

בלע המות לנצח

בִּלְעַת הַמּוֹת לְנֶצַח, וּמָחָה אֲדֹנֵי אֱלֹקִים דְּמָעָה מֵעַל כָּל פָּנִים (ישעיה כה, ח)

"He will swallow up death forever, and the L-rd G-d will wipe away tears from every face"

רבי מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן, Lubavitcher Rebbe, A maamar of the

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תשמ"ח

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The Tree of Knowledge, the Mingling of Good and Evil, and Why Death Entered the World

בלע המות לנצח ומחה אלקים דמעה מעל כל פנים¹,
ומבאר אדמו"ר מהר"ש במאמרו ד"ה זה², דזה שלע"ל
יהי' בלע המות לנצח הוא לפי שאז יהי' ואת רוח הטומאה
אעביר מן הארץ³. ויובן זה בהקדים הטעם דהמבואר
בקרא (דלקמן) שע"י חטא עה"ד נעשה בעולם מיתה,
וחטא עה"ד ומיתה עה"ד שייכים זה לזה.

והענין הוא, דע"י חטא עה"ד נעשה תערובות טוב ורע.
דמציאות הרע הי' גם קודם החטא, אלא שאז הי' הרע
מובדל מהטוב, וכידוע^{4,5} שבתחלת הבריאה הי' מדור
הקליפות למטה מהעולמות דקדושה (בכל העולמות⁶),
ועי"ז חטא עה"ד נעשה תערובות טוב ורע, שהרע מעורב
בהטוב והטוב בהרע, ועד אשר אין רע בלא טוב ואין טוב
בלא רע.

"He will swallow up death forever, and G-d will wipe away tears from every face" (Isaiah 25:8). The Rebbe Maharash, in his own maamar on this verse, explains that death being swallowed up forever in the Future will come about because at that time, "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the land" (Zechariah 13:2) — the two verses describe a single event. To understand why the elimination of impurity is what ends death, we first need the reason (spelled out further in the verses discussed below) that death entered the world through the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The sin and death are intrinsically linked to one another — not merely a punishment attached to a crime, but a genuine cause and effect.

The point is this: *the sin of the Tree mixed together good and evil*. Evil existed even before the sin — but it was separate from good, occupying its own rung ("the realm of the kelipos") entirely below the realms of holiness. Through the sin, that separation collapsed throughout all the worlds: good became mixed into evil and evil into good, to the point that today there is no evil entirely without some good in it, and no good entirely without some admixture of evil.

SIDEBAR — Kelipah, and why the mixture matters

Before Adam's sin, Kabbalistic cosmology places the קליפות (husks/shells of impurity) on their own rung, structurally below — and separate from — the worlds of holiness. Nothing was wrong with the world being layered this way; separation is itself a kind of order. The sin's damage was specifically the *mixing*: good and evil became interwoven inside the same object, the same food, the same human impulse. This is why the Torah's account of forbidden fruit isn't really about a magical poison — it's about the collapse of a boundary. Everything afterward — the need for *birurim* (sifting/refining good from evil), the entire project of avodah, and (as this maamar argues) death itself — follows from that one structural change.

וזהו מ"ש⁷ ועתה פן ישלח ידו ולקח גם מעץ החיים ואכל
וחי לעולם, דלכאורה, הרי בריאת האדם היתה באופן
שיהי' (מלכתחילה) לעולם, והטעם על זה שנגזרה עליו
שלא יאכל מעה"ד בכדי שלא יומת (ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע
לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות), ומה
איכפת שיאכל מעה"ד ויהי' חי לעולם.

ומבאר אדמו"ר הזקן⁸, דמכיון שע"י חטא עה"ד נתערב רע
בהאדם, לכן, ועתה (לאחרי חטא עה"ד) יש לחשוש פן
ישלח ידו וחי לעולם, כי כשיהי' הוא חי לעולם, גם הרע

This is the meaning of the verse, "And now, lest he put forth his hand and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). On the surface this is puzzling: Adam was originally created to live forever — that was the plan from the start! The only new decree was that he not eat from the Tree of Knowledge, on pain of death ("of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die"). So once he had eaten — what would it actually cost G-d to let him also eat from the Tree of Life and live forever anyway?

The Alter Rebbe explains: precisely *because* the sin had mixed evil into the human being, G-d now had reason to worry about the man eating from the Tree of Life and living forever — because if he lived forever, the evil now mixed into him would *also* gain permanent existence. On this basis we can say:

death entering the world through the sin of the Tree was specifically so that this now-mixed-in evil would not become permanent.

