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We are going to be doing the Maharal's essay in Netivot Olam called Netiv Koach Ha Yetzer

A bit of introduction:

One of the very unique facets of the Maharal's writings is that he combines so much nigla and nister in a way that unsurpasses scholarship, so questions are answered by him on many levels simultaneously. Netivot Olam means paths of the world. He speaks about different paths we take in our journey through life. His style is that he brings a pasuk from Mishlei and then asks questions on it after first giving us possibly a medrash or gemara. He then answers some of the questions, brings us more information and draws a conclusion. So because his style goes back and forth, it might seem like he is repeating himself, but in fact he is drawing different points together. This is the style.

Perek Beis

From Mishlei:

If your enemy is hungry give him bread and if he is thirsty, pour out water for him to drink because you will be pouring hot water on his head, Hashem will reward you. If you have an enemy, if someone hates you, he says what you should do with that person.

Shlomo tells us if your enemy is hungry don't fail to give him bread or being compassionate on him. Not concretely and not internally. Why?

Compassion is the opposite of animosity. He won't be your enemy if he feels your compassion. It is a matter of feeling compassion toward him which will change things.

When a person gives, the rachmanos turns over the enemy because when the person feels compassion, they identify with them, feels close to them and this leads to a reciprocal feeling, even in an enemy that opposes you.

When you pour hot water on his head you annihilate your enemy, he can't hate you anymore.

Because you have attached yourself to him through compassion, you won't find the opposition. He won't be able to hate you and you won't be able to hate him.

In our times, we have different ways to face evil. If our enemy is one of us, the first step is awaken compassion, because that can change things. The person goes from one extreme to the other and Hashem will repay him for this. This is especially true if the person is completely compassionate as opposed to self serving compassionate.

The way this works is that a person can't feel compassion and hatred simultaneously. So we move beyond our hatred. For the enemy, he will feel a certain inner shame if he defines us as an enemy. Let us understand how shame works There is a premise that the

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more the person thinks of himself, the higher the threshold of their shame. Gerald Ford once tripped coming off the plane and it was a source of humiliation. If I tripped, it would not be the same, because my expectations for myself and from other people are not that exalted nor should they be. Some people's expectations of themselves has been diminished so much they have no shame. They sleep in the street, etc. Their expectations for themselves have diminished so much.

When you feel compassion, you give hashivos to someone, you see significance, which in turn gives them a sense of shame. How can I do this to someone who likes me, who understands me?

It doesn't mean when you pour coals on his head that you have set him afire. It could actually be destruction as with Esther and Haman. Why did Esther invite him? The Gemara adds, if your enemy is hungry (Haman wanted power and control), give him bread, which she did, she invited him to the seudah. It will lead him to submission, you are pouring coals on his head. As soon as you sustain him, he is under your control. When he is under your control because he has received from you, your poured coals on his head because you changed his ability to act. Hashem Who does not want opposition will give him over to your hand and He will help you.

This is a dear and beautiful explanation. Regarding Haman, Hashem does not want opposition in the world, He wants things to work within the frame of his pattern. That would be Esther should defeat Haman, which restores order. If you are talking hatred within the Jewish community, it would mean something else. It means you turn someone over by to alleging himself through your rachmanos on him. So either way, the bond that is created through giving is the first step to defeating an enemy. Concretely, we realize that hatred and compassion are incompatible. When you are dealing with someone with whom you wish to have compassion, you have to not only give but to feel for him, and that will diminish your hatred and their hatred. If it is a hatred like Haman, the act of giving (not rachamim) makes him subservient. And there is a third component, busha, shame. The enemy will be embarrassed to turn against someone who treated him in a way that he came to grips with his own hashivos.

Concretely, some of you may be teachers. If you have teenager who is totally turned off, one way to approach is opposition..I won't allow...which is sometimes for the sake of the other children, but not for that person. Find out what he needs, what is his bread? You give him what he wants and he will be embarrassed to oppose you. A story of Reb Aryeh Levine...he had a congregation, the people involved in opposing the British rule. Reb Aryeh approached one of them and one of his congregants swallowed a cigarette because he could not stand to be seen in contrast to Reb Aryeh's wishes.

Would this work with every relationship?

You know who your enemy is? You may think it is someone who opposes you or does not value you. The gemara tells us your real enemy is yourself.

