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UNLOCKING THE
SECRET OF THE

EREV
RAV

B . R . L E V Y

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of years' ago, I came across a document online called 'The Modern-Day Erev Rav', which sparked my interest in the subject. I never discovered who the author of that document was, but their generosity in putting that information together and freely sharing it inspired me to start researching the subject of the Erev Rav myself. The fruits of those labors are now contained in this book.

I also want to thank my spouse and my children for their patience and understanding as my ongoing interest in the 'Erev Rav' has played out over the last decade or so; and my Rabbis, who continue to guide me on the path of truth and emuna.

I'm sincerely grateful to my publishers at The Matronita Press, and to designer Raphael Albinati for enabling this manuscript to see the light of day.

And finally, the biggest thanks has to go to the Creator of the world, who gave me my ability to write in the first place, as well as the inspiration to complete this book.

B.R. Levy

July, 2016

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, surprisingly little has been written about the ‘Erev Rav,’ that mysterious group of people who somehow attached themselves to the nascent people of Israel, as they were leaving their Egyptian exile, and who went on to cause them so much strife and grief.

The whole concept of the Erev Rav has been shrouded in mystery and intrigue for millennia. Where they have been discussed at all in our sources and by our Sages, the impression left has always been that the Erev Rav are very bad news for Am Israel, and the source of so many of our difficulties, problems and even ongoing exile.

You’ll read some of those sources for yourself, as you go through this book, to discover the secret of the Erev Rav. But as you’ll hopefully learn by the end, successfully understanding *who* the Erev Rav really are, and what their real relationship to Am Israel actually is, is the key to redemption – but in a very different way than you might expect.

This book is the product of more than five years of ongoing research into the sources that describe the Erev Rav. The sources in this book span the breadth of our esoteric writings, from the Zohar and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, through to the Vilna Gaon and his Chassidic contemporary, Rebbe Nachman of Breslev.

The picture they paint of the Erev Rav is complex, and at times even disturbing. This book is small in size but big in scope. It will introduce you to the real roots of the Erev Rav, explain why they are still a huge issue for Jews even today, in the twenty-first century, and then describe the real – and perhaps only – way we can truly meet the challenge they pose to us, our communities, and our hopes of redemption.

So without any further ado, let's discover the secrets of the Erev Rav.

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EREV RAV

BEFORE WE CAN EVEN BEGIN TO DISCUSS who the Erev Rav really are, and what the consequences are for today's Jewish community, we first need to know more of the background. This is where we'll discover the first secret of the Erev Rav, because far from being some strange Egyptian non-Jews who decided to jump on the Jewish bandwagon, the Erev Rav have been deeply connected to the Jewish people from the beginning of time.

Let's find out how.

THE EREV RAV IN THE TORAH

The first time the Torah explicitly mentions the Erev Rav is in Exodus (12: 37-38) when it says:

The Children of Israel traveled from Ramses towards Succoth. There were about 600,000 adult males on foot, besides the children. The Erev Rav also went up with them.

But that's not the first time they actually appear in the Torah. To discover where the spiritual roots of the Erev Rav actually begin, we have to travel back in time before the Egyptian exile, to the Garden of Eden.

ADAM HARISHON'S CONNECTION TO THE EREV RAV

Every school child knows that Adam HaRishon, the first man, made a huge mistake when he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in the Garden of Eden. When Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, evil stopped being something 'external' to man, as embodied by the primordial snake in the Garden of Eden and became an internal part of humanity instead.

Now, instead of being solely good, human beings had an internal fight on their hands between their urge for good, and their newly-acquired urge for evil, or what's often referred to as the *Yetzer Hara* in Hebrew.

There were many, many consequences of Adam's big mistake, but the main ones we're going to focus on for this book are the following:

- » Adam's sin brought death into the world - instead of living forever, mankind now had to die.
- » God, and His direct control of the world, became 'hidden' instead of being openly revealed.
- » Evil - the evil inclination, or Yetzer Hara - became an integral part of man's spiritual and emotional psyche.
- » Where 'good' and 'evil' were previously kept strictly separate, now they were completely mixed up in the world – and nowhere more so than inside man himself.

The Gemara (Eruvin 18b) tells us that after he had committed the terrible sin of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam separated from his wife, and involuntarily 'emitted seed'¹ for a period of 130 years.

In his foundational work on the Kabbalah, called 'Shaar Hakavanot,' Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, the Arizal, explains that the dark side captured the souls contained in this 'wasted seed', and that they subsequently needed to go through many reincarnations before they could start to be purified.

The Arizal explains that **these souls are the root of both the Erev Rav and Am Israel.**

THE EREV RAV'S EGYPTIAN CONNECTION

The Arizal explains that these souls started their rectification process when they were reincarnated as the generation of the flood. They continued the process when they were rein-

1 I.e. Adam HaRishon experienced a number of nocturnal emissions.

carnated again as the generation of the dispersion (referring to the people who built the infamous Tower of Babel). Next, they came back again as the cruel inhabitants of Sodom and Amora, in Avraham Avinu's time, and then finally, they were reincarnated again in ancient Egypt, at the time of the Egyptian Exodus.

Those souls who had been sufficiently rectified and purified by the process they'd already gone through were reincarnated into *Bnei Israel*, or the Children of Israel. But the souls who had not been sufficiently rectified by their previous incarnations became the *Erev Rav*, or 'mixed multitude,' the millions of Egyptian converts who came out of Egypt with the Children of Israel.

As mentioned, the Torah first explicitly mentions the Erev Rav in Shemot 12: 37-38, when it informs us that:

*“The Children of Israel travelled from Ramses towards Succoth. There were about 600,000 adult males on foot, besides the children. **The Erev Rav also went up with them.**”*

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE TZADDIKIM AND THE EREV RAV

In another of his Kabbalistic works called Shaarei HaPesukim, the Arizal explains in the chapter on Shemot 1:8 that when the Torah describes Pharaoh's complaints that: “The people, the Children of Israel are more numerous and greater than us,” he wasn't just talking about Yaacov Avinu's direct descendants, the Children of Israel. He was also talking about the millions of

Egyptians who had already converted over the past few years, as a result of the efforts of Yaacov Avinu, and his son and *de facto* ruler of ancient Egypt, Yosef HaTzaddik.

Pharaoh's reference to: 'The people' – was referring to these Egyptian converts, while his reference to 'the Children of Israel' was talking about a distinctly separate group – Yaacov Avinu's direct biological descendants.

We shouldn't be surprised to learn that the Jewish Patriarchs were deeply engaged in trying to rectify these 'lost souls' that came about as a result of Adam's wasted seed, right from the beginning.

It's also no coincidence that Avraham Avinu exerted so much effort trying to convince God to spare the incredibly sinful communities of Sodom and Amora. On a very deep level, Avraham knew about the true source of the souls contained in the people of Sodom and Amora - and their spiritual connection to the Jewish people - and was trying to rectify their spiritual blemish even then. But the time was not yet 'ripe,' and the people had to be reincarnated again, in Egypt, before they were truly ready for the next stage of the rectification process.

When Yosef HaTzaddik found himself as the *de facto* ruler of Egypt, he understood that the next part of that process had begun, and as Rashi tells us in his comments on Parshat Mikeitz verse 56, he made all of the Egyptians circumcise themselves before he would give them any supplies from his stores of grain.

There are different explanations given for this, but the one that's pertinent to this book is that Yosef HaTzaddik understood that these souls had been spiritually damaged as a result of what's called '*Pagam HaBrit*', or 'blemishing the covenant' – the wasted seed that Adam emitted in the 130 years that he was separated from his wife. One of the main rectifications for

this sin is the mitzvah of *brit milah*, or circumcision.

Together with his father Yaacov, Yosef HaTzaddik was already busy trying to rectify these ‘lost’ souls down in Egypt, a hundred years before Am Israel would leave under the aegis of Moshe Rabbenu.

While the Jewish people were further along in the process of rectification, the Erev Rav were actually from the same spiritual root, and also required ‘fixing’. This idea is further underlined by the fact that in the plague of darkness, Rashi explains that 4/5 of Am Israel died, leaving just 600,000 Jewish men to go out, with their wives and children, to receive the Torah under Moshe Rabbenu.

If we do the math, that means that around 2.4 million people died in that plague – and that’s the same number of Egyptian converts, or ‘Erev Rav’ who travelled out with Am Israel when the Jews left Egypt.

MOSHE RABBENU’S CONNECTION TO THE EREV RAV

Now, perhaps, we can also start to understand why Moshe Rabbenu, the leader of Am Israel, was so willing for these Egyptian converts to come along for the ride, despite the fact that even God warned Moshe against including them in the Exodus from Egypt.

On some level, Moshe was continuing the work of the previous Tzaddikim and was trying to rectify these ‘lost’ souls that came from the same root stock as the Jewish people. But unfortunately, the time was not yet ripe for the full rectification of these souls – and of the world generally, to be completed, as we’ll discuss a little later on. Consequently, most of the

problems that the Jews faced in the wilderness came from their association with the unrectified Erev Rav.

SO, THIS IS THE FIRST SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

Spiritually, they come from the same place as the Jewish people, they are just further back in the rectification process.

For now, park that idea in the back of your mind somewhere. We're going to come back to it in subsequent chapters, but first, we have to figure out why the Erev Rav have had such a bad name in our sources, and why they pose such a huge challenge to Am Israel if they're effectively coming from the same spiritual root as the Jewish people.

CHAPTER 2

WHY HAVE THE EREV RAV TRADITIONALLY BEEN SUCH A BIG PROBLEM FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE?

NOW THAT WE'VE LEARNED A LITTLE OF THE GENESIS OF THE EREV RAV, and their intrinsic spiritual connection to Am Israel, let's turn our attention to why the Erev Rav have traditionally been viewed in such a negative light, wherever they've been mentioned in our holy sources.

THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF

If we go back to Sefer Shmot (Ki Tisa, 32:1-6), we find that the second time that the Erev Rav is mentioned in the Torah, it's in connection with one of the most shameful episodes in the whole of Jewish history. While Moshe is up the mountain for 40 days, receiving the Torah and being given the first set of Luchot haBrit, or Ten Commandments, the people in the camp have grown tired of waiting for him to return and have decided to take matters into their own hands, by making a Golden Calf.

At this point, God tells Moshe to go down, because **'your people** have become corrupted.' Chazal explains that God is referring to the Erev Rav, the people Moshe accepted against God's advice.

God tells Moshe:

*They [the Erev Rav] have made themselves a molten calf...and they said [to Am Yisrael], 'This is **your** god, O Israel'...*

THE 'AM' THAT ISN'T 'AM YISRAEL'

Chazal teaches us that every time Israel is referred to as 'Am' in the Torah, as opposed to 'Am Yisrael', it's an illusion to the Erev Rav. That's why sometimes we find references to 'the people' in the Torah, and other times, references to the 'Children of Israel.'

If Bnei Yisrael had made the calf themselves, they would have said 'this is **our** god'. The Torah's language - together with a number of additional commentaries by our Sages - makes it clear that the Erev Rav were responsible for leading Am

Yisrael away from the service of God, with devastating consequences.

Writing more than a thousand years after the episode of the Golden Calf, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in the Tikkunei HaZohar (97a) says:

All the exile and the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash (the Temple), and all the suffering, all of it came through Moshe's acceptance of the Erev Rav.

He then continues:

[A]nd the wicked people and evildoers in each generation come from them, meaning from their souls, for they are reincarnations of those who left Egypt and this is what the Gemara (Beitza 32) refers to when it says:

“Anyone who does not have mercy on the creations is from the Erev Rav because (the trait of) rachamim (mercy, or compassion) is what Hashem gave to the Jews.”

Rashbi and the Gemara appear to be telling us very clearly that when someone acts in a cruel manner, as opposed to with compassion or mercy, we should suspect them of being ‘Erev Rav.’ Again, just park this idea for now, as there’re a few more parts of the puzzle you need to have before we can really start pulling all the different strands together into a more coherent picture.

TIKKUN HAOLAM AND THE 974 GENERATIONS

If we return to the Talmud, we find the next clue to what's really going on with the Erev Rav in Chagigah 13b. Rashi explains that God originally intended to give the Torah only after 1000 generations, but ultimately, he ended up giving the Torah to Moshe Rabbenu in the 26th generation, and consigned the other 974 'skipped' generations to Gehinnom.

Why did God decide to do this?

In the book of Daniel (7:10), the prophet tells us that:

*A river of fire starts to flow
before God's throne.*

The Gemara in Chagigah 13b explains that:

*To where does this river flow? It
pours onto the head of the wicked in
Gehinnom. Who are they? They are the 974
generations that were plucked before the
creation of the world and not created.*

How can these generations be wicked if they were never even created? It seems incredible that a benevolent Creator would consign so many souls to Gehinnom without even giving them a chance to prove their potential goodness.

The answer is: God did give these souls many opportunities to show their mettle: 974 opportunities, to be exact. These souls were the inhabitants of the 974 worlds that were created

² For a more detailed treatment of this subject, please read: *Mysteries of the Creation*, by Rabbi Dovid Brown (Targum / Feldheim)

BEFORE our world, which began 5776 years ago, at the time of this writing.

In Bereishit Rabba (28:4), we're told this explicitly:

One thousand generations were planned, of which 974 were destroyed.

The Midrash Tehillim (34:1) tells us why this happened:

God created this world at the appropriate time, for previously God had built world after world and destroyed them, because they did not deserve creation.

Next, the Zohar (Bereishit 25a) comes to tell us why these previous inhabitants of planet earth did not deserve to stay alive:

God created successive worlds and destroyed them; those that would not keep the mitzvot of the Torah.

To sum up what we've just learned, the 974 generations being referred to by our Sources existed before the creation of our world, when the world existed but was in a state of chaos (*TOHU*). God destroyed those generations, and the worlds they inhabited, because they refused to accept the Torah, and to keep God's mitzvot.

Now, we can understand why these souls deserved to be placed in Gehinnom, as described above. But that's not where the story ends, because the Gemara in Chagigah 13b continues:

These were the 974 generations that were decreed to be created before the creation of the world, but were not created. The Holy One, Blessed is He, arose and places them in each generation, and they are the most brazen of each generation.

The word 'brazen' is a vital clue to what's going on here, and we're going to meet it again later on, as go through many of the other holy works.

Rabbi Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman (commonly known as the Vilna Gaon), explains in the first chapter of his book Sifra D'Tzniusa, that these 974 generations are the Erev Rav. He says:

*The entire 974 generations which are the 'Erev Rav' which are the souls from the world of chaos (TOHU), God transplants them into every generation, and they are the **brazen-faced** of the generation. Our Sages said that in the period of 'Moshiach's footsteps' impudence will become great...and the Erev Rav will return to be the leaders of Israel.*

The Vilna Gaon (or some say, one of his very close students) is also purported to be the author of a book called Kol HaTor. In Chapter 2, Section 2 of that work, it says the following about the Erev Rav:

...the Erev Rav is our greatest enemy, the one who separates the two Moshiachs. The klipah of the Erev Rav works only

*through deception and roundabout ways.
Therefore, the war against the Erev Rav
is the most difficult and most bitter of all.
We must strengthen ourselves for this
war. Anyone who does not participate
in the battle against the Erev Rav
becomes, de facto, a partner with the
klipah of the Erev Rav, and was better
off not being born in the first place.*

The author of the Kol HaTor is not mincing his words here, and the message is very clear: he believes that fighting the Erev Rav and splitting off from them is the only way we're going to get to redemption.

THE DIVRE SIMCHA, ON THE EREV RAV

The Divre Simcha, Rabbi Simcha Issachar Ber Halberstam, also writes about the Erev Rav in a very similar tone:

*The root of our deficiency comes
from what the Erev Rav do to us. As it is
written in the Zohar: They (the Erev Rav)
damage Israel more than all the nations.*

*And one has to strengthen oneself
with great emuna (faith), because Israel
was redeemed from Mitzrayim (Egypt)
only in the merit of faith, and so it will
be with the future redemption, that we
will need great faith, because we will see
how the ways of evildoers succeed.*

And even if we see in them (the Erev Rav) good things like Torah, and tradition, and good manners, and in particular, they make peace with everybody and peace is the foundation of everything, and it is a very good trait, even so, as in the case of a sick person that needs to have his blood extracted, even though the soul is in the blood, so it will be in the days prior to Moshiach.

We must reject all these people even when they have good aspects in their behaviour, because then will be time of clarification and selection, and this will be the trial and choice in those days.

WHO ARE THE MODERN-DAY EREV RAV?

But while the Vilna Gaon and the Divre Simcha are giving us some very clear guidance on the need to split off from the Erev Rav, in practise, there are many difficulties with this idea. The main one is that it's virtually impossible for us to really know 'who' the Erev Rav are, in our days.

Back in the desert, the distinction was clear: the people of Israel were literally a family unit, albeit a massively large one, and each of them could trace their lineage directly back to one of Yaacov's 12 sons. By contrast, the Erev Rav were clearly converts of Egyptian descent and were physically and culturally different.

But today, it's not like that. Today, any Jewish person could potentially have an 'Erev Rav' soul, even if they have the lon-

gest beard, learn the most Torah, and come from a family with impeccable Jewish lineage. So, how exactly are we meant to ‘fight’ the Erev Rav and split off from them if we have no idea who they are?

