its source—to stop treating our pain as a mistake and start seeing it as a messenger from the Infinite.

Modern Story

“The man with the burned face”

Dr. Edith Eger, a Holocaust survivor and trauma therapist, tells the story of a soldier she once treated. He had survived a fire in Iraq, and half of his face was burned beyond recognition. In therapy, he refused to look in a mirror. He was angry, bitter, and said: “This face ruined my life.”

Dr. Eger gently asked him: “What if this face *saved* your life? What if it’s your badge of survival?”

Over months, he began to speak with the part of himself that was hiding. The burn, it turned out, protected him—from death, yes, but also from the unbearable guilt he felt for surviving when others didn’t. That disfigured face was his serpent. It looked like a curse. But once he stopped fighting it—and “looked upward”—he saw it differently.

Years later, he became a firefighter. When asked why, he said, **“Because I was burned, I can walk through fire without fear. People trust me. My wound became my mission.”**

This is exactly what the Alter Rebbe teaches: don’t deny the serpent, elevate it. Every burn, every wound, every darkness is still alive only because it carries the breath of G-d. The transformation begins the moment we stop looking at pain as the end—and begin to lift it as a beginning.

(Source: Edith Eger, *The Choice*, and lecture by Dr. Eger at USC Trauma Institute)
END NOTE]