

SECRET OF THE ZOHAR

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This book is dedicated to my parents, of blessed memory,
Elchanan ben Yehuda and Nahama bat Benyamin Raphael.
May they be awarded with an everlasting blessing
In the world of everlasting souls
For spreading the light of Torah.

Rabbi Abba explained the verse: “The secret of Hashem is revealed to those who fear Him, to make known to them His Brit” (Tehillim, 25:14). “The secret of Hashem” is the most exalted secret of the Torah that G-d only grants to those who fear sin.

To those who fear sin, G-d reveals the most exalted secret of the Torah. And what is the most exalted secret of the Torah?

It is the sign of the holy Brit, which is called the secret of Hashem. This is the holy Brit.

(Zohar, Bereshit 236b)

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Editor's Note

This book is a study of Shmirat HaBrit, based on the holy Zohar. Shmirat HaBrit means guarding the Covenant by observing the laws of proper sexual behavior.

The ideas and explanations presented are based in great measure on the teachings of the holy Kabbalist and Tzaddik, the Gaon, HaRav Eliahu Leon Levi, of blessed memory, who personified the verse:

“He shall be like a tree deeply rooted alongside brooks of streaming water, that yields its fruit in its season, and whose leaf never withers, and everything that he does will succeed” (Tehillim, 1:3).

Surely, any mistakes and misunderstandings in this book are on my part alone, not on his.

In addition, the book presents passages from the Zohar, which emphasize the exalted importance of Shmirat HaBrit to the spiritual and material well-being of each and every Jew, to Am Yisrael as a whole, and to all of the world.

In preparing the commentary, I have benefited from a range of holy texts. These include the explanations of the Gaon of Vilna to the Zohar and Tikunei Zohar; and the wonderfully clear and scholarly commentary on the Zohar, Matok M'Dvash, written by Rabbi Daniel Frish, z'tzal. Any reader interested in a more detailed analysis of the Zohar is advised to make use of this magnificent commentary, the Matok M'Dvash, which relies heavily on the writings of the famed Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe Cordevero, known as the Ramak.

It is necessary to emphasize that the explanations offered in this book are very basic understandings of the text. Every passage from the Zohar contains level upon level of esoteric Kabbalistic meaning. This present study only endeavors to offer a clear, simplified understanding of the spiritual secrets hidden inside the exalted teachings of the Zohar.

It is impossible to accurately translate such a holy and complex work as the Zohar. While we hope the translation remains true to the sense of the text, we warn the reader that it cannot even hope to capture the richness and multi-meaning passages of the original.

In composing the English translation, I relied on the above-mentioned works, and also on the excellent Hebrew translation of the Zohar published by the Yeshivat HaMakubalim, “Nahar Shalom,” in Jerusalem. Another scholarly translation is the Soncino Zohar, although it is often abridged. To facilitate the reader’s understanding, each passage of the Zohar is preceded by a capsule summary. Occasionally, brief explanations are brought in parenthesis within the translations themselves. Explanations appear in a smaller font than the text of the Zohar. In the portions from the Zohar, italics have mainly been used to indicate verses from the Tanach. While the Zohar seems to indicate in several places that there is no tikun (rectification) for transgressions of the Brit, in other places it states that repentance is indeed possible – with a great t’shuva (repentance). All later authorities agree that t’shuva is indeed possible, even for severe sexual transgressions. Furthermore, masters of the Kabbalah have composed tikunim to help the baal t’shuva in his path.

General guidelines regarding t’shuva, and specific guidelines regarding Tikun HaBrit, are also included in the book. Every reader is encouraged to study them, for it is precisely in these sensitive matters that it is written, “For there is not a man who is such a tzaddik on earth that does good and never sins” (Kohelet, 7:20).

The book was written before the Corona pandemic. Since Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai and other Masters of the inner teach that plagues and widespread tribulations come upon the world largely because of transgressions against the Brit, I added a reference to Corona at the end of the first chapter.

May it be the will of the Almighty, that in the merit of the holy Zohar, and in the merit of its author, the divine Tanna, angel of G-d, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, that the prayer of King David be fulfilled for all of His people, “Open Thou my eyes, that I may behold the wonders of your Torah” (Tehillim, 119:18).

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Foreword

Rabbi Shimon said: Woe to the man who says that the Torah comes to teach tales of this world and to speak about ordinary affairs. If that were so, even today, we could create a Torah dealing with ordinary matters that would be far superior. If it comes merely to explain the matters of this world, even the princes of the world have more advanced things to say. If so, we should follow them and compose a Torah from their teachings! But this is not the case. For all the words of the Torah are concerned with exalted matters and celestial secrets. Come and see, the upper world and the lower world are weighed in an exacting balance. Israel here below is mirrored by the angels above. Of the celestial angels it is said, “Who makest His angels spirits” (Tehillim, 104:4). When they descend down to earth, they dress up in the garments of this world, for if they didn’t dress in the garments of this world, they could not exist in this world, nor could the world endure them.

Now, if this is the case with the angels, how much more must it be with the Torah that created them, and that created all of the worlds and that sustains them all. How much more so the Torah in descending to this world had to dress herself up in the garments of this world so that the world could endure.

Thus, the stories of the Torah are only her worldly garments, and whoever thinks that this worldly attire is the Torah itself, and not something deeper, may his soul be obliterated – he will have no portion in the world to come. For this reason, David said, “Open mine eyes, that I may see the wonders of Your Torah” (Tehillim, 119:18), meaning the things that are beneath the Torah’s worldly garment. Come and see. There are garments that everyone sees. When fools see a man in smart-looking clothing, they don’t look any deeper (but rather judge the worth of the man according to his clothes). However, the pride of the clothes is the body, and the pride of the body is the soul.

In the very same way, the Torah has a body made up of the commandments of the Torah, which are called the body of the Torah. This body is dressed up in garments that are the stories of this world.

The fools of the world only see the garment, the worldly narrations. They do not know anything more, nor do they look beneath this outer garment. Those who understand more, do not look just upon the garment, but on the body that is under the garment. The sages, the servants of the exalted King, those who stood on Mount Sinai, peer down to the soul, which is the principle thing of them all, and this is the real Torah. In the future, they are destined to gaze into the soul of the soul of the Torah.

Behold, in the same way, the upper world has a garment, a body, a soul, and an inner soul. The heavens and their hosts are the outer garment. The Community of Israel is the body which houses the soul, "Tiferet Yisrael." This soul of "Tiferet Yisrael" is the Torah. And the soul of the soul, this is Ancient Holy One. All of these are attached one with the other. Woe to those sinners who say that the Torah is merely a story, who only see its outer garment and no more. Fortunate are the tzaddikim who gaze properly on the Torah. Wine cannot be contained except in a flask. Likewise, the Torah requires an outer garment. Therefore, one needs to look only upon the things that are under the garment. And therefore, all of these ordinary matters and all of these stories are only exterior garments.

Chapter One

SEXUAL PURITY FOUNDATION OF AM YISRAEL

THE FLOW OF BLESSING

It is no secret that in these times of the “birth pains of Mashiach,” our nation is facing great challenges and dangers. The rebirth of the nation in Israel, with all of its wondrous victories and achievements, seems to have stumbled off track. During the Disengagement or “Hitnatkut,” the Government of Israel evacuated and razed flourishing Jewish communities in Gush Katif and the Shomron, communities that it itself had built. Yet, from the north and from the south, rocket attacks and terrorism continue with a greater wrath, threatening all of the country.

In addition, the Jewish identity of the State is being threatened by the foreign, non-Jewish ideologies that reign rampant in the Israeli media, the Israeli Supreme Court, the Ministry of Education, and the Knesset. Additionally, an obsession with Western culture has brought a plague of sexual immodesty to the streets of the Holy Land. Given all of these discouraging factors, it is not surprising that immigration to Israel is down to a trickle, motivated largely by growing outbreaks of anti-Semitism around the world, and now because of the devastation which the Coronavirus brought to many Jewish communities around the world.

To growing numbers of people in Israel, it is obvious that salvation will not come from the Knesset, or the army, nor from new elections, or from political demonstrations and the like. While we have faith that the long-awaited redemption will surely come, the present situation compels us to do a thorough heshbon nefesh, an inner accounting, to discover what we can do to stop our nation’s spiritual decline.

With so many tribulations hovering over Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael, it behooves us to explore the inner spiritual factors that disrupt the flow of Divine blessing to the People and Land of Israel – and in doing so, to correct what has gone wrong.

For some time now, the elder sages of the Kabbalah in Israel have warned

that, to a large measure, a root cause of the tribulations we are facing is the sexual immorality which has reached the shores of the Holy Land, along with the import of alien Western cultures and values - not to mention the lack of modesty on television and in the movies, and the pornography of the Internet, which has invaded the sanctity of Jewish homes, like a Trojan Horse, may G-d save us.

Time and again, the holy Zohar explains that in committing sexual transgressions, the Jewish People violate the Brit between Avraham Avinu and G-d. This Brit is the Holy Covenant upon which the Nation of Israel was founded. As the Zohar makes clear, this Brit is also the channel that brings the flow of Hashem's blessings to the Jewish People in Eretz Yisrael.

Furthermore, by engaging in forbidden sexual conduct, we give strength to the Sitra Achra (the realm of evil). According to the inner understandings of Torah, this gives the nations of the world the power to dominate over the Jewish People, and to establish their sovereignty over the Land of Israel, G-d forbid.

The holy Kabbalist, Rabbi Yaacov Abuchatzera, z'tzal, explains that all of the terrible tribulations that fall upon the Jewish People, as set forth in the Torah portion, Bechukotai, stem from sexual transgressions. "Both the Rishonim (early rabbinical authorities) and Achronim (later rabbinical authorities) have stated that the majority of man's sufferings, whether through pestilence, war, or famine result from transgressions to the Brit" (See the book, "Abir Yaacov," section, Pitochei Chotam; Bechukotai).

Needless to say, if this decline in sexual norms is damaging the material and spiritual state of the Jewish People in the Holy Land, how much greater the damage to the Jewish People in the impure lands of the Diaspora, where sexual immorality reigns in all of its destructive force! The alarmingly growing rate of assimilation outside of Israel bears witness to this.

What is true for the nation as a whole is also true for the individual. As the Zohar emphasizes, sexual transgressions, in whatever form they take, bring a wide gamut of sufferings and tragedies in their wake. When a person's connection to G-d has been damaged because of flagrant wrongdoings, the flow of Divine blessing normally directed to him is stunted. This can cause problems with health, livelihood, children, family life, and the like.

The Baal HaTanya explains that while all transgressions blemish the spiritual channel that brings Divine blessing to the world, transgressions incurring excision, like the wasting of semen, cause the most damage (Igeret HaT'shuva, Ch.6). This is true for single and married people alike.

In passages quoted from the holy Zohar, we will see how sexual misconduct impairs the Divine channel of blessing more than anything else.

In the holy book, “Reshit Chochmah,” it is explained that the ten tribes of Israel violated all of the commandments in the Torah, but exile was only decreed upon them when they transgressed the laws of proper sexual conduct (See the Gate of Kedusha).

Referring to the sexual decline of his time, the prophet Yishayahu declares, “Your sins have made a separation between you and your G-d” (Yishayahu, 59:1-2).

This study proposes that by understanding the vital importance of sexual purity as set forth in the Torah, and as repeatedly explained in the Zohar, we can help repair what we have blemished, and restore the flow of Divine blessing to ourselves, to our nation, and to our Land.

THE COVENANT OF THE LAND

While our connection to G-d, and to Eretz Yisrael, are eternal, the Torah warns Avraham Avinu that Shmirat HaBrit (guarding the Covenant) is of paramount importance in insuring that the Covenant of the Brit remains constantly active:

“And I will give to thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land in which thou dost sojourn, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their G-d.

“And G-d said to Avraham, therefore Thou shall safeguard my Brit, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations.

“This is My Brit that thou shall safeguard, between Me and you and thy seed after thee, every male among you shall be circumcised” (Bereshit, 17:8-10).

The meaning of Shmirat HaBrit, as the Zohar stresses, is not merely the obligation to circumcise our children, but also to guard our sexual purity.

This is what differentiates us from the gentile nations, and this is what guarantees our settlement of Eretz Yisrael. As the Torah portion of Achrei Mot makes clear – the punishment for sexual misconduct is national destruction and exile, G-d forbid, from our Land (Vayikra, 18:28).

SHMIRAT HABRIT NEEDS LEARNING

Shmirat HaBrit means guarding the Covenant by keeping the laws of proper sexual behavior. Unfortunately, the in-depth study of this subject, the foundation of Am Yisrael, has been left largely unlearned. This is due to two

factors: the long tradition of modesty surrounding the subject; and the fact that the texts which elaborate on the importance of Shmirat HaBrit belong, in large measure, to the world of Kabbalah and to the secrets of Torah. In our time, the works of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov are most known for their focus on Shmirat HaBrit. However, the vital role of Shmirat HaBrit is not only found in Hasidic literature. As we shall discover, the theme appears again and again in the Torah, the Talmud, and in the precise, down-to-earth details of Jewish Law.

The great Torah scholar, the Gaon of Vilna, also known as the Gra, throughout his commentaries on the Zohar and Tikunei HaZohar, also emphasizes the role of Shmirat HaBrit as the foundation of Jewish life. For instance, the Gaon of Vilna writes that Tikun HaBrit (rectifying the Brit) is the ultimate purpose of man (Tikunei HaZohar, Tikun 23, Folio 76, Column 3).

He states that Shmirat HaBrit is the key to understanding the secrets of Torah (Zohar, Parshat Pikude, 248a).

And he notes that the redemption will come speedily – Achesheva – if the Jewish People merit it due to Shmirat HaBrit (Tikunei Zohar, Tikun 21, Folio 56, column 3).

While Rabbi Nachman of Breslov and the Gaon of Vilna both emphasized the importance of Shmirat HaBrit to the spiritual health of the individual Jew, and to the nation, they are only two of a long list of Torah giants who wrote on the theme. In this small study, we have chosen to focus on the teachings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who learned the secrets of Torah from Eliahu HaNavi, and through the channel of Divine Inspiration. It is here, in the Zohar, that the importance of Shmirat HaBrit is explained in all of its magnitude and force.

SECRETS OF TORAH

As we shall discover, sexual purity and the secrets of Torah go hand in hand. Our Sages have repeatedly emphasized the necessity of learning the secrets of Torah at the time of Geula.

The holy Kabbalist, Rabbi Chaim Vital, foremost student of the Arizal, emphasizes in his introduction to the “Eitz HaChaim,” that the prolongation of the exile, and all of its sufferings, stem from the fact that the inner secrets of Torah have gone unlearned.

The Gaon of Vilna writes: “This Geula will only come about through the learning of Torah, and the main factor of the Geula depends on the learning

of the Kabbalah” (Even HaShelma, 11:3).

Throughout all of his writings, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook stresses the necessity of learning the secrets of Torah at the time of Israel’s redemption.

“The revelation of the secrets of Torah in the last generation, in order to purify the hearts and to fill the minds with noble thoughts, whose source lies in the secrets of Torah, this is an absolute necessity in the last generation to insure the survival of Judaism” (Orot HaKodesh, Part 1, Pg. 141).

In his holy proclamation, “The Great Call,” Rabbi Kook wrote:

“Dear brothers, sages of Torah, and influential scholars! We too acted foolishly and sinned! We studied and researched the sources; we debated the fine points of the Talmud and discovered new insights; we wrote and explained; but we forgot Hashem and His might. We failed to hear the words of the true prophets, the exalted voice of our eternal sages, to hear the voice of the tzaddikim (righteous ones) and hasidim (saintly ones), the sages of Musar, and the possessors of the secrets of Torah, who called out and proclaimed in the most strident of voices, that in the end, the river of Talmudic analysis would turn arid and dry if the deep ocean of Kabbalah, and the Torah’s inner understandings, weren’t constantly drawn into the learning – the waters of the knowledge of Hashem, the pristine waters of pure faith which flows from our inner souls, and which stream forth from our life source” (Orot, pg. 101).

