

Sparks

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Sick Minds, Sick Bodies *The power of our beliefs to heal or harm*

The Jewish Sages gave a spiritual rather than physiological explanation for the disease *tsara'as* (generally translated as "leprosy") which affected not only the body but also clothing and the walls of houses. According to one source several sins could possibly be the cause:

R. Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Yochanan: Because of seven things the plague of leprosy is incurred, namely, slander, the shedding of blood, a vain oath, incest, arrogance, robbery and envy. (Arakhin 16a)

However, most Sages concur that the main cause for *tsara'as* was slander and gossip.

HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE PHYSICAL IMPACT OF OUR MORAL AND SPIRITUAL ACTIONS?

The Kabbalah teaches that the world you and I live in is a product of our perception of reality. The philosopher Immanuel Kant probed this concept. He asked: Do we see reality or do we see our perception of reality? Kant's answer is that we do not see reality, but only our perception of reality. In other words, is this world reality? No, this world is your perception of reality. Therefore, the focus and clarity of your consciousness will determine the kind of world you live in.

This is expressed in the Kabbalistic Classic, the Zohar's, commentary on the story of Jacob as he's going to Egypt to be reunited with his long-lost son Joseph. Jacob has misgivings about leaving the land of Israel, even to see his beloved son. G-d appears to Jacob and says, "Jacob, don't worry. Joseph will close your eyes." The Zohar queries, what does this mean? According to Torah, when a person passes away, someone must close the eyes of the deceased. The Zohar explains that the colors and textures and shapes of this world exist in your eyes. In order to enter a new world, a higher world, after death, the soul must first leave this world. This world exists *in one's eyes*, so the eyes must be closed in order to take leave of this world and see a higher world. G-d is announcing to Jacob that he is going to die in Egypt and Joseph will be there to close his eyes to this world, so that he will be able to enter, i.e. see, the next world.

Is the Zohar saying that this world is an illusion? No. The Zohar is saying that this world is your subjective perception. Your consciousness of reality determines the world you're in. Your consciousness of G-d determines how much of the light and the truth of G-d will be allowed into your world. To the extent that you acknowledge G-d, to that extent G-d will be in your life. This is a very crucial idea. Although G-d is, G-d is not revealed in your perceptual world unless you actively acknowledge and invite G-d in.

Each one of us has a choice. You can believe that this world is filled with the presence of G-d who cares about it and guides it. Or you can believe that this world is one big accident, a chaotic mess. The choice

is yours. But remember what you believe is ultimately what you will see and experience. What you believe creates the world you live in.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

How would I act if I really believed that G-d's presence filled my life, my home, my office, my city, my world? How would I speak to my wife and kids? How would I treat the stranger? To the extent that I think, speak, and act in accordance with this heightened awareness, to that extent, G-d can be present in my world. It's not just a matter of believing and saying so. We have to acknowledge G-d's presence in the world constantly, by how we conduct our relationships, how we speak to and about others, how we eat our lunch, how we do virtually everything. Spirituality without a daily discipline is just a hobby.

It is not only through a collection of very deep ideas that I build consciousness of G-d. I need a daily concrete way to walk the talk. The so-called "good- deeds" and "rituals" of Torah tradition are designed to be building blocks to nurture and concretize consciousness all day long, so that I can channel G-d's presence into the world and into my life.

By increasing my consciousness of G-d, I thereby allow the light of G-d and all the gifts of spiritual wealth to pour into the world. Few realize the true goodness in deeds and the real richness in rituals. They are really invitations to G-d. What we are saying in both words and actions is, "G-d, I want to get You into my life!"

When I reach into my pocket and give charity to the beggar on the street, when I smile at the person next to me in the supermarket line, when I extend myself to help my neighbor unload heavy packages, when I spend quality time with my kids by reading with them, I am inviting G-d into my world. All these good deeds actually become invitations to bring the Divine into our world.

EXILING G-D

I have choice. I can nourish the consciousness of G-d through my speech, thoughts and actions. Or I can neglect it. I could choose to filter out the divine qualities from my awareness, and thus live in a godless world. Kabbalah refers to that state as "the exile of G-d's presence." In other words, I can throw G-d out of the world.

An amazing verse in Psalm 119 says, "I am a stranger on earth." According to some commentaries, the "I" refers to G-d, who considers Himself present in this world, but unrecognizable by anyone. In another astounding verse, we are told, "You are my witnesses. I am G-d." The Midrash comments, "If you are my witnesses, I am G-d. But if you are not my witnesses, I am not G-d." What does that mean? It's an unbelievable idea. G-d depends upon our acknowledgement in word and deed in order to enter into our world. For G-d to appear in our world we must be G-d's witness. G-d, so to speak, depends on our consciousness in order to enter into our world.

Without our consciousness, the light of G-d cannot illuminate our world, so we will find ourselves in a frightening darkness. That darkness which results from the absence of G-d's light creates the space for evil and disease.

I am always amazed when I take off in an airplane, on a dark gloomy cloudy day, how bright it actually is once we get passed the clouds. I always try to remind myself during dark times in my life that the light is actually still shining. I just need to pierce the clouds and let the sunshine in. The darkness comes only because something is blocking the light.

We can block G-d's light from the world by creating cloudy consciousness through our thoughts, speech and actions. If we close our eyes to seeing G-d, we'll create a dark world which is seemingly governed by chaotic and destructive forces.

The Kabbalah says that you and I have the dimmer switch in our hands. We can either turn the light of G-d up, creating a whole and radiant world filled with health and joy, imbued with the presence of G-d, or we can turn the dimmer down, creating a dark, gloomy, ugly, Godless world. Our consciousness, which is nurtured by our thoughts, speech, and actions, becomes the vessel to receive the divine presence and the vehicle to transmit the divine blessings into our daily lives.

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