

IN HONOR OF

Hatomim **Dov Ber Asher** שיח'ל
ben Reb **Tzion** ע"ה **Yakubov**

On the occasion of his birthday,
Shabbat Parshat Vayishlach, 13 Kislev, 5785

AND IN HONOR OF HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS שיחיו

AND IN HONOR OF HIS MOTHER

Mrs. **Adina** שתח'ל **Yakubov**

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Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Vayishlach, 5785

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May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah and *mitzvot*.

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Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson



by

Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Vayishlach

THE IMPURITY OF IDOLATRY

Removal of idolatry is a pre-requisite for Redemption. The tumah, ritual impurity, of idolatry can affect both the object and the person. Every sin is an act of idolatry. "Removing the strange gods" breaks through the barriers concealing G-d's Presence.

It is well known that serving idols and accepting G-d's sovereignty are mutually exclusive. Idolatry is an obstacle to the complete revelation of G-d's presence. Thus, one of the accomplishments of the era of Moshiach will be elimination of the spirit of impurity, the source of idolatry. When the nations will be motivated to serve G-d, then all forms of idolatry will be destroyed.

Idolatry itself has two negative consequences. First, the practices and rituals violate G-d's Will. Second, idolatry creates ritual impurity, a distancing from holiness. The term for this in Hebrew is *tumah*. The concept of *tumah*, which has far-reaching consequences, may be understood as follows: G-d is the source of life. Anything that reveals, or can potentially reveal, the innate G-dliness, the Divine life-force, is in a state of ritual purity (*taharah*). Anything that conceals, obstructs or impedes the flow of G-dliness is *tumah* – ritually impure and prohibited from being in contact with holiness.

According to Maimonides, this week's Torah reading contains an allusion to the impurity of idolatry. As Jacob prepares to return home with his family, he gives them the following instruction: "Put away the strange gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments." Here we see a clear connection between idolatry – the "strange gods" – and *tumah*, or impurity.

as the waters cover the ocean bed."⁷

*(From the talk of the end of 19 - beginning of 20 Kislev 5752
- in a group private audience)*

7. *Yeshayahu* 11:9.

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In all that has been said this year, what requires the most emphasis is what the times require: the true and complete Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. As has been said frequently of late, all the requirements have already been completed and we only need to greet our righteous Moshiach in actual reality. This will be hastened even more through learning Torah in general, and in particular through learning all of the Talmud as divided on Yud Tes Kislev, when the inner teachings of Torah were given. For through "engaging in Torah study, etc."¹ one realizes "Redeem my soul in peace"² - "A Redemption for me and my children from the nations of the world,"³ through the true and complete emancipation and Redemption.

(Pamphlet on the occasion of the completion of the division of the Talmud for study, 19 Kislev - Sefer HaSichos 5752, p. 491)

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1. *Brochos* 8a.
 2. *Tehillim* 55:19.
 3. *Brochos* 8a.

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The unique advantage of the 19th of Kislev of this year is that it occurs after the completion of the **eighty-ninth** year, in Gematria "**Redeem.**"¹ The Redemption from every thing that obstructed and hindered the coming of Dovid the King Moshiach, "who reviled the footsteps of your Moshiach," (as Psalm Redeem-89 [PaDaH--Pey-Tes] concludes) has been completed. We find ourselves already in the **ninetieth** [Tzaddik] year, connected with the third Redemption and the third Temple.

...In these times - **the days of Moshiach** - in which we now find ourselves,² we only need "to open the eyes." Then we will see that the true and complete Redemption already exists, in the simple sense. All the Jewish people, "with our youth and our aged, etc., with our sons and our daughters,"³ are prepared, in every single, last detail, "to approach and sit at the table," the table prepared with every delicacy and delight, beginning with those of the Redemption, Livyosan, Shor HaBor⁴ and Yayin Meshumar.⁵ Also, [the Jewish people are ready for] the most important thing, "to know G-d,"⁶ "the world will be filled with knowledge of the L-rd

1. [This address was given in the Rebbe's 90th year. The Hebrew letters for "89" are "Pey, Tes." The Hebrew word for "Redeem" is spelled "Pey, Daled, Hey." The letter "Tes" has the numerical equivalent of 9; the letter "Daled" has the value of 5 and the letter "Hey" the value of 4. Thus, the word "PaDaH" (Redeem) is numerically equivalent to and therefore connected with the number Pey-Tes (89). Translator's note.]

2. As mentioned many times by the leader of our generation, my sainted father-in-law, that already much earlier all the appointed times have passed, and all aspects and preparations have been completed, including the buttons, etc.

3. *Bo* 10:9.

4. See *Bava Basra* 75:a. *Vayikra Rabba* chapter 13:3, and in other places.

5. *Brochos* 34:2. And in other places.

6. *Rambam* at the conclusion of his work the *Mishneh Torah*.

By removing the "strange gods," the idols, the household of Jacob will purify itself. Jacob's instruction will be completely and literally fulfilled in the era of Moshiach when, as the prophet declares, the spirit of impurity will be removed.