THIS BRINGS US TO THE SECOND SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

Today, there is no distinct community or Jewish population that is obviously ‘Erev Rav’, which means that they could be present in every stratum of the Jewish world.

It’s also a mistake to believe that observant Jews don’t have to worry about the problem because keeping mitzvot is no guarantee that someone doesn’t have aspects of the ‘Erev Rav’ in their soul (as we’ll cover in more detail, in Chapter 4). The opposite is also true: just because someone appears to be very far from Torah and mitzvot observance, that doesn’t automatically mean that they are ‘Erev Rav.’

The truth is far more complicated and convoluted, as you’re about to discover.

CHAPTER 3

HOW THE EREV RAV BEHAVE

SURELY, THE VILNA GAON AND RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI KNEW that it was impossible to follow their advice to ‘split off’ from the Erev Rav, and to fight against them with all our might - even when they were actually writing those words? Surely, even at that point in history, they knew it was effectively impossible for us to really know *who* was from the Erev Rav, and who wasn’t? So, what is it that they were really advising us to do?

This is where we start our transition away from discussing ‘Erev Rav’ people, towards discussing ‘Erev Rav’ character traits. If we can’t know who the Erev Rav are by their clothing, appearance or surnames, then what other clues do we have to go on? Both Rashbi and the Vilna Gaon set out a description

of five different types of Erev Rav, so before we continue, let's take a look at them, and see what we can learn about how the Erev Rav typically behave.

THE FIVE TYPES OF EREV RAV - ACCORDING TO THE ZOHAR

The Zohar explains that there are five categories of Erev Rav:

- 1) **The Amalekites** – These are the people who ‘make themselves leaders by force,’ i.e., they’re bullies who aren’t scared to use violence, intimidation or emotional manipulation to get their own way.
- 2) **The Neflim** (‘fallen ones’) – These are promiscuous people who are obsessed with their sexual lusts.
- 3) **The Gibborim** (‘mighty ones’) – These are the people who build synagogues, yeshivas, and other communal institutions, primarily because they want their name on the plaque by the front door. It also refers to those individuals who are interested in positions of leadership and power because of the honour and influence they’ll receive, as opposed to being genuinely interested in working for the general good of the community.
- 4) **The Refaim** (‘weak ones’) – These are the people who ‘if they see Israel in trouble, abandon them.’ If the State of Israel is engaged in a military operation against Arab terror, guess whose side these people will be on. Even if they could help their fellow Jew in some way, they don’t, preferring to ingratiate themselves with non-Jews, instead. This also refers to people who make very little effort to learn, or keep, the Torah.
- 5) **The Anakim** (‘giants’) – In modern parlance, we would describe this group of people as ‘anarchists’, who hate rules,

who hate being told what to do, and who put a lot of effort into trying to destroy notions of morality, social responsibility, or having limits of any type put on their desires and behaviour.

THE FIVE TYPES OF EREV RAV – ACCORDING TO THE VILNA GAON

Meanwhile, the Vilna Gaon also identifies five distinct types of Erev Rav, but he describes them a little differently, as follows:

- 1) Those that create strife and talk *lashon hara* (evil speech, gossip, slander).
- 2) Those who pursue their physical lusts and desires.
- 3) The swindlers who pretend to be Tzaddikim, but their hearts are not straight.
- 4) Those who pursue honour and build great synagogues to make a name for themselves.
- 5) Those who pursue money and strife.

As we can see, there's a lot of overlap between the two lists, and taken together; we're starting to build up a more composite picture of the sorts of things Erev Rav people *might* do.

THE ALLUSIONS TO THE EREV RAV IN PSALM 37

Now, let's go to the Zohar II, 45b, where Rabbi Yitzhak explains that Psalm 37 is talking all about the Erev Rav:

Rabbi Yitzhak opened and said (Psalms 37:1), 'Do not pay attention to the deceivers (merayim).'" Who are the 'deceivers'? For

*it is not written- sinners or evildoers, but deceivers, **for they deceive themselves, and those who befriend them.***

Rabbi Yehuda said: Deceivers! Get away from the deceivers, so that you will not befriend yourself with their acts, and then be part of their sins. Come and see: If there was no Erev Rav... that act (i.e., making the Golden Calf) would not have been done, and all those who died from Israel would not have died, and all that was caused upon Israel would not have been caused.

So, another clear trait of the Erev Rav appears to be that they lie, not only to those around them but also (crucially) to themselves.

WHAT ELSE CAN PSALM 37 TEACH US ABOUT NEGATIVE EREV RAV TRAITS?

In that Psalm, King David tells us three times: Do not compete with evildoers! – Again, referring to the Erev Rav.

So, competition and comparing themselves to others appear to be two more key traits of the Erev Rav.

King David continues:

The wicked man plots against the righteous person, and gnashes at him his teeth,

This suggests that the merayim/Erev Rav appear to act spitefully and vindictively, and have an obsession with getting even with other people.

The Psalmist continues:

Borrow does the wicked, but repays not.

Another Erev Rav trait seems to be that they have very little regard for abiding by agreements, or respecting other people's rights.

The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice (mishpat). The Torah of his God is in his heart, falter not will his footsteps. The wicked one watches the righteous one, and seeks to kill him. But Hashem will not forsake him to his hand, nor let him be condemned when he is judged.

In this passage, King David explains that a righteous Jew speaks 'justice,' in other words, that he's internalized his Torah, and it's in his heart. By contrast, it appears to be a wicked / Erev Rav trait when people go through the external motions of being pious, or put on a show of being religious for other people.

The last Erev Rav trait we can gather from King David's words is the tendency to rush to judgment against other people, and to condemn them harshly. Remember that previously, the Vilna Gaon explained that speaking evilly about others and spreading slander and gossip (i.e., *lashon hara*), is a key trait of the Erev Rav.

Before we leave Psalm 37, there's another secret we need to pick up here:

THE THIRD SECRET OF THE EREV RAV

Whenever we see the words 'merayim' in scripture, it's a coded word that the Erev Rav is being discussed.

'THE BRAZEN-FACED OF THE GENERATION'

A little earlier, we saw that the Vilna Gaon described the Erev Rav as being the 'brazen-faced' of the generation. What else can we find in our holy sources about 'brazen-faced people,' that might give us more clues about who or what we're meant to be fighting against?

In our morning blessings, we recite the following *bracha*, or blessing:

*May it be Your will Hashem, my God
and the God of my forefathers, that you
rescue me today and every day from
those who are brazen-faced and from
brazen-facedness, from a person who
is evil, from a companion who is evil,
[and] from a neighbour who is evil.*

The morning *brachot* seem to be setting up a clear connection between 'brazen-faced' people and evil people.

In the daily *Tachanun* service and our Yom Kippur davening, we begin the *Vidui*, or confession of our sins, with the following statement:

...do not ignore our supplication. For we are not so brazen-faced and stiff-necked as to say before You, Hashem, our God, that we are righteous and have not sinned, for indeed, we and our forefathers have sinned.

Here, our Sages appear to be making a clear link between ‘brazen-facedness’ and people who refuse to admit their sins, or to repent for them.

‘BRAZENNESS’ IN SEFER HAMIDDOT (THE BOOK OF TRAITS)

In his work, *Sefer HaMiddot* (the Book of Traits), Rebbe Nachman writes the following about ‘brazenness’:

- * Brazenness is caused by anger.
- * Brazenness prevents a person from accepting rebuke.
- * Brazenness causes stubbornness and attests that one has not rectified the sinful ways of his ancestors.
- * [A] brazen person has certainly stumbled in sin, and will stumble in more sin. It is permitted to call him ‘wicked’ and to hate him, and **he is from the 974 generations that preceded the Creation.**

(This last statement is another link between ‘brazenness’ and the Erev Rav, and echoes both the words of the Vilna Gaon and the Gemara in Chagigah 13b.)

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER: THE NEGATIVE TRAITS OF THE EREV RAV

Before we conclude this chapter, let's just take a moment to recap everything we've learnt about the negative traits of the Erev Rav, as drawn from a variety of Jewish sources, ranging from the holy Zohar, through to *Sefer Tehillim*, *Kol HaTor*, *Sefer HaMiddot*, and other sources:

Erev Rav Traits as described by the Zohar:

- » They lack the traits of compassion and mercy for others.
- » They bully other people.
- » They use violence or intimidation, and emotional manipulation to get their own way.
- » They act in a sexually promiscuous way and have an unhealthy obsession with their lusts.
- » They want to make a name for themselves.
- » They'll contribute money for good causes in the Jewish world primarily to get honour and recognition from the community.
- » They'll pursue positions of leadership (both in the secular and the religious world) primarily for the influence, power and prestige they'll acquire as a result, and not because they have the community's best interests at heart.
- » They're moral cowards, who are more interested in protecting their own social standing than helping their fellow Jew.
- » They ingratiate themselves with non-Jews.
- » They make very little effort to learn or keep the Torah.
- » They are anarchists, who are bent on destroying the fabric of society whichever way they can.
- » They hate having to abide by rules, and they hate being told what to do.

Erev Rav traits as described by the Vilna Gaon:

- » They make a lot of trouble, and create strife between people.
- » They engage in evil speech, gossip, and slander (lashon hara).
- » They are obsessed with fulfilling their own lusts and desires, particularly sexual lust.
- » They swindle other people.
- » They pretend to be externally ‘righteous’ or holy, but it’s just for show, and their hearts aren’t really in it.
- » They pursue honour.
- » They build synagogues, etc., just to make a name for themselves.
- » They’re obsessed with making money.

Erev Rav traits as described by King David in Psalm 37:

- » They deceive themselves, and other people.
- » They lie.
- » They spend a lot of time comparing themselves to others, and competing.
- » They’re spiteful and vindictive.
- » They hold grudges.
- » They’re obsessed with ‘getting even’ with other people.
- » They often don’t abide by the agreements they make.
- » They don’t respect other people’s rights or property.
- » They make a big show for other people of being pious, or righteous, but they don’t feel it in their hearts.
- » They rush to judgement against other people.
- » They’re very critical of other people and condemn them harshly.

Erev Rav traits as described by the Gemara in Chagigah

13b

- » They are brazen.

- » They are wicked - primarily because they refused to accept God's primacy in the world, and to abide by His Torah.

Erev Rav traits as described in the Torah, (Parsha Ki Tisa):

- » They are stiff-necked or stubborn.

Erev Rav traits as described by Rebbe Nachman (Sefer HaMiddot):

- » They are angry.
- » They can't accept rebuke.
- » They're stubborn.
- » They do a lot of sins.

HOW IS THE WICKED PERSON GOING TO 'VANISH'?

The last thing we'll take from Psalm 37 is King David's wisdom about what ultimately happens to the Erev Rav:

I have seen a wicked man, powerful and well-rooted like a native tree that is ever fresh. Yet he vanished, and indeed! He was no more; I sought him, but he was not to be found.

As we're about to learn, this verse can be understood in either of two key ways, both of which have huge implications for how Jews should react to the spiritual 'problem' posed by the Erev Rav. The first way, as espoused by many of our Sages and their writings about the Erev Rav, is that the wicked person himself will vanish, in entirety.

The second way, as put forward by Rebbe Nachman in his

lesson on Azamra (which we'll explore in much more detail in a subsequent chapter) is that the wickedness in the person will vanish, leaving only the rectified good.

This distinction is crucial, as we're about to find out.

CHAPTER 4

EREV RAV AND THE 'FALSE LEADERS'

BEFORE WE JUMP into how we resolve the problem of the Erev Rav, there's another secret to share with you:

THE FOURTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

Before the coming of Moshiach, the majority of our leaders will act like the 'Erev Rav'.

Arguably, one of the most upsetting factors of modern Jewish life is the number of Jewish leaders we have, both in

the observant and the secular world, who are falling far short when it comes to even basic standards of morality.

Everyone, unfortunately, has their own examples of this, but it's useful to understand that this phenomenon too, is connected to the Erev Rav issue we're discussing in this book.

Earlier, we saw the passage from the Vilna Gaon where he stated that:

Our Sages said that in the period of 'Moshiach's footsteps' impudence will become great...and the Erev Rav will return to be the leaders of Israel.

“Let us make a name for ourselves”

Really, this shouldn't come as such a surprise, as 'making a name for themselves' was one of the key Erev Rav traits, as set out both by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in the Zohar, and the Vilna Gaon.

In his book *Etz Chaim*, Rabbi Chaim Vital, the main student of the Arizal, warns us that one of the ways that the Erev Rav will try to make a name for themselves is by pursuing 'honourable' positions in the Jewish religious world, and making a point of doing mitzvot in order to get kudos from others.

All those that do kindness and toil in the Torah, they do it only for themselves. And in particular through our many sins, in our times the Torah has been made into a hammer with which to do their own ends for many baalei Torah, who occupy themselves in the Torah in order to receive their reward

and other benefits and luxuries, and in order to be in the group of heads of yeshivot, and judges in their courts, so that their names and fame spread throughout the land.

So, if a leader is more interested in their salary, press cuttings or prestigious perks than the people they are meant to be serving, or the Torah they are meant to be teaching, then a red flag should go up that we *might* not be dealing with a bona fide Tzaddik or saintly person.

Rabbi Vital tells us how we can spot who is the real deal:

In Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers) 6:41, Rabbi Meir said: He who studies the Torah for its own sake (without ulterior motives) deserves many things, and not only that, but the whole world is indebted to him. And he is called beloved friend, loved by God and men, he pleases the Creator and humanity.

The Torah covers him with modesty and fear, makes him virtuous, merciful, devoted, just and faithful, and moves him away from sin, guiding him by the path of virtue.

The secrets of the Torah are revealed to him and he is turned into an endless fountain of wisdom, and he becomes modest, patient, and forgiving of offenses.

When this isn't happening with the leaders in our neighbourhood or community, religious or otherwise - i.e., we notice that they're still impatient, arrogant, boorish, superficial, judgmental and highly critical of other people's flaws

- we should make a mental note that while these individuals undoubtedly still have many good qualities and maybe, even an enormous amount of Torah learning and good deeds under their belt, there's still some spiritual work to do before we can safely assume that they're as altruistic, honest and holy as we'd like to believe.

REBBE NACHMAN AND FALSE LEADERS

In the book *Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* (published by the Breslov Research Institute), in paragraph 126, Rebbe Nachman is quoted as saying the following about false leaders in the time preceding the coming of Moshiach:

The Talmud teaches us that the angels will chant 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' before the Tzaddikim, just like they do before God...the Tzaddikim who remain faithful before the Moshiach's coming will deserve this, and much more. So difficult will it be to remain firm in faith and not to be misled by everyone's mistaken beliefs in the pre-Messianic era.

At that time, many who call themselves religious leaders will preach falsehood... There will remain some truly religious individuals, but they will be very widely scattered.

Again, without belabouring the point, these passages should make it clear that the Sages of previous generations were warning us that the closer we get to Moshiach, the more

‘brazen-faced’ and morally-corrupt many of our leaders would become.

The assumption is often made that just because someone is in a position of leadership or influence, that they are above reproach and beyond moral scrutiny – but sadly, the opposite is often the case.

In this time before Moshiach, *many of our leaders will be false*. So, beware! We need to be very careful about who we place our trust in, who we ask for advice, and whose directives we follow, and to be sure that they meet the criteria of a ‘true leader’ as set out by Rabbi Vital, namely:

The secrets of the Torah are revealed to him and he is turned into an endless fountain of wisdom, and he becomes modest, patient, and forgiving of offenses.

While it’s sometimes hard to tell if someone is truly wise or not, it’s usually much easier to spot if they’re patient, modest and forgiving.

CHAPTER 5

HOW REINCARNATION SOLVES THE PROBLEM

THE EREV RAV IMPASSE

In the previous chapters, we've been exploring how the Erev Rav came into being, how they got attached to Am Yisrael, some of the enormous spiritual problems they've been causing us, how they typically behave, and how traditionally, our Sages have issued a number of dire warnings about the need to split ourselves off from them.

But, as we also started to learn, there are some massive barriers to actually doing this, namely:

It's practically impossible in our day and age, to identify

who the Erev Rav really are, as they could even be members of our own family, religious leaders, or people with apparently externally ‘perfect’ lives and morals.

If you were reading the list of negative character traits carefully, you may also have spotted another huge problem with what we’ve currently set out *vis-à-vis* how to identify and deal with the Erev Rav, which brings us to the fifth secret of the Erev Rav.

THE FIFTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

Today, most of us have at least a few of the ‘Erev Rav’ traits, too.

Does that mean that everyone who has some of these ‘Erev Rav’ traits is actually ‘Erev Rav’, or is something else actually going on here?

The rest of the book will be devoted to answering these questions, and sharing more of the secrets of the Erev Rav.

Before we continue, let’s set out the problem very clearly:

It’s impossible for us to know who is ‘Erev Rav’ and who isn’t.

Today, almost all of us have at least some of the traits typically identified as belonging to the ‘Erev Rav’.

If we can’t identify who the ‘real’ Erev Rav are in our midst, we certainly can’t split off from them, or stay away from them.

Even if we had 100% clarity that some of the people we know are bona fide Erev Rav, if those people were our close family members or friends, we would probably still find it almost impossible to ‘split off’ from them.