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With the present enemies of Israel there is a difference between feeding them enough to give them subservience and giving your country, which would be giving yourself. If we give our selves to them rather than giving them what they need and create dependency, then we become subservient to them.

.The yetzer hara presents itself as someone hungry and thirsty. When you feel that lack, that hunger and thirst, you have to fill it with something or else it will make its demands and take whatever it wants from you. Give it bread of Torah, water, of spirituality.

He begins by telling us that the yetzer hara has two forms, the yetzer that tells us to uncover the body so you can get at it and take delight in it. Take physical reality and let the pleasure of that fill the lack. This is the pursuit of taiva, lack of kedusha. This comes from the profound feeling of lack and trying to fill it with physical means. For example, food. It is not good for filling the empty space within you....no one loves me, I am bored, etc. Because it emotionally makes that claim, overindulgence in gashmius it opens the door to all kinds of yetzer hara. There is nothing wrong with gashmius, the physical world is purposeful and good. but it can be used for the wrong purpose to fill that empty space.

The second kind is avoda zara. What is in it for idol worship. We have an empty space. Either we can fill it by making ourselves bigger or by making G-d smaller and more immediate, so that we have no need to upraise ourselves and uplift our lives.

Someone who is frum but has a yetzer and likes to experience everything went to Beth Lechem. People go down these steps, and the crowding was extreme, but she saw at the bottom a cradle...Betsy Wetsy. In the manger there was a plastic doll that you feed and it wets. Thousands of people brought themselves into religious ecstasy using that as a medium. What people do is they find what they admire the most in the aspect of G-d within them and they worship that. So in Christianity, they say that G-d is love. G-d is far more than love...and not only that, it is love as we humans experience it, so they create a legendary human being that is infinitely loving and compassionate and worship that. As opposed to moving what human love and compassion could be to its Divine source through the mitzvohs.

So avoda zara takes one sense of yearning for meaning and connection and degrading it bynot moving all the way up to G-d but settling on a more base form of perceived hashivos. For example, lashon hara. When a person speaks lashon hara and throws judgments out right and left, they are in the judge's seat which feels very good. Or if not judging, they are in a central position, the one in the know that someone else is listening to. So finding self importance through making the G-d within you small instead of taking the G-dliness within you and attaching it to its source is called avoda zara. Both forms have to be fed. And you feed the yetzer with Torah.

How does this work?

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The gemara says, if you happen to find the despicable one, meaning the yetzer hara, drag him to the bais ha medrash . If he is stone he will be erased and if he is iron he will explode and shatter. Are not my words like fire, Hashem swears, and like a hammer He explodes a rock. How does this work? Why does learning and Torah annihilate the yetzer hara.

The effect of mitzvahs are in two categories, positive and negative. One form of yetzer hara opposes positive mitzvahs..get up and do, fill the empty space by doing something positive. But we have a part of us that is like a stone. We want others to do for us. We don't like to move. We like being energized by movement, but we don't like to move. The nature of the physical body is take a rest, take a break. The body is of the earth. On a deeper level, there is a part of us that is stonelike, that becomes much more a presence in our thoughts when we despair. When we despair, we no longer believe in our ability to move things, we become stone like.

It has to be then that you take this stone and you reduce it, with water. Give yourself small steps until you have the courage and will to do. Another form of the yetzer hara is the opposite. We want to do something, but it is destructive. Destruction is just as much fun as creation! The feeling of empowerment that you get by destruction, self-destruction, destroying others, doing – that sometimes is hard to contain. If the yetzer hara within a person tells that person to get up and do wrong and to transgress negative mitzvahs through doing the wrong thing, then that person at that point is similar to iron that breaks and destroys. That person enjoys destruction, I have broken the limit, I have gone past morality, I have done whatever I have done. There is a good feeling of empowerment that comes from destruction. The pleasure and feeling of activity that comes from real learning can quiet this. The yetzer hara can only act when you feel lack. The yetzer hara lives in a vacuum of lack. When a person is full of Torah, they are not lacking. This feeling of lacking...this is where the yetzer hara finds his place and it can always be filled with Torah and mitzvahs.