Regarding Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Kook wrote, “Due to the alienation from the recognition of the secrets of Torah, the recognition of the holiness of Eretz Yisrael is perceived in a unclear manner” (Orot, Eretz Yisrael, 2).

Rabbi Kook sums up this same essay in a similar vein:

“We are not coming to negate any conceptualization or understanding that is founded on honest intellectual endeavor, sensitivity of thought, or the fear of Heaven, in whatever form they take – but rather only the viewpoint that seeks to negate the secrets of Torah and their tremendous influence on the spirit of the nation. This is a tragedy that we must battle against with counsel, wisdom, holiness, and valor” (Ibid.).

Elsewhere in Orot, Rabbi Kook emphasizes the great importance of detailed sexual purity as a necessary foundation for our revival in our land, for the Shechinah will not rest in an unholy place (Orot HaTehiya, 35). In support of his assertion, he quotes verbatim two passages from the Torah:

“When thou goest out to encamp against thy enemies, then keep thee from

every evil thing. If there be among you any man that is not clean by reason of an impure emission of semen at night, then he shall go abroad outside of the camp, he shall not come within the camp” (Devarim, 23:10-11).

“For the L-rd thy G-d walks in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thy enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy, that He see no unclean thing in thee and turn away from thee” (Devarim, 23:15).

Elsewhere in Orot (Orot HaTechiya, 57), Rabbi Kook stresses the importance of studying the Zohar, as a necessary harbinger of redemption:

“At this moment, the closest time to the final salvation, the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land...the flowers appear on the earth, and the demand of seeking the light of Hashem, of seeking an exalted spiritual redemption, of surging forward toward Hashem and His goodness, progresses and expands.

“Now, the time demands a greater acquisition of the inner Torah, with holy visions that cannot begin to be heard except through the elevation of the soul and the uplifting of its valor in the light of its purest, transcendental life.

“A legion whose hearts have been touched by Hashem, from this Divine camp, this will be for us the power that establishes the foundation of the salvation, the power that grants grace, and the light of life, and the pride of greatness to all manifestations of life at the time of the revival of the nation in Eretz Yisrael.

“The book of the Zohar, that breaches new paths, forging a way in the desert, a road in the wilderness, it and all of its bounty is prepared to open doors of redemption. ‘Since Israel is destined to taste from the Tree of Life, which is the book of the Zohar, they will be redeemed from the exile with mercy’” (Zohar, Naso, 124b).

THE GREATEST SECRET

One of the reasons that the Zohar is so vital to our times is because of the great light it sheds on the Brit as the spiritual channel through which Divine blessing is channeled to Am Yisrael. The Zohar itself states that this the Torah’s greatest secret:

Rabbi Abba explained the verse: “The secret of Hashem is revealed to those who fear Him, to make known to them His Brit” (Tehillim, 25:14). “The secret of Hashem” is the most exalted secret of the Torah, which G-d only grants to those who fear sin. To those who fear sin, G-d reveals the most exalted secret of the Torah. And what is the most exalted secret of the Torah? It is contained in the sign of the holy Brit, which is called the secret

of Hashem – this is the holy Brit (Zohar, Bereshit 236b).

It is sometimes thought that when the word Brit appears in the Torah and the Tanach, it is referring to a general covenant between Hashem and the Jewish People. The Zohar, however, makes clear that almost every reference to the Brit means guarding the sexual purity of Am Yisrael. We see this clearly with Yosef, who is called, Yosef HaTzaddik, because he overcame the temptations of Potifar's wife.

Thus, the Zohar teaches:

Behold, all of the Jewish People have a portion in the World to Come, because they safeguard the Brit on which the world is established, as it says, "If not for My Brit day and night, I would not uphold the ordinances of heaven and earth" (Yirmayahu, 33:25). Thus Israel, who have accepted the Brit and preserve it, have a portion in the World to Come.

Furthermore, because of this they are called tzaddikim. We learn from this that whoever safeguards this Brit, which upholds the world, is called tzaddik. We learn this from Yosef. Because he guarded the Brit of the world, he merited to be called, "Yosef the Tzaddik." And so it is that, "Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever" (Zohar, Bereshit 59b). From the secrets of Torah found in the Zohar, we learn that the holiness of our sexual lives, and the blessings we receive from Hashem, go hand in hand.

CORONA

What does all this have to do with the Coronavirus pandemic? We have quoted warnings from Sages of the inner Torah, stating the widespread infractions to the holiness of our sexual lives can bring terrible disasters and plagues in their wake. The word corona also bears the meaning of "crown." Certainly, in shutting down the world via the Coronavirus, the Master of Heaven and Earth wants mankind to pay more attention to Him and to acknowledge His crown and Kingship. The word "corona" also refers to the head of the organ of the Brit, known in Hebrew as the "atarah," which, in Kabbalistic language represents "Ateret HaYesod," the union of the sefirot of "Yesod" and "Malchut." Thus, the term, Coronovirus, has a direct connection to the Covenant of the Brit. Just as sexual transgression and pornography extend to the far corners of the world, so does the Corona epidemic.

Chapter Two

THE SPIRITUAL BLUEPRINT

While many passages in the Zohar read like Midrashim, seemingly understandable on their surface level, the language of the Zohar is filled with codes that refer to the spiritual worlds of the sefirot and partzufim. In order that the reader may more deeply comprehend the selections from the Zohar in this study, it is necessary to present a brief and very basic explanation of the sefirot.

It is widely known that the spiritual blueprint of the world is comprised of sefirot that serve as channels of Divine illumination. Through these ten channels of Divine blessing, the Holy One Blessed Be He manifests Himself in this world.

In a sense, the sefirot act as filters, allowing G-d's illumination to appear in the world without overwhelming it. The higher sefirot are called Keter, Chochmah, and Binah. The lower sefirot are Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Nezach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut.

The Zohar rarely mentions the sefirot by name. Rather it speaks in codes. For example, Avraham Avinu is associated with the sefirah of Chesed, Yitzhak with Gevurah, and Yaacov with Tiferet. Through the teachings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his disciples, who were great Torah scholars in their own right, the Zohar reveals the spiritual blueprint at work behind the narratives and commandments of the Torah. The Holy Arizal later detailed this elaborate system.

To help us understand the system, let us imagine that the lower sefirot are aligned in the form of a funnel. The main body of the funnel comprises the sefirot of Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Nezach, and Hod. The spout of the funnel, is the Yesod, the channel through which the influences of all of the sefirot must pass in order to appear in our manifest world of Malchut. From this illustration, it follows that if the spout of the funnel, the Yesod, is blocked up because of our sins, then the Divine illumination from Above cannot pass down to our world.

In the language of the Zohar, this damage to the spout of the funnel causes

the “upper river” to dry up. Because of this, our world of Malchut is not watered with Divine illumination or shefa. This drying up of the shefa brings about destruction (chorban) and exile (galut).

Concurrently, when the channel of the Yesod is blocked up because of our transgressions, then our prayers, Torah study, and good deeds cannot ascend to the higher spiritual worlds. Not being able to enter the spout and properly rise up the funnel of the sefirot, our prayers and good deeds are cast away into the realm of the Other Side, the realm of the forces of darkness and impurity outside of the funnel. It is this diverted kedusha (holiness) that gives power to Israel’s enemies.

MICROCOSM OF THE WORLD

With this illustration in mind, we must mention another central Kabbalistic idea vital to the understanding the Zohar. Hashem created man as a microcosm of the world. Man contains the spiritual blueprint for all of existence. Accordingly, the sefirot that make up the spiritual universe find their parallel in man. The right arm parallels the sefirah of Chesed. The left arm, Gevurah. The upper body, Tiferet. The right and left legs parallel Nezach and Hod. And the place of the Brit parallels the Yesod.

Thus, referring back to our illustration of the funnel, the organ of the Brit parallels the spout. To reach our world of Malchut, the shefa from all of the sefirot must pass through the channel of the Yesod, the spout of the spiritual world. For this reason, the Yesod is said to encompass and include all of the other sefirot. Thus the tikun, (rectification) of the damaged Yesod is called the Tikun Clalli, meaning the all-encompassing tikun.

To give an example, at the time of marital relations, all of the genetic information from every organ and limb of the body has to converge in the channel of the Brit in order to reach the proper destination in the female, who embodies the sefirah of Malchut. The codes of DNA from the brain, from the eyes, the arms, the heart, and the legs, all gather in the Yesod as it unites with Malchut in order for the genetic transference to take place. Thus, in the physical world, the organ of the Brit parallels the spiritual function of the Yesod, in its being the channel of life force through which the marital union is consummated. In the microcosm of man, the place of the Brit serves the same function as the spout of the funnel.

Due to the parallelism of man and the spiritual worlds, it follows that if a man impairs his Brit through sexual transgression, then his wrongdoing will also damage the parallel spiritual counterpart of the Yesod.

This understanding is based on the principle that whatever man does in this world has a direct and immediate effect on the upper spiritual worlds. The beginning chapters of the book, “Nefesh HaChaim,” describe this phenomenon fully – how our thoughts, deeds, and speech all impact the upper worlds for good and for evil.

Thus by transgressing the sexual laws of the Torah, a person damages the spiritual channel, the Yesod, that brings Divine illumination and blessing into the world. The Zohar emphasizes time and again that sexual wrongdoing brings tragedy and plagues on the individual and on the nation, in this world and in the world to come.

If sexual sins become rampant on a national level, this can cause a total blockage, or the drying up of the channel of the Yesod, bringing destruction and exile to Am Yisrael. This is precisely what occurred in the days of the First and Second Temples. While other sins were rampant as well, the prophets stridently warned about the declining immorality of the times. The importance of the Yesod can be seen from a verse of Tehillim regarding the destruction of Jerusalem. “Remember, O L-rd against the children of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, when they said, Raze it, raze it, to its very Yesod (foundation)” (Tehillim, 137:7).

When the Yesod was damaged Above through Israel’s transgressions, it was only a matter of time before the enemy succeeded in destroying its physical counterpart embodied in Zion and Jerusalem below.

From this, we can understand the great importance of Shmirat HaBrit. By conducting one’s sexual life in holiness, the sefirah of Yesod is preserved in its pure, functioning state, insuring that Divine blessing is constantly poured down upon Am Yisrael and the individual Jew.

This is the inner meaning of the verse, “Your sins have withheld good (tov) from you” (Yirmeyahu, 5:26). In the language of the Zohar, tov is the Yesod. Our sins prevent the Divine illumination that comes through the Yesod from reaching us. According to the Kabbalah, this is the prime inner cause of all of the sufferings we face.

THE UNION OF MALCHUT AND YESOD

One further point is needed to facilitate our understanding of the Zohar. The sefirah of Malchut is the vessel that receives all of the Divine illumination and blessing. In our world, Malchut is manifested in many different forms, including Am Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael, Jerusalem, the Kingdom of Israel, and the Shechinah.

In the human anatomical diagram of the sefirot, Malchut is associated with the crown of the Brit, called Ateret HaYesod. Thus, Malchut and Yesod are always associated together. When the Yesod is damaged, then Malchut is damaged also. This is also why sexual transgression on a national level can cause a separation between the Yesod and Malchut – resulting, G-d forbid, in the destruction of the Jewish Kingdom, and the exile of the nation and the Shechinah from the Land.

From this we see the importance of sexual purity in establishing and safeguarding the Kingdom of Israel.

We also mentioned how the word “Corona,” has the meaning of crown, and the corona of the male sexual organ, which, in the spiritual blueprint for the world parallels the union of the Yesod the Malchut.

For instance, the Zohar teaches that Yosef merited Malchut (kingship) because he guarded the Brit, by overcoming sexual temptation. In the opposite light, when King Shlomo transgressed against the Brit, by going astray after his foreign wives, Malchut was taken from him, as is written, “So that the L-rd said to Shlomo, Since this is in your mind, and thou has not kept My Brit and My statutes which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant” (Melachim I:11:11).

The Zohar (Vayikra 14a) comments:

Thus Yosef merited two kingships, one for himself and one for his descendant (Yerobam). Since King Shlomo attached himself to gentile wives, his kingship was given over to Yerobam. From this we learn that the Brit is more cherished than anything else.

Thus the Zohar teaches that there can be no lasting Malchut without the sanctification of the Yesod. This is because Malchut rests on the sefirah of Yesod, the foundation of the world.

This understanding, repeated again and again in the Zohar, is vital in addressing the challenges we are facing today. At this critical stage of the Israel’s revival in Eretz Yisrael, in order to establish the Kingdom of G-d on earth (Malchut), we must concurrently sanctify the Yesod by purifying our sexual lives. It is not enough to build a powerful army, beautiful cities, and flourishing settlements. The army, and the cities and settlements must all be

holy as well. If we violate the sexual prohibitions of the Torah, we damage the Brit between Hashem and Avraham Avinu, weakening our hold on the Land, G-d forbid.

Relying on Israel's inner, holy segulah is not enough as the redemption approaches completion. In order to advance, we must actualize in our everyday lives the holiness we inherited from our forefathers.

This can be illustrated from a passage of the Zohar that explains how Eliahu HaNavi dealt with the deteriorating situation in his time, when Am Yisrael abandoned Hashem through idol worship, sexual transgressions, and neglecting the mitzvah of circumcision. By so doing, they destroyed the foundation of the Jewish Kingdom, symbolized by the destruction of the altar.

Rabbi Yehuda was often with Rabbi Shimon. Once they studied the verse, "And he healed the altar of the L-rd that was broken down" (Melachim I, 18:30). What is the meaning of the expression "and he healed" (instead of saying he rebuilt)?

Behold, in the days of Eliahu, all Israel abandoned the Holy One Blessed Be He, and abandoned the life- sustaining Brit. When Eliahu came and saw that the children of Israel had forsaken the Brit and its sign, he set out to rectify the matter to its former state. This rectified everything. This is why it is written, "And he healed the altar of the L-rd that was broken down," meaning he reestablished the holy Brit that had been abandoned (Zohar, Bereshit 66b).

In Kabbalistic terms, the transgressions of Am Yisrael caused a breach between the sefirot of Yesod and Malchut, damaging the channel of Divine blessing to the nation.

Understanding this, Eliahu HaNavi sought a spiritual healing. By rectifying the transgressions surrounding the Brit, he reunited Yesod with Malchut and succeeded in restoring the Jewish People to G-d, symbolized by the "healing" of the altar.

THE SIXTH MILLENIUM

The sages of the Kabbalah have taught that the Sixth Millennium parallels the sefirah of Yesod, number six of the lower sefirot. For this reason, Shmirat HaBrit is the test of our times. As the time of our final redemption approaches, in order to reach the palace of Malchut, first we are tested in the raging waters of Yesod. This is the underlying spiritual cause for the

alarming increase of promiscuity and pornography in the world. Just as in the days of Bilaam and Balak, who strove to destroy the Jewish People by luring them into sinning with the daughters of Midian on the eve of our entry into Eretz Yisrael, we are being similarly tested today. To blemish the holiness of Israel, and to sever our attachment to G-d, the forces of evil are waging a sexual war against us, just as the nations of Amalek, Midian, Canaan, and Greece tried to do in the past.

SHMIRAT HABRIT THE KEY TO REDEMPTION

The Zohar emphasizes repeatedly that the spiritual and material redemption of the Nation of Israel, and of the world, is dependent on Shmirat HaBrit. From a verse in the Book of Ruth, the Tikunei Zohar teaches that the key to Israel's redemption coming Achesheva – in a speedy, painless fashion, depends upon Shmirat HaBrit:

“If he will redeem you, good (tov) will redeem” (Ruth, 3:13). What is tov? It means that if you are redeemed by the Brit (called tov) it will be good. (Tikunei Zohar, Tikun 21, Folio 51a. See the Gaon of Vilna, there, on redemption through Shmirat HaBrit).