Which is probably why the Erev Rav have continued to pose such an enormous spiritual problem to Am Yisrael, as it appears that we really can't win. But now, we've reached the sixth secret of the Erev Rav that's about to change the whole picture:

THE SIXTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

There are no true, 100% 'Erev Rav' souls today. Each and every Jewish soul is a composite of many different soul sparks, including some from the Erev Rav.

To understand what's really going on today, we first have to learn a little more about the principles of Jewish reincarnation, and then later, dip into one of the most important teachings of the famous Chassidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslev.

THE JEWISH CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION

In recent times, there has been a great deal of confusion in the Jewish world as to whether the concept of reincarnation applies to Jews, or is even a Jewish idea. Most people are aware of the basic principle of reincarnation as taught primarily by the Eastern religions, namely that the spiritual soul is 'incarnated' into a different physical body again and again, in order

to give it the opportunity to work on, and ‘fix’ issues and character traits that it failed to rectify in its previous incarnations.

That’s the mainstream, non-Jewish view of reincarnation, but as you might expect, Judaism has a great deal more to say on the subject. But before we get into the technical details, be assured that reincarnation is a fundamental tenet of the Jewish faith – so much so, that in the ‘Hamapil’ prayer that we traditionally recite before saying the bedtime Shema, we say that we:

...forgive anyone who angered or antagonized [us], or sinned against [us]...whether deliberately or in thought alone, whether in this reincarnation or in another reincarnation...

This prayer can be found in every Orthodox Jewish prayer book the world over, so reincarnation is accepted in the mainstream Orthodox Jewish world, although not everyone is aware of this.

In his excellent book *Return Again* (published by Devora Publishing), Rabbi Avraham ArieH Trugman explains that:

Among Torah scholars in our day, there is no opposition to the teachings of reincarnation. Chassidic teachings are replete with references to it, and even...the Vilna Gaon, who himself authored a number of important Kabbalistic commentaries, acknowledged its existence openly.

(In the reference section at the back of this book, you'll find more suggestions on books to further your knowledge of Jewish reincarnation, if you'd like to learn more.)

THE FIVE PARTS OF THE JEWISH SOUL

Until the Arizal, the father of modern Kabbalah, appeared on the scene in the 16th century, our understanding of the mechanism of reincarnation had for the most part been lost or forgotten, partially as a result of our long exile, and partially due to external pressures from the other 'monotheistic' world religions who do *not* believe in reincarnation, and who pressured the Jews to keep their 'heretical' ideas to themselves.

With the emergence of the Arizal, the Jewish concept of reincarnation was refined and renewed and reclaimed its original place in Jewish theology. In contrast to Eastern traditions that teach that the same soul gets reincarnated again and again (and which generally don't talk about God being part of the reincarnation picture at all), the Arizal taught that each Jewish soul is made up of five different parts or levels, called (in descending order):

- » Yehida - (Unique)
- » Chaya - (Living)
- » Neshama - (Soul)
- » Ruach - (Spirit)
- » Nefesh - (Animal Soul)

The first two of these soul parts, the Yehida and the Chaya, are kept tucked away in the Heavenly realms. They are still attached to a person, and can still influence them, but crucially, the person's bad actions and negative behavior can't tarnish or sully these parts of their soul. You can picture this concept as a sort of spiritual one-way mirror, where these upper levels of

the soul can ‘see’ and influence the person they belong to, but usually not vice-versa.

They will still benefit from, and participate in, that person’s good deeds, but they can’t be harmed or destroyed by their bad deeds. In some ways, they are our ‘collective soul’ that belongs to Am Yisrael, and also the part of our soul that is 100% rooted in the spiritual realms, and which isn’t affected by the world’s materialism and corruption.

So, the real work that happens in this world mainly involves the other three parts of the soul, as follows:

Level 1 Soul: Is called the *Nefesh*, in Hebrew, or animal soul. You get this level of soul as soon as you’re born, and it’s the soul that’s responsible for what’s often described as the life force or will to live. Biologically, it’s associated with the so-called ‘primitive’ brain functions including eating, sleeping, breathing and procreating, and anything else associated with the basic notion of survival and staying alive.

Level 2 Soul: Is called the *Ruach*, in Hebrew, or spirit. This is the soul level that’s associated with your emotions and feelings; and physiologically, it’s connected to the aptly-named ‘emotional brain’ or limbic system. The brain’s limbic system is responsible for things like perception, and your subjective *feeling* of experiences. It’s the part that tells you whether you think something is good or bad, nice or nasty, scary or reassuring, dangerous or safe.

Level 3 Soul: Is called the *Neshama*, in Hebrew, or Divine soul. This soul is the bit of you that only wants to do good, that only wants to stay close to God, that only wants world peace, good relationships with everyone, and an end to suffering and starvation in the world. It’s usually associated with a person’s intellect or mind, particularly the neocortex or frontal lobes of the brain.

(You can learn more about the link between human physiology and the human soul, and how they both mirror each other, in Appendix 1 at the back of the book.)

So far so good? Great! Because it's about to get even more complicated. Each one of these five soul levels contains five levels, to make a total of 25 levels.

For example, before even the basic soul level of Nefesh can be considered to be truly 'fixed' or rectified, spiritually-speaking, a person will have go through each of the five different soul levels it contains in turn, fixing each one as they go.

As our Sages teach that it's easier to learn the whole of the Talmud, in some ways, than to fix even one bad character trait, we can see how we've really got our work cut out for us. We can't skip levels, and we have to rectify them in order, working from the level of 'Nefesh: Nefesh', on up.

Once again, this is a very simplified version of the ideas explained by the Arizal, but it gives us the basic framework of Jewish reincarnation that's required in order to grasp the ideas presented in the rest of this chapter.

NO-ONE CAN FIX EVERYTHING IN ONE GO

These days, it's impossible to blast through all the required rectifications in one go, so it's considered good going, spiritually, if we manage to fix just one of these 25 soul levels in any given lifetime. (Although exceptional people can and do manage to fix more.)

If you fix one level, then you are given life experiences, circumstances and personality characteristics in your next life that will help you to work on the next level up.

As long as you're making the effort, doing the work and

moving in the right direction, even if you haven't actually completed the job, God will give you up to a thousand more lifetimes to finish what you started.

But if you're not fixing your soul levels, and you're even doing the opposite, causing even more spiritual blemishes and issues than when you began, then God gives you three chances, or lifetimes, to get your act together, before He splits your soul up into its various components, and starts recycling them.

What that means, again very simplistically, is that God sees that Mikey Cohen still needs to fix his Soul Level 1, or *Nefesh*, and that Linda Abrahams still needs to fix her Soul Level 2, or *Ruach*, and that Eli Strauss still needs some work on his Soul Level 3, or *Neshama*.

So then, God creates a new body called "Susan Freeman", whose soul now contains bits of all these other people, and He gives *her* the job of finally fixing the mess the other people made.

Here is the crucial thing to remember: while the different components of Susan's soul are all 'old', and have all been down here many, many times before, the spiritual soul entity that is Susan's soul is completely unique. Those different soul sparks have never been put together before, and they will never be put together again.

So while the soul is old, it's also completely unique – God doesn't do the same thing twice.

Everyone today is an 'old' soul

At this stage in history, there are no 'new' souls. Every single Jew walking around today has a soul that's made up of different bits of different people from the past. That's part of what makes modern life so confusing, intense and 'heavy' be-

cause there's so much spiritual unfinished business going on.

This has profound implications for what it means to have an 'Erev Rav' soul, as we'll discover in a moment. But before we get there, there are a few more things you should know about the Jewish concept of reincarnation.

SOME MORE FACTS ABOUT JEWISH REINCARNATION

Jews do believe in purgatory (what's often incorrectly referred to as 'hell'), but not in the mainstream way that you typically find in the West. Jewish purgatory typically only lasts a maximum of 11 or 12 months (with some notable exceptions)³ and only atones for the sins they committed in relation to God. If you didn't keep the commandments between 'man and God' the way you should have, for example, like observing *Shabbat* (the Sabbath day), or keeping kosher, or fasting on Yom Kippur, then purgatory pays down that debt.

But purgatory doesn't atone for any of the sins you did to *people*. If you stole something and didn't repay it – some part of your soul will probably need to get reincarnated to take care of that debt. If you hurt someone badly and never apologized for what you did – some part of you may need to come back again, and this time, you could be the one that's on the receiving end of some pretty nasty behavior, to even things up spiritually.

If you treated your spouse very badly the last time around – chances are high that in this lifetime, you'll be married to someone who literally makes your life hell.

As soon as you understand that reincarnation is a basic

3 See the Gemara, Rosh Hashana 17a

tenet of the Jewish faith – albeit in a far more complex and complicated form than we’ve set out here – it also suddenly starts to answer a whole bunch of those difficult questions about why apparently ‘bad’ things happen to apparently ‘good’ people.

We often can’t understand WHY we have to endure many of the difficult things that all of us have to go through in our time down here, on planet earth. But once we know that we were here before and that we did a whole bunch of stuff that now requires fixing, it can make the hard things we have to go through so much easier to bear.

THE REINCARNATION ANGLE TO THE EREV RAV

It’s now been more than 3,300 years since the Egyptian Exodus. Those original souls of Bnei Yisrael and the Erev Rav have now been reincarnated, spliced together, reincarnated, re-fitted, reincarnated so many times now that it’s very unlikely that there is anyone alive today who has all five parts of a 100% ‘Erev Rav’ soul.

On some level, at some stage, the Erev Rav souls were all intermingled with the souls of the Children of Israel. This is one explanation for why things appear to be so mixed-up and confused today. Once we understand that different soul sparks are coming from different places, it makes it much easier to grasp *why*, for example, someone who appears to be completely irreligious can truly have a heart of gold and treat other people so morally; and also, *why* someone else, who appears to be so learned in Torah and so externally pious, can have so much work to do when it comes to the more basic facets of acting like a mensch.

Today, if we try to judge people (including ourselves) by the measure of whether we're acting like the Erev Rav, in some way nearly all of us are going to fail the test. One person will learn Torah assiduously, but still be treating their friends like dirt. Another person will give charity generously, but still be living a completely immoral, 'unkosher' lifestyle.

(As an aside, I heard a story firsthand that illustrates this point to a tee. One of my Rabbis was acquainted with one of the big mafia bosses in Israel, who was personally involved in organizing the supply of hard drugs into the Holy Land. Every week, the man would *religiously* tally up his profit on a Thursday morning, and then use that money to (anonymously) pay for food baskets to be sent to hundreds of religious families, so they would have food to eat on Shabbat. He continued doing this for years, until he was eventually murdered by one of the competing drug cartels.)

That's not to say that the process of rectification is going to be easy. Clearly, the more 'Erev Rav' soul sparks a particular person has, the harder it's going to be for them to rectify everything they need to, spiritually. But the key point is this: **today, there are no more 100% Erev Rav souls.** On a fundamental level, even if we have parts of an Erev Rav soul, every single one of us still has a spark of the *pintele yid*, or eternal Jewish soul inside of us, and every single one of us can still make complete Teshuva.

Which brings us to our seventh secret:

THE SEVENTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

Even if someone only has a 1% soul spark from Am Yisrael, that's still enough to rectify the other 99%, and to return the whole soul in a completely rectified state back to God.

IT'S ABOUT TRAITS, NOT PEOPLE

Instead of pondering about whether so-and-so is 'Erev Rav' or a 'real' Jew – which has only managed to lead us down some very bleak spiritual dead-ends, as described above - the discussion must now evolve into one of Erev Rav *traits* that need to be identified and fixed, and away from Erev Rav *people*.

But how do we actually do that? We'll find out in the next few chapters.

REBBE NACHMAN'S LESSON OF 'AZAMRA!'

REBBE NACHMAN WAS A GREAT-GRANDSON of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidut movement, and a renowned Jewish mystic and religious leader in his own right, who lived in the Ukraine. Before he died in 1810, he authored a work called the Likutey Moharan, which contains some of the most sublime esoteric teachings of all time.

One of Rebbe Nachman's most important and memorable lessons in Likutey Moharan is Lesson 1:282, popularly called Azamra, which describes how important it is to search for the point of good that can be found in every Jewish soul. (In the

Resources section at the back of the book, you can find details of a website that has a full free online listing of Rebbe Nachman's works, translated into English, where you can read this, and the other works by Rebbe Nachman.)

But for our purposes, the key point of the lesson of Azamra is this:

Know! One must judge every person favorably. Even if the person is totally wicked, one must search and find in him some bit of good, regarding which he is not wicked. By finding in him this bit of good and judging him favorably, one actually elevates him to righteousness and is able to bring him to make repentance.

DOES AZAMRA APPLY TO THE EREV RAV?

The question of how to apply Azamra becomes that much sharper, once the Erev Rav are added into the mix. Remember, the other holy sources who were explicitly talking about the Erev Rav (a sampling of which you've read for yourself, in previous chapters) suggested that the souls of the Erev Rav were rooted in the realm of evil, and couldn't be fixed.

These commentators, including such Torah luminaries as the Rashbi and the Vilna Gaon, *appeared* to be saying that unlike the Children of Israel, the Erev Rav had no spiritual place to 'come back' to, as their souls weren't a part of Hashem in the same way that Bnei Israel was. That's a big part of the reason the Erev Rav could, and did, act in such treacherous, cruel, upsetting and disturbing ways.

If the Erev Rav weren't considered to be real Jews, then does Rebbe Nachman's lesson of Azamra - of seeing the good - also apply to them? And, if the answer is 'yes', then how on earth are we meant to do that, in practice, given how difficult they are to deal with, and the problems they trail in their wake?

If Azamra applies to the Erev Rav, then there *is* a way back for them, and they can be fixed. If Azamra doesn't apply to them, then *de facto*, it would appear they can't be fixed and we're back to square one of trying to do the impossible of figuring out who they really are, and then trying to steer clear of them, as much as possible.

In the course of my research into the Erev Rav, I kept coming back to the same question: Can the Erev Rav make Teshuva? Can they change the way they act and behave, and return to Hashem?

A great deal appeared to be hanging on finding the right answer to these questions, but that answer was simply not forthcoming – until a few months' ago, when one of the leading Torah greats of our generation, Rabbi Eliezer Berland, released the following statement on his website, a translated excerpt of which is below:

AZAMRA REDUX: RABBI ELIEZER BERLAND BLASTS THE PATH OPEN

From the moment that Rebbe Nachman of Breslev came into the world, he sweetened all of the judgements in the world until the end of all generations. He drew down Shefa into the world; he drew down

Chessed into the world, and he announced that there are no more wicked people and that the age of wickedness in the world had come to an end! From the moment that Rebbe Nachman was born, the age of wickedness finished; there were no more wicked people in Am Yisrael, as he himself revealed in Lesson 282 of Likutey Moharan (popularly known as 'Azamra')...

...Rabbenu teaches us in Lesson 282 that there is no such thing as a wicked person in Am Yisrael! There is no such reality. Even if you see a completely wicked person, from his head to his feet, you can't see any Yiddishkeit in him at all, he is completely anti-Torah, anti-observance, God forbid, even if it seems to you that there was never a more wicked person than this since the creation of the world, you should know that the main problem is that this person simply lacks da'at, or spiritual awareness....

In Lesson 282, Rebbe Nachman writes: "And you need to search and find in him a small amount of good. And in that small place, he is not a wicked person." Rabbenu is teaching us that there is no such thing as a wicked Jewish person, from his head to his toes, just that it currently seems that way to you. But it's only your imagination! You imagine that he's a completely wicked person, but if you train yourself to look for some little bit of good that he has

done, or some kindness that he did to help someone else, you'll always find even in the most wicked person lots and lots of good. And the very act of you finding some good in this person, and judging him favourably, through this very act you raise him up to the side of good, and you can cause him to make Teshuva....

...Every single Jew will one day make Teshuva! ...

...Now, it's possible to speed this process up, but only if we start looking with a 'good eye'. Only if a person merits to look at every Jew with a 'good eye' then, "he will consider his place, and he [the wicked person] won't be there any more", [i.e., in the place of being wicked]. If people would realise this, and internalise that if they started to judge others favourably, and to stop looking at them with an ayin ra, or 'bad eye,' then there wouldn't be any more wicked people in Am Yisrael. Because it is possible to bring all of them back to make Teshuva, in the blink of an eye....

...Even when a Jew appears to be the most wicked person, know that he really has the most righteous Neshama, or soul. It's the opposite of how it appears to be externally: the more 'bad' the Neshama seems, the more righteous it actually is...

...This is the foundation of what Rebbe Nachman taught us, that there are no wicked people in Am Israel. It's forbidden to call any Jew 'wicked.' It is forbidden to say: 'this one is wicked.' We need to fix this way of speaking because there's no such thing....

AZAMRA APPLIES TO EVERYONE

There are a few key points to note from Rav Berland's statement. The first is that from the time Rebbe Nachman of Breslev came to the world, there are no longer any 100% wicked people in the nation of Israel.

This statement is not intuitive because if you look back at the last 200 hundred years or so, you'll see a period of time where a great many Jews turned their back on mitzvah observance, where assimilation became the order of the day, and where large numbers of Jews were caught up in organisations and activities, particularly in communist Russia, that made persecuting their fellow Jew for maintaining even a vestige of their Yiddishkeit a 'mitzvah'.

