

Talmud *Harnessing the good within us as well as sublimating potentially negative desires by means of exercising our capacity for free will.*

ברכות דף נד עמוד א

ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך וגו'.  
"בכל לבבך" - בשני יצריך, ביצר טוב וביצר הרע.

חברותא<sup>1</sup> - הערות ברכות דף נד עמוד א הערה

<sup>21</sup><sub>(21)</sub> 1) רבינו יונה ביאר שעבודת יצר הטוב היא לקיים מצוות עשה, ועבודת יצר הרע היא לכבוש את יצרו.

ועוד, שלפעמים יש לו לעבוד את ה' עם היצר הרע ומדותיו, כגון להתאכזר על הרשעים, וראה חזו"א<sup>2</sup> [או"ח נו ד] שניתן לאדם יצר הנקמה, כדי שלא יהא מרחם על הרשעים בבואו למצות עמם את הדין הראוי להם...

2) ובשנות אליהו<sup>3</sup> ביאר שצורך ענייני העוה"ז כאכילה ושתייה, באים מכח יצר הרע שרוצה ליהנות, וכשעושים לשם שמים, נמצא שהוא

Berachot 54a

(Devarim 6:5) "And you will love the LORD, your God with all of your heart..."  
"With all your heart"—with both of your inclinations, the Good Inclination and the Evil Inclination.

Chevruta<sup>7</sup>—Comments on Berachot 54a, #21

1) Rabbeinu Yona explains that the service of the Yetzer HaTor is to fulfill positive Commandments, and the service of the Yetzer HaRa is to suppress his Yetzer (HaTov).

Furthermore, it is his challenge to serve HaShem with his Yetzer HaRa and its attributes, e.g., to be cruel towards evildoers.

See Chazon Ish<sup>8</sup> (Orech Chayim 56:4) that the Yetzer was given to man for the purpose of revenge, so that he would not have compassion on evildoers when he comes to render upon them the judgment that is appropriate to them...

2) And in Shenot Eliyahu<sup>9</sup> he explained that the necessary this worldly actions of eating and drinking come about due to the Evil Inclination that wishes to gain benefit. And when these things are done for the sake of Heaven, he in effect

<sup>1</sup> ביוגרפיה - חברותא

Rabbi Yaakov Shulvitz and Rabbi Yehuda Leib Gartner . A commentary on the entire Talmud Bavli. It was published and distributed as softcover booklets which were sent by subscription in installments over the course of the Daf Ha - Yomi cycle. The booklets were comprised of a section of Gemara, followed by its commentary, which included a simple explanation at the top of the page and a more extensive commentary on the bottom. It was also published as a series of hard cover books in several dozen volumes. The commentary was compiled based on various sources by Rabbi Yaakov Shulvitz of Bnei Brak, who was later joined by Rabbi Yehuda Leib Gertner. (Bar Ilan CD ROM)

<sup>2</sup> **Avrohom Yeshaya Karelitz**, (7 November 1878 – 24 October 1953), popularly known by the name of his magnum opus, **Chazon Ish**, was a Belarusian born Orthodox rabbi who later became one of the leaders of Haredi Judaism in Israel, where his final 20 years, from 1933 to 1953, were spent...

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avrohom\\_Yeshaya\\_Karelitz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avrohom_Yeshaya_Karelitz)

<sup>3</sup> תורתו של רבי אליהו מווילנה הידוע בכינויו הגאון מווילנה התפרסמה דרך כתביו. עם זאת בימי חייו, לא פורסם בכתב דבר מכתביו (זולת החרמות על החסידות). (יחד עם זאת, רשמו תלמידיו מפיו את דברי תורתו והם פורסמו לאחר מותו, מיוחסים לו יותר משבעים חיבורים...

סדר זרעים: שנות אליהו על סדר זרעים, נכתב על ידי תלמידיו. לחלק מהמסכתות יש שתי מהדורות.

<sup>7</sup> See fn. 1.

<sup>8</sup> See fn. 2.

<sup>9</sup> See fn. 3.