The opposite is also true, G-d forbid. As we mentioned, sexual transgressions cause the Yesod, the channel of Divine blessing, to become severed from Malchut, bringing destruction to the world.

Whoever transgresses against the sign of the Brit, by casting the seminal seed into a foreign domain, causes the flow of shefa to the Shechinah to dry up. This happens because the influx of Divine illumination, normally stimulated by the marital union, is cast away from the Shechinah, leaving it parched, without shefa. And this brings about the destruction of the world. Immediately, it is said, “And the river shall be left waste and dried up” (Yishayahu, 19:5). This is the river (the Yesod) that flows out of Eden.... (Tikunei Zohar, End of Tikun 43, see the Commentary of the Gra).

The Tikunei Zohar goes on to teach that the flow of Divine illumination to the Jewish People also dries up when the Torah is not learned in all of its majestic depth:

Likewise, whoever causes that the Kabbalah and the wisdom of the inner Torah not be considered a part of the Oral and Written Torah, and causes others not to learn it (the wisdom of the inner Torah) by saying that there is nothing more to the Torah and the Talmud other than the simple meaning of the P'shat, it is certainly considered as if he had extinguished the flow of

shefa from the river (the Yesod) and from the garden (the Malchut). It would have been better for him if he had never been born, or ever learned the Oral and Written Torah. It is considered as if he returned the world to a state of chaos and void, and brought poverty to mankind and lengthened the exile of Israel (Tikunei Zohar, Tikun 44).

In summary, this study is a call for a national, spiritual healing by educating the Jewish People on the importance of Shmirat HaBrit.

The good news is that while the problem is great, there is a tikun. Just as it worked for Eliahu HaNavi, it can also work for us today.

Chapter Three

SECRET OF THE BRIT

The holy Zohar reveals the secrets of the Torah in their panoramic splendor. Throughout the Zohar, the teachings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his students emphasize that safeguarding the Brit is the foundation of the Jewish Nation, and every Jew's channel to G-d. In this chapter, only a selection of the Zohar's teachings on the Brit has been included, listed chronologically according to the Torah portions in which they appear. A list of other equally important passages can be found in the Appendix of this book. To help elucidate more esoteric meanings of the text, capsule explanations have been included using a smaller font.

SELECTIONS FROM THE ZOHAR

A man who guards his sexual purity in this world is guarded from the torments of Gehinom (Hell) in the world to come.

Zohar, Bereshit 8a

Rav Hamnuna the Elder said this: "Do not let thy mouth cause thy flesh to sin" (Kohelet, 5:5). A man should not allow his mouth to utter words that may bring him to lustful thoughts, and thus cause his holy flesh, on which is stamped the holy Brit, to sin. For whoever does this is dragged into Gehinom. The one presiding over Gehinom is called Duma, and there are tens of thousands of angels of destruction with him. He stands at the door of Gehinom. But for all of those who have guarded the holy covenant of the Brit in this world, he is impotent to harm them.

This passage underscores the importance of sexual purity, owing to the fact that the place of the Brit on the body parallels the sefirah of Yesod, the spiritual channel that brings Divine goodness into the world (Malchut).

Zohar, Bereshit 47b

"And G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it (oto)" (Bereshit 2:3).

What did He sanctify? The same place of the sign of the Brit (the word "oto" also means "his sign") as in, "and show me both it (oto) and His habitation," (Shmuel 2, 15:25). This is the place of all of the Divine illuminations. From here they go forth to the Community of Israel and grant her delicacies and the bread of everything good....And all of the Divine illuminations that descend from the upper worlds, they go forth from this place – and this is the

meaning of “and sanctified it (oto)” where oto refers to the sign of the Brit. The following two passages explain that a man’s purity or impurity, not only influence his spiritual state, they also directly influence the spiritual state of his children.

Zohar, Bereshit 54a

“And the man knew Eve his wife...” (Bereshit 4:1).

Rabbi Abba explained, referring to the verse: “Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upwards, and the spirit of the beast goes downward to the earth” (Kohelet, 3:21)? He said, This verse has many facets, and so it is with all the words of the Torah – they all contain several understandings, and all of them are correct. So it is that all of the Torah can be explained in seventy ways, corresponding to seventy sides and seventy wings. So it is with every word of Torah. And everything that can be understood from each and every word, there are several different facets to all.

Therefore, when a man walks in the path of truth, he goes towards the right and draws upon himself an exalted, spirit of kedusha (holiness) from above. This spirit ascends with a holy desire to attach itself to the upper world and to cleave to an exalted kedusha that never leaves him.

When a man walks in the path of evil and strays from the way, he draws upon himself an impure spirit from the left side, which pollutes his being, as it says, You shall not make yourselves abominable with them... that you should be defiled by them (Vayikra 11:43), implying that a person who comes to pollute himself is led further into defilement.

From this we can learn that when a man walks in the path of truth, and draws upon himself a spirit of kedusha (holiness) from Above and cleaves to it, he also draws a spirit of holiness on to the son he brings into the world, so that the child will be holy with the sanctity of his Master, as it is written, “Sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy” (Vayikra, 11:44).

Once again, the Zohar teaches that the Brit of sexual purity is the foundation of the world. This is because the Brit is the secret of the Yesod, the channel that brings the Divine life force to the world. Transgressions to the Brit interrupt the flow of blessing between Yesod and Malchut, as if uprooting heaven and earth.

Zohar, Bereshit 56a

Rabbi Abba said: On the day that Adam transgressed the command of his Master, heaven and earth wanted to be uprooted from their place. What is the reason? Because they only remain secure in their places because of the covenant of the Brit, as it is written, “If not for My Brit day and night, I would not uphold the ordinances of heaven and earth” (Yirmeyahu, 33:25).

And Adam broke the covenant of the Brit, as it is written, “But they like Adam have transgressed the Brit” (Hoshea, 6:7 – referring to sexual sins). And if it had not been revealed before G-d that in the future Israel would stand at Mount Sinai to uphold this Brit, the world would not have been preserved.

Rabbi Hizkiah said (referring to Adam), Whoever admits his sin is granted release and forgiveness from G-d.

We learn from the word “bereshit” that the site of the Altar in the Beit Hamikdash parallels the channel of the Yesod, from which the world was created.

Behold, when G-d created the world, He made this Brit and established the world upon it. How do we know this? It is written, Bereshit, which we can be read, “bara sheet,” meaning, “created sheet,” which is the Brit (the Yesod) on which the world stands. (Sheet has the meaning of six, which represents the sefirah of Yesod. Sheet also is the place of the Altar.) From this place, blessings are drawn and go forth to the world. Upon this place (the Yesod) the world was created.

The Zohar teaches that the flood in the days of Noach came as punishment for the sin of wasting semen. This is learned from the use of the same word, “ra” in describing Yehuda’s son Er, who was stricken by G-d for spilling his semen in vain. This sin adds strength to the spirit of impurity and drives the Shechinah from the world.

Zohar, Bereshit 56a

“And the L-rd saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and all the desire of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all of the day” (Bereshit, 6:5).

Rabbi Yehuda quoted the verse, “For thou art not a G-d who has pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil (ra) dwell with Thee” (Tehillim, 5:5).

He explained: Come and see – someone who cleaves to the evil inclination and pursues it, not only does he defile himself, but he is led to pollute himself further, as has already been stated. For the wickedness of mankind was great (in the generation of Noach) and all kinds of evil was committed, but the measure of their guilt was not complete until they wasted their blood (semen) upon the ground. Who are these people who corrupted their way on the earth? We know by comparing two verses. Here, it is written, “Only evil (ra) all of the day,” and in another verse, “And Er, Yehuda’s firstborn, was evil (ra) in the sight of the L-rd” (Bereshit, 38:7).

Said Rabbi Yosi: Isn’t evil (ra) the same meaning as “wickedness” (resha)? No. A man is considered wicked if he raises his hand to strike his neighbor,

even if he doesn't touch him, as it is written, "And he said to the wicked one (rasha), why will you strike your fellowman?" He is called wicked even though the future tense of the verb indicates that he had not yet done any physical harm.

But, evil (ra) refers only to a person who corrupts his way and pollutes himself and the earth (by spilling semen in a sinful manner). This lends force and added strength to the impure spirit which is called "ra" as it is written, "only evil (ra) all the day." This person will not be allowed to enter the celestial palace, nor gaze upon the Shechinah, for by this sin the Shechinah is driven from the world.

How do we know this? From Yaacov. When the Shechinah departed from him, he thought that perhaps his sons were blemished in this manner, and because of them the impure spirit had grown stronger in the world, even blemishing the moon and diminishing its light. If you wonder how this can be – the reason is that this sin pollutes the Temple (and drives the Shechinah from the world). If this is what caused the Shechinah to leave Yaacov, how much more so does it apply to any man who corrupts his ways and defiles himself, thus adding strength to the spirit of impurity. Therefore, when a man defiles himself in this manner, he is called evil (ra).

Behold, when a man defiles himself, the Holy One, Blessed Be He does not visit him with blessing. Rather, he is subject at all times to visitations of the spirit called "ra."

The Zohar relates a wondrous deed of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in defending the world from G-d's wrath.

Zohar, Bereshit 57b

All the generations during the time of Noach would take off their clothes and commit their sins in public for all to see. Rabbi Shimon was walking one day through the gate of Tiberias when he saw some men drawing the bow tight (masturbating) into earthenware pots. "What!" he exclaimed. "Do they commit this sin openly in order to anger their Master?" With his eyes, he peered at them, and they were cast into the sea and drowned.

Behold, every sin which is committed openly repels the Shechinah from the earth and removes her habitation from the world. The people in the time of Noach committed their sins openly in a spirit of defiance and drove the Shechinah from the world, until HaKadosh Baruch Hu thrust them away from Him and removed them from the world, as implied in the Proverb, "Take away the dross from the silver, and a vessel emerges for the refiner. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness" (Mishle, 25:4).

The Jewish People have a portion in the world to come precisely because they safeguard the Brit.

Zohar, Bereshit 59b

“These are the generations of Noach.” Rabbi Hiya began by explaining the text: “Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever; they are the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified” (Yishayahu, 60:21). The People of Israel are meritorious because they occupy themselves with the Torah and know its paths, and through the Torah they will merit the world to come.

Behold, all of the Jewish People have a portion in the world to come, because they safeguard the Brit on which the world is established, as it says, “If not for My Brit day and night, I would not uphold the ordinances of heaven and earth” (Yirmeyahu, 33:25). Thus Israel, who has accepted the Brit and observe it, has a portion in the world to come.

Furthermore, because of this, they are called righteous. We learn from this that whoever safeguards this Brit, which upholds the world, is called Tzaddik (righteous). We learn this from Yosef. Because he guarded the Brit of the world, he merited to be called, “Yosef the Tzaddik.” And so it is that, “Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever.”

Since the act of spilling semen in vain defiles both man and the earth, the spiritual blemishes it causes can only be rectified through a great t’shuva.

Zohar, Bereshit 61b

Rabbi Yitzhak was in the presence of Rabbi Shimon. He asked him:

Regarding the verse, “And the earth was corrupt before G-d” (Bereshit, 5:11), if men transgressed, why should the earth be called corrupt?

Rabbi Shimon answered him, Because it is written, “For all flesh has corrupted its way.” In a similar fashion, it is written, “And the land was defiled, therefore do I punish its iniquity upon it” (Vayikra, 18:25). If mankind sinned, why is the earth to blame? The reason is that mankind is the essence of the earth. When they pollute their way in the world, the earth becomes defiled. This is proven by the verse, “And G-d saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.”

Come and see, all sins of man, and all of his acts of defilement, can be rectified through t’shuva (repentance). But the sin of spilling one’s seed on the earth, which defiles the man and casts semen onto the earth, defiles both him and the earth. Of such a man it is written, “The stain of thy iniquity is before me” (Yirmeyahu, 2:22). It also says, “For Thou art not a G-d that hath pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil (ra) dwell with Thee” (Tehillim, 5:5), except through a great t’shuva. On this it is written, “And Er, Yehuda’s

firstborn, was evil (ra) in the sight of the L-rd, and the L-rd slew him” (Bereshit 38:7).

Rabbi Yitzhak asked, Why did the Holy One, Blessed Be He judge the world with water, and not with fire or something else? Rabbi Shimon answered: This is a secret. Through their sin of corrupting their ways, they prevented the upper waters and the lower waters from uniting as they should. Since in corrupting their ways (spilling semen in vain) they did not allow male and female waters to join, thus they were punished with water, for the transgression of wasting their water.

Furthermore, the waters were boiling and caused their skin to peel off, just as they had corrupted their ways by spilling their hot semen – measure for measure.

As long as the Jewish People guard their sexual purity, embodied by the Brit, there is no enemy that can harm them.

Zohar, Bereshit 66b

“And I will establish My Brit with thee” (Bereshit, 17:21) that you shall be the sign of the Brit in the world. After that, “And thou shall come into the ark.” For if Noach had not been a tzaddik (a guardian of the Brit) he could not have entered the ark, for only the tzaddik can unite with the ark (signifying the union of Yesod and Malchut). Therefore it is written, “And thou shall come into the ark,” as has been explained.

Rabbi Elazar said, As long as men remain attached to this Brit and do not loosen their hold of it (do not blemish it with sexual sins), there is no nation nor language in the world that can do them harm. Noach clung to Brit and guarded it, therefore the Holy One Blessed Be He safeguarded him. But all of his contemporaries did not guard the Brit, and because of this, the Holy One Blessed Be He removed them from the world. As has been stated, in exactly the same way that they sinned, they were blotted out from the world. In the days of the prophet, Eliahu, the Jewish People strayed from G-d by worshiping idols, engaging in sexual transgressions, and neglecting the mitzvah of circumcision. By doing so, they destroyed the foundation of the Jewish Kingdom, symbolized by the destruction of the altar. In Kabbalistic terms, their sins caused a breach between the sefirot of Yesod and Malchut. Understanding this, Eliahu HaNavi sought a spiritual cure. By rectifying the transgressions surrounding the Brit (thus reuniting Yesod with Malchut), Eliahu was able to restore the Jewish People to G-d.

Zohar, Bereshit 66b

Rabbi Yehuda was often with Rabbi Shimon. Once they studied the verse, “And he healed the altar of the L-rd that was broken down” (Melachim I,

18:30). What is the meaning of the expression “and he healed” (instead of saying he rebuilt the altar)?

Behold, in the days of Eliahu, all Israel abandoned the Holy One Blessed Be He, and abandoned the life-sustaining Brit. When Eliahu came and saw that the Children of Israel had forsaken the Brit and its sign, he set out to rectify the matter to its former state. This rectified everything. This is why it is written, “And he healed the altar of the L-rd that was broken down,” meaning he reestablished the holy Brit that had been abandoned (reuniting Malchut with Yesod).

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai emphasized that there is no sin in the world that so arouses the zealously of HaKadosh Baruch Hu as the sin of transgressing the Brit.

Zohar, Bereshit 66b

Rabbi Shimon said, There is nothing in the world that so arouses the zealously of HaKadosh Baruch Hu as the sin of transgressing the Brit, as is said, “And I will bring a sword upon you that shall avenge my Brit” (Vayikra, 26:25).

Behold, the generation of the Flood was not considered completely guilty until they sexually corrupted (l’hashchit) their ways on the earth. Even though they acted violently, each man with his fellow, as is written, “And the earth was filled with violence,” and, “for the earth is filled with violence through them,” nevertheless, it was because, “the earth was corrupt (from the Hebrew verb l’hashchit) before God” that “behold I will destroy (also from l’hashchit) them.”