In many ways, the last two hundred years have marked the spiritual low point of the Jewish people, where pogroms and poverty chased hard on the heels of assimilation, atheism and even conversion to other religions. And yet, according to Rav Berland, the leading authority in Breslev today, and an enormous Talmid Chacham and Kabbalist in his own right, completely wicked people don't exist anymore, and things are not really as they seem from the outside.

Remember, back in Chapter 3, Rebbe Nachman made the connection between 'wicked' people and the Erev Rav when he wrote in the *Sefer HaMiddot* (Book of Traits) that:

“[A] brazen person has certainly stumbled in a sin, and will stumble in more sin. It is permitted to call him ‘wicked’ and to hate him, and he is from the 974 generations that preceded the Creation.”

If Rav Berland is now telling us that: **“It’s forbidden to call any Jew ‘wicked’”**, then he’s effectively telling us that today, it’s forbidden to say that any Jew is ‘Erev Rav’ – for reasons that we are explaining in this book.

SPIRITUAL RECTIFICATION TAKES TIME

The second point to take from Rabbi Berland’s statement is that Am Yisrael is still undergoing a process of purification and rectification – that same process that was begun all those centuries ago in Egypt, and even before. But Rav Berland is implying that this process is now almost concluded and that it won’t be much longer until all the souls that make up Am Israel (including those with sparks from the Erev Rav) are completely rectified.

A third point that jumps out from Rav Berland’s statement – so much so, that it’s going to become our eighth secret - is that *how we view our fellow Jew is either going to speed the rectification process up, or slow it down.*

THE EIGHTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

How we view our fellow Jew – seeing the good in them, or the opposite, God forbid – is either going to speed up the rectification process, and bring Moshiach and redemption, or slow it down.

If we think the difficult people in our lives are ‘bad’ Erev Rav types, that’s the reality we’ll create, at least for ourselves.

But if we practise Rebbe Nachman's lesson of Azamra and try out best to see the good in them, that action by itself will empower their innate power of good, and give them the ability to make complete Teshuva, and return to God.

(We'll come back to the idea of *how* to successfully apply Azamra in a later chapter, where I'll set out some practical guidelines.)

REMEMBER, EVERYONE TODAY IS A COMPOSITE SOUL

If we try to pick out those parts of Rav Berland's statement that are pertinent to our discussion and understanding of the Erev Rav, and what response God is really requiring from us, we come to the same conclusion we came to in the previous chapter, albeit framed in slightly different language:

Today, every single member of Am Yisrael has the potential to make complete Teshuva, and to return to God, and to become a holy *Tzaddik*. Instead of wasting our time looking at all the bad that's going on around us, and trying to figure out who might be the evil Erev Rav, so we can stay away from them, we actually need to be making much more of an effort to be focussing on the good, as that's the only way the situation is really going to turn around.

Whilst this answers the question of 'can the Erev Rav make Teshuva, and change?' it also begs many more questions like: How do we actually see the good in evil people, in real life? And, how are we meant to deal with all the evil actions and ideas we're surrounded by if we're being adjured to focus on the good? It all sounds nice in theory, but what does it actually *mean*, in practise?

Hopefully, by the time you come to the end of this book,

you'll have a much clearer idea of how to actually *practise* Azamra, in real life. But in the meantime, let's conclude this chapter by stating the ninth secret we've learned about the Erev Rav:

THE NINTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

They can make Teshuva, and eventually every single one of them will return to Hashem.

And when they do, that will mark the end of the process of *Tikkun HaOlam*, or the rectification of Adam's sin, that began almost 6,000 years ago, in the Garden of Eden. But before that happens, there are still a few more bits of the puzzle that we have to piece together, to complete the picture.

CHAPTER 7

THE MESSAGE OF THE WATER CASTLE

REBBE NACHMAN'S STORIES

Of all of Rebbe Nachman's works, the loftiest and most profound are his stories, known as the *Sipurei Maasiot* in Hebrew. These were among his final teachings, and they contain allusions to many of the secrets of creation, hints about what will happen in the period known as the 'footsteps of Moshiach', and many other deep spiritual and Kabbalistic secrets, besides.

Rebbe Nachman explained that each of his stories had the power to bring people back to God, even if they had no clue of the deeper meanings that he'd wisely hidden in the narrative.

Of these stories, the one known as 'The Seven Beggars' is arguably the most important, at least for our purposes. (Again, you can read a full version of this story online, at the site listed in the Resources section at the back of this book). In the Yiddish notes that originally accompanied the printing of these stories, Rebbe Nachman tells us the following:

You will find very, very great secrets of the Torah in this story, from beginning to end. All the stories of this book [Sipurai Maasiot] are enormously great secrets of the Torah; each word and each thing means something completely different — but this story is above them all. And it's not really possible to even begin to tell of the greatness of this awesome story, for it is above them all.

Did Rebbe Nachman hide some clues about the Erev Rav in his Kabbalistic tales? Did he set out a secret blueprint for how to help the Erev Rav reintegrate back into Am Yisrael, leading to Tikkun HaOlam and the ultimate redemption of mankind? We're about to find out.

THE SEVEN BEGGARS: AN OVERVIEW

Before we jump in, here's a brief précis of the main story. The narrative of The Seven Beggars revolves around a young boy and girl, who get accidentally left behind in a forest by their respective parents.

They find each other and over the course of time, seven different beggars pass by them in the forest and give them food, encouragement, and advice on how to live and survive. As the years pass, the children turn into ‘professional’ beggars themselves and start plying their trade in the nearby towns.

The local beggars decide that these two young people should get married, and hold an impromptu wedding ceremony for them in a pit (often understood as the darkest, spiritual-ly most lowly period that humanity will endure, directly prior to the coming of Moshiach.)

As the wedding celebrations are in full swing, the bride and groom express their yearning for the Seven Beggars who helped them when they were lost in the forest – and as they mention each Beggar, he appears! Each Beggar tells them a story and blesses them with a wedding gift that they should achieve the attainments he himself has merited.

Although there are Seven Beggars, the tale actually ends with the story of the Sixth Beggar, ‘the Beggar Who Has No Hands’. Rebbe Nachman told his followers that the final section of the story, concerning the Seventh Beggar, ‘the Beggar Who Has No Feet’, will be told by the Moshiach himself.

For the purposes of this book, we’re going to focus on the story of the Water Castle that occurs as part of the bigger story told about the Sixth Beggar, ‘the Beggar Who Has No Hands’.

(You can read the full version of this story online, including the section known as the Water Castle, at the site listed in the Resources section of this book).

THE WATER CASTLE – AN OVERVIEW

Breslev tradition holds that the story of the Seven Beggars is describing the unfolding saga of the Jewish people that culminates in the coming of the Moshiach. As many Sages have indicated that the Jewish people are currently in the period known as the ‘footsteps of Moshiach’, (which corresponds to the sixth millennia, that we’re currently coming towards the end of) the details of this particular story have more relevance and pertinence to us than any other generation in history.

The Sixth Beggar describes the final act before Moshiach, so anything that occurs within that narrative is talking directly about the situation each of us is experiencing today. The following is an abridged version of the story of the Water Castle that covers the most important points:

There’s a King, who’s extremely enamoured of a princess, and does everything in his power to win the maiden round, and get her to marry him. After they’ve been married for some time, the King has a very disturbing dream, where he sees the Queen killing him.

He wakes up from this nightmare terribly distraught and calls all his courtiers and wise men to interpret the dream. They all tell him the same thing: The Queen is going to kill you. This makes the King deathly afraid of the Queen, and his love for her starts to wane.

On the one hand, he doesn’t want to divorce her because he put so much effort

into wooing her in the first place, and he couldn't bear to see her with another man. Plus, he fears that if she remarries, she'll be in a much better position to try and kill him. He also doesn't want to kill her himself, as he still has some love for her.

As time continues, the relationship between the King and Queen degenerates to such a point that the Queen starts to hate her husband, and decides to run away from him. Servants bring the King word that the Queen has escaped, and has been spotted circling the Water Castle, a miraculous building where the walls, floors and everything it contains is made of water.

The King gives the order to his soldiers to recapture the Queen by firing arrows at her – and if she dies, she dies.

The Queen is hit with ten poison-tipped arrows, each more deadly than the last, but still manages to miraculously flee to the interior of the Water Castle, where she passes out.

It's the job of the Beggar who has no hands to heal the wounded Queen, and he can only do that by knowing the ten types of melody, and the ten types of pulse.

Before we continue, it's useful to know that the 'Queen' in the story is usually understood to be a reference to the soul,

while the ‘King’ in the story is usually understood to be a reference to the *Yetzer Hara*, or Evil Inclination.

HOW IS THE ‘WATER CASTLE’ CONNECTED TO THE EREV RAV?

To find the answer to this question, we need to look at to some of the insights that Rabbi Natan Sternhartz, Rebbe Nachman’s main student and redactor, wrote in his mammoth halachic work, *Likutey Halachot*.

In Chapter 2 of *Hilchot Pesach* in *Likutey Halachot*, Rabbi Natan tells us the following in connection to the story of the Water Castle, in the tale of the Seven Beggars:

*[T]he essence of exile is depression...
Redemption comes through simcha
(happiness). This is especially true of the
Egyptian exile, which resulted from Adam’s
wrongdoing. He sinned in regard to the
Tree of Knowledge, and he caused [further]
spiritual damage due to seminal emissions.*

*[This is a reference to Adam’s
‘wasted seed’, that we discussed at
length at the beginning of this book.]*

*Consequently, in order to repair
the damage caused by Adam’s ‘wasted
seed,’ the Israelites needed to be purified
in Egypt [as brought by the Arizal].*

*The Tikkun (spiritual rectification)
principally comes about through simcha*

(happiness) – in terms of our story, through the Ten Types of Melody – which is why our Rebbe [Rebbe Nachman] revealed that we should recite the Ten Chapters of Psalms that he specified.

These Ten Psalms represent the Ten Types of Melody and a Tikkun for the damage caused by seminal emissions.

So now we can see how the Water Castle is linked to our discussion of the Erev Rav. As Rabbi Natan makes clear, the injured Queen in the story is referring to the blemished soul sparks of the Erev Rav, who were captured by the realm of evil as a result of Adam's nocturnal emissions.

THE 10 TYPES OF MELODY, AND THE TIKKUN HAKLALI

When Rav Natan talks about the Ten Chapters of Psalms that relate to the Ten Types of Melody that we find in the story of the Water Castle, he's talking about what's called the Tikkun HaKlali, or 'General Remedy,' which is made up of the following ten Psalms:

6, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, and 150.

Rebbe Nachman first revealed the Tikkun HaKlali to his followers in March 1810, a few months before he died, and a week before he started telling the story of the Seven Beggars – which contains the story of the Water Castle.

Over the centuries, the Kabbalists knew about the existence of these ten Psalms or 'songs', and their ability to spiritually correct all sins at their root, even the worst sin of 'wasted

seed.’ Many of our greatest Sages worked tirelessly to try to identify the correct ten chapters, and some, like the famed Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, came very close. Unfortunately, they often died before being able to complete the task, as Divine permission had not yet been given for them to reveal this secret openly.

Rebbe Nachman was given the merit of being the one to finally reveal the correct order of the ‘General Remedy’ for sins, or *Tikkun HaKlali* – but he still paid a high price for it. In his teachings and conversations, he alluded to the fact that he’d lost his wife and seen so many of his children die young as the spiritual ‘price’ he was forced to pay for being the one who ultimately revealed this, and other lofty spiritual insights, to the world.

One of the basic tenets of Breslev chassidut is that the 10 Psalms that make up the *Tikkun HaKlali*, or General Remedy, can rectify the damage called by an individual’s seminal emissions, particularly if they’re involuntary, and the individual immerses in a mikva as soon as possible after the event, and then says the *Tikkun HaKlali*.

When Rebbe Nachman first unveiled the order of the *Tikkun HaKlali* to his followers, he told them:

If you can immerse in a mikva and then say the Ten Psalms, it is certainly best. But even if you are sick or travelling and cannot immerse, saying the Psalms alone is a great remedy. If you can say the Psalms with devotion and feeling, it is best. But saying the words alone also helps. This remedy has not been revealed since the

*time of creation...These Ten Psalms are a most wonderful and precious remedy.*⁴

But there was also a second tradition associated with the power of the Tikkun HaKlali to spiritually rectify a person's soul, which will help us to unlock some more secrets about how to rectify the Erev Rav.

THE TIKKUN HAKLALI SAID AT REBBE NACHMAN'S GRAVE

After the passage quoted above about how to rectify an individual's seminal emissions, Rebbe Nachman then went on to make a separate guarantee, in relation to saying the Tikkun HaKlali at his gravesite as follows:

Bear witness to my words. When my days are over and I leave this world, I will still intercede for anyone who comes to my grave, says these Ten Psalms, and gives a penny to charity. No matter how great his sins, I will do everything in my power, spanning the length and breadth of the creation, to cleanse and protect him...I will pull him out of Gehinnom by his payot (side curls).

*I am very positive in everything I say. But I am most positive in regard to the great benefit of these Ten Psalms.*⁵

⁴ Pages 273-275, 'His Wisdom', Published by the Breslev Research Institute

⁵ Ibid.

Rebbe Nachman stated emphatically that the Tikkun HaKlali was a 'General Remedy' for all sins; and that even the worst sins in the world can be rectified if a person would come to Rebbe Nachman's grave, recite these 10 chapters, and give a coin to charity.

The next question to explore is whether the Tikkun HaKlali is also connected to the original sin of Adam's 'wasted seed,' which resulted in the souls of Am Israel and the Erev Rav being trapped in the Realm of Evil. Is there anything in the Rebbe's writings that suggested this might be the case? The answer, it turns out is a resounding 'yes'!

THE GENERAL REMEDY, AS DISCUSSED IN LIKUTEY MOHARAN, PART 1, LESSON 36

Remember a little while back in Chapter 3 we learned that when King David is talking about the '*merayim*' in Tehillim, that's a coded word for the Erev Rav (and that this link is made for us by the Zohar)?

Lesson I:36 in Likutey Moharan is essential to deepening our understanding of how the Erev Rav and the Tikkun HaKlali are linked. We are going to look at some key parts of that lesson now, but you can also read the whole lesson for yourself online via the website you'll find in the Resources section at the back of this book.

But for now, let's go through and pull out the key quotations that may give us some more clues about how this lesson is connected to the Erev Rav.

Lesson 36 in Likutey Moharan begins with the following quote (from Psalm 27:2):

When merayim [self-deceiving evildoers] approach me to consume my flesh (or alternative translation: to slander me)

Here, Rebbe Nachman is using the code word for the Erev Rav used by David HaMelech to flag up the link.

Next, Lesson 36 teaches us that:

In principle, every Jewish soul is rooted in the seventy souls of the House of Jacob, and the seventy souls of the House of Jacob are rooted in the seventy aspects of the Torah.

But God created each thing and its opposite, so opposing the seventy souls of the House of Jacob are the seventy nations. Each and every nation has a specific negative trait that the others do not have, and on account of these traits, they are distant from the seventy aspects of the Torah.

Now, Rebbe Nachman is explaining that there are 70 specific negative personality traits or character flaws, and that each one of them is associated with one of the 70 nations of the world. He's also explaining that whenever someone has one of these negative traits, that's going to distance him from one of the '70 faces' of the Torah, as a result.

This is a good time to remind ourselves of the negative 'Erev Rav' traits that we identified back in Chapter 4 because here, Rebbe Nachman is making it clear that the more negative character traits a Jew has, the further away that Jew will

be from enjoying a genuine spiritual connection to Torah and Yiddishkeit – and that applies even when the person themselves appears to be externally ‘frum’.

Next, Rebbe Nachman explains that:

[T]his is the rule: Before any Jewish soul has a revelation of Torah or service, it is first tested and refined in the exile of the seventy nations, that is, in their lusts...

For the shell precedes the fruit, and whoever wants to eat the fruit must break through the shell, and therefore, before [receiving a] revelation, the soul must enter into exile, into their traits [the negative traits of the 70 nations], in order to break them and then [it can] attain a revelation.

This passage partially explains why the souls of Am Ysrael and the Erev Rav had to experience the harsh Egyptian exile before receiving the Torah. Ancient Egypt was renowned as a *bona fide* ‘Realm of Evil’, where every evil trait, negative behaviour, and lust under the sun was enthusiastically practised.

But even in Ancient Egypt, the lust they most excelled at was sexual immorality. Every year when we read through the Haggadah, or when we read about the exodus of the Children of Israel and the 10 plagues, the commentators tell us that when the plague of the death of the first-born struck, that multiple people died in each home, and not just the obvious ‘first-born.’

Why was this?

Because the ancient Egyptians were so immoral that different people fathered many of the children in the same family. One mother could consequently have many ‘first born’ children, as each child was the result of a different relationship with a different biological father.

The Children of Israel and the Erev Rav were thrust into this crucible of immorality, sorcery, idol-worship and cruelty by God, in order that they would be tested in these negative traits, ‘break’ them, and then be worthy of receiving the revelation of Torah at Mount Sinai.

Lesson 36 continues:

And know: The all-encompassing trait of these negative traits of the seventy nations is sexual lust. It is also the all-encompassing rectification, in that whoever breaks this lust will easily be able to break all the other lusts.

