YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THe Purpose of creation and the Mission of man**

**In Jewish thought**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur 22: The Purpose of Creation in the Thought of the Maggid of Mezeritch (3)**

**"Joy and Pleasure Above"**

In the previous *shiurim*, we saw that the Maggid of Mezeritch sets the concept of pleasure as the purpose of creation, which he illustrates by way of a parable regarding the relationship between a father and a son. In this *shiur* we will delve more deeply into this concept, and relate it to a fundamental question that connects all the sources we have seen so far on the issue: was the world created "for Him" or "for us"? Thus far we have seen opinions that God created the world in order to bestow good (Rabbi Saadya Gaon, Rabbi Chasdai Crescas, and others), and opinions that the world was created for the sake of God and for His glory (Ramban, Maharal, and others). The Maggid's words as well raise the question – was the world created to benefit God's creatures, or to satisfy a Divine need? And if the world was created for a Divine need, how is it possible that God has such a need?

The Maggid cites a *midrash* that touches on this question:

In the *midrash*: "God who has been my shepherd [all my life long until this day]" (*Bereishit* 48:15). Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish [disagreed]. Rabbi Yochanan said: Like a shepherd who stands and watches over his sheep that walk before him. And Reish Lakish said: Like a prince who walks and the elders walk before him. According to Rabbi Yochanan, we are needed for His glory, and according to Reish Lakish, He is needed for our glory.

It is possible to explain this based on what *Chazal* said (*Zohar* III, 7, 2): "Israel provide sustenance (*mefarnesin*) for [their Father in Heaven]." This is seemingly incomprehensible; what sustenance is relevant to God? It seems to me in accordance with what is written: "Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (*Yeshayahu* 49:3), that God glories in the deeds of the righteous and in his Torah, and as it is written: "My son, if your heart be wise, [my heart will be glad, even mine]" (*Mishlei* 23:15), and he causes satisfaction and joy above. And it is known that joy comes from the pleasure and satisfaction that one experienced, and after the pleasure comes the joy. Now, the pleasure and the satisfaction are the cause, as with a person who eats something and is sated by it, and we see that the satiety comes to the person from the vitality and spirituality in the food, and not from the physical food, but only from the pleasure and delicacy in the food, which is spiritual. There is further proof, that when a person has a certain pleasure from which he is satisfied, he is satiated and has no desire to eat further. Thus, we see that pleasure satiates. Similarly, as it were, the righteous cause joy and pleasure above, and this is called, as it were, a sort of sustenance. (*Or Torah* 60)

The Maggid clarifies the sense in which it is possible to say that we help God, and even "sustain" Him, as *Chazal* put it, and also gets into the question of the purpose of creation.

The Maggid writes that God "glories in the deeds of the righteous," and cites a verse that once again makes use of a parable dealing with a father and son: "My son, if your heart be wise, my heart will be glad, even mine" (*Mishlei* 23:15). Let us recall what we said in the previous *shiur*, that the Maggid understands the term "Israel" that appears in the verses of the Torah and in the words of *Chazal* as “the righteous." We are still at the beginning of the Chasidic movement, and therefore it seems that we are not yet talking about a "*tzaddik*" in the sense of a Rebbe and a spiritual leader of a community of *Chasidim*, but rather about a "*tzaddik*" in the simple and classic sense of a person who is fully connected to God and does His will in perfect manner. God has pleasure and joy from the actions of such people.

What is the difference between pleasure and joy? Pleasure is the immediate feeling of delight, and joy is the feeling of satisfaction and fullness that follows in its wake. In the case of the parable, the father takes pleasure and delights in his son, and from this he feels satisfaction and joy. The Maggid offers another example – a person eats and takes pleasure, and afterwards he has a sense of satiety. The Maggid points out that the feeling of satiety is not physical. A person’s joy does not come from the material side of the food; rather, he experiences inner pleasure by virtue of the spiritual aspect of the food that animates him. He adds that in certain states of exaltation and joy, people sometimes do not feel hungry at all, because they feel good. They have an internal feeling of satiety even if they have not eaten. In a parallel manner, when it is said that Israel sustains God, this does not mean they provide Him with material satisfaction, like in this world – because even in this world, the satisfaction from sustenance and food is essentially a spiritual phenomenon.