We can go a step further: physical death isn't merely a decreed *consequence* of the sin — it is *caused* by the sin, directly. Here's the mechanism: real life — *chiyus* — exists only in holiness. Evil and impurity, being the opposite of holiness, are themselves synonymous with death, in a spiritual sense. So once the sin mixed evil into the human being, spiritual death (death of the soul's connection to G-dliness) was automatically drawn into him — and physical death followed from that as its natural extension. This is why, in the Future, when spiritual evil is finally eliminated, physical death will automatically be swallowed up along with it — the two were never really two separate problems.

המעורב בו יהי' לו קיום לעולם. ועפ"ז יש לומר, דזה שע"י חטא עה"ד נעשה מיתה בעולם הוא בכדי שלא יהי' קיום להרע כנ"ל.

ויש לומר, דהמיתה בעולם שנעשתה ע"י חטא עה"ד היא מסובבת מהחטא עצמו. והענין הוא, דענין החיות הוא בקדושה דוקא, משא"כ הרע והטומאה (היפך הקדושה) הם מות^{9,10,11}, ולכן, מכיון שע"י חטא עה"ד נתערב רע בהאדם, מזה נשתלשל בו גם מיתה כפשוטו, דמכיון שאז יתבטל הרע הרוחני, ע"י זה יהי' במילא גם בלע המות כפשוטו.

Marginal citations, ¶1–11 (summarized): Isaiah 25:8 (1); the Rebbe Maharash's maamar of the same title, printed 5637 with additions (2); Zechariah 13:2 (3); Bereishis Rabbah and parallel Chassidic sources on the primordial separateness of the kelipos (4–5, 8); a note on this holding true "in all the worlds" (6); Genesis 3:22 (7); the Alter Rebbe's explanation as found in Chassidic manuscript sources on this verse (8); further Tanya and Iggeres HaTeshuvah citations on kedushah/chiyus vs. sitra achra/mavet (9–11).

2 Why Only the Future Redemption Ends Death — the Precedent, and the Limit, of Shlomo's Reign

Why is it specifically the Future Redemption — not any earlier moment in history — that will finally end death? Because only then will there be a revelation of G-dly light so lofty that, relative to it, all opposition simply dissolves on its own. The maamar notes that a real precedent exists: even while the Beis HaMikdash stood — especially the First Temple, and above all in the days of King Solomon, when (in the classic phrase) "the moon was in its fullness" — there was already a revelation of very lofty light. Because of that revelation, all the nations became nullified before Solomon so completely that there was no war at all — which is why his name, Shlomo, comes from *shalom*, peace.

והנה הטעם על זה שדוקא לע"ל יתבטל הרע ובמילא גם המות כפשוטו, הוא, כי אז יהי' גילוי אור נעלה ביותר, שלגבי אור זה, מתבטלים במילא כל המנגדים. ומבאר במאמר, דהגם שגם בזמן שביהמ"ק הי' קיים, ובפרט בזמן בית ראשון, ועאכו"כ בימי שלמה דקיימא סיהרא באשלמותא¹⁴, הי' גילוי אור נעלה ביותר, ומצד גילוי זה, כל הגוים נתבטלו לפניו שלא הי' עי"ז מלחמה כלל¹⁵ [שלכן נקרא בשם שלום].

SIDEBAR — "Kiy'ma Sihara b'Ashlemusa": the moon in its fullness

is a phrase from the Zohar describing King Solomon's reign as the historical high-water mark for the moon — the kabbalistic symbol for *Malchus*/Kingship/the feminine, receiving principle — being at its fullest, most complete illumination. It is the go-to source whenever Chassidus wants to describe a past era that already tasted, in real historical time, a piece of what the Future Redemption will be in full. This maamar's whole argument turns on the fact that Solomon's era is a genuine *precedent* for the End of Days — and precisely by seeing where that precedent still fell short, we learn what the actual Redemption will add.

And yet — the revelation of Solomon's day, for all its greatness, still left *some* room for "the outside forces" (the kelipos) to draw sustenance from holiness; only, that nursing was limited to the "hindmost," most external aspect of holiness, not its inner core. This lingering opening, the maamar argues, is visible precisely in the quality of the nullification the nations underwent before Solomon.