The word l’hashchit, to corrupt, also has the meaning of wasting one’s seed in vain.

Thus they were punished measure for measure: they were doomed to destruction for the sin of destroying their seed on the earth.

This passage, describing the Tzaddik, is a metaphor for the sefirah of Yesod, the spiritual channel that funnels illumination from all of the other sefirot to our world of Malchut. In this sense, the Yesod, called “Tzaddik,” is the foundation of the world, upon which all of the sefirot depend.

Zohar, Bereshit 82a

Rabbi Yitzhak explained the verse, “The righteous man flourishes like the palm tree; he grows like a cedar in Lebanon” (Tehillim, 92:13). Why is the tzaddik (righteous man) compared to a palm tree? Just as a palm tree, when cut down, takes a long time for another to grow again, so too when the world loses a tzaddik, it takes a long time before another rises in his place. For this same reason, the tzaddik is compared to a cedar in Lebanon.

Regarding, “flourishes like a palm tree,” just as a palm tree does not grow (and bear fruit) unless the male be planted by the female, so the tzaddik cannot flourish save when husband and wife are united, when the male aspect of tzaddik (Yesod) is united with the female aspect of tzaddik (Malchut), as with Avraham and Sarah.

Also, “he grows like a cedar in Lebanon,” just as a cedar is the tallest tree and everyone can sit under it, so the tzaddik is exalted over everyone and all sit under him (in the shade of his blessings). The world is supported upon a single tzaddik, as it is written, “The tzaddik is the Yesod (foundation) of the world” (Mishle, 10:25), and on his behalf the world (Malchut) is upheld. Rabbi Yehuda queried, Behold, we have learned that the world (the sefirah of Malchut) rests on seven pillars (the seven lower sefirot starting from Chochmah), as it is written, “she has hewn out her seven pillars” (Mishle, 9:1).

Rabbi Yosi answered him, That is certainly the case, but those others stand on the foundation of the seventh (Yesod, the seventh sefirah after the sefirah of Chochmah), which is the real support of the world. This is the tzaddik who waters and vitalizes the world and who nourishes all.

About him it is written, “Say of the tzaddik that he is good,) for (through his influence) they shall eat the fruit of their doings” (Yishayahu, 3:10). And also it is written, “The L-rd is good to all (to the Yesod which is called “all” because it is the channel for all of the upper sefirot) and His mercies are over all his works” (Tehillim, 145:9).

The Zohar teaches that whoever safeguards the purity of his sexual life in this world, if he has other sins, even though he be punished in the next world for them, it will not be through the sufferings of Gehinom.

Zohar, Bereshit 93a

Rabbi Abba said: Great is the merit of Israel for HaKodesh Baruch Hu desired them from all of the other nations, and gave them this sign of the Brit. For whoever has this sign will not descend to Gehinom if he guards it properly, by not entering it into a foreign domain, nor by dealing falsely with the Name of the King. For whoever betrays this sign is like one who betrays the Name of G-d, as it is written, “They have dealt treacherously against the L-rd, for they have begotten strange children” (Hoshea, 5:7).

This passage describes the insights of Torah revealed by Rabbi Shimon’s disciples during a long night of study, on the eve of a Brit Milah.

Zohar, Bereshit 93a

In the meantime, daylight arrived while they were still expounding words of Torah. When they rose to depart, their host said, “Please finish discussing

the matters you were engaged in this night.” When they inquired why, he responded that the following day they could see the master of the Brit (the prophet Eliahu), for the host’s wife had requested that they stay for the celebration of the circumcision of their son. Rabbi Abba answered, “This is an invitation to be present at a mitzvah, and to behold the Shechinah.” So they stayed.

They lingered the whole day. That night, the host assembled all his friends and they studied the Torah all that night, and there wasn’t anyone who slept. The host asked each and every one of them to explain a new understanding of Torah.

The key to understanding this passage is the double meaning of the expression “breaking of breaches,” (bifroah peraot) which can also be read as, “when they uncovered the flesh in the act of circumcision.”

Raba Abba commenced with the verse: “In time of a breaking of breaches in Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves, praise the L-rd” (Shoftim, 5:2). Why did Devorah and Barak begin their song with this verse? Because, as we have learned, the world exists only on behalf of this Brit, as is written, “If not for my Brit day and night, I would not establish the ordinances of heaven and earth.” For the heaven and earth depend on this. For this reason, as long as Israel safeguards this Brit, the laws of heaven and earth are secure in their place. And whenever Israel neglects this Brit, G-d forbid, heaven and earth are not in their place, and blessings are not drawn into in the world.

Just as the entire good of the world depends upon Israel’s proper observance of the Brit, its non-observance causes great harm. When the Jewish People do not draw back the foreskin from the head of the Brit, this gives strength to the impure klipah in the spiritual world, which in turn gives power to the Gentile nations to rule over Israel.

Behold, the Gentile nations only gained dominance over Israel because they neglected this Brit, by not uncovering and unrolling the foreskin after circumcision. Regarding this it is written that the children of Israel forsook the L-rd, and He gave them into the hands of Sisera, until Devorah came and made all Israel vow to perform the circumcision properly; then their enemies surrendered before them.

And similarly, this is what we have learnt, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Yehoshua, “The Israelites are uncircumcised, for they do not remove the foreskin as they should, and you desire to lead them into the land and conquer their enemies when they haven’t been true to My Brit? Circumcise the children of Israel a second time” (Yehoshua, 5:2). Thus until the foreskin

was removed properly, they did not enter the land and their enemies were not subdued.

So too (in the time of Devorah) when Israel vowed to observe this sign, their enemies were subdued before them, and blessing returned to the world. This is what is written, “In a time of a breaking of breaches in Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves, praise the L-rd” (Shoftim, 5:2).

As noted, the Brit is connected to the sefirah of Yesod. The sign of the Brit (specifically the crown where the circumcision is performed) is associated with the sefirah of Malchut. The following passages teach that a man who safeguards the purity of his sexual life, as embodied in the sign of the Brit, is raised up to kingship (Malchut), endowing him dominance over the material world.

Zohar, Bereshit 93b

Another taught: “And Yosef said to his brothers, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near (Bereshit, 45:4). Why did he tell them to come near, since they were standing beside him? The reason was that when he said to them, “I am Yosef your brother,” they were stunned, seeing his exalted, regal state. Yosef said, “I have attained this position of royalty because of this.” He told them to come near, and he showed them the sign of his Brit Milah. “This is what earned me this kingship, for I have guarded it properly.”

From this we learn that whomever safeguards the sign of the Brit, Malchut is safeguarded for him. We also learn this from Boaz, who said to Rut, “As the L-rd lives, lie down until the morning” (Rut, 3:13). The evil inclination tried to entice him, but he took an oath upon himself and safeguarded the Brit. Because of this, he merited that kings came forth from him (Kings David and Shlomo) who ruled over all the kings of the world, and also HaMelech HaMashiach, who will bear upon himself the Name of G-d.

The all-night learning goes on to reveal that King David’s confidence in battle, “In zot I am confident,” derived from the sanctity of his sexual life. Another scholar taught: “Though a host should camp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this (zot) I am confident” (Tehillim,, 27:3). What is the meaning of “this” (zot)? The word “zot” signifies the sign of the Brit, which is always with a man and has a parallel Above. Therefore it says, “in zot,” as is written, “Zot is the sign of the Brit” (Bereshit, 9:12), and “Zot is My Brit” (Bereshit, 17:10). Both (zot and Brit) are manifested in the same grade (of Malchut). The words “ze” (the masculine of zot, referring to the sefirah Yesod) and “zot” (the feminine form, referring to Malchut) are bonded in the same grade without separation

between them.

You might say, that if this is the case with all men, why should it apply to David alone, and not to everyone else? The reason is that this zot (the attribute of Malchut) was especially attached to him and engraved upon his character, it being the crown of kingship.

Once again, the Zohar emphasizes that by safeguarding the holiness of the Brit, a man is protected, not only in this world, but also in the next.

Zohar, Bereshit 94a

Another began his exposition by referring to the verse, “Unless the L-rd had been my help, my soul would have soon dwelt in (Duma) silence (Tehillim, 94:17). We have learned: what is the special merit of Israel that they do not go down to Gehinom, and are not delivered into the hands of Duma (the angel in charge of Gehinom) like the idol worshipping nations? The reason is that they are distinguished by the sign of the Brit.

For we have learned that when a man leaves this world, bands of destroying angels, wielders of fiery judgment, gather to claim him. But when they examine him and see that he bears the sign of the holy Brit upon him, they flee from him, and he is not delivered into the hands of Duma, to be cast down into Gehinom, for whomever falls into his hands is condemned to punishment there. Both upper and lower (angels) are afraid of this sign, and no evil decrees have dominance over a man if he has succeeded in safeguarding this sign, because he is attached to the Name of the Holy One, Blessed Be He.

The sefirah of Yesod, associated with the organ of the Brit, is the spiritual channel connecting an individual to G-d. Through the channel of Yesod come Divine Inspiration (ruach hakodesh). Thus a proper Brit Milah, and guarding the laws of sexual purity, are the keys to a Jew’s attachment to G-d.

Zohar, Bereshit 94a

Another explained the verse: “And from my flesh, I shall see G-d” (Iyov, 19:26). What is the meaning of “And from my flesh?” It would be more proper to say, “from my inner essence.” However, “my flesh” is to be understood literally (as being the place of the Brit), as in the verse, “and the holy flesh is removed from thee” (Yirmeyahu, 11:15), and also, “and my Brit shall be in your flesh” (Bereshit, 17:13).

For thus we have learned: whenever a man is stamped with the holy impress of this sign, through it literally he will attain his awareness of G-d, because the holy soul is attached to this place (in the parallel spiritual world of the Yesod).

But if he does not merit this, because he did not guard this sign, then of him it is written, “They lose the soul of G-d” (Iyov, 4:9), for he did not properly guard the impress of G-d. If, however, he guards it, then the Shechinah does not part from him....

When is the Shechinah established with him? When he is married, then the sign enters into its intended place....The holy soul is attached to this place, and everything depends on this sign. Thus it is written, “And from my flesh, I shall see G-d.” This is the perfection of everything, literally from “my flesh,” from this very sign. Therefore, how fortunate are the holy Jewish People who are attached to the Holy One, Blessed Be He; fortunate are they in this world and fortunate in the world to come. Regarding them it is written: “But you who cleave to the L-rd your G-d, are alive every one of you this day” (Devarim, 4:4).

A person who aspires to spiritual heights must guard his hands from transgression, including transgressing the Brit.

Zohar, Bereshit 100b

Come and see. “Who shall ascend the mountain of the L-rd, or who shall stand in His holy place?” (Tehillim, 24:3) The next verse explains. “He that hath clean hands,” meaning that he has not made the form of any forbidden image, and he has not held any forbidden object. Also, that he has not defiled himself with them, nor defiled his body with them like those who that pollute themselves with the doings of their hands. This is what is called, “clean hands.”

Having relations with a gentile woman not only defiles a Jew and his offspring, it is like bowing down to a false god.

Zohar, Bereshit 131b

Whoever cleaves to a woman of any of the gentile nations becomes defiled. The child born from such an attachment receives a defiled spirit. It may be asked, if the child is from a Jewish father, why should he receive a defiled spirit? Behold, at the very start, his father polluted himself when he attached himself to that impure woman. Since the father become impure from this impure woman, all the more so, the child born from her will receive an impure spirit. Not only this, but he transgresses the Torah, as is written, “For thou shall not bow down to another god; for the L-rd, whose Name is Zealous, is a zealous G-d...” (Shemot, 34:14). He is zealous over the holy Brit.

Rabbi Elazar said, Behold, because Avraham Avinu possessed the exalted Wisdom, he wanted to separate himself from all the other nations and not be attached to them. For this reason, it is written, “And I will make thee swear

by the L-rd, the G-d of heaven, and the G-d of earth, that thou shall not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, amongst whom I dwell” (Bereshit, 24:3).

The daughters of the Canaanites certainly refers to the underlying principle (that all gentile women are forbidden) as it says, “and has had relations with the daughter of a strange god...” [From the verse: “For Yehuda has profaned the holiness of the L-rd, whom he loved, and has had relations with the daughter of a strange god” (Malachi, 2:11)].

Behold, whomever inserts the holy Brit into a gentile woman brings it about that another place is also defiled (in the upper spiritual worlds, channels of Divine influx are polluted and closed, and the Divine influx is given over to the forces of impurity, strengthening them instead).

Regarding this it is written, “For three things the earth is disquieted...when a slave takes the place off the king... when a hated woman is enjoyed; and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress” (Mishle, 30:21).

And even though Avraham made Eliezer swear to uphold the Brit, he did not trust him until he prayed to G-d, saying, “And I will make thee swear by the L-rd, the G-d of heaven, and the G-d of earth, that thou shall not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, amongst whom I dwell.” He sent His angel before him, the Angel of the Brit, in order to safeguard this Brit, that it should not be defiled amongst the impure nations.

In these two passages of the Zohar, the inner meaning of the ladder from Yaacov’s dream is revealed as referring to the Yesod-Malchut connection. The expressions, “How awesome is this place,” and “the House of G-d,” as well as, “the gate of heaven,” are all associated with the place of the Brit – and the union of Malchut and Yesod.

Zohar, Bereshit 149b

“And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth” (Bereshit, 28:12). What is the inner meaning of this ladder? It represents the sefirah upon which all others rest, and this is the foundation of the world....

Zohar, Bereshit 150b

“And he was afraid, and said, How awesome is this place” (Bereshit, 28:17). This word, “place” (“makom”) has a double meaning. “How awesome is this place” is speaking of the same place previously mentioned (Malchut), and it also refers to the sign of the holy Brit (the sefirah of Yesod) which should not be left dysfunctional (without uniting with Malchut).

These two understandings are really one (when the feminine sefirah of Malchut is united with the masculine sefirah of Yesod). Thus Yaacov said: “This (zeh) is none other than the House of G-d,” meaning that “Zeh” (the

Yesod) should not be left inactive; it should not be left alone (without uniting with Malchut). The Brit functions as a House of G-d, to be used for procreation and to draw forth influence and blessings from all the bodily organs. “Zeh” (the Yesod) is the gate of the body, and thus it is written, “And zeh – this is the gate of heaven,” the gate through which the flow of blessings pass downwards. It is attached (like a ladder) both in the upper world and the lower: above as “the gate of heaven,” and below as “none other than the House of G-d.”

Thus, “He was afraid, and said, How awesome is this place.” Nevertheless, people pay no heed to the honor it deserves, in order to become perfect through it above and below.

According to the secrets of Torah, the term tzaddik, refers not only to a righteous individual who lives in sexual purity, but also to the organ of the Brit, and to the sefirah of Yesod, the spiritual channel through which all blessings flow to the world.

Zohar, Bereshit 162a

Rabbi Yesa the Younger was often in the presence of Rabbi Shimon. He asked him about the verse: “Blessings are upon the head of the tzaddik” (Mishle, 10:6). It should have simply said, “upon the tzaddik.” What is the meaning of “the head of the tzaddik?”

Rabbi Shimon answered, the head of the tzaddik refers to the holy crown (of the Yesod, called tzaddik) as has been taught elsewhere. Also, “the head of the tzaddik” is an allusion to Yaacov (the sefirah of Tiferet which is situated like a head above Yesod) who receives the blessings and transmits them to the tzaddik (the Yesod) and from there they emanate in all directions, and all of the worlds are blessed.