The *tumah*, or impurity, caused by idolatry falls into two categories. First, the *tumah*, or impurity, may apply to the idolatrous object itself. That is, just as the Torah prohibits one from deriving any benefit or pleasure from an object used in idolatry, so the rabbis decreed that an object used in idolatry is *tumah*, ritually impure.

However, the impurity, or *tumah*, of idolatry, may apply only to the individual, the actual idolater. That is, while the Torah prohibits idolatry, the object worshipped does not in and of itself become ritually impure. Rather, it is the person engaged in idolatry who becomes *tameh*. The rabbis decreed an idolater ritually impure – in a state of *tumah* – so that people would distance themselves from 'strange gods.'

These two categories emphasize different aspects of idolatry. When we say that the impurity applies to the idolatrous object itself, what is emphasized is the repulsiveness of the object. The idol is disgusting. On the other hand, when we say that the individual, the idolater, is *tameh*, the need to distance one's self from idolatry, to "remove the strange gods among you," is emphasized. There should be a complete distancing and total separation from the slightest vestige of idolatry.

Maimonides cites Jacob's declaration from this week's Torah reading as proof that idol-worship makes one *tameh*; that is, worshipping idols makes one ritually – and spiritually – impure. By doing so, he stresses the second aspect, the need to distance one's self from "the strange gods among you," rather than the first aspect, the repulsiveness of idolatry. Maimonides's explanation that the passage in this week's Torah reading – "remove the strange gods among you" – indicates that *tumah* applies mainly to the

individual also helps us understand a general principle of idolatry. Understanding this general principle requires two preliminary observations.

First, there is a fundamental difference between the prohibition of idol-worship and all other prohibitions in the Torah. All other prohibitions prohibit something of real substance. For example, the Torah prohibits eating *chametz* on Passover, or eating an animal that died of natural causes, and so forth. In each case the thing prohibited actually exists: there is *chametz*, a dead animal, etc., that one is not allowed to eat. Idolatry, on the other hand, is an illusion. True, the tree or stone being worshipped is real. But to imagine that the tree or stone or other object has any ability to harm or benefit is delusional. Therefore, in regard to idolatry, any act that would lead one to think that the 'strange gods' are actually real or have any effect is forbidden.

The second preliminary observation concerns the difference between prohibiting benefit or pleasure and the concept of impurity, or *tumah*. The purpose of a prohibition is to negate something, nullifying its significance. If something is *tameh*, on the other hand, this means the object, however loathsome, has the ability to affect the person who comes in contact with it. One who touches *tumah* himself becomes *tameh*. One who is impure thus cannot enter the Temple, the place of holiness, because he would bring impurity within its gates.

The whole concept of idolatry raises the question: how can something which denies G-d's Oneness exist in the world made by G-d? How can G-d allow a person to think that an idol has any reality, to the point where there is a need to destroy the idol and its associated rituals?

The answer lies in the wording Maimonides emphasizes. Jacob tells his household, "Remove the strange gods." The key action is the removal of the "strange gods," that is, the idols, by Jacob and

breaker [HaPoretz] has gone up before them."⁹

...In these days we really only need to open the eyes and to see the existence in actual reality¹⁰ - that we are sitting together with the Holy One, Blessed be He ("Israel and the Holy One Blessed be He are altogether one"¹¹) at the "Prepared Table" for the wedding feast, the feast of Livyosan, Shor HaBor and Yayin Meshumar.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Vayishlach, 16 Kislev 5752)

9. *Aggados Bereishis*, end of chapter 63. And see *Bereishis Rabba* end of chapter 85 and in the commentary of Rashi.

10. That is to say, not only is the Divine service completed and the revelation needs to be brought into the world (as mentioned above), but more than this, that it already is actually revealed. All that is needed is to open the eyes, because **already (in the past) "He gave to you... eyes to see."**

11. See *Zohar* Vol. 3 73a.

It may be said that herein is an allusion that in the refinement of France (Tzarfas) lies the overall completion and perfection of the world, which was created in the seven days of building, with all its myriad details.

It should be noted that the refinement of "Tzarfas" which has the numerical value of "770" was accomplished through ("the flame" that is ignited from) "the house of Yosef." This refers to the house of Yosef in its simplest sense, the house which my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, chose and bought and lived in for the last ten years of his life in this world. From there he continued and extended (in an "ever increasing measure") the Divine service of "the house of Yosef - whose number is (the house number in the obvious sense) is "770."

On a deeper level, the letters of "Tzarfas" are the same as "U'faratzta." This implies that the revelation and spreading of the wellsprings are "Tarfaz" (breaks through all barriers⁶). The wellsprings not only penetrate to even the lowest possible level (because the barriers of the wellsprings were breached) but this [occurs] from **the perspective of the nether regions**, exemplified by the correspondence of the letters of "Tzarfas" with those of "U'faratzta." Through this is accomplished, "You have broken through⁷ for yourself," and "This is Moshiach, as it says,⁸ "The

6. [The root letters for "Tzarfas" (south, France), "U'faratzta" (spread forth) and Pritzas (breaking through) are the same: Pey, Reish, Tzadik. Thus, the etymological connection indicates a deeper significance. Translator's note.]