<p>עובד את ה' עם יצר הרע, ומקורו מדברי הרמב"ם [דעות ג ב].<sup>4</sup></p> <p><u>הכתב והקבלה</u><sup>5</sup></p> <p>(ה) בכל לבבך. בשני יצריך ביצ"ט ויצה"ר (רש"י מספרי ומתני' דברכות),</p> <p>3) ופי' הרמב"ם ביצר טוב וביצר הרע: שישים האדם אל לבו אהבת הקל, ולהאמין בו ואפי' בשעת העברה והכעס והאף, שכל זה הוא יצה"ר, כמ"ש (משלי ג:ו) "בכל דרכיך דעהו" -- ואפילו בדבר עברה,</p> <p>ול"נ ככוונתם בזה, להיות ששני דרכים בעבודת הש", האחד לעבדו בדרך הישר, והוא בחלק המצות הנקראים "משפטים" שהם מן המושכלות ומפורסמות לרע אצל בני אדם; הנה בחלק זה מן המצות צריכים אנו לסלק ולבטל בנו נטיית היצר אליהם;</p>	<p>serves HaShem with the Evil Inclination, and its source is from the words of RaMBaM, Hilchot De'ot 3:2.<sup>10</sup></p> <p><u>HaKetav VeHaKabbala</u><sup>11</sup> s.v. BeChol Levavcha.</p> <p>With both of your inclinations, the Good Inclination and the Evil Inclination—RaShI, based upon Sifre and Mishna Berachot.)</p> <p>3) And RaMBaM interprets regarding the Good Inclination and the Evil Inclination: A person should place on his heart the love of God and he should believe in Him even when he is committing a transgression, at time of anger, or fury, for all of this is the result of the Evil Inclination, as it is said, (Mishlei 3:6) "In all of your ways know Him"—even within the context of transgression.</p> <p>And it seems to me that their intent regarding this, since there are two paths with respect to the service of God, <u>one</u>, to "worship him 'Yashar'," and this is in terms of the portion of Mitzvot that are known as "Mishpatim," which entails avoiding those things that are logically understood and publicized as evil among people,</p>
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<sup>4</sup> Mishneh Tora, Hilchot De'ot 3:2

A person should direct his heart and the totality of his behavior to one goal, becoming aware of God, blessed be He. The [way] he rests, rises, and speaks should all be directed to this end. For example: when involved in business dealings or while working for a wage, he should not think solely of gathering money. Rather, he should do these things, so that he will be able to obtain that which the body needs - food, drink, a home and a wife. Similarly, when he eats, drinks and engages in intimate relations, he should not intend to do these things solely for pleasure to the point where he will eat and drink only that which is sweet to the palate and engage in intercourse for pleasure. Rather, he should take care to eat and drink only in order to be healthy in body and limb. Therefore, he should not eat all that the palate desires like a dog or a donkey. Rather, he should eat what is beneficial for the body, be it bitter or sweet. Conversely, he should not eat what is harmful to the body, even though it is sweet to the palate. For example: a person with a warm constitution should not eat meat or honey, nor drink wine, as Solomon has stated in a parable: The eating of much honey is not good (Proverbs 25:27). One should drink endive juice, even though it is bitter, for then, he will be eating and drinking for medical reasons only, in order to become healthy and be whole - for a man cannot exist without eating and drinking. Similarly, he should not have intercourse except to keep his body healthy and to preserve the [human] race. Therefore, he should not engage in intercourse whenever he feels desire, but when he knows that he requires a seminal emission for medical reasons or in order to preserve the [human] race.

<sup>5</sup> ביוגרפיה - הכתב והקבלה

Rabbi Yaakov Zvi son of Rabbi Gamliel Mecklenburg was born in Germany, around the year 5545 (1785) . In his youth, he studied under the tutelage of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and later began a career in trade. Not until the 5591 (1831) did he receive his first rabbinic position in Konigsberg, Prussia. He joined forces with the Malbim to combat the growing influence of the Reform movement in his times. To this end he authored a commentary on the Torah, called Ha - Ktav Ve - Ha - Kabbalah. Much like the Malbim's commentary, it describes the connection between the written Torah and the oral tradition of the Sages. It explains how the Sages' interpretation of the Torah is evident from the correct grammatical reading of the Torah. His commentary is based on the writings of the Sages and the earlier commentaries, up to and including the Vilna Gaon. It includes many original insights into the language of the Torah. He also authored a commentary on the siddur, entitled Iyun Tefillah, which was printed in many siddurim alongside a treatise on the halachot of prayer, entitled Derech Chaim, by Rabbi Yaakov Lauberbaum, author of Netivot Ha - Mishpat. He passed away in Konigsberg in 5625 (1865) . His work, Ha - Ktav Ve - Ha - Kabbalah, was first published in 5599 (1839) , and a revised edition was published posthumously in 5640 (1880) by Professor Avraham Berliner. (Bar Ilan CD ROM)

<sup>10</sup> See fn. 4.