We have, however, explained that in the verse, “Blessings are upon the head of the tzaddik,” that “the head of the tzaddik” is the name given to the same place, the head of the Brit, from where fountains of blessing spread forth to the world. Just as the opening of a wine barrel through which the wine is poured is called the head of the barrel, so too “the head of tzaddik” is the place where the fountains flow forth into the female. The tzaddik is called head, the head of all the blessings, because all of the blessings rest upon it. Furthermore, the man who succeeds in guarding in purity the sign of the holy Brit, and who observes the commandments of the Torah, is called tzaddik, and is so called from his head to the sole of his foot. And when blessings flow into the world, they rest upon his head, and from there the blessings are spread throughout the world, through the holy and righteous sons whom he fosters.

Avraham had his servant, Eliezer, take an oath by placing his hand under the place of Avraham's circumcision, because of its exalted holiness.

Zohar, Bereshit 181b

“Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh” (Bereshit, 24:2), this is place of the tzaddik, the foundation of the world (the sefirah of Yesod). The secret of the matter is that from this place the life force of existence emanates to the world.

While this passage stresses the severity of wasting semen in vain, in other places, the Zohar affirms that atonement is indeed possible for this sin. One of the rectifications is having children, and raising them in the ways of the Torah. This brings blessing to a man in this world and in the world to come.

Zohar, Bereshit 188a

“And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the L-rd, and He slew him also” (Bereshit, 38:10).

Rabbi Hiya explained this by referring to the verse: “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening do not withhold thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, this or that...” (Kohelet, 11:6).

Behold, how fitting it is for a man to be careful against transgressing, and to be careful in his good doings before the Holy One Blessed Be He. For many messengers and chieftains are in the world who wander and roam about, spying out the doings of man in order to bear witness against him – and all is recorded in a book.

Come and see. Out of all the sins which defile a man in this world, the sin which defiles him the most, both in this world and in the world to come, is the sin of wasting seed with a forbidden woman, or spilling one's seed in vain with one's hand or foot. These acts bring defilement, as is said, “For Thou are not a G-d who has pleasure in wickedness; nor shall evil (ra) dwell with Thee” (Tehillim, 5:5).

This transgressor will not enter within the Heavenly Curtain, and will not behold the presence of the Ancient of Days. We learn this from the verses, “Nor shall evil (ra) dwell with Thee,” and, “And Er, Yehuda's firstborn, was evil (ra) in the sight of the L-rd” (Bereshit, 38:7).

Because of this sin, it is also written, “your hands are filled with blood” (Yishayahu, 1:15). How meritorious is the portion of the man who fears his Master, and who is on guard against this evil doing, striving to purify himself, and to keep himself strong in the fear of his Master.

Behold what the verse teaches: “In the morning sow thy seed,” refers to the years when a man is filled with the strength of his youth, when he endeavors to have children with the woman meant for him, as is written, “In the

morning sow thy seed.”

This is the proper time, as it says: “As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of one's youth” (Tehillim, 127:4). For then the father can then teach them the ways of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and thus receive a good reward in the world to come, as it is written, “Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them; they shall not be put to shame, when they speak with their enemies in the gate” (Ibid., 5). He will not be put to shame in the next world when the judges bring their accusations against him, since there is no greater reward in the next world than that of the man who has taught his son to fear his Master and to walk in the ways of the Torah.

So it is written of Avraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the L-rd, to do justice and judgment” (Bereshit, 18:19). This same merit stands by a man against all of the accusers in the other world. Therefore, “In the morning sow thy seed.”

“And in the evening do not withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, this or that....” Even in old age, one shouldn't say I have already done my duty, it is enough; or that I tried and wasn't successful, and now that I am old, I no longer want to. Even so, it says, “do not withhold thy hand,” from bringing children into the world. What is the reason? “For thou knowest not which shall prosper, this or that.” Meaning that a man cannot be sure which child will be the one to stand in his defense in the next world.... Therefore, fortunate is the man who merits to have sons and to teach them the ways of the Torah.

The Zohar teaches that the Divine punishments stated in the second passage of the Shema fall upon the nation and the Land due to Israel's sexual transgressions.

Zohar, Bereshit 189b

Come and see, when G-d watches over the world with the intent to judge it, and finds evildoers there, then, as is written, “He shut up the heaven, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield her produce” (Devarim, 11:17). And afterward it is written, “You shall quickly perish from the land,” for through the sins of mankind, heaven and earth are shut up and their natural workings are impaired.

Those who do not guard the sign of the holy Brit cause a separation between Israel and their Father in heaven, as is written, “And you turn aside and worship other gods, and bow down to them,” (Ibid.). And afterward, it says, “He shut up the heaven, so that there be no rain.”

For to be false to the holy Brit is considered like bowing down to another

god.

In upholding the Brit, by safeguarding his sexual purity, Yosef became attached to the spiritual channel of blessing, the Yesod.

Zohar, Bereshit 194b

Rabbi Shimon said, It was only after Yosef withstood the test of temptation (with the wife of Potiphor) that he was called Tzaddik. Since he guarded the holy Brit, he was called Tzaddik. And he was crowned with the exalted grade of the holy Brit, (the Yesod).

From Yosef, we learn that whoever safeguards his Brit in sexual purity, it is like he observed all of the Torah.

Zohar, Bereshit 197a

Come and see, the Holy One Blessed Be He fashioned the kingdom of earth after the model of the kingdom of heaven, one like the other, and whatever transpires on earth has first been approved above by G-d.

The holy kingdom was not a completed kingdom until it was united with the Patriarchs, since the Holy One Blessed Be He fashioned the upper kingdom that it should be illuminated in the world by the (sefirot mystically embodied in the) Patriarchs.

And when Yosef, the tzaddik, went down to Egypt before his family, he drew the Shechinah after him, since the Shechinah only follows after the tzaddik (keeper of the Brit). This is the reason that Yosef preceded the others to Egypt, where he gathered up all the wealth of the world, as was fitting. Afterwards, the Shechinah went down to Egypt to accompany the descent of the tribes.

And because Yosef guarded his Brit in sexual purity, he merited to be crowned with and attached to the place fitting him (the Yesod) and thus merited kingship both in the upper and lower kingdoms. And likewise, whoever guards the holy Brit, it is like he observed all of holy Torah, since the Brit is equal in weight with the whole Torah.

In this discourse of Rabbi Hiya, the severity of masturbation is stressed, to the point of declaring that repentance does not atone for this sin. However, in other places, the Zohar asserts that even this transgression can be erased with a path of exalted t'shuva.

Zohar, Bereshit 219b

We have learned concerning the righteous man whom G-d favors, that when the heavenly proclamation is made concerning him, that in thirty days he will take his place among the righteous in the Garden of Eden, then all the tzaddikim rejoice and come forth to crown his place until he comes to dwell amongst them.

But if he is a doer of evil, then the proclamation is made in Gehinom, thirty days before his coming, and all of the evildoers are saddened. They all moan: “Woe, behold, a new judgment is awakened because of so-and-so.” How many executioners are called out against him before he comes. Woe to the evildoer and woe to his neighbor! Then they all declare: “Woe, to the evildoer shall come evil, for the payment of his hands shall it be done to him” (Yishayahu, 3:11). What is “the payment of his hands?” Rabbi Yitzhak said that this includes someone who is adulterous with his hands to spill and destroy his seed in vain.

For we have learned that whoever spills his seed in vain is called evil (ra). This person will not merit to see the face of the Shechinah, as it is written, “For Thou are not a G-d who desires wickedness; Thou will not dwell with evil (ra)” (Tehillim, 5:5). It is further written, “And Er, the firstborn of Yehuda, was evil (ra)” (Bereshit, 38:7). Here also it says, “Woe, to the evildoer shall come evil (ra).” Woe to this evildoer who by his own doing made himself evil. He will be punished for the doing of his hands. This includes someone who acts adulterously with his hands to spill and destroy his semen in vain. Such a person is cast down lower than all the others in that world.

Come and see, it is written, “Woe, to the evildoer shall come evil.” Since it already says evildoer, why does it also say evil? However, it is like I said, because he makes himself evil, and because it says that G-d will not reside with evil. Everyone else has a chance to ascend from Gehinom, but not him. Can it be that he is worse even than a murderer? Behold, all can ascend, but not him. What is the reason? A murderer kills another man, but this one kills his very own children and spills very much blood. Behold, regarding all other evildoers in the world, it is not written, “And it was evil in the sight of the L-rd” (Bereshit, 38:10). But regarding this sin, it is written, “And it was evil in the sight of the L-rd, the thing which he did.” What is the reason? Because, as it is written, he “spilled his seed on the ground” (Ibid., 38:9). Rabbi Yehuda said: Every sin in the world can be atoned for by t’shuva except for this, and every evildoer may hope to see the face of the Shechinah except for this one, as is written, “Thou will not dwell with evil,” not at all. Having learned that those who blemish the Brit will not merit to see the face of the Shechinah, Rabbi Yitzhak teaches that it is precisely the guardians of the Brit who will.

Rabbi Yitzhak said, Fortunate are the tzaddikim (the guardians of the Brit) in this world and in the world to come. Regarding them it is written, “And Thy people are all tzaddikim; they shall forever inherit the land” (Yishayahu,

60:21). What is the meaning of, “they shall forever inherit the land?” Rabbi Yehuda replied, as it is written, “I will walk before the L-rd in the land of the living,” (Tehillim, 18:6), (where the land of the living refers to being joined with the Shechinah in the world to come).

Yaacov made Yosef swear on the place of the Brit, as did Avraham with his servant, Eliezer, because of its exalted holiness.

Zohar, Bereshit 222b

Rabbi Yosi said: With what did Yaacov make Yosef swear, in the verse, “Put I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh” (Bereshit, 47:29). By the very same sign of the Brit that was stamped on his flesh, since the holiness of the Brit, more than anything else, was what gave the forefathers their elevation and stature. And this Brit is the secret of Yosef.

In this passage, the Zohar explains a verse in Tehillim: “I have made a Brit with My chosen, I have sworn to David, My servant, thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne in all generations” (Tehillim, 89:4-5). The inner meaning is that Hashem promises the sefirah of Malchut, symbolized by David, that it will forever be united with the sefirah of Yesod, symbolized by the Brit, thus enabling Divine blessing to flow to Israel – except when the sins of Israel interfere, causing disconnection and exile.

Zohar, Bereshit 231a

“I have made a Brit with my chosen.” This Brit is the secret of faith.

Another explanation: this Brit is the tzaddik (the sefirah of Yesod).

Blessings flow forth to the lower world through him. And all of the chosen Holy Angelic Ministers (Chayot Hakodesh) are blessed through this flow.

This is the reason that the verse says: “I have made a Brit with My chosen.”

“I have sworn to David, My servant,” this is the secret of faith (Malchut)

that it is always bound up with the tzaddik (Yesod). And this is the

foundation of the world, that they (Malchut and Yesod) never be separated.

Except in the time of the exile, when the flow of blessing is cut off, and the secret of faith is impaired, and all joy is lost.

Rabbi Abba teaches that the most exalted secret of the Torah is the secret contained in the recondite understandings of the Brit. These secrets are only revealed to those who fear sin.

Zohar, Bereshit 236b

Rabbi Abba explained the verse: “The secret of Hashem is revealed to those who fear Him, to make known to them His Brit” (Tehillim, 25:14). “The secret of Hashem,” is the most exalted secret of the Torah that G-d only grants to those who fear sin. To those who fear sin, G-d reveals the most exalted secret of the Torah. And what is the most exalted secret of the

Torah? It is (the secret of) the sign of the holy Brit, which is called the secret of the L-rd – this is the holy Brit.

The man who lives a life of sexual purity, guarding the Brit, is the true man of valor.

Zohar, Bereshit 240b

Rabbi Abba taught: “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O valorous one; thy glory and thy majesty” (Tehillim, 45:4).

Is this glory and majesty, to arm oneself with weapons and use them? One who studies Torah and wages the battles of Torah, and arms oneself in this way, this is praiseworthy, this is glory and majesty. Yet it says, “Gird thy sword.”

The main point of the matter, however, is that G-d has given the sign of the holy Brit, and stamped it upon men for them to guard it, and not blemish it – it being the stamp of the King. He who blemishes it, behold, the sword which avenges the blemish to the Brit is raised up against him (Vayikra, 26:25) to avenge the blemish to the holy Brit which is impressed on him and which he impaired.

He who desires to safeguard this place should hurry and make a rectification-tikun on himself. When the evil inclination gains strength over him, he should picture the sword that is girded on the thigh to punish anyone who blemishes this place. This is the reason it says: “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O valorous one.” This one is called valorous, and this is his “glory and majesty.”

The tzaddikim are the guardians of the Brit.

Zohar, Bereshit 247b

Fortunate are they who are called tzaddikim, for only he who guards the grade of the sign of the holy Brit is called tzaddik. Fortunate are they in this world and in the world to come.

Sexual wrongdoings cause the Shechinah to be exiled from the world, and the prayers of mankind go unanswered.

Zohar, Shemot 3b

There are three transgressions which drive the Shechinah away from the world, and cause it to be that the Holy One Blessed Be He has no abode on earth, and that the cries and prayers of mankind go unanswered. And these are the transgressions:

A man who has sexual relations with a woman during the period of her menstruation. There is no impurity in the world so strong as menstrual impurity (niddah). The impurity of niddah is the most damaging type of impurity there is. The man is defiled and everyone who touches him is

defiled with him. Everywhere they go, the Shechinah flees from them. In addition, this man brings terrible diseases on himself and on the child born from such a union. Because he had contact with a woman in niddah, this impurity is transferred to him and clings to all of his body. A child born from this is possessed with a spirit of impurity, and this impurity will accompany him his whole life, since his foundation is built upon the most powerful and most stringent impurity that exists. For as soon as man has relations with a niddah, her state of menstrual impurity clings to him, as is written, “Her niddah impurity will be on him” (Vayikra, 15:24).

The second category is the man who has sexual relations with a gentile woman. For he puts the holy Brit and the sign that upholds the world into a foreign realm, as is written, “For Yehuda has profaned the holiness of the L-rd whom he loved, and has taken to himself the daughter of a strange god” (Malachi, 2:11). For we have learned that the Holy One Blessed Be He has no zealousness, except for His zealousness over the holy Brit, for this Brit (the Yesod) is the secret of the Sacred Name and the secret of faith. As is written, “And the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moav” (Bamidbar, 25:1), then, immediately afterward, “And the anger of the L-rd was kindled against Israel.”

The leaders of the Jewish People have the responsibility to make sure that the Brit is guarded properly.

The leaders of the nation who know of this, and yet do not actively protest, are the first to be punished, as is written, “Take all of the leaders of the people and hang them up before the L-rd against the sun” (Ibid., 4).

Rabbi Abba asked, What is the meaning of “against the sun,” in this verse? This is referring to a transgression against the Brit which is called sun.

Referring to this, the verse speaks: “For a sun and a shield is the L-rd your G-d” (Tehillim, 84:14). A sun and a shield, this is the holy Brit. Just as the sun rises and spreads light over the whole world, so too the holy Brit rises and spreads light over a man’s body (when its sanctity is properly guarded).

Just as a shield is used to shield a man, so too the holy Brit shields a man.

Whomever safeguards its sanctity, there is no harm in the world that can come near him, and this is the meaning of, “hang them up before the L-rd against the sun,” (for their transgression against the Brit which is called sun).

The leaders of the people are deemed responsible in every generation for this transgression, if they know of it, yet are not zealous in stamping it out. For they are required to be zealous on G-d’s behalf against this transgression (of sexual wrongdoing) for this is the Brit.

Repentance is possible, even for the grave transgression of sexual relations

with a gentile woman.

But he who enters this holiness into a foreign realm transgresses the prohibition, “Thou shall have no other gods before Me...thou shall not bow down to them, nor worship them; for I the L-rd thy G-d am a zealous G-d” (Shemot, 20:3). For it is all the same zealousness (for bowing down to a foreign god and bowing down to have relations with a gentile woman are considered the same). For this reason, the Shechinah flees from such a person. Being false to the holy Brit which is stamped on a man’s flesh, is like being false to the Name of G-d. For whoever is false to the seal of the King is being false to the King himself. He has no portion in the G-d of Israel, unless through the power of a constant (great) repentance....

