חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

LUBLIN · PERI TZADIK, CHAYEI SARA

Growing in Torah moves from merely seeing to truly possessing it

Peri Tzadik

The five progressive levels of the soul—nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, and yechidah—mirror a person's gradual growth in Torah, from the soul's first preserving the body at conception, through merely "seeing" Torah without fully possessing it, to finally attaining Torah as true kinyan (possession) that purifies and endures forever. This culminating stage, where wisdom becomes fixed and permanent within a person, is what Scripture means by Avraham being "zaken, ba bayamim" (old, come into days)—having fully acquired chochmah (wisdom) so that its light is openly manifest and lasting. AI SUMMARY

In Midrash Tanchuma on "And Avraham was old" [it cites] the verse, "Bless, O my soul..." (Psalms 103:1) — what did David see, that he blessed the Holy One, blessed be He, by means of the nefesh (soul)? Because the nefesh sees but is not seen, etc.; the nefesh preserves the body, etc. He enumerated two things there. And in the Gemara (Berachot 10a) he enumerated five [things about] "Bless, O my soul," corresponding to the neshamah (soul); and there he enumerated five things, see there.

These correspond to the five levels within the soul (which are enumerated in Bereishit Rabbah, chapter 14): nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, yechidah. And these correspond to the four letters of the Name Havayah together with the tip (kotz) of the yud, which alludes to the Keter Elyon (Supreme Crown). Nefesh [corresponds] to the final heh, Malchut; ruach to the Tiferet, the vav of the Holy Name; neshamah to the upper heh. And "neshamah of the neshamah" contains within it two further levels: chayah from the yud of Chochmah (Wisdom), and yechidah from the tip of the yud that rises above, which alludes to the Keter.

In the verse it is written, "Bless, O my soul" — and so too the wording in Midrash Tanchuma is "that the nefesh," etc.; while in the Gemara the wording is "corresponding to the neshamah," etc., "so too the neshamah," etc. This is just as, within the ten sefirot, each attribute contains within itself all ten sefirot — so too within the soul, in each of its levels one finds all five levels: nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, yechidah.

And he enumerated in the Gemara, "so too the neshamah fills the entire body," while in the Midrash it says, "the nefesh preserves the body" — and these are one and the same. This is just as it is said of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the Gemara, that He fills the entire world, and in the Midrash, that the Holy One, blessed be He, preserves the entire world — for these are one and the same. So too, when the nefesh fills the entire body, it preserves the entire body. And this begins immediately when the body is created, even though it has no understanding at all to grasp matters of Torah. The neshamah is placed within a person from the time of conception, as is said (Sanhedrin 91b), and it preserves the entire body.

Afterward, when a person merits to grasp something of Torah, nevertheless at first he merits only sight (re'iyah), not possession (kinyan) — in the manner explained elsewhere regarding what is said, "a maidservant saw at the sea," etc. And so it says, "so

too the neshamah sees but is not seen" — meaning that the neshamah merits sight in matters of Torah, but it is not seen, [that is,] it is not apparent that the body too has attained [anything] from the Torah teachings. That is to say, [it is not yet apparent] that one will merit Torah teachings by possession, that they should be fixed within the body as well. Afterward, when one becomes thirteen years old and merits the neshamah, then one merits that the neshamah has brought merit to the entire body, so that it attains life from the words of Torah which enter into the heart — "He will open understanding through His Torah."

Afterward he enumerated, "so too the neshamah is pure." This is because, just as at the time of the giving of the Torah it is written, "I said, you are angels" (Psalms 82:6), for the yetzer hara (evil inclination) was uprooted from their hearts, yet afterward the yetzer hara returned to its place — so too, even after one merits that the neshamah has brought merit to the body so that it attains life from Torah teachings, nevertheless a person's yetzer grows stronger every day and renews itself every day. Afterward one merits, "so too the neshamah is pure" — that it remains pure, standing forever, that it should not be spoiled, so that the power of the yetzer hara is nullified. Yet, even so, the yetzer hara does not depart entirely, as it will in the future, when the Holy One, blessed be He, will slaughter the yetzer hara, as is said (Sukkah 52a).

He then enumerated, "just as the Holy One, blessed be He, dwells in the innermost chambers (chadrei chadarim), so too the neshamah dwells in the innermost chambers." Chadrei chadarim: the chamber (cheder) of the yud alludes to the yud of Chochmah, which is included together with the tip of the yud alluding to the Keter. This corresponds to the saying "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3), which corresponds to Chochmah together with the light that was hidden away. Chadarim [can be read as] cheder yud mem — meaning that the yud is sealed by means of a closed mem, indicating that it should never again go forth into the world. (Compare what is said in Zohar III, 236b: "the closed mem is the Supreme King, Binah," see there.)

This means that one merits the attribute of "old" (zaken) — "this one has acquired chochmah (wisdom)," as is said (Kiddushin 32b) — meaning that one has merited chochmah by actual possession (kinyan), so that the light becomes explicit to the eye, able to be pointed to with the finger. Then one merits "coming into days" (ba bayamim), into the supernal days, to become refined in all the attributes down to the root, and to endure forever — and this is cheder yud mem. And this is what is meant by "And Avraham was old, [he] came into days."

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)