This passage is key to understanding what’s really going on, and how the spiritual rectification of the whole world is bound up with rectification of the remaining Erev Rav soul sparks, and the concept of sexual purity.

Rebbe Nachman is returning to the idea that sexual immorality, and particularly ‘wasted seed’ is the root of all the evil in the world – and it’s been this way right from the beginning. If we go back to the Garden of Eden and the book of Genesis, the commentators⁶ tell us something very interesting, namely that the snake only went after Eve in the first place as it desired her for himself.

There’s some suggestion (usually toned down or even

⁶ See Rashi’s commentary to Parsha Bereishit 3:1; plus the Midrash in Bereishit Rabba 18:6

deliberately omitted, in most scriptural reference books) that the snake actually succeeded in having some sort of carnal relationship, on some level, with Eve after it convinced her to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁷

Here, Rebbe Nachman is explaining that when the negative trait of sexual lust is broken, then all the other negative character traits will simply fall by the wayside - which brings us to the tenth secret of the Erev Rav:

THE TENTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

When the negative trait of sexual lust is broken, then all the other negative traits will disappear, and the Erev Rav soul sparks, and the world will finally achieve its complete rectification.

Back in the desert, many commentators⁸ explain that the Erev Rav were chafing under the restrictions on their intimate activity that the Torah, with its focus on sexual purity, had placed on them. They made the Golden Calf as a pretext to enable them to indulge in an orgy of immoral behaviour.

Elsewhere, Rebbe Nachman explains that the festival of Shavuot, which takes place on the 6th of Sivan, when the Torah was given, comes to rectify the lust for illicit sexual relations.

As we mentioned in point 2 above: *Each and every nation has a specific negative trait that the others do not have, and on account of these traits, they are distant from the seventy aspects of the Torah.*

When someone is caught up in the negative trait of sexual immorality, that trait is equivalent to all the negative traits and

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See Rashi's commentary on Parsha Ki Tisa, 32:6

lusts in the world – which means that in some way, they are then distanced from all 70 aspects of the Torah.

Next, Rebbe Nachman tells us that:

[S]exual lust arises from the spoilage of the blood caused by the spleen, which represents Lilith, the evil maidservant, the mother of the Erev Rav...

Now, the gloves are really coming off, as Rebbe Nachman makes an explicit link between sexual lust and the Erev Rav. ‘Lilith’ is a somewhat mysterious figure, connected with the story of Adam and Eve and the creation of the world in Sefer Bereishit. She frequently pops up in Kabbalistic works in connection with the Realm of Evil, and there’s a veiled hint in the Torah⁹ that she and Adam were actually created together, back-to-back before Eve came on the scene.

Somehow, Lilith got separated from Adam and pulled over to the side of evil, and appears to have had a crucial part to play as the ‘temptress’ that somehow seduced Adam to waste his seed. Consequently, she’s known as the ‘Mother of the Erev Rav’ – those souls that were captured by the Realm of Evil, as a result of Adam’s nocturnal emissions.

Also, remember that at least one of the five distinct groups of Erev Rav identified by the Zohar and the Vilna Gaon engaged in promiscuous behaviour and was addicted to sexual immorality, so this is clearly a big ‘Erev Rav’ trait.

Further, when Yosef HaTzaddik insisted that the Egyptians undergo circumcision before he would sell them any of the grain he’d stored away during the terrible famine that hit

⁹ See Parsha Bereishit, 1:27

the entire area, Rashi explains that this was partly in order to decrease the urge for immoral sexual relations.

(We're now going to skip a few verses to get to the next point that Rebbe Nachman makes, namely:)

When a person accepts the yoke of heaven upon himself by reciting these verses [the Tikkun HaKlali], he encompasses his soul within the Twelve Tribes of God and separates his soul from the souls of the Erev Rav...

...This is the Tikkun HaKlali, (all-encompassing rectification), by way of which, “My oppressors and enemies – they shall stumble and fall” (Psalm 27) – which refers to the seventy nations. When one breaks this lust, all other selfish lusts fall away automatically.

It's well worth reading the whole of Lesson 36 to get the proper context of the quotes that we're pulling out in this chapter, but we've effectively just hit the pay-dirt:

Rebbe Nachman is unequivocally telling us that when someone recites the Tikkun HaKlali, they can break their urge for sexual immorality, which is the root of all the other negative character traits and lusts. And once they do that, then their soul can finally become rectified enough to become a true part of Am Israel, and to leave the ranks of the Erev Rav.

SAYING THE TIKKUN HAKLALI RECTIFIES THE SOUL SPARKS OF THE EREV RAV

Let's conclude this chapter with the final secret we've learnt from Lesson I: 36 in Likutey Moharan:

THE ELEVENTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

Reciting the 10 Psalms that constitute the Tikkun HaKlali, or 'General Remedy', can heal the soul sparks of the Erev Rav at their spiritual root!

Now, you might think that we've reached the end of the journey and that we've uncovered all the clues that we need to resolve the challenge of how to overcome the Erev Rav, rectify the world, and bring Moshiach and redemption. But the most important piece of the puzzle is still to come, and we'll take a look at it in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

THE LINK BETWEEN A LACK OF COMPASSION AND A LACK OF DA'AT

IN THIS CHAPTER, we're about to learn some truly amazing insights that have a direct impact on many of the things we've been discussing so far, regarding how to heal the Erev Rav, how

to overcome the lack of compassion and the lack of da'at in the world, and how to spiritually rectify the sin of 'spilled seed'.

Before we do all that, let's first just remind ourselves of how each of these aspects are connected to the Erev Rav, and the negative character traits they embody.

Back in Chapter 1, we learned that the Gemara (Beitza 32) says: *Anyone who does not have mercy on the creations is from the Erev Rav because (the trait of) rachamim (mercy, or compassion) is what Hashem gave to the Jews.*

We learned from this that passage that lack of compassion and empathy for others is a key 'Erev Rav' trait.

We also learned earlier that the Erev Rav and the souls of the Children of Israel derive from the same spiritual root, namely the 'wasted seed' that Adam emitted after he separated from his wife following his sin of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The souls that were initially created by Adam's 'wasted seed' were reincarnated many times before winding up in Egypt, where the more rectified souls became Am Israel while the less-perfected souls became the 'mixed multitude' of Egyptian converts that went out of Egypt with Am Israel.

Lastly, Rav Berland explained in Chapter 6 that:

*Even if it seems to you that there was never a more wicked person than this since the creation of the world, you should know that **the main problem is that this person simply lacks da'at or spiritual awareness.***

Which gives us our next secret:

THE TWELFTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

A lack of da'at (spiritual awareness) is the main reason people act in an evil way, and not because they have an innately evil nature.

So now, we come to the next question that needs resolving: is a lack of da'at and a lack of compassion somehow connected? According to Rebbe Nachman, writing in the Likutey Moharan, the answer is another resounding 'yes'!

HOW DA'AT AND COMPASSION ARE LINKED

Lesson 8 in Part 2 of Likutey Moharan was the last lesson that Rebbe Nachman gave over, shortly before his death in 1810. His main student and redactor of his teachings, Rabbi Natan, believed that this lesson was akin to Rebbe Nachman's spiritual will – a guide to the path that he wanted his followers to continue down after he passed away.

The lesson is one of the longest in the whole of the Likutey Moharan, spanning many pages, which is one of the reasons why I'm not bringing the whole thing here. As before, you can read the whole lesson for yourself online in English, and you'll find details of how to do that in the Resources section at the back of this book.

(NOTE: What follows is quite a complex discussion that assumes quite a bit of prior knowledge of various Torah sources. If you're finding it hard to follow, you might want to skip the detailed discussion describing how we come to the conclusions we do and go straight to the end of this chapter where I set out the main points and secrets learned).

For our purposes, the main themes of Lesson 2:8 are as follows:

1. It's impossible for us to rebuke our fellow Jew in our times because:

[T]he rebuke of someone who is unable to rebuke arouses the stench of the evil deeds and bad character traits of the person he is rebuking...thereby weakening their souls.

To put this another way, every time we point out the 'bad' in our fellow Jew, we are making it that much harder for them to find the spiritual strength they need to overcome their bad character traits, and to make Teshuva.

Also, remember what we learned about the negative traits of the Erev Rav back in Chapter 3, from the *Sefer HaMiddot*, namely that:

“Brazenness prevents a person from accepting rebuke,” – and brazenness is one of the key negative traits of the Erev Rav.

Rebbe Nachman then goes on to say that the only person who is capable of giving rebuke in a way that won't damage the listener's soul is a Tzaddik like Moshe Rabbenu, “when he rebuked the Israelites for the Golden Calf.”

This reference to the Golden Calf is this lesson's first clear link to the Erev Rav.

2. Next, Rebbe Nachman refers to the “Voice of Song”, that will be heard in the future (messianic) times, that is able to “subdue the heel of the Realm of Evil”, and he brings the famous verse from the Torah (Parshat Toldot, 22) that: ‘The voice is the voice of Jacob.’

The voice of Jacob is always linked to prayer. Later on, Rebbe Nachman explains that the Song of the Future (that will be able to “subdue the heel of the Realm of Evil”) will imbue the Jewish soul with a pleasant spiritual fragrance.

(i.e., instead of stirring up the stench of his sins, this voice will somehow bring the Jew's good points and good deeds to the fore instead, creating a pleasant spiritual aroma for God.)

This is a reference to Azamra, the concept we first learned about back in Chapter 6 where we discovered that:

Even if the person is totally wicked, one must search and find in him some bit of good, regarding which he is not wicked. By finding in him this bit of good and judging him favorably, one actually elevates him to righteousness and is able to bring him to make repentance.

The 'Song of the Future' is a reference to the ten types of melody from the story of the Water Castle, and also to the Tikkun HaKlali or General Remedy.

3. Next, Rebbe Nachman makes a clear link between prayer, compassion and da'at (internalised spiritual awareness):

Attaining this Voice is accomplished by means of prayer. This is because the essence of prayer is a plea for compassion (see Avot 2:13), and compassion is essentially dependent on da'at... Da'at will increase in the Future [messianic time], and there will then be no violence or cruelty, for compassion will become ubiquitous by means of da'at, since compassion is contingent upon da'at.

4. Further on, Rebbe Nachman explains that:

[O]n account of compassion becoming spoiled and turning to cruelty, 'da'at'

(i.e. spiritual awareness) is damaged, as in, 'Whoever loses his temper loses his wisdom' (Pesachim 66b). Da'at is then diminished into the category of immature mentality...This in turn causes sexual lust. And when compassion and da'at are damaged, it is impossible to pray.

In Appendix 1, you'll find a brief discussion of the physiology of the human brain that bears out exactly what Rebbe Nachman is teaching us here, in points 3 and 4.

Next, Rebbe Nachman tells us that:

[B]y virtue of prayer...the Realm of Evil and the klipot (husks of evil) slowly disappear. Then, proselytes convert and glory is manifested.

The key things to note here is that prayer is what makes the Realm of Evil disappear and that the process occurs *slowly* over an extended period of time. But ultimately, the 'proselytes convert', and God's glory fills the world again.

Now, who are the 'proselytes' that Rebbe Nachman is referring to here? The answer is, the souls of the Erev Rav! Otherwise, there would be no need for the double expression 'proselytes convert'. The Erev Rav were the original 'proselytes' that joined the Jewish people during the Exodus from Egypt. If he was talking about regular converts, then Rebbe Nachman would have said that the 'non-Jews convert.' By contrast, the sparks of the Erev Rav souls have already converted once, but they now need to complete the conversion process to

become fully fledged, completely rectified Jews, which they do by virtue of prayer.

This gives us our thirteenth secret:

THE THIRTEENTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

Prayer, especially *hitbodedut* or personal prayer, is what makes the ‘Realm of Evil’ disappear, and what leads to the rectification of the Erev Rav and the rectification of the world.

Next, Rebbe Nachman describes how when more people start to pray, this will lead to more prophecy returning to the world.

(As a side note, prophecy is meant to return to the world again once Moshiach comes, and the closer we get to that happening, the more ‘Ruach Hakodesh’ starts to proliferate, even amongst the common people.) Then he tells us:

[B]y virtue of the proliferation of prophecy, the power of imagination is refined and rectified.

Here, Rebbe Nachman is telling us that when people start to pray, meditate and talk to God on a regular basis, then their imagination will start working in a much healthier way again, effectively resolving the root cause of mental and emotional illness.

Rebbe Nachman continues:

The essence of emuna (faith) corresponds to imagination...by virtue of the proliferation of prophecy, which refines and rectifies the imagination, the true emuna of holiness is rectified.

The holy Arizal explained that the generation before Moshiach has one main thing that they've been sent back down here to fix: their lack of emuna.

Here, Rebbe Nachman is setting out a clear path about how to actually do this, namely via profuse prayer and meditation, or *hitbodedut*. We'll come back to this idea again in Chapter 10 when we pull all of Rebbe Nachman's advice together, as it's a full package and *hitbodedut* is only one part of the rectification process.

For now, it's enough to note that *hitbodedut* is the main way that a person can achieve what's called in Hebrew *yishuv hada'at*, which is normally translated as a 'settled mind.' But really, it's hinting at the direct link between regularly talking to God and profuse prayer, and fixing 'da'at' – the lack of spiritual awareness that's really at the root of the Erev Rav's negative character traits.

Rebbe Nachman now sets up the connection between the Ten Commandments and the ten levels of prophecy referred to in Genesis Rabbah 44.6:

[B]y virtue or prophecy, which compromises ten levels that correspond to the Ten Commandments, one attains

emuna in God, that God created everything with ten sayings.

This is a pivotal part of the lesson, especially for anyone looking for clues about the Erev Rav. For the sake of brevity, we'll sum it up like this. The following things are all connected to the spiritual healing power of the Ten Psalms that make up the Tikkun HaKlali:

- » the Ten sayings of Creation (that include the 'hidden saying' that enables evil to exist in the world);
- » the Ten commandments (that encompass the whole Torah, and that Moshe Rabbenu smashed, as a result of the sin involving the Erev Rav and the Golden Calf); and
- » the Ten poisoned arrows that are fired at the princess, in the story of the 'Water Castle' (that we covered in more detail back in Chapter 6).

Next, Rebbe Nachman emphatically tells us that a person can only really learn emuna, and fix their imagination, and start praying if they're following a 'true leader':

One must search and seek for such a true leader very intensively, and beg God to give you the privilege of becoming the follower of a true leader so that you can attain perfect emuna.

Rebbe Nachman goes on to explain that if you have the misfortune of following a 'false leader' who doesn't know how to pray, and who hasn't rectified his own power of imagination, not only will your own imagination and emuna *not* be rectified, it could actually end up being damaged even more,

and you won't achieve your spiritual rectification, which is the whole point of why you got reincarnated in the first place.

So, in addition to the criteria set down by Rav Chaim Vital (in Chapter 4), here's another way we can check if our spiritual mentors are the real deal or not: do they pray profusely? Do they genuinely have emuna? Do they inspire and encourage their followers to pray more, and to see God's hand in everything that's going on in their lives?

If the answer is 'no', then anyone who's following such a leader won't be able to learn genuine emuna, and achieve their soul correction.

The next big reference is now to Rosh Hashanah, the time when Rebbe Nachman encouraged all of his followers to congregate as his gravesite in Uman – even after his passing:

[O]n Rosh Hashanah, prayer is in the category of din and judgement...by means of which we extract all the life-force from the Realm of Evil that it had consumed from da'at and Jewish prayers.

Rebbe Nachman goes on to explain that Rosh Hashanah takes place on the first of the Jewish month of TISHREY. TISHREY is an acronym for the verse: **Y**am **S**heebarta **R**ashey **T**aninim which means: the sea, You [God] broke the heads of the serpent. 'Taninim' is usually translated as 'serpents', but it can also mean snake.

The primordial snake has always been the main symbol of the Realm of Evil, where the snake seduced Eve into going

against God and eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which directly led to Adam's sin of emitting 'wasted seed', which directly resulted in the creation of the Erev Rav.

But there's another place where snakes are given major billing in the Torah, and that's when God is speaking to Moshe by the burning bush, and telling him he has to go and 'bring the people out' of Egypt – the people Moshe brings out are both the Children of Israel and the Erev Rav.

God tells Moshe to throw his staff to the ground, where it transforms into a snake. Then, God tells Moshe to pick the snake up by its tail, and it will transform back into a piece of wood. But Moshe is petrified of this snake! Some commentators suggest that this snake was actually the Primordial Serpent itself, the head of the Realm of Evil that swallowed all the holiness of the souls emitted by Adam's 'wasted seed.'

No wonder Moshe was scared!

But in the month of Tishrey, that's when the head of this 'serpent' will be crushed, and it's forced to return all the da'at it's stolen from the Jewish people.

Remember what Rav Berland told us: the reason people don't make Teshuva is because they lack da'at. Who's got their da'at? The Primordial Serpent!

When is it forced to give it all back? In the month of Tishrey, and specifically, on Rosh Hashanah.

So, this is our fourteenth secret:

THE FOURTEENTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

The one time of the year when the Tzaddikim can force the Realm of Evil to release the soul sparks and the da'at of the Erev Rav that have been captured is

Rosh Hashanah, the start of the Jewish New Year.

Lesson 2:8 continues:

And when it [the Realm of Evil] returns the holiness of the da'at that it has swallowed, da'at and the mind are restored to perfection.