Abortion is the third wrongdoing that drives the Shechinah from the world. He who murders his child – the fetus his wife is pregnant with – by bringing about its death in the womb. For this is contrary to G-d’s blueprint and His creative workings. There is a man who kills another man, but this one kills his own child.

This act brings about three evils that the world cannot endure. These things destroy the world’s foundations, little by little, without people knowing the cause, and G-d removes Himself from the world, bringing war, famine, and pestilence upon mankind. These are the things brought about by abortion: the murder of one’s child; the destruction of G-d’s blueprint for creation; and the Shechinah is exiled and made to wander in the world without finding rest. Over these, the Shechinah weeps, and the world is punished with harsh judgments. Woe and sorrow to the man who causes this – it were better for him that he had never been born.

In the merit of guarding themselves from these three sins, Israel was redeemed from the bondage of Egypt.

Zohar, Shemot 3b (continued)

It was a mark of Israel’s righteousness that, even though they were in exile in Egypt, they guarded themselves from these three sins; from transgressing the laws of Niddah; from having sexual relations with gentile women; and from abortion. In fact, they made a special effort to multiply, in open opposition to the decree that every newborn son be cast into the river. Not a single Jew aborted a pregnancy, nor slew any child at all. It was in the merit of these three things that Israel was liberated from the exile.

In answer to the question, why didn’t the Almighty reveal Himself in all of His glory when he redeemed Israel and the Shechinah from the Babylonian exile, like He did from Egypt, the Zohar answers:

Zohar, Shemot 7a

Behold, we have learned that it was because of their sin, for the Jews took gentile wives and caused the holy Brit to enter into a foreign realm (profaning G-d's Name). This is the reason that the miracles and wondrous signs that were fitting to be performed were denied them. This was not the case in the exile in Egypt, where all of the Jews remained true to being the Tribes of Hashem. As the pure Sons of Israel they entered Egypt, and as the pure Sons of Israel, they departed.

Guarding the purity of sexual life is the key to possessing the Land of Israel, for in doing so, the sefirah of Yesod is united with the sefirah of Malchut, which finds its earthy expression in the Land of Israel.

Zohar, Shemot 23a

“And I have also established My Brit with them to give them the land of Canaan” (Shemot, 5:4), because they circumcise themselves. For all those who are circumcised inherit the land, for the land is only inherited by the tzaddik, and everyone who is circumcised is called tzaddik, as it is written, “Thy people are all tzaddikim, they shall forever inherit the land” (Yishayahu, 60:21). Whoever is circumcised and guards the purity of the sign of the Brit is called tzaddik. Come and see with Yosef. He was not called tzaddik until he had safeguarded this same Brit, the sign of the holy foundation (Yesod). Since he guarded its purity (by overcoming the temptations of Potifar's wife), he was called tzaddik – Yosef HaTzaddik. Sexual sins impair the union of the sefirot of Yesod and Malchut, thus preventing Divine blessing to descend to the world. In revenge, Malchut sends “the sword that avenges the Brit” against transgressors.

Zohar, Shemot 26a

Rabbi Hiya and Rabbi Yosi were present with Rabbi Shimon when Rabbi Shimon began to explain: “Be afraid of the sword, for wrath over sins brings the sword, that you may know that there is judgment” (Iyov, 19:20).

Judgment here means a judgment from Above. Then what is the sword? This is “the sword that avenges the Brit” (Vayikra, 26:25). For this sword stands waiting to punish those who are false to the Brit. The vengeance comes from this sword (the sefirah of Malchut). This is what is written, “for wrath over sins (of the Brit) brings the sword.”

What is the reason (that the sefirah of Malchut is the punishing agent)?

Because whoever is false to the Brit, causes an impairment above (between the sefirot of Yesod and Malchut, impairing their union). Thus the natural flow of Divine influx to the world is disturbed, and the longing to send forth blessing is not awakened in its rightful place, (thus denying the sefirah of Malchut its rightful function).

On the other hand, the man who guards the Brit, he causes an awakening of the Brit above (the union of Yesod and Malchut), and through him, both upper and lower worlds are blessed.

When the tzaddikim guard the Brit, they are rewarded with the gift of the Land of Israel, the secret of Malchut in this world.

Who awakens this Brit above (bringing about the yichud-union of Yesod and Malchut)? The tzaddikim in the world (who guard the Brit). From where do we learn this? Because it is written, “I have also established my Brit with them (the tzaddikim) to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their dwellings” (Shemot, 6:4).

In the merit of the Brit, the Destroyer passed over the houses of the Jews in Egypt.

Zohar, Shemot 36a

It was taught that the very same hour that Egypt was smitten, Israel was healed. Rabbi Yosi said (Rabbi Hizkiah said) in the verse, “Hashem shall pass over the door” (Shemot, 12:23), why does it say pass over the door (petach, meaning opening)? It should say that Hashem will pass over you. The meaning of “over the petach” is over the specific petach – the petach of the body. And what is the petach of the body? One has to say it is the place of circumcision.

Also, “Hashem shall pass over the petach,” meaning the well-known petach (of the milah). Why is it called the petach? Because it is the opening of the spirit and of the body.

Come and see, until Avraham was circumcised, he was covered over (by his foreskin) and closed up in all facets (spiritually and physically). But when he was circumcised, everything was opened, and he was no longer covered and closed up as before.

At the time of the resurrection, only those who have guarded the Brit will merit everlasting life.

Zohar, Shemot 57b

Rabbi Shimon said, Fortunate are those who will remain in the world at that time (of resurrection of the dead). And who will they be? Behold, no man will remain except for the circumcised who accepted the sign of the holy Brit, and have entered into this holy Brit in its two parts, as we have noted (the circumcision itself and the folding back of the skin), and have guarded the Brit, not to enter into forbidden relations. These are the men who will remain, and they will be inscribed for eternal life.

How do we know this? Because it is written, “And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem, shall be called holy,

everyone in Jerusalem that is written to life” (Yishayahu, 4:3). We can learn from this that those who are left in Zion, and who remain in Jerusalem, that is, those who perform the circumcision properly enter into these two grades (of Zion-Yesod, and Jerusalem-Malchut). And if he properly guards the purity of the Brit and is careful not to blemish it, regarding him it is written, “He that is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem shall be called holy.” These shall remain at that time, and the Holy One Blessed Be He will renew the world with them and rejoice with them. Regarding that time it is written, “May the glory of the Lord be forever; may the L-rd rejoice in his works” (Tehillim, 104:31).

Amongst several explanations of the prohibition, “Thou shall not make for yourself any graven image,” the Zohar cites transgressions of the Brit.
Zohar, Shemot 87b

We learned in a Braita, Rabbi Yitzhak said, “Thou shall not make for yourself any graven image,” this teaches that a man should not be false to the Name of G-d. What is this? The holy, life-sustaining sign of the Brit. For whoever is false to this Brit is false to the Name of G-d, for by means of the Brit, Israel made its initial attachment to the Holy One Blessed Be He, through the act of circumcision. Everything is based on this initial act of entering into the covenant of Avraham. This is the connection to the Shechinah. A man must not be false to this Brit. For whoever is false to this Brit is false to G-d. What is the essence of this betrayal? Not to taint the Brit by bringing it into a foreign domain, as is written, “took for himself the daughter of a strange god” (Malachi, 2:12).

Rabbi Yehuda said, the verse, “They betrayed the L-rd in giving birth to foreign children” (Hoshea, 5:7) is referring to this, for whoever is false to this Brit is false to the Holy One Blessed Be He. Because through this Brit a man is attached to G-d. And it says, “Thou shall not make for yourself any graven image, nor any likeness...” and after that it says, “Thou shall not bow down to them, nor worship them.” (Having sexual relations with a gentile woman is like bowing down to a foreign god, and the children of such unions are considered like graven images).

Guarding the Brit in sexual purity unites a man with Hashem.
Zohar, Shemot 87b

Fortunate is the man who has inherited this holy heritage (of the Brit) and guarded its purity. For in this holy heritage, a man is united with the Holy One Blessed Be He, especially if he keeps the precepts of the Torah. Behold, the King stretches out His right hand to receive him, and he cleaves to the Holy Trunk (the sefirah of Tiferet). Concerning this it says of Israel, “And

you who cleave to the L-rd your G-d” (Devarim, 4:4) and, “You are sons to the L-rd” (Ibid., 14:1). You are literally sons, as is written, “My firstborn son Israel” (Shemot, 4:22). And further, “Israel, in you I am glorified” (Yishayahu, 49:3).

The Torah commands that all male, circumcised Israelites make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Festivals. “Three times a year shall all thy males appear before the L-rd thy G-d in the place that He shall chose” (Devarim, 16:16). The Zohar teaches that the blessing of the holiday comes to the world only through these Jewish men, in their aspect of Yesod.

Zohar, Shemot 124a

“All thy males.” Why all thy males? Rabbi Elazar said, specifically all thy males (since they are circumcised), because they receive blessings from the fountain of the stream (the Yesod). From this we learn that every circumcised Israelite must appear before the Holy King so as to receive a blessing from the gushing waters of this stream. This is the meaning of, “according to the blessing of the L-rd thy G-d that He has given thee” (Devarim, 16:17). And it is written, “before the L-rd thy God,” since, as we learned, it is from there (the Yesod) that blessings flow forth to be received. Meritorious is the portion of Israel more than all the other nations.

In the merit of the Brit, the Jewish People triumph over their enemies and inherit the Land of Israel.

Zohar, Shemot 124a

Rabbi Hiya said, Through the merit of circumcision, the enemies of Israel are subdued before them, and Israel inherits their lands. Come and see what is written, “Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the L-rd G-d, the G-d of Israel” (Shemot, 34:23). Afterward it is written, “For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders.” For the Holy One Blessed Be He uproots inhabitants from their place and puts others in their stead. For this reason, it is written, “shall all your males appear before the L-rd G-d, the G-d of Israel.”

The commandment “Remember what Amalek did to you,” is a warning to remember that Amalek wages not only a physical war against us, but also a spiritual war against Israel’s attachment to the Brit. As Rashi writes (Devarim, 25:18), Amalek’s strategy was to entice the Jews into sexual transgression, as it says, “asher karcha b’derek,” from the word ker, meaning the impurity of a forbidden seminal discharge.

Zohar, Shemot 194b

“And Moshe gathered together all of the congregation of the Children of Israel” (Shemot, 35:1).

Rabbi Hiya began by explaining the verse, “And Shaul said to the Keni, Go depart, go down from among the Amelekites” (Shmuel 1, 15:6). Come and see. It is written, “I remember that which Amalek did to Israel” (Ibid., 15:2). What is the reason that the war that Amalek waged against Israel was singled out for remembering by the Holy One Blessed Be He, more than the wars that all other nations waged against Israel? Certainly, the reason is that the war with Amalek was waged on all sides, above and below. For at the same time, the evil serpent mustered its strength on high (in the spiritual battlefield), and physically down on earth.

Just as a poisonous snake lies in wait on the crossroads, so too Amalek was to Israel, like an poisonous snake waiting to ambush them on the crossroads, as it is written, “How he lay in wait for him on the way when he came up from Egypt” (Ibid., 15:2). He was lying in wait on high to defile the Mikdash (the Temple is Israel’s bond to Malchut) and lying in wait below to defile Israel’s purity (Israel’s bond to Yesod). How do we know this? Because it is written, “how he met thee (karcha) by the way” (Devarim, 25:18). The meaning of “karcha” can be understood from its alternate form “mikre” in the verse, “If there be among you any man that is not pure by reason of impurity that chances (mikre) by night” (Ibid., 23:11).

We are omitting a passage describing how Bilaam would enter a state of defilement through keri in order to wage a spiritual war against Israel. Here also, from the verse, “how he met thee (karcha) by the way,” we learn that Amalek set against thee that evil serpent on high in order to defile you on all sides. And if Moshe had not waged a mighty spiritual battle on high, and Yehoshua a mighty war down below, Israel would not have been able to overcome him. It is for this reason that the Holy One Blessed Be He insisted on preserving the memory of this hatred from generation to generation.

What is the reason? Because Amalek strove to uproot the sign of the Brit (Israel’s sexual purity) from its place.

All blessing and joy flow to the world from the Yesod.

Zohar, Vayikra 5b

“G-d is known in her palaces for a fortress” (Tehillim, 48:4). These palaces represent (the sefirot of) Nezach and Hod, for all of the blessings are gathered there (in Nezach). And all joy is gathered there (in Hod). From there they flow forth via the grade called tzaddik (the Yesod). There all of the blessings are gathered to sweeten the holy city (Malchut) and to give forth blessing.

A man who is not married is considered incomplete and deficient in his Divine service.

Zohar, Vayikra 5b

Come and see. It is written, “If any man of you bring an offering to the L-rd...” (Vayikra, 1:2). The word “man” excludes one who is not married, for behold, his offering is not considered an offering, and blessings do not reside with him, neither above nor below. We learn from what is written, “If any man of you bring an offering,” that an unmarried man is not a man, and the Shechinah does not rest on him, because he is lacking wholeness and is called blemished. He is not fit for Divine service, especially to bring an offering on the altar.

Because they were not married, Nadav and Avihu were deficient in their attachment to the sefirah of Yesod, and thus were not worthy of approaching the altar which is also established in the union of Malchut and Yesod.

Nadav and Avihu are proof, as is written, “And a fire went out before the L-rd” (Vayikra, 9:24). Therefore it is written, “If any man of you bring an offering to the L-rd.” Only a man who is composed of male and female is fitting to bring an offering.

Rabbi Abba said, Even though their deaths have been explained in other fashions, and these are certainly true, nonetheless, the incense is the most exalted of all of the offerings (associated with Yesod) for everything above and below are blessed through it. Because they were not married, they were not worthy to bring this supreme offering. For if they were not worthy to bring a regular offering, how much more so regarding the most exalting matters (the incense offering) which brings blessing to all of the worlds.... All of this is because a man who is not married is lacking. He is considered blemished before the King. And the holiness of the King flees from him, because it will not abide in a man lacking wholeness. Therefore it is written, “If any man of you bring an offering to the L-rd.” That is to say, someone who is called a man can bring. And someone who cannot be called man, is unable to bring.

Safeguarding the purity of the sexual covenant is considered like observing all of the Torah, for the Brit, and the Torah, and the Name of G-d are bound up as one.

Zohar, Vayikra 13b

Rabbi Abba taught, “All this (zot) has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten Thee, nor have we been false to Thy Brit” (Tehillim, 44:18). It is written (in the feminine gender), “All zot has come upon us...” when we would have expected (the masculine gender), “All zeh have come upon us....” However, the word zot refers to the heavenly judgments (of the feminine-associated Malchut). And, “we have not forgotten Thee,” means

that we have not forgotten the words of Your Torah. From this we learn that whoever forgets the teachings of the Torah, and does not want to study it, is considered like someone who forgot HaKadosh Baruch Hu, for all of the Torah is the Name of the Holy One Blessed Be He.

And the meaning of, “nor have we been false to Thy Brit,” is that whoever is false to the sign of the holy Brit which is stamped on him is considered to have dealt falsely with the Name of the King, for the Name of the King is stamped on him.

And a verse that follows substantiates this, as is written, “If we had forgotten the Name of our G-d, nor stretched out our hands to a strange god, would not G-d search this out?” (Ibid., 21). The words, “If we had forgotten the Name of our G-d,” parallel the words, “we have not forgotten Thee,” which is speaking about the Torah which is the Name of G-d. And when it says, “nor stretched out our hands to a strange god,” this is parallel to, “nor have we been false to Thy Brit.” These verses are all speaking of the same thing. Someone who stretches out his hands to embrace the foreign domain of the Sitra Achra, and someone who is false to the Brit, both are acting falsely to the Name of G-d.