<sup>11</sup> See fn. 5.

אמנם בחלק המצות הנקראות "חקים", שהם מן השמעיות, שאלמלא התורה לא היו רעות כלל, בחלק זה מן המצות, יותר טוב לנו לעבוד אותו ית' בדרך ה"כובש", שגניח את נפשותינו אוהבת העברה, ולא תמנענו מלעבור עליהם אלא מצד התורה (כדעת הרמב"ם בששי, משמונה פרקיו לאבות).<sup>6</sup>

behold with respect to this portion of Commandments, we have to remove and cancel out from within us the turning of the Yetzer towards them. However, with respect to the group of Mitzvot known as "Chukim," which are Commandments that need to be revealed (as opposed to logically deduced), that without the Tora, they would not be known at all, with respect to this group of Commandments, it is better to worship God in the manner of "conquest," where we assume that our souls love transgression, and we should not refrain from

<sup>6</sup> RaMBaM, Eight Chapters, Chapter 6

CONCERNING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SAINTLY [OR HIGHLY ETHICAL] MAN AND HIM WHO [SUBDUES HIS PASSIONS AND] HAS SELF-RESTRAINT :

PHILOSOPHERS maintain that though the man of self-restraint performs moral and praiseworthy deeds, yet he does them desiring and craving all the while for immoral deeds, but, subduing his passions and actively fighting against a longing to do those things to which his faculties, his desires, and his psychic disposition excite him, succeeds, though with constant vexation and irritation, in acting morally. The saintly man, however is guided in his actions by that to which his inclination and disposition prompt him, in consequence of which he acts morally from innate longing and desire. Philosophers unanimously agree that the latter is superior to, and more perfect than, the one who has to curb his passions, although they add that it is possible for such a one to equal the saintly man in many regards. In general, however, he must necessarily be ranked lower in the scale of virtue, because there lurks within him the desire to do evil, and, though he does not do it, yet because his inclinations are all in that direction, it denotes the presence of an immoral psychic disposition. Solomon, also, entertained the same idea when he said, "The soul of wicked desireth evil", and, in regard to the saintly man's rejoicing in doing good, and the discontent experienced by him, who is not innately righteous, when required to act justly, he says, "It is bliss to the righteous to do justice, but torment to the evil-doer". This is manifestly an agreement between Scripture and philosophy.

When, however, we consult the Rabbis on this subject, it would seem that they consider him who desires iniquity, and craves for it (but does not do it), more praiseworthy and perfect than the one who feels no torment at refraining from evil; and they even go so far as to maintain that the more praiseworthy and perfect a man is, the greater is his desire to commit iniquity, and the more irritation does he feel at having to desist from it. This they express by saying, "Whosoever is greater than his neighbor has likewise greater evil inclinations". Again, as if this were not sufficient, they even go so far as to say that the reward of him who overcomes his evil inclination is commensurate with the torture occasioned by his resistance, which thought they express by the words, "According to the labor is the reward". Furthermore, they command that man should conquer his desires, but they forbid one to say, "I, by my nature, do not desire to commit such and such a transgression, even though the Law does not forbid it". Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel summed up this thought in the words, (Sifra to Lev. XX, 26, and Midrash Yalkut to Wayikra, 226) "Man should not say, 'I do not want to eat meat together with milk; I do not want to wear clothes made of a mixture of wool and linen; I do not want to enter into marriage', but he should say, 'I do indeed want to, yet I must not, for my Father in Heaven has forbidden it'".