**Pleasure – Joy with Independent Value**

Thus, the Maggid solves the problem of attributing material benefit to God, but the fundamental difficulty still remains: How is it possible that God depends on the deeds of the righteous? What do we give Him? Another difficulty relates to the statement that God created the whole world only for His own sake. It is true that this objection can be raised against anyone who says God created the world for the sake of His glory, rather than for our glory, but with the Maggid the difficulty becomes more acute because creation is intended for God's *pleasure* – as if He did not create the world for an important purpose, but only for His enjoyment.

How do we deal with this objection? One possibility is to try to explain why even service of God ultimately works for our benefit. The Maharal, as we saw in the *shiurim* that dealt with his teachings, took this path, and explained that it is precisely because the world was created for God's glory that His creatures have more significance than if the world had been created for our glory. The Maggid, however, took a different path; he does not look for an answer that explains why the approach of "service as a Divine need" is logical and understandable, but instead illustrates this from reality. He looks for an example to demonstrate that pleasure has important meaning even from our perspective, and thus it is possible to attribute it to God as well. For this, he brings the concept of spiritual pleasure.

The Maggid cites the verse "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; let the Lord rejoice in His works" (*Tehillim* 104:31), which also appears in several places in the writings of the Ramchal. "May the glory of the Lord endure forever" is connected more to the argument that everything was created for the purpose of revealing God's glory, but the words "let the Lord rejoice in His works" imply that it is important that God *rejoice* in His creation. This is a description of a peak, of a point of perfection. A verse with a similar principle appears in the book of *Mishlei*: "Then I was by Him, as a nursling; and I was daily all delight, playing always before Him" (*Mishlei* 28:30). At the beginning of our study, we saw the *midrash* on this verse that suggests God delighted in the Torah before the world was created, and we can better understand the concept of delight in light of this *midrash*. Delight in the pre-creation Torah expresses joy that does not depend on anything else, for the world had not yet been created. The words “delight” and “pleasure” describe joy with independent value and no other purpose, that arises from the thing itself. According to this, the world has independent value and is not a means to an end.

**The Joy in the Connection Between Father and Son**

The principle with which the Maggid is dealing has, in fact, an earlier source. It originates in a very special book, called *Emek Ha-Melekh*, by the kabbalist Rabbi Naftali Hertz Bachrach. This book contains traditions from another branch of the Ari's *Kabbala*, which passed through Rabbi Israel Saruk (who may or may not have studied with the Ari himself), and it brings elements that do not appear in any other writings in the name of the Ari.

The *Emek Ha-Melekh* cites the Ari's comments on the verse in *Parashat Bereishit*: "No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground" (*Bereishit* 2:5). The Ari says, in the name of the *Zohar*, that in order to create the world there had to be an awakening from below, but there were still no humans who could bring about such an awakening. Therefore, as a one-time act, God raised a mist from below (ibid. 2:6) so that there would be, so to speak, an awakening from below and it would be possible to create the world. This is the meaning of the idea that certain things "rose up in God's thought" before the creation of the world; for example, God raised the thought of Israel as a mere idea, and this was the awakening from below for the creation of the world. The *Emek Ha-Melekh* explains: With God there is no past, present, or future, and therefore in the first stage of creation, He raised in his mind the righteous who would be in the future. God looked ahead, saw the awakening of the righteous from below, and based on this, He created the world. Just as man sometimes make plans for the future and acts on them already in the present – God too foresaw the satisfaction that would come from the righteous in the future, and He created the world so they would come into existence. The Maggid of Mezeritch bases himself on the *Emek Ha-Melekh* and develops this approach further: God contemplated the righteous who would be born in the future, and for this He created the world. The purpose of creation is the delight received from the righteous people of the future.