From this we learn that the Torah is bound up with this Brit. For whoever keeps this Brit is considered like one who keeps the whole Torah. And whoever is false to it is considered like one who is false to the whole Torah. Come and see, until Avraham was circumcised it was not said of him that he kept the whole Torah. However, after he was circumcised, it says, “Because Avraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws” (Bereshit, 26:5), all because he became circumcised and was stamped with the holy sign, and guarded it in the proper fashion. Therefore the verse attributes to him that he observed all of the Torah. A Jew is commanded to sanctify himself in his marital relations and not to be drawn after his lusts.

Zohar, Vayikra 49b

Rabbi Abba said, I see that the masses pay no attention to, and are ignorant of, the honor due to their Master.

It is written of Israel, “I have set you apart from the nations to be mine” (Vayikra, 20:24), and it is written, “You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I, the L-rd, am holy” (Ibid., 11:44).

If they distance themselves from G-d (by following after their lusts), where is their holiness, since their desires turn them away from Him? About this, the verse proclaims, “Be not as the horse, nor as the mule which have no understanding” (Tehillim, 32:9). How are men distinguished from the horse

and the mule? By sanctifying themselves, and by perfecting themselves, and by distinguishing themselves from all other beings.

Therefore, a man's marital relations should be at established times, in order that he may concentrate his desire on cleaving to the Holy One Blessed Be He. Behold, we have emphasized that at midnight, G-d enters the Garden of Eden to take pleasure in the tzaddikim, and then Knesset Yisrael (the Shechinah) praises Him. This is the favorable time to cleave to Him.

At this time, the disciples who study the Torah (at midnight) join Knesset Yisrael in praising the Holy King by their study of Torah.

All other men at this favorable time should sanctify themselves in G-d (during their marital relations) and concentrate their desires on cleaving to the Holy One Blessed Be He.

For the Torah scholars, their marital union should be at the time when there is another (supernal) union, and this is from one Sabbath (midnight) to the next Sabbath (midnight) in order to concentrate their desire on cleaving to the Holy One Blessed Be He and Knesset Yisrael. For this is a favorable time Above when all of the worlds, the upper and the lower, are blessed. If men distance themselves from Him and behave like beasts during their marital relations, where is their holiness in their duty to be holy? Where are those holy souls that could have been brought down from Above? Regarding this, King Shlomo cried out and proclaimed, "Also the soul without knowledge is not good" (Mishle, 19:2). What knowledge does this refer to? The knowledge of the Holy One Blessed Be He (during marital relations). When this occurs, then the soul is not good. This is the soul that is drawn down to their offspring through their marital relations, it is not good, for this soul is drawn down from the Sitra Achra (the realm of evil called the "Other Side") and this is not a good soul, for their hearts are not concentrated on G-d.

A man who incites himself with the evil inclination, and who does not focus his intention and the desire of his heart on G-d, the soul which he draws down comes from the side of the evil inclination, and this soul is not good. This is the meaning of, "Also the soul without knowledge is not good." Whoever races forward transgresses. Someone who hurries (to have relations) and ignores the favorable time, without desiring to sanctify the act, he behaves sinfully. He acts wrongly in every aspect.

And this is the reason that evil diseases fall upon men, and bear witness against them because of their brazenness, and reveal that G-d is repelled by them, and that He will not look on them with favor until they repent and mend their ways and return to their original purity.

Israel, and the Torah, and the Brit, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu are all connected, one to the other, in an all-inclusive bond.

Zohar, Vayikra 73b

Rabbi Hizkiah said, It is written, “For the L-rd will not forsake His people for the sake of His great Name” (Shmuel I, 12:22). Why will Hashem not forsake His people? Because of His Great Name. For all (the Jewish People and Hashem) are connected one with the other. And how is Israel connected to Hashem? Through the holy stamp imprinted on their flesh. Thus, “For the L-rd will not forsake His people,” the reason is, “for the sake of His great Name,” which is stamped on them.

We have learned in a Braita that the Torah is called Brit, and The Holy One Blessed Be He is called Brit, and the holy stamp (of the circumcision) is called Brit. Thus everything is connected one with the other, and they are never separated one from the other.

The holiness of Israel is manifest in the holiness of their marital relations.

Zohar, Vayikra 80a

Fortunate are the tzaddikim who labor in the study of the Torah, and who know the ways of the Holy One Blessed Be He, and sanctify themselves with the holiness of the King (during their marital relations) and thus become completely holy. Through this, they draw down a holy spirit from above, so that all of their children are truly righteous and are called sons of the King – holy children.

Woe to the wicked who are brazen and whose doings are brazen (in their sexual relations). From this, their children inherit a brazen soul from the impure side, as is written, “and be defiled by them.” That is to say, if a man comes to defile himself, he is defiled from on high.

“Be not as the horse, nor as the mule” (Tehillim, 32:9), the most lustful of animals, “that have no understanding,” which means that men should not behave in this beastly fashion. For if they act this way, then the “no understanding” of this verse will be like the “no understanding” of the following verse: “Yea, the dogs are brazen in spirit, they never have enough, and they are shepherds that have no understanding” (Yishayahu, 56:11).

That is to say, they will fall victim to spiritual demons called brazen spirited dogs. What is the reason? Because they do not know enough to understand (to sanctify their ways during marital relations).

And who are the shepherds mentioned? They are the demons that shepherd a man into Gehinom. “They never have enough,” as is said, “The leech has two daughters, crying, give, give” (Mishle, 30:15). They cry, give, give (hav, hav, like the bark of a dog) because they never have enough (in sending

more and more sinners to Gehinom). They all go their way, bringing more victims to their end. For they are the spies of Gehinom.

Why does all this come upon these men? Because they do not sanctify themselves in their marital relations in the proper fashion. Regarding this, it is written, “You shall be holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am holy” (Vayikra, 19:2). The Holy One Blessed Be He said, Out of all the other nations, I desired that only Israel be attached to me, as is written, “You who cleave to the L-rd...” (Devarim, 4:4), meaning, you and not the other nations.

Therefore, “You shall be holy.”

A man is called “one” when he sanctifies himself with his wife during marital relations.

Zohar, Vayikra 81b

And when is a man called “one?” When the man and his wife are together, and he sanctifies himself with an exalted holiness, and his intention is directed toward sanctification. Behold, when a man is engaged in marital relations, and he strives to sanctify the act in the proper fashion, then he is whole and is called “one” without blemish. For this reason, a man should make his wife happy at this time, in order that they should share the same desire and the same intention. And when they are united in this manner, then they are completely one; one soul and one body. Their soul is one through their shared desire to cleave one to the other. And their body is one, for as we have learned, a man who is not married is in a state of separation, and only when male and female are united do they form one body. Thus, they are one soul and one body, and are called one person. Then the Holy One Blessed Be He rests upon that oneness, and infuses it (the offspring of that holy union) with a spirit of holiness. These (offspring) are the ones referred to as, “sons of HaKadosh Baruch Hu,” as has been said, and thus it is written, “Be holy for I, Hashem, am holy.”

When a man gazes at forbidden things, he brings impurity upon himself, comparable to worshipping idols.

Zohar, Vayikra 84a

We have learned, it is forbidden for a man to gaze upon the beauty of a woman, so that he should not come to have evil thoughts and thus be incited to something worse (the wasting of semen. See Avodah Zara, 20b).

For this reason, when Rabbi Shimon had to walk through the town, followed by his disciples, whenever he came to a place that beautiful women were apt to be found, he would lower his eyes and say to his companions, “Do not turn astray (after their gods)!”

For whoever gazes at the beauty of a woman by day will have sinful

thoughts at night. And if these evil thoughts overcome him, he transgresses the commandment, “Thou shall not make for yourselves molten gods.” Furthermore, if he has marital relations with his wife while thinking about these evil images, the children born from such union are called “molten gods.” For this reason, it is written, “Do not turn astray after their gods,” and, “Thou shall not make for yourselves molten gods.”

In this passage, the Zohar understands the word “oto,” not in the usual meaning of “him,” but rather as “his sign,” teaching that whoever blemishes the sign of the Brit loses the Divine protection afforded him as a keeper of the Brit.

Zohar, Bamidbar 183b

“And the L-rd said to Moshe, Do not fear him (oto)” (Bamidbar, 21:34).

This meaning here of the word oto (him or his sign) refers to the fact that Og was attached to Avraham and was a member of his household. And scripture tells us that Avraham circumcised “all of his household.” This included Og who was also circumcised and received the holy sign. When Og saw that Israel was approaching his land, he said to himself that he had the merit of entering the Brit before the Jewish People, and this merit would stand by him to overcome them.

At the same time, Moshe was afraid that they would not be able to uproot the sign that Avraham had given to Og....

Immediately, G-d said to him, “Do not fear him (oto).” Do not fear his sign of the Brit, for he has blemished his sign, and whoever has blemished this sign deserves to be uprooted from the world.... For this reason, Og was uprooted from the world. Though he was a mighty warrior determined to destroy Israel, he fell through the hand of Moshe and was annihilated.... Meritorious are the Jewish People that the prophet Moshe was amongst them, for in his behalf the Holy One Blessed Be He did all the miracles. The Holy One Blessed Be He did not make a covenant with any other nation to attach them to Him, rather only with the Jewish People, the offspring of Avraham, of whom it is written, “And I will establish my Brit between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations, for an eternal covenant” (Bereshit, 17:7).

On this it is written, “As for Me, this is my Brit with them, says the L-rd: My spirit that is upon thee, and My words that I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart from thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, not out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, says the L-rd, from henceforth and forever more” (Yishayahu, 59:20).

When the Jews went out from Egypt, the sea split in the merit of Yosef,

because he gave honor to G-d's Name in safeguarding the Brit.

Zohar, Bamidbar 213b

Rabbi Yesa said, he who gives honor to his Master's Name in this manner of safeguarding (the Brit) merits that his Master will honor him in all matters. From where do we learn this? From Yosef, as is written, "and had him ride in his second chariot" (Bereshit, 41:43), and furthermore, "and made him ruler over all of Egypt" (Ibid.). In addition, when the time came for Israel to cross the sea, the coffin of Yosef entered first before them, and this is what caused the waters to split. This is the meaning of "the sea saw it and fled" (Tehillim, 114:3). Why did it flee? Because it saw the coffin of Yosef, regarding whom it is written, "and he fled and went outside" (Bereshit, 39:12).

A Jewish man and Jewish woman who conduct their marital relations in holiness influence the highest celestial channels and cause Divine blessings to flow to all of the worlds.

Zohar, Devarim 266a

As they walked along, Rabbi Abba said, What is the meaning of the verse: "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Yirmeyahu, 2:13)? The meaning of "they have forsaken Me (oti)" refers to one who has forsaken "my sign," by being false to the imprint of the holy Brit. And how does he betray it? By bringing it into a foreign domain, as is said, "and took for himself the daughter of a foreign god" (Malachi, 2:11). These women are called "broken cisterns," for all of the gentile nations are broken cisterns. But Israel's women are "a well of living waters." This is a holy domain, of a holy faith, and it is called a flowing well of pure, streaming waters, as is said, "streams from Lebanon" (Shir HaShirim, 4:15) and, "Drink waters out of your own cistern, and running waters out of your own well" (Mishle, 5:15). Also, it is written, "A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters" (Shir HaShirim, 4:15). But the other domain (Sitra Achra) is called, "broken cisterns than can hold no water."

Behold, the ever-flowing stream above (Yesod) waters all the Garden (Malchut) and irrigates every place, as we have already explained, until it fills that place in the Garden which is called "the well of living waters," which nourishes all of the upper and lower worlds, as is said, "And from there it was parted" (Bereshit, 2:10).

But all the sides of the Left Side are not watered from that fountain of flowing water, because they are of the side of the other nations, and they are called "broken cisterns."

And one who is false to the holy imprint of the Brit cleaves to this side of the broken cisterns that do not hold water, because the water does not flow into them.

However, the man who merits to guard the Brit properly merits to drink of the waters of that flowing stream in the world to come, and causes that upper well to be filled in order to send forth blessings above and below. Fortunate is he in this world and in the world to come. About him it is written, “And thou shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters never fail” (Yishayahu, 58:11).

Chapter Four

SHMIRAT HABRIT

SHMIRAT HABRIT MUST BE TAUGHT

Toward the end of his life, the renowned Rabbi, the Chatam Sofer, became seriously ill, suffering from terrible pains in the area of his Brit. In a letter, he disclosed his apprehension that the suffering had come upon him because of some sin. Reviewing his life, he did a scrupulous self-accounting, hoping to discover the cause. But he could not recall ever having committed a sexual transgression. Finally, he understood the reason for his suffering. He was being punished, he writes, for not having taught enough about Shmirat HaBrit, for it was his custom to speak to his congregation about the matter just one time a year, on the eve of Yom Kippur.

From this story, we can learn the importance of teaching about Shmirat HaBrit, in order to help people rectify sexual mistakes of the past.

Today, at a time when sexual immodesty is everywhere, on the streets, in the shopping malls, on TV, in the movies, in the newspapers, and on the Internet, each and every man is inundated with difficult trials each day. To combat this “Tsunami” of temptation, parents, educators, and rabbis must meet the challenge by arming their children, students, and congregations with the necessary defenses – the first and foremost of which is knowledge. People must be taught to recognize the gravity of the problem, and learn how to avoid falling into the traps that surround them. Through education, people who are trapped in darkness can be given the guidance that can lead them to light.

After studying passages from the Zohar, it should be clear that Shmirat HaBrit is the foundation for a healthy and holy life, for the individual and for the Jewish Nation. Once we understand that guarding the Brit in sexual purity is the key to bringing Divine blessing into the world, this recognition can inspire us with the motivation to set out on a course of t’shuva and rectification.

While the supreme importance of Shmirat HaBrit is emphasized in the Zohar and other mystical texts, a general overview of Torah sources is necessary to complete the picture. To present the reader with a broader perspective of the subject, we will cite a small sample of these sources, including a look at the halacha, or Jewish Law.

Sometimes it happens that when a person is confronted with the magnitude of the transgression of spilling semen in vain, whether it involves masturbation, or some other forbidden sexual act, he is overwhelmed with the severity of his mistakes. For this reason, it is important to emphasize at the outset that t'shuva is certainly possible, even for a long history of sexual wrongdoing.

The following chapters will set out practical guidelines for Tikun HaBrit. The important thing to keep in mind is that G-d is an all-forgiving father, always happy to accept and forgive wayward children who long to come home. As our Sages promise, a person who sets out on a healthier, holier course is assured Divine assistance.

THE SOURCE OF LIFE

In order to grasp the full significance of the laws surrounding Shmirat HaBrit, it is necessary to understand the tragedy of spilling semen in vain, both for an unmarried person, and for a husband and wife.

We have seen how sexual wrongdoing damages the flow of Divine blessing in the world, and how it causes the estrangement of the individual, and the Jewish People, from G-d. In addition, it is important to realize that semen contains the Divine spark of life that sustains the whole world.

The Zohar explains that the ladder that Yaacov saw in his dream represents the Yesod, the spiritual channel that connects man with heaven (Zohar, Bereshit 149). According to its inner meaning, Yaacov was not only speaking about the place of the Temple Mount, but also about the place of the Brit on the body:

“And he was afraid, and he said, How awesome is this place; this is none other than the House of G-d, and this is the gate of heaven” (Bereshit, 28:17).