This has huge implications on two levels:

On the personal level, Rebbe Nachman is telling us that when someone is able to get their da'at (their spiritual awareness) back from the Realm of Evil, then they will be able to develop the trait of compassion, and they will also be able to overcome all the crazy, evil behaviour and negative character traits typically associated with the Erev Rav, particularly, sexual immorality.

This will enable them to make complete Teshuva, and to fully and finally integrate with the Jewish people.

But on the global level, something even more profound is occurring here. When the last of the Erev Rav soul sparks is fixed in the way just described, then the *Sefira*, or spiritual world, of Da'at will also be restored to perfection – which means that the sin of Adam will finally be rectified, leading to Moshiach and the global redemption of the world.

(As a side note, Moshe Rabbenu took it upon himself to bring the Erev Rav out from Egypt, and Breslev tradition teaches that Rebbe Nachman possessed a reincarnated soul spark from Moshe Rabbenu – which is also why he was so keen to complete the job of rectifying these Erev Rav soul sparks.)

In the last point that we'll take from this very long, amazing lesson, Rebbe Nachman returns to the theme of rescuing proselytes from the Realm of Evil (that we've already figured out is a coded word for the soul sparks of the Erev Rav):

When we draw out of the Realm of Evil what it has swallowed, we draw out also its very life-force, representing proselytes. This too is alluded to in TISHREY, as in: 'You know the soul of the foreigner/proselyte because – (eT nefesh hager keeY) – you had been foreigners', (Exodus 23:9).

These letters spell out: TISHREY – the month of Rosh Hashanah, the month when the world was created. Also, the verse itself is telling Am Yisrael something very profound: You know the souls of these proselytes/foreigners/Erev Rav people because you were also 'foreigners' in the same way, and you come from the same soul root! Just that you're a little further along in the spiritual rectification process...

There is so much more we could say about the insights contained in Lesson 8, of Part 2 of Likutey Moharan, but we'll leave it there for now, and try to pull what we've just learnt together into some sort of order.

RECAP: THE CLUES REBBE NACHMAN LEFT ABOUT THE EREV RAV IN LIKUTEY MOHARAN 2:8

- » A lack of compassion and da'at, and a 'faulty' or warped power of imagination are the principal causes of mental and emotional illnesses and negative character traits.
- » You can fix those things via regular prayer/meditation/hitbodedut.
- » The following things fix the unrectified soul sparks of the Erev Rav:
 - Profuse prayer
 - Seeing the good points instead of focussing on the bad stuff (a.k.a. Azamra)
 - Working on strengthening emuna
 - Finding a 'true leader' to follow
 - Going to Rebbe Nachman's grave on Rosh Hashanah
- » According to the Arizal, the main soul correction that the generation before Moshiach has to make is to fix their emuna.
- » On Rosh Hashanah, a true Tzaddik has the ability to release the soul sparks that got swallowed by the Realm of Evil as a result of Adam's sin of 'wasted seed'. These soul sparks are the Erev Rav – and when the last of them has been rescued from the Realm of Evil, evil will have no more power in the world, and Moshiach will come.

CHAPTER 9

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER: WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON WITH THE EREV RAV

IN THESE NEXT FEW CHAPTERS, we're going to start pulling everything that we've learnt together, to hopefully create a clear picture of the true situation facing us vis-à-vis the Erev Rav, and how the problem can actually be resolved, leading to the redemption of Am Israel and the rectification of the whole world.

Before we get into a discussion of what each of us can do in our own lives to finally 'solve' the problem of the Erev Rav, let's first recap the main points of what we've discovered so far:

- » The Erev Rav and the Jewish people come from the same place spiritually, namely the 'wasted seed' emitted

by Adam HaRishon, that was captured by the Realm of Evil.

- » The Children of Israel that Moshe Rabbenu took out of Egypt were more 'spiritually evolved' in the rectification process than the 'mixed multitude', or Erev Rav.
- » That process of spiritual rectification is going to continue until every last spark of the Erev Rav souls has been rescued from the Realm of Evil which is when Moshiach and global redemption will occur.
- » Today, there are no 100% Erev Rav souls - we're all a mixture of many different sparks of many different souls, including some 'Erev Rav' soul sparks.
- » Some Jews will have more 'Erev Rav' soul sparks or negative character traits to fix, and some will have less.
- » Instead of talking about Erev Rav people, we need to switch our focus to tackling the negative Erev Rav personality traits wherever we find them, including in ourselves.
- » The Erev Rav sparks in every Jewish soul can be rectified, and the whole person can be brought back to God.
- » Believing in the 'point of good' that exists inside every Jewish person – as taught in Rebbe Nachman's lesson of Azamra - is enough to reawaken the spark of the pure Jewish soul that exists inside of every single Jew, which can eventually completely return them back to God.
- » Spiritually, the following things exacerbate a person's lack of da'at (spiritual awareness) and compassion:
 - Sexual immorality
 - Lack of Torah observance, particularly in regard to keeping Shabbat, keeping kosher, and giving charity.
 - Sadness and depression (i.e., a fundamental lack of happiness)
 - Lack of emuna (i.e., atheism, weak belief in God)

- » Rebbe Nachman left a number of clues and practices in his teachings about how to fix these Erev Rav soul sparks, and finally achieve Tikkun HaOlam or the full spiritual rectification of the world. These include:
- The regular practice of *hitbodedut*, or personal prayer.
 - Reciting the Tikkun HaKlali or ‘General Remedy’.
 - Going to Uman on Rosh Hashanah, the one-time of the year when the Tzaddik can force the Realm of Evil to disgorge the ‘da’at’ and compassion it has stolen from the Erev Rav soul sparks.

In the last chapter, we’re now going to focus more closely on the practices that Rebbe Nachman prescribed, to explore how best to rectify the ‘Erev Rav’ soul sparks that nearly all of us have today, leading to Moshiach, redemption, and Tikkun HaOlam.

CHAPTER 10

A PRACTICAL SOLUTION FOR THE EREV RAV PROBLEM

BEFORE WE CAN COME UP WITH A SOLUTION to resolving the Erev Rav problem that's practical, effective and doable in real life, we first need to clearly define the problem across all three levels of body, mind, and soul.

Why?

Because humans are holistic beings, and God created us in such a way that whenever we have a spiritual problem or issue, it also manifests itself at the mental level (a.k.a. mind,

character traits, and emotions), as well as at the physical or physiological level too. Any genuine solution to the problem of how to rectify the Erev Rav soul sparks has to work across all three of these areas.

(If you want a more detailed explanation of the holistic aspects briefly discussed here, please see the Resources section for more Recommended Reading on this subject).

So first, let's restate the problems involved with rectifying the soul sparks of the Erev Rav across all three levels of body, mind, and soul.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM:

The 'Realm of Evil' captured the soul sparks of the Erev Rav, and also the soul sparks of the Children of Israel. These souls are the most powerful that God ever created, and they have the power to rectify the world, and to bring Moshiach and redemption.

BUT – in order to do that, they have to undergo a number of different incarnations, often in very difficult circumstances, as part of a continual process of spiritual rectification. The 'Erev Rav' soul sparks are just as innately holy as the soul sparks of Am Israel, but they're sunk much deeper into the Realm of Evil, and usually can't escape it by themselves.

Today, almost every Jew has some 'Erev Rav' soul sparks that require rectification. Once we complete that job, the world will be spiritually rectified, leading to Moshiach and global redemption.

THE MENTAL / EMOTIONAL DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM:

The main way that the Erev Rav soul sparks manifest themselves at the level of mind and emotions is via our negative character traits, and particularly the way we treat other people.

Chief amongst the negative character traits that we need to work on and overcome are:

- » A lack of compassion and empathy for other people;
- » A lack of emuna or genuine belief in, and connection to God; and
- » Sexual immorality.

Why these three traits in particular?

Well, when someone lacks empathy and compassion for others, that usually means that they have a very hard time taking other people's needs, feelings or ideas into account, which means they can act in very harsh, judgmental, cruel and thoughtless ways.

When you can't relate to how it *feels* to be someone else, you probably won't be inclined to give a coin to the beggar you see on the street; or to go out of your way to help your friend; or to step out of your own comfort zone to try and meet your rebellious teen halfway.

When people lack compassion and empathy, they tend to make a lot of harsh judgment calls about others, and the suffering they're experiencing, and also to engage in many of the other negative behaviours we identified in the chapter on the negative traits of the Erev Rav.

A lack of emuna is included on this priority list because developing a true belief in God, and in God's goodness, is the

fundamental rectification required for every single one of us in this generation before Moshiach.

And lastly, sexual immorality is on the list because Rebbe Nachman explained that this negative trait encompasses every other negative trait, and is the root of them all. Resolve this issue, and all the other negative characteristics will start to dissolve by themselves.

THE PHYSIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE PROBLEM:

[Note: the physiological description of the problem briefly described here is covered in much greater detail in Appendix 1).

Traumatic experiences can permanently affect the way the brain operates, causing a type of serious - but still reversible - ‘brain damage’ that effectively causes people to lose their higher functioning abilities, including empathy and the ability to put intangible spiritual considerations ahead of physical desires and lusts.

Now that we’ve described the problem across all three levels of body, mind and soul, let’s explore how to resolve each one.

CALLING OUT TO GOD

Rebbe Nachman told us that as soon as people start praying profusely and calling out to God, the ‘Erev Rav’ part of them will start to disappear. It brings us back to the two ways of understanding *how* the problem of the Erev Rav is actually going to be resolved, that we flagged all the way back at the beginning of the book when we were looking at Psalm 37:

*I have seen a wicked man, powerful
and well-rooted like a native tree that
is ever fresh. Yet he vanished, and
indeed! He was no more; I sought
him, but he was not to be found.*

After everything we've learnt, we know that evil traits and Torah just can't go together. Every negative trait we have is keeping us away from one of the 70 facets of Torah, and the ability to spiritually connect to God and act in an authentically Jewish way.

So, here's the choice we're faced with, in the time leading up to the final redemption: either we do everything it takes to fix our negative traits and our bad characteristics and have the wickedness disappear that way; or we get stuck with the far less pleasant-sounding option where the wickedness – and the person who contains it – somehow gets 'vanished' before Moshiach appears.

I know which one I'd prefer!

So, how do we get there? Read on.

HOW TO ACTIVATE THE SPIRITUAL SOLUTION

1: UMAN, ROSH HASHANA

Fact: when people lack compassion and da'at, they find it difficult to behave morally, think spiritually, or choose to go against their baser instincts.

We all know people like this: it's the ones you just can't reason with or who shock you with their callous attitude or selfish behaviours or who can't seem to 'get' or relate to any

of the more spiritual concepts and ideas you try to share with them, and who relate to life very superficially.

Effectively, the part of their brain (called the neocortex) that would enable them to think more deeply and to act more thoughtfully and to grasp more abstract ideas is offline and shutdown, usually as a result of traumatic or abusive experiences.

That's a 'real world' explanation of why they lack compassion, da'at and deeper insight. But the spiritual explanation as we've been exploring at length is that their 'da'at' and compassion got taken away by the 'Realm of Evil'.

So, how can they get it back, spiritually speaking? Chapter 8 gave us the answer to this part of the problem:

Go to Uman for Rosh Hashanah!

Why does this help? Because as described in great detail in Lesson 2:8 of Likutey Moharan, Rosh Hashanah is the one time of the year that the Tzaddikim can 'force' the Realm of Evil to give back all these holy soul sparks that it swallowed.

WHAT ABOUT THE WOMEN?

At this point, we hit a very interesting question: If going to Uman on Rosh Hashanah is how you can reclaim your compassion and da'at, then why can't women go too? Why is Rosh Hashanah only for men?

This is a great question, and it has a few possible answers. Firstly, the Arizal stated that the women who return in the generation before Moshiach are effectively already spiritually rectified, and are only coming back to help their husbands to achieve their soul correction.

Remember, even though Eve was involved in the sin of

eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam alone was responsible for the far worse sin of emitting ‘wasted seed,’ which occurred as a result of him separating from his wife.

While women certainly have an obligation to dress and act modestly, the main obligation of *Tikkun haBrit* or rectification of the covenant and sexual purity, actually falls on the man.

So, that’s the first possible answer.

A second answer is that according to the Kabbalah, a Jewish man and his wife are effectively two halves of the same soul. What that means is that whatever gets ‘fixed’ or rectified in the one half, will also be fixed in the other half. To put it another way, if the husband returns from Uman with more compassion, self-awareness, and spiritual insight; then sooner or later, it will also start to rub off on the wife and the rest of the family too.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that the whole world is just a mirror that God uses to show us our own issues and flaws, so we know what we need to work on. In that vein, if there’s a lack of compassion or da’at present in the wife, that’s simply ‘mirroring’ the same problem in the husband. If it gets fixed in him, it will also get fixed in her.

(That’s not PC at all, but what can you do? The Torah doesn’t always conform to modern notions of political correctness and gender equality.)

2: RECITE THE TIKKUN HAKLALI

Another spiritual solution is to say the Tikkun HaKlali or General Remedy on a regular basis, and also to make the trip to Uman to say it by the gravesite of Rebbe Nachman, and to give a coin to charity.

These two practices are achieving two separate ends as follows:

HEALING THE SOUL'S WOUNDS (AS DESCRIBED IN THE 'WATER CASTLE')

In the story of the 'Water Castle', Rebbe Nachman explained how the Queen (i.e., the soul) had been hit by 10 poisonous arrows which caused it to fall unconscious.

The Beggar Without Hands was able to heal these wounds by way of the 10 melodies – that we learned was a reference to the 10 Psalms that make up the Tikkun HaKlali.

Kabbalah teaches that the world is created from 10 Sefirot or worlds and that those 'Sefirot' are also present in man, too.

Reciting the Tikkun HaKlali on a regular basis – those 10 chapters of Psalms – helps us to rectify the blemishes and character flaws in each of the 10 'Sefirot' or areas which God used to create the world, and that are reflected in man too.

To say this in a more plain English way, regularly reciting the Tikkun HaKlali fixes our negative character traits. Each trait that we fix enables us to engage with another aspect of Torah and to get closer to God and our own spiritual dimension.

THE TIKKUN HAKLALI FIXES THE SIN OF 'WASTED SEED'

Separately, saying the Tikkun HaKlali also rectifies the spiritual sin of 'wasting seed,' in every sense, both on the personal level as it occurs in our own lives, and also on the global level of rectifying the original sin of Adam HaRishon.

The more 'sexually pure' a person is, the easier they will find it to overcome all of their negative traits, and to return to God.

THE TIKKUN HAKLALI GETS YOU OUT OF GEHINNOM

Lastly, we have the specific benefit of saying the Tikkun HaKlali by Rebbe Nachman's grave in Uman, while giving a coin to charity.

Rebbe Nachman made a formal guarantee in front of two kosher witnesses that he would get anyone who does this out of Gehinnom. How does having a 'get out of Gehinnom, free' card help us, regarding what we're discussing in this book?

There are a few reasons. Firstly, as we discussed earlier, when someone lacks compassion and da'at, or spiritual awareness, then they're usually transgressing all sorts of Torah laws. Anything we do that goes against God and the Torah's commandments – that we didn't already make Teshuva for and try to fix while we were still alive – creates a spiritual debt or blemish that needs to be paid down.

The way we pay off those spiritual debts is by spending a few months in Gehinnom.

If we got to the point that we fell into atheism, God forbid, and a complete denial of the Creator, then, in theory, the Gemara tells us that we could end up spending an eternity in Gehinnom. Unfortunately, when people lack the tools to get more in touch with their spiritual side, and to connect to God, it becomes all too easy to adopt an entirely materialistic view of the world where God is effectively absent.

So, Rebbe Nachman is effectively telling us: "Even if you become an atheist, God forbid, if you say the Tikkun HaKlali by me, and give a coin to charity, you won't have to spend the whole of eternity in Gehinnom. There's still a way I can get you out, eventually, and fix the mess."

The second thing to say is that Gehinnom isn't only something that we experience after we die. Many people literally

live ‘in Gehinnom’ day to day, especially if they’re consumed by the sorts of negative character traits and bad middot we’ve been describing here, that destroy their ability to have healthy, loving relationships with other people, and to find any spiritual meaning or purpose in their lives.

In Likutey Moharan 1:22, Rebbe Nachman himself tells us that: *Gan Eden and Gehinnom exist very literally in this world.* So, if you feel like you’re going through hell (and you’re really in good company if you are) – then Rebbe Nachman’s promise can also apply to your life *right now.*

3. PROFUSE PERSONAL PRAYER, A.K.A. HITBODEDUT

The third and last, spiritual solution prescribed by Rebbe Nachman is to engage in profuse prayer and meditation, or what’s known as *hitbodedut*. (Hitbodedut is the practice of talking to Hashem in your own words and your own language, where you pour your heart out to the Creator of the world.)

Here too, Rebbe Nachman told his followers that anyone who made it a practice to do an hour of hitbodedut every single day would be able to fix all the spiritual deficiencies that had accrued from all of their previous incarnations, all the way back to the creation of the world!

What happened at the creation of the world? Adam ate from the tree, emitted ‘wasted seed’, and those soul sparks got captured by the Realm of Evil. (Does this sound familiar?)