The novelty in the Maggid's approach lies in his definition of the relationship between the Creator and His creatures. In general, God and creation are viewed as the perfect and the deficient: God is perfect, He created a world that is deficient, and we must try to understand why He did that. For the Ramchal, for example, God is good and beneficent, to the point that His goodness overflows, as it were. His goodness flows out, and He creates a deficient world in order to bestow goodness upon it. For the Maggid, on the other hand, instead of a perfect Creator and deficient creatures, the distinction is between great and small, between an adult and a child. There is a great gap between the two sides, yet there is also a closeness and affinity between them. If the child were not his father's son, he would really not be connected to his father at all, because he is radically different and distant from him; however, because he *is* his son, they are connected to each other. In fact, it is precisely when the son is small that the father derives more pleasure from him. Just as a parent enjoys the little wisdom of his son, and his small deeds, God takes pleasure in the righteous precisely because they are not great in relation to Him.

**Freedom from the Question of “His good or our good?”**

Through this relationship, between the adult and the child that issues from him and is connected to him, we can return to the fundamental question that we raised at the beginning of the discussion. We wondered about the concept of pleasure; did God create the world only for His own pleasure? The parable of the father and the son illustrates that pleasure is not egoistic; it cannot be said that the father enjoys his son because he cares only about himself. The truth is just the opposite: it is precisely because his son is so dear to him that he causes him pleasure and joy. This also follows from the continuation of the words of the Maggid:

We can liken this to a father who teaches his son. The son receives wisdom from his father, and whatever he comprehends is all by virtue of the father's words, because the father's wisdom is very great and completely hidden. The son comprehends only by virtue of the fact that the father contracts his wisdom and makes it smaller, in accordance with the son's understanding, and clothes it in words. The son as well, when he sets his thought and contemplation on the words, receives from there, because a single unity is created there. And this is the meaning of what they have said [*Berakhot* 22a]: "Open your mouth and let your words illuminate," that is to say, wisdom illuminates through words. And by virtue of this it also illuminates for another person, allowing the student to attain it. Then the father has pleasure, as in a case where a child asks his father for something, and when the father does what the child wants and gives him that thing, the father has pleasure from that. This is: "The righteous rules in the fear of God" (II *Shmuel* 23:3), because God's will and the will of the righteous man become one, and what the righteous man wants is the will of God, and he can turn the attribute of justice into mercy. (*Or Torah* ibid.)

When a father talks to his son, it is not only the father who has pleasure, but also the son. "The son as well, when he sets his thought and contemplation on the words, receives from there, because a single unity is created there." Even if the son does not understand all of the father's words, because they are beyond his comprehension, he takes pleasure in the very speech of his father; he senses how great and wise his father is. Thus "a single unity is created there," and the desires of the father and the son also become united – "as in a case where a child asks his father for something, and when the father does what the child wants and gives him that thing, the father has pleasure from that." When there is a relationship between the father and the son, the son is happy that the father fulfills his desire, and the father is also happy to fulfill his son's desire.

In the relationship between a father and his son, the terms "for him" and "for you" do not apply at all. According to the Maggid, if we are asking for which of us the world was created, we have missed the point. What is important is not the pleasure of the father, or the pleasure of the son, but the togetherness. The Maggid liberates us from the polarizing question that presumes there are two possible answers to the question of for whom the world was created. When we asked "for Him or for us," we thought we had covered all the options, but the Maggid challenges the very setting of these options in opposition to each other. The good of the father does not stand against the good of the son; rather, the essential point is the connection and closeness between them.

This is the model that the Maggid sets for the relationship between God and us, and it is typical of the Chasidic movement that is gradually being built through him. It invites a movement of relationship-building, love, yearning, and devotion.

(Translated by David Strauss)