מ"מ, הגילוי שהי' בימיו הי' באופן שעדיין הי' נותן מקום ליניקת החיצונים, אלא שהיתה יניקתם רק מהבחי' אחוריים דקדושה, ולא מבחי' פנימיות. ויש לומר, דזה שביהמ"ק עדיין הי' נותן מקום ליניקת החיצונים, ניכר גם באופן הביטול שנתבטלו לפניו.

וכמו מלכת שבא, דעם היות שגם בהיותה בארצה ורק ששמעה שמעה נעשה בה ביטול (קצת), שמצד זה באה אל שלמה, ובפרט לאחר שבאה אליו וראתה את חכמתו וכו' שעי"ז נתבטלה לפניו באופן שלא היה בה עוד רוח¹⁹, מ"מ, גם אז היתה מלכה, ויתירה מזו, שגם שלמה כיבד אותה בכבוד גדול²¹.

משא"כ הגילוי דלע"ל יהי' באופן שלא תהי' יניקה לחיצונים כלל (גם לא מבחי' אחוריים), ויתבטל הרע לגמרי, בלע המות לנצח.

Take the Queen of Sheba as the illustration: while still in her own country, merely *hearing* of Solomon already produced some measure of nullification in her — enough that she travelled to see him. And once she arrived and witnessed his wisdom firsthand, the nullification deepened further, to the point (in the Midrashic phrase) that "there was no more spirit left in her." Even so — she remained a queen the entire time. More than that: Solomon himself honored her with great respect. Her selfhood, her "outside" standing, was never actually erased — only overwhelmed.

The revelation of the Future, by contrast, will be of a completely different order: it will leave *no* opening at all for the outside forces to draw from — not even from the hindmost aspect — and evil will be nullified entirely, root and branch. That total elimination is what "He will swallow up death forever" actually means.

Marginal citations, ¶14–21 (summarized): Zohar sources on באשלמותא in Solomon's days (14); Midrashic sources on the nations' submission to Solomon without war (15); the account of the Queen of Sheba, I Kings 10 and Midrashic amplifications on her loss of composure before Solomon's wisdom (17–19) and Solomon's honoring her in turn (21).

ג The Deeper Parallel: Sur Meira vs. Mo'eis BaRa — Turning From Evil, or Utterly Detesting It

וביאור החילוק בין הגילוי שהי' בימי שלמה שזה עדיין הי' נותן מקום ליניקת החיצונים, מבחי' אחוריים עכ"פ, להגילוי דלע"ל (שמצד גילוי זה לא יהי' להם יניקה כלל), מבאר במאמר, שהוא ע"ד החילוק בעבודת האדם, בין העבודה דסוד מרע, דמואס ברע אבל אינו שונא את הרע בעצם, ובמילא, אף שבפועל הוא מבטל את הרע, נשאר אצלו עדיין נתינת מקום להרע, ועד שבהעלם יש לו איזה שמץ אהבה לרע, כמבואר בתניא²³ בדרגת צדיק שאינו גמור.

What actually explains the gap between Solomon's revelation (which still allowed the outside forces some hindmost nourishment) and the Future's revelation (which will allow them none at all)? The maamar draws the parallel to two grades of personal *avodah*, spelled out in Tanya: the service of "turning from evil" (*sur mei'ra*) — in which a person is repelled by evil and rejects it, but does not, at root, hate evil itself. In practice he does suppress it — but some residual "opening" for evil remains in him; on some hidden level, the Tanya says, he retains a faint trace of attraction to it. This is the level called the "imperfect tzaddik," *tzaddik she'eino gamur*.

SIDEBAR — Sur mei'ra ve'aseh tov vs. mo'eis bara: the two tzaddik-grades

Tanya (ch. 10–15 area) distinguishes several rungs of relationship to evil. The beinoni only ever manages *sur mei'ra* — suppressing evil in deed and speech, while some spark of it still stirs, unrealized, in the heart. A *tzaddik she'eino gamur* (imperfect tzaddik) has actually transformed evil in his emotional life too — he feels genuine revulsion, not mere restraint — but the Alter Rebbe still describes a residual "shemetz" (faint trace) that can theoretically be stirred. Only the *tzaddik gamur* (perfect/complete tzaddik) has converted the evil so completely that no trace, no "opening," remains at all: he doesn't merely refrain from evil, he actively *hates* it (ביתכילית) with total revulsion. This maamar borrows that exact ladder to explain the difference between a redemption that still leaves the kelipos some "hindmost" foothold, and one that leaves them none.