At first blush, by a superficial comparison of the sayings of the philosophers and the Rabbis, one might be inclined to say that they contradict one another. Such, however, is not the case. Both are correct and, moreover, are not in disagreement in the least, as the evils which the philosophers term such and of which they say that he who has no longing for them is more to be praised than he who desires them but conquers his passion are things which all people commonly agree evils, such as the shedding of blood, theft, robbery, fraud, injury to one who has done no harm, ingratitude, contempt for parents, and the like. The prescriptions against these are called commandments, about which the Rabbis said, "If they had not already been written in the Law, it would be proper to add them". Some of our later sages, who were infected with the unsound principles of the Mutakallimun, called these rational laws. There is no doubt that a soul which has the desire for, and lusts after, the above-mentioned misdeeds, is imperfect, that a noble soul has absolutely no desire for any such crimes, and experiences no struggle in refraining from them. When, however, the Rabbis maintain that he who overcomes his desire has more merit and a greater reward (than he who has no temptation), they say so only in reference to laws that are ceremonial

הנה בדרך זה יקיים האדם את המשפטים ביצ"ט,  
אחר שהשתדל לסלק ולבטל ממנו כל נטיות  
יצרו הרע אשר בקרבו לעבור,

אמנם החקים יקיים תמיד ביצה"ר, להניח יצרו  
מתחזק ומתקרב קרב נפשו,  
אלא שמצד אהבת ה', ילחום נגד נטיות יצרו הרע  
ויתגבר ללחום נגדו,  
אזוהו אמרם "ואהבת את ה"א" בשני יצריך, ביצ"ט  
ירצה בחלק המשפטים, וביצה"ר ירצה בחלק  
החוקים.

אמנם אין דעת הרמב"ם בזה מוסכמת, ויש לה  
מתנגדים האומרים שכל חלקי המצוות, בין  
בחקים בין במשפטים, יותר מעולה "הישר" מן  
"הכובש", עד שגם בחקים שיצר הרע משיב  
אליהן לפי שהם מתנגדי הטבע ומרוחקי שכל  
האנושי, יותר משובח שיתעלה האדם למדרגת  
ישר, עד שיקיימם בלתי תאוה כלל, ולבו  
המתאוה יהיה כחלל וכמת בקרבו,  
הנה בזה הדרך יהפוך טבעו הראשון שהיא נטויה  
לרוע לעבור על החוקים עד שיהיה נטוע בו  
טבע שניי' כולו לטוב,  
ובזה יאהוב אותו גם ביצר הרע,  
אזוהו "ואהבת את ה"א" -- גם ביצה"ר;  
ואהבת ה' ביצ"ט, הוא במשפטים שלא יקיימם  
מצד שהן מושכלות כ"א מצד שהן מצוות  
אלקיות; והוא יסוד גדול בעבודת ה',

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transgressing them for any other reason than the Tora prohibits it (like RaMBaM's view in the sixth of his eight chapters re Pirkei Avot).<sup>12</sup>

In this manner, a person can fulfill "Mishpatim" with his Good Inclination, once he strives to remove and to cancel from himself all of the tendencies of his Evil Inclination to transgress.

However, the "Chukim" will always be the focus of the Evil Inclination, and this inclination will ever strengthen itself and become more evident within his soul. But from the perspective of love of God, he will fight against the inclination of his Evil Inclination and be victorious over it.

And this is what they mean "And you will love the LORD, your God" with both of your Inclinations, with the Good Inclination that desires to carry out the "Mishpatim," and the Evil Inclination that is desirous of the "Chukim."

However, not everyone agrees with RaMBaM about this point. There are scholars who disagree who say that with regard to all of the Commandments, whether "Chukim" or "Mishpatim," the "Yashar" approach is better than the "Koveish" approach. Even with respect to "Chukim," the Evil Inclination argues against them because they run counter to nature and distant from human understanding. It is better for a person to rise to the level of "Yashar," until he reaches the point of not having any negative desire at all, and his desirous heart will become like a space and something dead within him.

Behold, in this way, his first nature which tended towards transgression and sinning against "Chukim," will change to the point where its second nature will only be for good.

And in this manner, he will love Him also with his Evil Inclination.

And this is "And you will love the LORD, your God"—even with the Evil Inclination, "And you will love HaShem"—with the Good Inclination, this is via "Mishpatim," where he does not fulfill them because they are the Commandments of God, and this is a fundamental principle in the service of HaShem...