Rebbe Nachman also told his followers that yes, he’d get them out of Gehinnom if they said the Tikkun HaKlali by his grave (as described above). But if they did an hour of hitbodedut every single day, then they *wouldn’t end up in Gehinnom in the first place!*

In the next section on the mind and emotions, we’ll return

to hitbodedut again, to see why this is the case.

RECAP of the Spiritual Solution:

- » Go to Uman for Rosh Hashanah (or send your husband, if you're a woman). Why this helps: Rosh Hashanah is the one time of the year that the Tzaddikim can rescue the trapped 'da'at' and compassion that was swallowed by the Realm of Evil, and return it to the souls it was taken from.
- » Recite the Tikkun HaKlali. **Why this helps:** i) It rectifies the root of our bad character traits ii) It rectifies the sin of 'wasted seed' on both the personal and global levels (preventing any more souls from getting trapped in the Realm of Evil) iii) Saying it by Rebbe Nachman's grave gives you a 'get out of Gehinnom, free' card.
- » Do an hour of hitbodedut or personal prayer and meditation every single day. Why this helps: It helps you to rectify the parts of your soul that were blemished in previous incarnations, all the way back to the creation of the world.

ACTIVATING THE MENTAL / EMOTIONAL SOLUTION

1: DO HITBODEDUT EVERY DAY

Back in Lesson 2:8, Rebbe Nachman told us that profuse prayer (also called 'hitbodedut', or personal prayer) helps to rectify the imagination.

(As a side note, this has been backed up by scientific experiments on meditation, which showed that regular meditation strengthens the frontal lobe regions and strengthens compassion while 'slowing up' the emotional brain's knee-jerk reac-

tion that is responsible for perception and imagination.)

In a nutshell, when you talk to God for an hour every day, that gives you the time and mental space you need to go over your thoughts, actions and experiences from the last day, and to revisit them from a calmer, more compassionate and introspective place. In the heat of the moment, we react – and our reactions are not always correct or appropriate.

When you do an hour of *hitbodedut*/personal prayer/meditation/talking to God – whatever you want to call it, and you're making an effort to figure out where there's room for improvement in how you're acting and behaving, very quickly, you start to make those connections.

You start getting insights into how you may have overreacted, or acted rashly, or did something selfish, or said something hurtful – and once you've got that clarity, then you can choose to go and fix the problem in whichever way that's required.

When we don't take the time to do this, then we're just buying into the 'imaginary' view of the world that our primitive brain is feeding us 24/7, namely that everything we do is always justified and correct, and that everything we want is always justified and correct, and that everything that goes wrong in our life is always someone else's fault.

Making the time to talk to God for an hour a day sends a very clear signal that you're willing to work on yourself, you're willing to change, and you're willing to acknowledge your issues, and to try to rectify them. It's taught that when someone comes to purify themselves, they are helped from Above, and that certainly happens when you're regularly practising *hitbodedut*.

In essence, it's fixing the original sin of Adam and Eve, where good and evil got so mixed up, by sifting through everything that's happened over the past 24 hours, and separating

the different elements out into ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

There’s much more to say about the power of hitbodedut to rectify the mind and our negative character traits, but hopefully this has given you enough of a taste to encourage you to learn more about it for yourself.

(You can find more Recommended Reading on this topic in the Resources section, at the back of this book.)

2: DEVELOP MORE EMUNA

The single best way of making your emuna real, and gaining tangible benefits from it, is to learn Rabbi Shalom Arush’s three rules of emuna and to apply them to every area of your life and experiences.

The three rules of emuna are:

- 1. God is behind everything that happens to us.**
- 2. Everything God does is ultimately for our good – even the seemingly ‘bad’ stuff.**
- 3. Everything that happens to us is coming to teach us something, or give us a message – and we have to try and work that message out.**

Remember, the Arizal taught that the main soul correction for our generation is just to learn more emuna. When people start to recognise God’s hand in their life, it changes their behaviour on a number of levels.

The definition of da’at is: ‘experiential knowledge of God’ – i.e., God isn’t just a theoretical concept or lofty idea; God infuses every part of your life and becomes ‘real’. Practising the three rules of emuna helps you to really internalise that God exists, God’s pulling the strings, and that everything that

happens to you is meaningful and purposeful, even when it's unpleasant.

In practise, when people try to live by these three rules of emuna, they stop holding grudges against others, and they find it much easier to let go of negative emotions like hatred, jealousy, resentment and vengeance; they stop having panic attacks and anxiety fits about 'what might be' – because everything is ultimately for the best! In turn, this gets their 'fight or flight' response to calm down a bit, and to even occasionally switch-off, enabling them to enjoy their life in a more relaxed and calm fashion.

Living the three rules of emuna also means that when things don't go as planned, or when you start hitting some tough patches, instead of getting filled up with anger, anxiety, regret and criticism, you just start looking for the message instead. *Why* isn't God letting you buy your dream house right now? *Why* did God arrange for you to get fired this week? *Why* is your kid struggling in school? *Why* isn't your mother-in-law talking to you?

None of these things are punishments (especially the last one...) – but they *are* messages that we need to take a look at ourselves, and figure out what we need to change, work on or fix in our lives, outlook or behaviour.

When you combine these three rules of emuna with an hour of daily hitbodedut, you start to strengthen your da'at and compassion; to tackle your bad character traits; and to develop a much stronger, tangible connection with God – which is exactly what the spiritual rectification process is all about.

3: KEEP THE TORAH'S COMMANDMENTS

As we learned in previous chapters, each negative trait is pitted against a different facet of the Torah. The more Torah

we learn, the more of the Torah's commandments we try to keep, the harder it will be for the negative traits to keep their hold on us.

Again, let's take this out of theory, and see how it works in practise, to help us fix our mind, emotions and bad middot.

The Torah requires each of us to give at least 10% of our income to charity. That's not a 'nice' thing to do; it's a Torah law with the same weight as keeping kosher or keeping Shabbat. In order to keep this commandment, we're going to have to overcome the internal resistance that inevitably gets thrown up by the primitive brain that's concerned with self-preservation, survival and staying in the comfort zone.

"Wait a minute! You can't give all that money away!" it tells us. "You need it for *you!*"

Now, the fight to do the right thing begins. If we manage to overcome the objections of our primitive brain, and also to overcome the 'imaginary problems' thrown up by our emotional brain, to actually give the 10% to charity, then we've taken a huge step towards strengthening our frontal lobes – the part of the brain responsible for self-awareness, compassion for others, free choice, and a more spiritual outlook on life.

God gave us the Torah and its commandments to help us live the most productive, happy and fulfilled life possible. Every time someone overcomes their impulse to eat a cheeseburger, or starts keeping the laws of family purity, or stops working on Shabbat, they are strengthening their 'higher self' and weakening the grip that the primitive brain exerts on their thought process and reactions.

What God wants is to help us to reach our full potential, in all senses of the word, and the Torah's commandments are designed to help us do that.

4: MAKE SEXUAL PURITY A PRIORITY

As we learned above, Rebbe Nachman told us that sexual immorality is equivalent to all the other 70 negative traits in the world.

So anything we do, even in any small way, to overcome any sexually immoral tendencies we have in our own lives literally moves mountains, in relation to helping us overcome our negative tendencies and bad character traits.

5: PRACTISE AZAMRA, A.K.A. SEEING THE GOOD.

The last thing we can do to start fixing ‘Erev Rav’ related mental issues and emotional illnesses is to practise seeing the good in ourselves and others at every opportunity.

Again, this needs some explanation as to how to really do this in practice, as there may be some confusion about what Rebbe Nachman actually meant when he told us to search for the good point even in apparently very wicked people.

It comes back to the idea that permeates the whole of this book, that instead of making global judgement calls about people being ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘Jew’ or ‘Erev Rav’, the correct path concentrates on *individual actions and traits* instead.

That means that we don’t excuse the inexcusable, or justify the bad, or ignore the immoral wherever it crops up in our lives, both internally and in our external environment. Anger is bad, full stop. Abusive behaviour is bad, full stop. Shaming other people is bad, full stop.

(In Appendix 2, you’ll find list a number of the primary traits that mental health professionals look for when they’re diagnosing personality disorders and other serious mental disorders. There is a high degree of overlap between this list and the list of negative ‘Erev Rav’ traits that we identified back

in Chapter 3.)

Sometimes, we all do some of those ‘bad’, mentally-ill things.

Does that make us ‘bad’, beyond hope, or ‘Erev Rav’? No, it doesn’t. What it *does* mean is that we have some serious spiritual work to do in order to rectify those negative character traits, and that’s actually the whole point of being alive in the first place.

*AZAMRA SAYS: SEE THE GOOD BUT DON’T
JUSTIFY OR IGNORE THE BAD*

So, how do we apply this idea, in practise? Here’s what works for me: any time I meet someone who’s acting in a distressingly nasty, obnoxious, superficial or inflexible way, the first thing I think is: this person must have gone through a lot in life and experienced a lot of pain and hardship to be acting like this.

The next thing I think is: I am not going to get caught up in any of their mentally-ill, emotionally-disturbed ideas and dramas.

If I can help them out in some way without putting myself at risk from their bad behaviour or negative character traits, then I’m very happy to do that. If I can’t – I don’t feel the least bit guilty about walking away.

I already know from Lesson 2:8 that rebuking them, or pointing out how badly they’re acting isn’t going to get them to change. If they’re directly harming or hurting me, or others, then I need to take steps to stop them from doing that. But if I think that rebuking them is going to change the whole picture, Rebbe Nachman already told me not to bother: it’s only going to make it worse.

Why is this?

Because when people are acting like this, they've learned to 'tune out' the constant anger, blame, criticism and emotional shaming tactics that they've had to deal with for years already. You can't reach them by telling them how bad or horrible they are – because the main reason they're acting so 'bad and horrible' is because in their heart of hearts, they already believe that to be 100% true.

They already can't see the good in themselves (external appearances to the contrary notwithstanding) – and they can't see the good in other people either.

But Azamra can change that.

THE POWER OF SEEING THE GOOD

If we can approach these difficult people with compassion, and understand that they act the way they do because:

- » for whatever reason, (either trauma, abuse or other spiritual considerations), their ability to connect with others in a truly caring, compassionate and altruistic way has been damaged; and
- » they really don't like themselves despite appearances to the contrary; and
- » their behaviour is completely wrong and unacceptable, but the person underneath is still full of good and has the potential to turn around and come back to God.

THEN, we really can start to see some good in them (albeit usually from a safe distance) – which really can start to tip them over to the side of good, and speed up their Teshuva process, as Rebbe Nachman, and Rabbi Berland explained earlier on.

AZAMRA STARTS WITH US

The last thing to say about Azamra, the lesson of seeing the good, is that it has to begin with us.

So many of us are walking around beating ourselves up for not being perfect or for still having a lot of negative character traits, or for being lousy parents, or for not being good enough Jews, or for being a terrible friend, or whatever it might be.

We're doing this because we've bought into the false premise that doing bad things makes us bad.

If there's just one thing you should take away from this book, it's this: If we really want to improve our behaviour and start liking ourselves and other people a whole lot more, and to bring Moshiach the sweet way, we have to stop talking about 'bad people', and just focus on overcoming 'bad character traits' instead.

It's not: 'I'm a bad person because I yelled at my kid.' It's: 'Yelling at my kid *was* very bad, but I'm actually a really good person underneath, and I want to find a way of overcoming my anger issue.'

See the difference?

When you tell yourself 'you are bad' – you will lose all your motivation and hope of changing.

When you tell yourself the *action* was bad – now you're all fired-up to do something about it, and to get it fixed, so the real good in you can start shining out into the world, the way God intended.

“BUT WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL BAD ABOUT MY BAD BEHAVIOUR?”

If you dig deep down enough, most people do regret their bad behaviour, and would like to change, even if they can't

normally admit that, even to themselves.

But if there's no sense of regret at all, then that's a clear sign that your compassion and da'at are still trapped over in the 'Realm of Evil', and you need to book your ticket to Uman ASAP.

RECAP OF THE MENTAL / EMOTIONAL SOLUTION:

- » **Just going to Uman isn't enough.** We have to also do our part to actively 'choose good' and to work on our mental and emotional issues, and bad character traits.
- » **Do an hour of hitbodedut or personal prayer and meditation every single day.** Why this helps: i) it strengthens your clarity, compassion, and objectivity; ii) it weakens the force of the 'knee jerk' reactions coming from your lower brain, and iii) it helps you to work out what you need to change or fix.
- » **Develop more emuna:** Practising the Three Rules of Emuna helps develop our 'da'at', and to help make God more 'real' to us. When we see God's hand behind everything that happens to us, we also stop hating and blaming other people, harbouring grudges, and thinking that the whole world is out to get us.
- » **Keep the Torah's commandments:** Both because that's the right thing to do spiritually, but also because they are designed to strengthen the mental functions of our 'higher self', and to reduce the negative, instinctive urges and impulses coming from our lower brain.
- » **Make sexual purity a priority:** Because sexual immorality is equivalent to all the other 70 negative character traits, so a little improvement in this area goes a very long way.
- » **Practise Azamra or seeing the good:** Stop thinking in terms of 'good or bad people' and starting thinking in

terms of ‘good or bad behaviours.’ Don’t justify, excuse or ignore the bad – acknowledge it and deal with it in any way you have to, but recognise that the person still contains some good, and that good is enough to potentially get them back to God. Remember that the most important person to practise Azamra with is yourself.

ACTIVATING THE PHYSICAL SOLUTION

When someone experiences severe trauma, emotional or psychological disturbance, or some type of abuse or neglect, particularly during their childhood, and particularly if it’s chronic, it can literally change their physiology and affect the way their brain works.

Traumatic experiences of this nature seem to be the physical mechanism that God uses to ‘take away’ a person’s da’at and compassion – which means that the problem also has to be addressed at the physical level.

When someone is severely traumatized, they start to develop the sort of lack of compassion, self-awareness, spiritual accountability and depth that is at the root of many of the so-called ‘Erev Rav’/mentally-ill traits we’ve identified in this book.

THE TRAUMATIC HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Few people have been through more stresses than the Jewish people, especially in this post-holocaust world. Few people (especially from Jews) eat so badly, or exercise so little. Few people (especially those that live in Israel) have had to deal with more ongoing, PTSD-inducing stress, wars, and terrorism.

And that trauma is showing up as all sorts of physical and mental health issues in the Jewish community.

It's important to note that many of the problems we've been discussing also have a pronounced physiological and biological component to them.

That's why taking care of the body at the physical level – eating right, sleeping enough, exercising regularly, and taking the steps required to release any trauma that's being stored in the physical body - can also make a huge difference to clearing up emotional, mental and behavioral difficulties.

PEOPLE ARE HOLISTIC BEINGS

Human beings are holistic beings; our body, mind and soul all mirror and reflect each other, which is why the problem of how to resolve difficult character traits, and how to rectify any 'Erev Rav' soul sparks has to take all three of these areas into account.

If someone only goes to Uman, but then doesn't regularly talk to God, try to see the good in themselves and others, and continues to live a very physically stressful and unhealthy lifestyle, they'll still make some progress – but it's unlikely that they'll see a lot of spiritual movement.

By contrast, if someone is very spiritual, drinks bottled water, runs marathons and religiously bakes their sprouted spelt bread – but they haven't connected to the power of transformation contained in the Torah, and activated by praying at the graves of the true Tzaddikim, for example – then it's also unlikely that they'll be able to fix everything they need to, for all the reasons we've been discussing.

It takes all three parts to solve this problem, namely:

» Torah, Tikkun HaKlali and Uman on Rosh Hashanah

- » Hitbodedut, Azamra, mitzvah observance, and sexual purity
- » Less stress, healthy diets, more sleep and exercise, and body-based therapies to help deal with any physiological trauma

So, the last secret we've discovered over the last few pages is this:

THE FIFTEENTH SECRET OF THE EREV RAV:

It takes a concerted effort across all three levels of body, mind and soul to completely resolve the issue, and finally rectify the sparks of the Erev Rav.

CHAPTER 11

THE LAST WORD

LET'S JUST ROUND-UP EVERYTHING we've learned about how to really resolve the problem of the Erev Rav, and bring Moshiach and global redemption the sweet way.

- 1. Historically, the Erev Rav share the same spiritual 'root' as the Jewish people; just they are further back in the rectification process.**
- 2. Today, probably all of us have some soul-sparks from the Erev Rav in our spiritual make-up, which need rectifying and returning to God.**
- 3. The only practical way to tackle the 'Erev Rav' problem is to take the focus away from trying to eradicate problematic people, and to focus on eliminating problematic character traits, instead.**
- 4. The more 'Erev Rav' soul sparks a person has to**

rectify, the harder they'll find it to access their compassion, self-awareness, spirituality and genuine connection to God (collectively known as 'da'at). This is because their compassion and 'da'at' got swallowed by the 'Realm of Evil.'