משא"כ כשהוא מואס ברע בתכלית (דרגת צדיק גמור), אין אצלו שום נתינת מקום לרע, שהרי אדרבא, הוא שונא

By contrast, someone who detests evil to the utmost (*mo'eis bara*, the level of the "complete tzaddik") gives evil no opening whatsoever — because he doesn't merely avoid it, he actively hates and despises it with total revulsion. The same

את הרע ומואס בו בתכלית השנאה והמאוס. ועד"ז הוא החילוק בין הגילוי שהי' בימי שלמה — דעם היות שגם לגבי גילוי זה מתבטלים כל המנגדים (בדוגמת העבודה דסור מרע), עדיין נשארת בו נתינת מקום ליניקת החיצונים מבחי' אחוריים — להגילוי דלע"ל, שהי' בדוגמת העבודה דמואס ברע בתכלית, דרגת צדיק גמור, שאז אין שום נתינת מקום לרע כלל.

distinction maps directly onto our two revelations: Solomon's era, for all that it nullified every opponent, did so on the model of "turning from evil" — and so it still left the outside forces a hindmost foothold. The Future's revelation will operate on the model of "utterly detesting evil," the level of the complete tzaddik — at which point there is no opening left for evil at all.

Marginal citation, §23: Tanya, on the grades of tzaddik and beinoni and the residual "shemetz" of attraction to evil that can remain even at the level of tzaddik she'eino gamur.

7 It Depends on Us: Sinah Gemurah in Avodah Brings the Final Revelation

והנה ידוע שכל הגילויים דלע"ל תלויים במעשינו ועבודתנו עכשיו²⁴. ומזה מובן, דזה שלע"ל יהי' גילוי שאינו נותן מקום ליניקת החיצונים כלל (בלע המות לנצח), תלוי בזה שישראל, בעבודתם עכשיו, שונאים את הרע בתכלית השנאה (עד"ז שנתבאר בהעבודה דמואס ברע, דרגת צדיק גמור).

It is a foundational principle that every future revelation depends on our deeds and our service *now*. From this it follows that the very possibility of a revelation that leaves the outside forces no foothold at all — "swallowing up death forever" — depends on Jews, in their service right now, hating evil with the total revulsion described above as *mo'eis bara*, the complete tzaddik's stance.

ומכיון שדרגת מואס ברע בתכלית, דרגת צדיק גמור, אינה מצויה אלא במועטים, ואפילו בנוגע לדרגת הבינוני ידוע הפתגם, הלואי²⁷ — יש לומר, דזה שלע"ל יהי' בכל ישראל בלע המות לנצח, אינו תלוי בזה שכא"א יגיע לדרגת צדיק גמור ממש, אלא, שבכא"א מישראל ישנם זמנים מיוחדים — בשעת התפלה, או בשעת עסק התורה, או בשעה שמקיים מצוה בהתלהבות, ואפילו בשעה שעוסק בדברי הרשות לשם שמים — שבשעה זו מוסר את כל מציאותו לאלקות, ואינו שייך אז לבגדים הצואים, כמו צדיק גמור.

Now, since the level of "detesting evil to the utmost" — the complete tzaddik's level — is inherently rare, and even reaching the middling level of a *beinoni* is (in the well-known saying) something one can only wish for — we must say that the universal, world-wide "swallowing up of death forever" does not require every single Jew to permanently attain the literal rank of complete tzaddik. Rather: every Jew has certain special moments — in the midst of prayer, in the midst of Torah study, in the fervor of fulfilling a mitzvah, or even (see sidebar) while engaged in a permitted, mundane activity done for the sake of Heaven — in which he hands over his *entire* being to G-dliness. In that moment, he is, functionally, not susceptible to "the soiled garments" (evil's grip) at all — exactly like a complete tzaddik.

SIDEBAR — "Devarim shel reshut l'shem Shamayim" and "b'chol derachecha da'eihu"

(permitted/mundane matters") are the ordinary, non-obligatory activities of daily life — eating, business, rest — as distinct from Torah and mitzvos. Chassidus, following the verse "בכל דרכיך דעהו" — "know Him in all your ways" (Proverbs 3:6) — teaches that even these can become a vehicle for total self-transcendence when done consciously "for the sake of Heaven": not merely permitted, but actively transformed into service. This maamar leans on that idea to explain how an ordinary person, not only rare tzaddikim, can taste — even if only in flashes — the very same total self-nullification that defines a "complete tzaddik," and thereby contribute their share toward the final elimination of death.