7. Vayeishev 38:29. [The Hebrew emphasizes the concept by repeating the word as both verb and noun: "Paratzta alecha paretz," literally, "you have breeched for yourself a barrier." (Note that the f-sound and the p-sound are physiologically related, i.e., made by a closure of the lips. In Hebrew, the same letter is used for both; they are differentiated by an indicator of stress, called a dagesh. Translator's note.)]

8. Micha 2:13.

his household. In other words, idolatry exists only so that the very possibility of idolatry will be completely eliminated through the actions of the Jewish people. G-d wants holiness to be brought into this world and revealed through the efforts of the Jewish people.

The reason G-d permits these false notions to exist is for the Jewish people to reveal that idolatry is a lie, without any substance. By negating idolatry, a true belief – belief in the One G-d – is revealed.

Every sin or transgression is a miniature act of idolatry. Belief in the Oneness of G-d means more than accepting that there is no other god. It means recognizing there is no other existence, and that all creation is an expression of the "word of G-d" which gives it life and being. Any thought or feeling of self-sufficiency – any violation of G-d's commandments – denies, at least in a subtle way, the Oneness of G-d.

The same may be said of forbidden objects: they oppose the Oneness of G-d. We may apply the same logic to the "miniature" idolatry: prohibited objects exist for the sake of the Divine service of the Jewish people. *Tumah*, the sense of being a separate existence and other oppositions to holiness – all appear to have substance and reality because the Divine life-force that animates them is covered up and concealed. Once the concealment of the Light of the Infinite is removed, the innate G-dliness within even the most mundane aspects of the world will be revealed. As Jacob commanded his family, "remove the strange gods from among you," so too must we "remove the strange gods," break through the barriers and concealments, and reveal the G-dliness within every aspect of creation. Then will be fulfilled the prophecy concerning the era of Moshiach, that the "spirit of impurity will be removed from the earth."

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 30, pp. 155-160)

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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The "deeds and Divine service" of all the Jewish people throughout the generations brought about the culmination and perfection of all aspects of refinement to the world, **within the parameters of the world**, as my sainted father-in-law was able to publicize that all aspects of the Divine service have been completed. This includes "polishing the buttons," and everything is ready for the coming of Moshiach.

In particular, this process was effected by the revelation of the teachings of Chassidus on the 19th of Kislev, which was the principal beginning of "your wellsprings will spread farther outward.")¹ From that time onward, the dissemination has progressively increased through our Rabbeim and leaders from generation to generation until the leadership of my sainted father-in-law, through whom the wellsprings spread to the farthest corner of the world.

It follows then that now, as long as our righteous Moshiach delays his coming (for utterly incomprehensible reasons), our Divine service is no longer one of "refinement" (since we have already concluded and perfected the service of refinement), but one unique to bringing the revelation into reality in the world.

The uniqueness of our generation is alluded to in the Haftarah of Parshas Vayishlach - "And² the house of Yaakov will be a fire and the house of Yosef a flame and the house of Eisav straw... and the inhabitants of the South will inherit the mountain of Eisav... and the exiled... until **Tzarfaz**... will inherit the cities of the South. And the

1. See *Sefer HaSichos Toras Shalom* end of p. 112 ff.

2. *Ovadyah* 1:18 ff.

saviors will ascend Har Tzion [Mount Zion] to judge Har Eisav [the mountain of Eisav]."

The "House of Yosef of our generation (my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation whose first name was yosef) distinguishes itself in comparison to former generations, even that of the Alter Rebbe ("The House of Jacob.")³ The innovation of our Yosef is that through him the wellsprings spread to the farthest ends of the world, beyond which there is nothing further, as the country of **Tzarfaz** (France). The times of the Alter Rebbe (and also in the times of our Rabbeim and leaders that followed) the revelation of the wellsprings of the Torah of Chassidus was not so well established in France due to its lowly state (to such an extent that the Alter Rebbe feared it might be victorious...⁴). Precisely in our generation, through "the House of Yosef," the wellsprings were revealed and spread even into France, through the establishment there of the Yeshiva "Tomchei Temimim," as in the city of Lubavitch. Therefore, we have actually reached the time of "they will inherit the cities of the South" and "the saviors will ascend to Har Tzion to judge Har Eisav."

This can be expanded and elucidated through an allusion:

"Tzarfaz" in Gematria is seven hundred and seventy (770).⁵ This is the perfection of the number seven, since it includes ten sevens (70) and a hundred sevens (700) and both of them together (770).

3. The particular connection between the Alter Rebbe and Yaakov (see at length *Ma'ayanei HaYeshua* (Kehot 5748 p. 101 ff.) should be noted.

4. See *Sefer HaToldos Admur HaZakein* (Kehos 5736) p. 259 ff. And elsewhere. [During the Napoleonic Wars, the Alter Rebbe was a vehement antagonist to Napoleon and the so-called "Enlightenment" he brought with him. Translator's note.]

5. [The number 10 represents completeness, and thus 100 perfection. Here, we have the completeness and perfection of the number 7, which represents the physical world (seven days of Creation, etc. Translator's note.)