The Torah can fill this empty place deep within us, to the point that whatever is lacking in a person disappears. The process is that at least at the moment a person is full of Torah, they are like an angel because they have moved away from the place of lack (in the body, I want more and more; or emotions and ego, I need to be more and more acknowledged.) The Torah moves a person to a place of seichel. Ordinary intellectual pursuit tells you about the world, science, humanity, etc. The basis of secular info is observation. Even mystic observation comes from what the physical eye can see. The process of knowing is limited by human observation. We don't see all that much, and our quest for truth is very limited. The Torah comes from a place that is beyond human seichel from beyond our powers of observation. Because of that when a person enters the seichel of the torah, they can fill any empty space. And it doesn't just mean learning Torah, it means learning Torah in the way in which one desires to fill the empty space.

Righteous people walk in the statutes of Torah, takes them higher and higher. The people who are using the Torah as a means of filling themselves with material or ego gain

through the Torah may not get there. What about going through shelo lishma to lishma? The only way to lishma is from shelo lishman. There has to be some will to see shelo lishma as a process and not an end in itself. He tells us the Torah can eliminate ego and materialism with something pure and real.

He explains more deeply. The Torah is complete. Nothing that we have is complete.

A story

A Rabbi in California told this story. He went to the funeral of the late Bobover Rebbe. There was a Black man there, weeping. The Rabbi was interested in why he was there, he was not Jewish nor a convert. He knew the Rebbe. 25 years before, the Rebbe called him to paint the house. The first day, he filled the cracks and the next day you paint. The first day, the Rebbe asked him if he had breakfast, and started to serve him. He ate the breakfast. The next day, he was ready to start. The Rebbe said to him, it doesn't have to be perfect. The man said I am a very good painter, why doesn't it have to be perfect. The Rebbe said, in this world nothing is perfect, no people, nothing is perfect. Nothing is perfect? The rebbe said, we had a temple in Jerusalem that was perfect, but since then nothing is perfect. The painter took that in.

He had another job in a different rebbe's home. No one asked him about breakfast the first day. The second day, the Rebbe said, I want a perfect job, no mess, no corner mistakes. The black man said, Rabbi, in this world nothing is perfect, no people, nothing is perfect. You Jews once had a temple in Jerusalem that was perfect, but since it was destroyed nothing is perfect. The black man said, the Rebbe, he is my man. He had a picture of the Rebbe in his wallet.

The perfection of the Bais HaMikdosh was real because it brought Hashem's presence into the world, and Hashem is perfect. The way Hashem communicates His perfection to us is through the Torah only the Torah is perfect. Everything else leaves a missing place. On a communal or national level, we feel this lack. Whatever is lacking predominates and we become disillusioned. The early Communists were often Jewish, they filled themselves with it, to fill the empty space but it didn't predominate because it was not the justice of Torah. The secular Zionists filled that empty space with building the land, but they, as opposed to other Zionists, wanted to do this oppositionally to Torah and the act of milking cow isn't going to fill the empty space very long. To the point that the same people who built are in the process of destroying to a very large degree. What the Maharal is saying if you don't want to end up with that despair of having tried to fill that space with something else, the only thing that fills it authentically is Torah because only Torah has no buchitza to the world.

The way the Torah works to erase that which is stone and explode that which is iron. Looking further, it says concerning the age of Moshiach...I will remove the stone heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. The place where the yetzer hara can dominate is in the heart of flesh, the place where the stone is, I don't have the patience,

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the koach, the part that wants immediate gratification doesn't get it. It takes time. It wants immediacy. I will give you a heart of flesh not of stone.

No one is interested in ideology. If I interview the kids who come out, and I try to tell them about the Guide for the perplexed, they would look at me like I am crazy. The issue is immediacy and desire, I want it now.

This was predicted. It says Hashem will take away the heart of stone. That is where we are, with a heart of stone.

The fact is if you want to change someone or anyone, you have to feel compassion to bond the person to you. There is a however.

For example, there are people in the world to steal because they want to own the item and maybe the feeling of getting away with it. You can't justify theft if you want someone to stop stealing. Through compassion, you try to give them something to substitute. Let us not be patronizing. Compassion is when the person is lacking and you want to help them, Judgment is to see what is lacking, but if you stay there and just say this is wrong like a broken tape recorder, there will be no change. There has to be a bond of compassion between you.

To conclude we have spoken about different forms of yetzer haras and different approaches to it...we spoke about the approach of compassion , bonding, creating a certain sort of busha, dependency in dealing with enemies. We then spoke how the enemy within us, the yetzer hara, within us feeds on perceived lack and we can fill that lack with taiva or self-importance by instead learning Torah, and this works because it is true, and it comes above human limitations.