ומכיון שיחוד זה הוא למעלה נצח, נמשך עי"ז הגילוי שאינו נותן כלל מקום ליניקת החיצונים, בלע המות לנצח.

And because that bond forged Above in such a moment is itself eternal, it draws down, in kind, the revelation that leaves the outside forces absolutely no foothold — "He will swallow up death forever."

Marginal citations, ¶24, 27 (summarized): the general Chassidic principle that future revelations are drawn down through present avodah; the well-known saying regarding the rarity of even reaching the level of beinoni.

ה Why Death Persisted Even in the Days of the Beis HaMikdash — and What Changes at Techiyas HaMeisim

וזהו בלע המות לנצח, דכל זמן שלא נשלמו עדיין הבירורים והתשובה, והטוב והרע מעורבים זב"ו (כולל גם בזמן שביהמ"ק הי' קיים, ואפילו בימי שלמה דקיימא סיהרא באשלמותא), יש ענין המיתה, בכדי שלא יהי' להרע קיום. וזהו הטעם שגם צדיקים, שעפרן טהור, יחזרו לעפרם שעה אחת קודם תחיית המתים³⁴ [דהגם שאין רימה שולטת בהם³⁵, ואף שגופם קיים מאות ואלפים שנים, מ"מ, מכיון שקודם תח"מ עדיין קיים ענין תערובת טו"ר בכל העולם, לכן עדיין תחזור לעפר לאחר יין].

This, then, is the full meaning of "He will swallow up death forever": as long as the process of *birurim* (sifting good from evil) and *teshuvah* is not yet complete — as long as good and evil remain intermingled — the phenomenon of death continues to exist, precisely so that evil cannot gain permanent existence. This holds true even during the era when the Beis HaMikdash stood, even in Solomon's own days of "the moon in its fullness." It is why even the perfectly righteous, whose bodies are pure and over whom, famously, "no worm has power," and whose bodies may remain intact for hundreds or thousands of years — nonetheless return to dust for one hour immediately before the Resurrection. Since the world-wide admixture of good and evil hadn't yet been fully resolved, some final trace of "returning to dust" still had to occur, even for them.

SIDEBAR — "One hour before Techiyas HaMeisim"

A striking Midrashic teaching (cited widely in Chassidus, e.g. Torah Or, Likkutei Torah) holds that even perfectly righteous people, whose bodies do not decay in the ordinary way, will nonetheless crumble to dust for a single hour immediately preceding the Resurrection of the Dead — only to be immediately rebuilt and reanimated, now with eternal, indestructible bodies. This maamar uses that teaching as its proof-text that *death is structurally tied to the unfinished state of the world*, not merely to personal spiritual standing: as long as *birurim* remain incomplete anywhere in creation, even the most elevated bodies must still pass through this final, minimal echo of "returning to dust" — and only after that point does death disappear categorically.

וכשיהי' רוח הטומאה אעביר מן הארץ, ויתבטל התערובת טוב ורע לגמרי, אז יהי' בלע המות לנצח — שגם הגוף, כמבואר במאמר, ע"י שניצוצות הקדושה שבו יתבררו ויתעלו, יזדכך ויוזן מרוחניות ממש כמו הנשמה, ולא יהי' עוד שייך לענין המיתה כלל, וכל זה יהי' בגילוי בפועל למטה, בגאולה האמיתית והשלימה על ידי משיח צדקנו, בקרוב ממש.

But when "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the land" is fully realized — when the very mixture of good and evil is undone entirely — then "He will swallow up death forever" in the most literal sense. As the maamar explains, even the physical body itself: once the sparks of holiness embedded within it are fully extracted and elevated, the body will be refined to the point that it is nourished by spirituality just as the soul is, and it will no longer be susceptible to death *at all*. All of this will be revealed and actualized here, in this lowly world, in the true and complete Redemption through Moshiach Tzidkeinu, may it be speedily, in our very days.

Marginal citations, ¶34–41 (summarized): Shabbos 152b and parallel sources on the righteous returning to dust one hour before techiyas hameisim (34); sources on "no worm has power" over the bodies of the righteous (35); Yeshayahu 26:19 and related verses on the resurrection and the future refinement of the body (37–41).



METHOD

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