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prohibitions. This is quite true, since, were it not for the Law, they would not at all be considered transgressions. Therefore, the Rabbis say that man should permit his soul to entertain the natural inclination for these things, but that the Law alone should restrain him from them. Ponder over the wisdom of these men of blessed memory manifest in the examples they adduce. They do not declare, "Man should not say, 'I have no desire to kill, to steal and to lie, but I have a desire for these things, yet what can I do, since my Father in heaven forbids it!'" The instances they cite are all from the ceremonial law, such as partaking of meat and milk together, wearing clothes made of wool and linen, and entering into consanguinuous marriages. These, and similar enactments are what God called "My Statutes", which, as the Rabbis say are "Statutes which I (God) have Enacted for thee, which thou hast no right to subject to criticism, which the nations of the world attack and which Satan denounces, as for instance, the statutes concerning the red heifer, the scapegoat, and so forth". Those transgressions, however, which the later Sages called rational laws are termed commandments, as the Rabbis explained.

It is now evident from all that we have said, what the transgressions are for which, if a man have no desire at all, he is on a higher plane than he who has a longing, but controls his passion for them; and it is also evident what the transgressions are of which the opposite is true. It is an astonishing fact that these two classes of expressions should be shown to be compatible with one another, but their content points to the truth of our explanation. [http://www.archive.org/stream/eightchaptersofm00maim/eightchaptersofm00maim\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/eightchaptersofm00maim/eightchaptersofm00maim_djvu.txt)

<sup>12</sup> See fn. 6.

4<sup>(כא)</sup> נראה טעם הדרשה מן "בכל לבבך" הוא ע"פ מש"כ בס"פ שלח דכ"מ דהשם "לב" בא בשני בית"ן, בא לדרוש כפילת השם, יעו"ש.

4<sup>21)</sup> It seems that the understanding of the interpretation of "BeChol LeVavcha" is in accordance with what was said at the end of Parashat Shelach, that wherever the noun "Lev" (heart) appears with two "Beit's" (לבבך), it is in order to indicate that the doubling (of the consonant) in the noun is to be interpreted (beyond the simple literal meaning.) Look into it.

אך לא נתבאר מה ענין האהבה בשני יצריך ביצ"ט וביצה"ר, ואפשר לומר "לעבדו" בקיום מצות עשין ובמניעת עשיית הל"ת, ומכנה את המ"ע בשם יצר טוב ע"ש הכתוב (תהילים לד:טו) "עשה טוב" ואת המניעה ממצות ל"ת בשם עבודה ביצה"ר ע"ש הכתוב (שם) "סור מרע":

Nevertheless it is not clear what it meant to "love" utilizing both of one's Inclinations, i.e., the Yetzer Tov and the Yetzer HaRa. And it is possible to say that "LeAvdo" is associated with fulfilling positive Commandments inspired by the Good Inclination, in accordance with the verse, (Tehillim 34:15) "Do good." And the avoidance of transgressing negative Commandments is inspired by the Evil Inclination, in accordance with the verse, (Ibid.) "Turn away from evil."

Questions for thought and discussion:

1. The Rabbinic interpretation of "BeChol Levavcha," i.e., that one should serve HaShem with both his Yetzer Tov, and, counter-intuitively, also his Yetzer HaRa is explained four different ways in the interpretations cited above. What are those interpretations and how would you group them?
2. Shenot Eliyahu appears to apply the general mandate of sanctifying that which inherently is not holy but "neutral" to one's everyday activities. But isn't attributing their impetus to the "Yetzer HaRa" looking upon the necessities of life negatively and inappropriately advancing an ascetic perspective? While overemphasizing such activities might be considered evil, are they evil by their very nature, assuming that they are pursued in moderation?
3. The two views cited in HaKetav VeHaKabbala's explanation of RaMBaM, instead of concentrating upon the necessities of life, discusses one's attitude towards the fulfillment of various types of Mitzvot. The second view promotes the ideal of reaching a level where one no longer feels tempted not only to transgress logical Commandments, but even the ones that appear to be purely ritualistic. This would appear to be a very elitist perspective given the rarity that such a level of personal conduct could be achieved. Is it appropriate to set as a goal an extremely difficult level of achievement in light of the inevitability of the vast majority of individuals finding themselves unable to achieve it? Discuss.

Practical applications of the sources:

1. While the dialectical approach of positing that every individual has within him/her a Good and an Evil inclination was developed even by the likes of Sigmund Freud when he posited that the ego was the result of a conflict between the id and the superego, do you feel such a struggle within yourself? Is it possible to describe your religious strivings in terms of some alternate model?