- 5. Rosh Hashanah is the one time of the year that the Tzaddikim, particularly Rebbe Nachman, can rescue this stolen 'da'at' from the 'Realm of Evil', and return it to those who it was taken from. That's why it's important to go to Uman for Rosh Hashanah (or to send your husband there if you're a woman).**
- 6. Once all the 'Erev Rav' soul sparks have been rescued and returned to the side of holiness, Moshiach and the global redemption will come.**
- 7. It's not enough just to go to Uman. We also have to make an active effort to rectify our bad character traits by:**
 - a. Regularly saying the Tikkun HaKlali (or General Remedy);**
 - b. Regularly connecting to God by talking to Him every single day;**
 - c. Keeping the Torah as much as possible, particularly in connection with the laws of sexual purity; and**
 - d. Seeing the good in other people and ourselves.**
- 8. On the physiological level, trauma causes changes in the brain that prevent a person from being able to access their 'higher self', including mental functions like compassion, self-awareness and spirituality (i.e., 'da'at).**

- 9. There are some things that can be done to overcome this type of trauma and PTSD-type physical response, including proper nutrition, enough sleep and exercise, and body-based interventions including massage, acupressure, acupuncture, energy psychology and neurofeedback techniques, amongst other things.**
- 10. The more we work on developing our own compassion, emuna, and ability to judge ourselves favourably (as well as all the healthy eating and healthy living stuff), the easier it'll be to spot the 'Erev Rav' traits that are ruining our own lives, poisoning our communities and preventing Moshiach.**

In its humble way, hopefully this book has taken some small step towards boosting the amount of holy knowledge in the world and bringing the redemption of all our loved ones, even those 'difficult' people in our lives that much closer.

APPENDIX 1: THE PHYSIOLOGY OF THE HUMAN BRAIN

THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON THE BRAIN

Physiologically, the brain is split into three main areas: the so-called primitive brain; the limbic system; and the cognitive, rational brain (a.k.a. the neocortex, including the frontal lobes.)

Scientific studies have shown that when someone experiences something acutely or chronically traumatic or abusive, it impacts the way these three parts of the brain function in a fundamental way as follows:

EFFECT OF TRAUMA ON THE PRIMITIVE BRAIN

In traumatized individuals, the primitive brain – and particularly the areas involved in what’s called the ‘fight of flight’ stress response - get top billing, and starts to call all the shots in relation to how the person behaves, reacts to and interacts with their environment.

This can be very problematic because the primitive brain is primarily responsible for self-preservation, survival, and physical urges. The urge to eat, fight, sleep and procreate are all going on here, which can lead to the worst type of animalistic behavior if not properly channeled and reined-in by the cognitive brain.

When a person’s ‘fight or flight’ response is switched on, their rational, cognitive brain (the neocortex) effectively gets sidelined and over-ruled by the primitive brain. But the neocortex is the home of those functions associated with a more

spiritual, altruistic and compassionate way of being, as we'll explain in more detail a little further on.

Physically, when a person is being ruled by their primitive brain and its stress response, their body will be flooded with stress hormones that can cause any number of physical health issues, and also make them feel much more aggressive, anxious, moody, 'on edge', and generally unhappy than otherwise.

EFFECT OF TRAUMA ON THE LIMBIC SYSTEM

The limbic system is the part of the brain that's responsible for defining our perception of things, and categorising them as good, bad, safe, dangerous, etc.

The limbic system makes judgement calls and assigns subjective values to thoughts, things, and experiences. When a person experiences traumatic or chronically abusive situations, especially as a child, their limbic system gets 'hard-wired' in a way that they start to perceive the world as a dangerous, hostile, threatening and unfriendly place. (This is the 'warped' power of imagination, described in Likutey Moharan, which needs to be rectified.)

People can start to imagine that people are out to get them, or develop paranoid thoughts about germs and terrorists, or *imagine* (there's that word again...) that all sorts of bad, terrible, horrible things are lurking in wait for them.

Following the rule that we create our own reality, and that how we perceive things to be is how they *will be*; this warped perception of the world can become a self-defined reality. For example, someone who is hardwired to expect to have to fight to get anything done will end up having far more angry clashes and confrontations than someone else with a different and less hostile outlook.

This ‘warped perception’ is behind almost every mental or emotional illness you care to mention, including the so-called ‘incurable’ personality disorders like Narcissistic Personality Disorder, as well as psychotic states like schizophrenia.

EFFECT OF TRAUMA ON THE COGNITIVE BRAIN

When someone has been traumatized and is still experiencing some sort of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) response, that usually means that their rational, cognitive brain (a.k.a. the neocortex or frontal lobes) have gone offline, and have effectively shutdown.

Physiologically, this occurs because the blood ceases to flow to the frontal lobes when an individual is experiencing a fight-or-flight response, and only returns when the danger has passed, and the fight-or-flight response is switched off. But this simply doesn’t happen in individuals who are permanently traumatized and stuck in fight-or-flight mode.

Unfortunately, this part of the brain is responsible for most of our ‘higher’ functions such as the ability to:

- » feel empathy and compassion for others;
- » relate to others;
- » speak and communicate the experience of our own inner world;
- » overcome our own base, animalistic urges and drives;
- » think in more abstract (and less materialistic) terms; and
- » view the world, and our own place in it, in a more spiritual way.

The neocortex is the part of your brain that will stop you from punching other people in the face just because they annoyed you; that will encourage you to ‘do the right thing,’ even

when it's not obviously in your best interests (like for example, giving 10% of your income to charity); that will put a brake on your other physical impulses and urges, and that will help you to access the more spiritual dimension of life, and connect more to God and to your own soul.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN COMPASSION AND THE NEOCORTEX

According to the latest scientific research¹⁰ involving neuroscanning, the ability to feel compassion and empathy is located in the part of the brain called the neocortex, (a.k.a. 'the frontal lobes').

The frontal lobes also house the human ability to speak, and our ability to think abstract thoughts, and to get to grips with more 'spiritual' ideas and concepts which embody the idea of 'da'at', or experiential knowledge of God and Divine Providence.

Neuroscience has discovered that the frontal lobes, together with all their 'higher functions' are effectively shut down by traumatic or abusive experiences – the 'violence and cruelty' that Rebbe Nachman refers to in the lesson in Likutey Moharan II:8 below:

[O]n account of compassion becoming spoiled and turning to cruelty, 'da'at' (i.e. spiritual awareness) is damaged, as in, 'Whoever loses his temper loses his wisdom' (Pesachim 66b). Da'at is then diminished into the category of immature mentality...This in turn causes sexual lust. And when compassion and da'at are damaged, it is impossible to pray.

Again, physiology bears this idea out. When the frontal

¹⁰ See *The Body Keeps The Score*, by Bessel Van Der Kolk.

lobes go 'offline' due to traumatic, abusive or cruel experiences, the ability to speak out our true feelings, and to relate to ourselves, others and God in a mature, compassionate way is also lost, at least temporarily.

Scientific studies have also found that one of the best ways of reopening the frontal lobes leading to increased compassion, increased self-awareness and increased 'da'at' (or innate spiritual awareness) is by the practice of meditation¹¹, or what in Breslev circles is referred to as *hitbodedut* or personal prayer.

FREE CHOICE AND THE NEOCORTEX

When people lack compassion, when they lack self-awareness and a connection to God and the more spiritual side of life (a.k.a. 'da'at'), and when they find it hard to get a grip on their own negative character traits, that's usually a clear sign that their neocortex – the rational, cognitive part of their brain - has been taken out by some sort of traumatic or abusive experience.

Effectively, the neocortex is the physiological home of free choice, namely the ability to choose what's good for someone else over what appears to be best for you; the ability to pick 'good' over 'bad', and the capacity to put serving God ahead of being a slave to your own bodily desires and animalistic impulses.

Biology explains this a little more clearly: As we mentioned above, compassion and free choice and spiritual and self-awareness are the province of the neocortex or frontal lobes. Those areas are 'offline' when someone has gone through some traumatic or abusive experience and is stuck in

11 *Ibid.*

the stress response, (a.k.a. ‘fight or flight’) that gives the primitive brain full control of the decision-making process.

A person in this situation effectively has no free choice in these situations and is ‘reacting’ to their environment and the people around them, often in a very negative manner. It’s only when the trauma is somehow overcome that the ‘fight or flight’ reaction is finally switched off, and the person’s frontal lobes are ‘reattached’ to the rest of their brain, and start working again.

Once their frontal lobes have been reclaimed in this way, the person will have *free choice* to decide how they are going to react. They can still choose to react with aggression, greed, jealousy, selfishness and hatred, etc., but now there are also other options available to them, like forgiveness, compassion, altruism, love, and a willingness to make peace.

The more they choose these ‘good’ reactions, the stronger the influence of the neocortex will become, and the less of a grip the primitive brain will exert on the person’s behaviour and reactions. But before they can even get to this position of being able to choose good, they have to regain the mental functions associated with their frontal lobes.¹²

WHAT CAUSES ‘TRAUMA’?

Trauma leading to a type of physiological, PTSD-type response can be caused by so many things today, including:

- » Difficult births
- » Serious physical illnesses
- » Divorce or major family conflict
- » Financial problems

¹² *Ibid.*

- » All forms of verbal, physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect
- » Chronic lack of sleep
- » Chronic lack of exercise
- » Nutrient and vitamin-poor diets
- » Electromagnetic ‘smog’ (coming from things like Wi-Fi, smartphones and microwave ovens)
- » Death of a close family member or friend

Plus, all the more ‘dramatic’ and obvious forms of trauma, like terrorist attacks, car accidents, muggings and personal assaults, etc.

APPENDIX 2: THE MAIN CHARACTER TRAITS PRESENT IN SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESSES, SUCH AS PERSONALITY DISORDERS

The following list is an aggregate (and incomplete...) list of the main character traits typically associated with serious mental illnesses, as found in the Diagnostic and Statisticians' Manual (DSM).

There is a lot of overlap between these traits, and the list of 'Erev Rav' character traits identified at the end of Chapter 3. ·
Aggressiveness

- » Anger
- » Attention seeking
- » Black and white thinking
- » Creates drama, tension, and conflicts
- » Deceitfulness
- » Despair
- » Disempowering of others
- » Dishonesty
- » Doesn't abide by the rules
- » Empty feeling
- » Excessive talking
- » Fragile ego - can't tolerate being questioned, challenged or disagreed with
- » Highly critical
- » Impulsiveness
- » Inappropriate behavior, particularly sexual and provocative
- » Indifference to others' pain or suffering

- » Inflexibility
- » Instant gratification
- » Irresponsibility
- » Irritableness
- » Judgmentalness
- » Lack of empathy and compassion
- » Lack of remorse
- » Lack of resilience, ability to 'bounce back'
- » Ingratitude
- » Manipulates others for attention
- » Marked attachment to roles involving praise/credit/
power
- » Not open to change
- » Obsessed with self-gratification
- » Over-preoccupation with external appearances
- » Perfectionism
- » Phoniness
- » Resentment
- » Rigidity
- » Serves others only because of underlying or hidden
ulterior motives
- » Snobbery
- » Stinginess
- » Stubbornness
- » Superficial charm, in order to gain trust, control, or
help them better exploit other people
- » Unforgiving
- » Unrealistic expectations
- » Uses physical appearance to draw attention to them-
selves
- » Vindictiveness
- » Wants to be seen as special/superior to others

GLOSSARY

Am Yisrael: The people, or nation, of Israel

Arizal: Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, considered to be the father of modern Kabbalah who lived between 1534-1572 and died in Tsfat, Israel.

Bnei Yisrael: The Children of Yisrael (a reference to the Jewish people).

Bracha (pl: *brachot*): Hebrew for ‘blessing’.

Chassidut: A general term referring to the teachings of the *chassidic* movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698-1760).

Chaya: The fourth level of soul, known as the ‘living one’.

Da’at: Internalized spiritual awareness.

Divre Simcha: Rabbi Simcha Issaschar Ber Halberstam, the Cheshinover Rebbe. Lived in Poland, 1870-1914.

Emuna: An all-encompassing belief in God.

Erev Rav: lit: ‘mixed multitude’, referring to the conglomeration of Egyptians who left Egypt together with the Jewish people during the Exodus.

Gehinnom: Jewish purgatory.

Hitbodedut: Personal prayer, or the practise of talking to God in your own words. Rebbe Nachman instructed his followers that they should spend an hour every day engaged in hitbodedut, pouring their heart out before their Creator.

Kabbalah: A general term referring to the collected teachings of Jewish esoteric, or mystical, thought.

Likutey Moharan: The main work of Rebbe Nachman of Breslev, originally published in two parts.

Middot: Hebrew term for character traits.

Mitzva (plural: mitzvot): Any action mandated by the written or oral Torah; an action that's desired by God.

Moshiach: The Jewish redeemer, or messiah, who will appear at the end of days and usher in a period of time of peace, understanding and holiness.

Nefesh: The first level of soul, known as the 'animal soul', and often directly associated with animating the physical body.

Neshama: The third level of soul, known as 'soul'.

Pagam HaBrit: lit: 'blemish of the covenant', referring to sexual impropriety.

Rabbi Chaim Vital: Main student of the Arizal, and the redactor of many kabbalistic works attributed to the Arizal. Lived in Tsfat, 1542-1620.

Rabbi Natan Sternhartz: Main student of Rebbe Nachman of Breslev, and the redactor of the Likutey Moharan. Rabbi Natan single-handedly kept the flame of Breslev Chassidut alive for future generations in the face of enormous persecution and opposition. Lived in the Ukraine, 1780-1844.

Rashbi: The acronym for **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai**, author of the kabbalistic work called the Zohar. Died 1 A.C.E, in Meron, Israel.

Rashi: The acronym for **Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki**, one of the most respected commentators on the Tanach. He lived in France between 1040-1105.

Rebbe Nachman: A great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, and a famous chassidic master in his own right. He founded Breslev Chassidut, authored the Likutey Moharan, and left

firm instructions that his followers should continue to congregate at his grave in Uman, the Ukraine, on Rosh Hashana, even after his death. He lived in the Ukraine between 1772-1810.

Rosh Hashana: Literally the ‘head’ of the year; refers to the Jewish new year.

Ruach: The second level of soul, known as ‘spirit’.

Ruach HaKodesh: Literally, the Holy Spirit. Referring to the Divine spirit of prophecy.

Sefirot: A plural noun of *sefira*, denoting the 10 energetic worlds or spiritual interfaces that exist both in the physical world, and also within the human soul.

Shema: Recited twice daily, morning and night. It’s a fundamental ascertainment of what it means to be a Jew: ‘Hear, O Israel, God is our God; God is One.’

Teshuva: A term denoting the act of repentance, or returning to God and mitzvah observance.

Tikkun Haklali: The ten psalms described by Rebbe Nachman as being able to rectify the spiritual damage caused by nocturnal emissions.

Tishrey: The seventh month of the year (according to some Jewish traditions) and also the first month of the year (according to others). Rosh Hashana occurs in Tishrey.

Tohu: The world of chaos that existed prior to the creation of our present world.

Tzaddik (plural: Tzaddikim) : A holy or saintly individual.

Vilna Gaon: Rabbi Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman, a hugely knowledgeable Torah leader often best known for his opposition to chassidut. Lived in Lithuania 1720-1797.

Yetzer Hara: The inclination for evil.

Yechida: The fifth level of soul, known as ‘unique one’.

Yosef HaTzaddik: Literally, ‘Joseph the Saint’ - referring to the son of the patriarch Jacob, who was called a ‘tzaddik’ for withstanding the seduction of Potiphar’s wife.

Zohar: The basic text of mystical Jewish thought, or kabbalah, authored by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

RESOURCES

ONLINE RESOURCES

FOR MORE OF REBBE NACHMAN'S WORKS, ONLINE:

You can download all of Rebbe Nachman's works online in English for free (or buy hard copies of the books at wholesale prices) at the following site:

<http://breslovbooks.com/books>

*FOR MORE ABOUT THE TIKKUN HAKLALI,
OR 'GENERAL REMEDY':*

You can download a free English PDF transliteration and translation of the Tikkun HaKlali (together with some additional information about the importance of sexual purity) at the following site:

http://shmirashabris.org/Holy_Nation.pdf

*FOR MORE ABOUT THE LINKS BETWEEN MIND/
BODY/SOUL FROM A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE:*

Visit: www.spiritualselfhelp.org

FOR MORE ABOUT JUDAISM AND BRESLEV TEACHINGS:

Visit: www.emunaroma.com

<http://en.shuvubanimint.com/> - Official website of Rabbi Eliezer Berland

<http://www.breslev.co.il/> - Official website of Rabbi Shalom Arush

RECOMMENDED READING

BOOKS ON TALKING TO GOD:

The Garden of Emuna, by Rabbi Shalom Arush.

In Forest Fields: A guide to personal prayer, by Rabbi Shalom Arush.

The How, What and Why of Talking to God, by Rivka Levy

OTHER BOOKS ON THE MIND-BODY-SOUL CONNECTION:

Talk to God and Fix Your Health: The Real Reasons Why We Get Sick and How to Stay Healthy, by Rivka Levy

The Body Keeps the Score: Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD

BOOKS ABOUT JEWISH COSMOLOGY AND THE CREATION OF THE WORLD:

Mysteries of the Creation, by Rabbi Dovid Brown

BOOKS ABOUT REINCARNATION:

Return Again, by Rabbi Avraham Arie Trugman

BOOKS ON REBBE NACHMAN'S TEACHINGS:

The Water Castle, by Reb Noson of Breslov (published by the Breslov Research Institute)

Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom (published by the Breslov Research Institute)

Tzaddik (published by the Breslov Research Institute)

Rabbi Nachman's Stories, translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan
(published by the Breslov Research Institute)