Regarding the verse, “And he lied down (וַיִּשְׁכַּב) HEB<<ENG> v'yishkav) in that place” (Bereshit, 28:11), Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, shlita, teaches that v'yishkav can be read, וַיֵּשׁ כַּב HEB<<ENG> v' yeish kaf bet (and there are 22 letters) in that place – the place of the Brit.

The Midrash teaches that with these 22 letters of the Torah, the world was created. These Hebrew letters are the building blocks of Creation. Thus, every drop of semen contains not only the genetic blueprint of the father, but also the spiritual blueprint of life. This is the reason that Avraham commanded his servant, Eliezer, to swear an oath by placing his hand under the place of the Brit – because of its exalted holiness (Bereshit, 24:9). In this

sense, blemishing the sanctity of the Brit through sexual wrongdoing is like desecrated a scroll of holy scripture, may G-d have mercy.

The Hebrew word for semen is zera, which means seed. This seed contains not only the physical and spiritual blueprints of life, but also the life force itself. Each discharge of semen contains hundreds of thousands of souls. Each microscopic drop is more than a potential life. It is already a living soul. For this reason, the sin of spilling semen in vain is considered like the spilling of blood – like taking the life of a person. Not just the life of any person, but the life of the child of the man who commits the sin (Niddah 13A; Shulchan Oruch, Even HaEzer, 23:2).

Kabbalistic sources explain that with each drop of semen, a soul is brought into the world. When this occurs in a manner forbidden by Jewish Law, the soul is taken captive by the forces of impurity – the klipot, or husks, of the Sitra Achra. Thus the holy life force contained in these souls is captured by the realm of evil, strengthening the power of evil in the world. These evil klipot are known as “outside forces,” “destroyers,” and “demons.” They are also called “shovavim,” meaning delinquent children. In their anguish at being taken captive amongst the husks, these kidnapped souls return to haunt the man who gave birth to them, inevitably causing him a gamut of troubles, sometimes sickness, sometimes depression, sometimes poverty, and a long list of other tragedies. The Arizal explains that the Hebrew word for pleasure, נֶגַע>HEB<<ENG> “oneg” that a man experiences during a forbidden sexual climax, turns into נֶגַע>HEB<<ENG> “nega,” or plague, by a rearrangement of the letters. This is because the captive children that he created return to cause him great suffering (Shaar HaKavanot, Part Two, Sukkot).

In addition to physical harm, these klipot act as a barrier between the man and G-d, dulling his spiritual sensitivities, and turning his prayer and Torah learning into heavy, half-hearted endeavors which bring no satisfaction nor joy.

“TEFILLA ZAKA”

On the eve of Yom Kippur, to enter into a mood of repentance, many congregations recite the prayer called “Tefilla Zaka,” which begins: “Almighty, Father of mercy and forgiveness, Whose right hand is extended to accept those who return in t’shuva, and Who created man to bestow goodness upon him at the end of his days, and Who created in him two inclinations, the good and the evil inclination....

“And now, my L-rd, I didn’t listen to Your voice, and I followed after the counsel of the evil inclination...and not only did I not sanctify my organs and limbs, but I made them impure.

“You created in me a brain and a heart, and fashioned in them the faculty of thought to think good thoughts and pure contemplations, and a heart to understand your holy words, and to pray and pronounce every blessing with pure intentions. And I made them impure with wicked thoughts and foreign contemplations.

“And worse than this, through my evil fantasies and foreign thoughts, I came to emit semen in vain, both by accident and knowingly, through impure seminal emissions that make the whole body impure. And through emitting this seed, I created destroyers and agents of damage (michablim) which are called (nig’ei benei Adam) the plagues of the sons of man.”

From this we see that the description of demons and spiritual adversaries is not some mystical imagery belonging to the world of Kaballah, but an actual phenomena that finds its way into our Yom Kippur prayers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MODESTY

Before continuing on with a halachic look at Shmirat HaBrit, in the light of these mystical insights, we can understand the great importance of the laws of modesty. The women of Israel have the responsibility to dress in a modest fashion, so as not to cause Jewish men to be drawn into sexual fantasies and sin. Their attire should cover the body according to Jewish Law. For example, sleeves should extend lower than the elbow. Skirts should extend below the knees. Clothes should not be so tight-fitting that they expose the outline of the body in a suggestive fashion. When a women dresses immodestly, she arouses the sexual urge in the men who see her, and this can cause sexual fantasies and the subsequent spilling of semen in vain. Besides violating the laws of modesty, women who dress in an enticing fashion transgress the prohibition of putting a stumbling block in front of a blind man, in that they lead others to sin.

GUARDIANS OF HOLINESS

The Torah warns us that Israel’s success and security is dependent on guarding our holiness, specifically in the area of sexual purity.

“When thou goest out to encamp against thy enemies, then keep thee from every evil thing. If there be among you any man that is not clean by reason

of an impure emission of semen at night, then he shall go abroad outside of the camp, he shall not come within the camp” (Devarim, 23:10-11).

“For the L-rd thy G-d walks in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thy enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy, that He see no unclean thing in thee and turn away from thee” (Devarim, 23:15).

This demand for sexual purity applies not only to the soldiers of Israel, but also to community life in general. The Torah commands us, “Kedoshim tih’yu!” “You shall be holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am holy” (Vayikra, 19:2).

To ensure the day-to-day holiness of the Jewish People, the Torah and its Sages set forth guidelines to prevent a man from succumbing to the temptations that can easily cause him to err.

For example, Jewish Law demands that a man exert special care to distance himself from interaction with women (Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, 21:1).

This warning is not because women are evil, G-d forbid. Rather, it comes to guard a man from falling into transgression.

Regarding the prohibition against being alone with a woman, Jewish Law states:

“One must not be alone with any woman, whether she is young or old, a Jew or non-Jew, a relative or not, except in the case of a father with his daughter, a mother with her son, and a husband with his wife” (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, 152:1).

The halacha continues:

“A man should ever avoid women; thus he should not make gestures at them, nor wink at them, nor jest with them, nor act with levity in their presence, nor gaze at their beauty. It is forbidden to smell their perfume, especially on a woman scented with it. One is forbidden to look at the colored clothes of a woman with whom he is acquainted, even though the clothes are not upon her, lest he come to think of her. If one encounters a woman in the street, he should not walk behind her, but he should hasten his steps so that she is either alongside of him or behind him. One should not pass by the door of a harlot, even by four cubits. He who gazes at the small finger of a woman in order to enjoy its sight, commits a serious wrongdoing. It is forbidden to hear the voice of a woman singer or to gaze at a woman’s hair” (Ibid., 152:8).

“The great Sages of Israel, of blessed memory, have already dealt in length in their holy works concerning the custom prevailing in some communities, where there is a lack of scholarship and piety, that they hug and kiss the groom and bride, and the young men and women dance together. Besides the

grave sin of coming in contact with a woman in her menstrual period, he also stimulates lewd thoughts within himself, causing erection and the vain discharge of semen, G-d forbid” (Ibid., 152:13).

THE IMPURITY OF NIDDAH

It is important to note that all unmarried women are considered to be in a state of menstrual impurity. The impurity of niddah (menstrual impurity) is one of the severest forms of spiritual uncleanness. The punishment for having relations with a woman considered niddah is karet, dying before one’s time. Because of the great strength of niddah impurity, a man does not only become impure through having sexual relations with her, but also through intimacies like hugging and kissing.

When a man pollutes himself through the accidental emission of semen in vain, through masturbation, by contact with a woman considered niddah, or even through a sexual fantasy alone, the Shechinah departs from him.

Holiness and impurity cannot exist in the same place.

The Midrash teaches that the Holy One Blessed Be He is slow to anger in regard to every sin, except immorality (Bereshit Rabbah 26).

“Rabbi Simlai taught, Wherever there is immorality, indiscriminate destruction comes to the world and kills the good with the wicked” (Ibid.).

This is the reason why we are called upon to keep our camp holy, to insure that the Shechinah, which guards over Israel, never leave us prey to our enemies.

GAZING AT WOMEN

Not only is physical contact with women prohibited, gazing at them to enjoy their beauty is also a serious Torah transgression (Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, Ch. 300, Section 100:2).

Regarding the Torah commandment, “You shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes (Bamidbar, 15:39), the Talmud explains: “After your hearts – this refers to idol worship. After your eyes – this refers to sexual immorality” (Berachot 12B).

The eye and the heart are the two instruments of sin. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body completes the action (Rashi on Bamidbar, 25:39).

Today, because of the promiscuity and immodesty that pervade modern life and Western culture, we have become accustomed to this state of affairs, as if this is the natural way to be. However, Jewish Law demands a higher level

of moral behavior.

“Whoever gazes at a woman forbidden to him, and says to himself that there is nothing wrong with this, for he hasn’t had sexual relations with her, or even touched her, he is mistaken. Gazing at women is a serious wrongdoing, for it brings a man to sexual transgression, as it says, You shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes” (Hilchot T’shuva of the Rambam, 4:4). The Gemara teaches: “You should guard yourself from every evil thing – this means a man should not gaze on an attractive woman, even a single one, nor upon married woman, even if she is ugly” (Avodah Zara 20A).

This is because, “A man shouldn’t have sexual thoughts in the day and come to seminal impurity at night” (Avodah Zara 20B).

WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

A person shouldn’t think that he is wiser than the Torah and the great Talmudic rabbis who labored to explain the depth and wisdom of Jewish Law. If he says, “I go to the beach and the movies all the time, and nothing happens to me,” he is tragically mistaken. Gazing at attractive women, whether at the beach, the movies, in provocative magazines, or on the street, causes more damage to the spiritual world of a Jew than eating forbidden foods such as pork. Eating non-kosher foods pollutes the nefesh, the lower physical soul of a man. Gazing at women, however, pollutes the higher, more spiritual level of the soul, called the chiya. In doing so, it damages the flow of Divine blessing emanating from the highest spiritual realms (Kedushat Yisrael, HaRav Eliahu Leon Levi, Pgs. 23-29).

In his book, “Kuntres HaAvodah,” Rebbe Sholom Dov Ber of Lubavitch, one of the early great Admores of Chabad, writes the following:

“Everyone who is concerned about his soul, not to pollute it, G-d forbid, should guard over his eyes. And if this is difficult for him, he should endeavor to restrain himself with all of his strength and might. He must take to heart that this matter is instrumental to the well-being of his soul, and if he does not guard himself in this matter, then all of his Divine service is accounted as nothing, and all of his achievements are as naught, and his service of G-d will fall lower and lower...” (Kuntres HaAvodah, Chapter 2). The eyes are the windows of the soul. The holiness of a Jew is dependent on the degree to which he guards his eyes from looking at forbidden images. When a man sees an immodestly dressed woman or an erotic photograph, his desire is aroused. Automatically, his spiritual world is polluted.

Automatically, a soul is released from his brain and joined with a seed of

seminal fluid. If he does not sense the spiritual shock to his being, it is because his soul has already become darkened and dulled by his habitual mistakes.

“The moment a man gazes upon a forbidden image, or at a woman whom he is not permitted to look at, a large and frightful klipah is created by this, along with an evil spirit, each time he looks. Resulting from this, when he has a sexual thought, with every fantasy he violates the Torah prohibition, “And you shall guard yourself from everything evil.” All the more so if, G-d forbid, this thought brings him to a sexual transgression” (Taharat HaKodesh, Ch. 3).

SPILLING SEMEN IN VAIN

Wasting semen is a Torah prohibition according to all authorities. Punishment is death at the Hand of Heaven (Niddah 13A). While in several places, the Zohar indicates that there is no t’shuva for this transgression, the meaning is that ordinary repentance, stemming from the fear of punishment, does not suffice, but that a course of higher repentance, or t’shuva m’ahava, stemming from a great love of G-d, is needed (Baal HaTanya, Letter of T’shuva, Ch. 4).

The Talmud compares all sexual offenses, including masturbation, with adultery (See Niddah 13A and B):

“Rabbi Eliezer said, It is written, ‘Your hands are full of blood’ (Yishayahu, 1:15). This refers to people who arouse themselves with their hands. The words of the commandment, You shall not commit adultery, imply not with your hand and not with your foot.”

“Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who wastes his seed is liable to the death penalty, as is written, ‘And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the L-rd, and He slew him also’ (Bereshit, 38:10).

“Rabbi Yitzhak and Rabbi Ami said: It is as if here were a murderer, as is written, ‘Slaughterers of children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks’” (Yishayahu, 57:5).

“Rabbi Asi said: It is as if he were an idol worshipper.”

The halacha as stated in the “Kitzur Shulchan Aruch,” states:

1. It is forbidden to discharge semen in vain. This is a graver sin than any other mentioned in the Torah (Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, 23:1). Those who practice masturbation and cause the issue of semen in vain, not only do they commit a grave sin, but they are under a ban, concerning which it is said, “Your hands are full of blood” (Yishayahu, 1:15), and it is equivalent

to killing a person. See what Rashi wrote concerning Er and Onan in the Portion of Vayeshev (Bereshit, Ch. 37) that both Er and Onan died for the commission of this sin. Occasionally, as a punishment for this sin, children die young, G-d forbid, or grow up to be delinquent, while the sinner himself is reduced to poverty.

2. One is forbidden to cause an erection, or to think about women. If a lascivious thought comes to one spontaneously, he should divert his attention to a subject of Torah. Lewd thoughts prevail only in a mind devoid of wisdom. A man should be extremely careful to avoid an erection. Therefore he should not sleep on his back with his face upward, or on his belly with his face downward, but sleep on his side, in order to avoid it. Two bachelors should not sleep together. One should not watch animals, beasts, or fowl copulate. It is also forbidden to ride on an animal without a saddle.
3. It is forbidden to hold the membrane while urinating. If one is married and his wife is in town and she is ritually clean, it does not matter, for since he has the possibility, he will not indulge in lustful thoughts or become stimulated; but it is nevertheless a matter of piety to avoid it. When not for the purpose of urinating, the above is forbidden by the law.
4. At supper, one should neither eat nor drink excessively, nor eat any foods that tend to heat the body, such as fat meat, cheese, eggs, or garlic. Neither should one drink a beverage that tends to heat the body, for all of these things cause the commission of this sin.

In summary, we can see from the warnings of the Torah, from the admonishments of the Talmud, from the exacting prohibitions of Jewish Law, and from the inner understandings of the Zohar and the Kabbalah, that Shmirat HaBrit is indeed the foundation upon which all of life is based.

Chapter Five

THE POWER OF PENITENCE

THERE IS A TIKUN

The reader can rightfully ask, “After all that I have learned from this book, what can I do to rectify my past mistakes?”

First of all, one must know that with all the gravity of sexual transgression, penitence (t’shuva) is certainly possible, as the Rambam states: “There is nothing that stands in the way of repentance” (Laws of T’shuva, 3:24).

Furthermore, a person should not think that because of the great number, or because of the seriousness of his sins, he can never start anew. This is not true, as the Rambam makes clear:

“Let not the penitent suppose that he is prevented from attaining the degree of the righteous because of the iniquities and sins that he has committed. This is not so. He is beloved by the Creator, and desired by Him, as if he had never sinned. Moreover his reward is great, since through having tasted sin, he renounced it and overcame his evil passions. The sages say, ‘Where penitents stand, the completely righteous cannot stand’ (Berachot 34B). This means that the degree attained by penitents is higher than that of those who had never sinned, since the penitent has had to put forth a greater effort to subdue his passion than he who has never sinned” (Ibid., 7:4).

The Talmud teaches that the penitent not only cleanses himself of transgressions, his penitence brings blessing to all of existence.

“Great is penitence for it brings healing to the world, and an individual who repents is forgiven, and the whole world is forgiven with him” (Yoma 86A).

The spiritual renewal awakened by t’shuva is undoubtedly one of the most uplifting experiences in life. Nonetheless, because of the pain involved in facing past errors, and the need to make real changes to set one’s life on a healthier path, the challenges facing the penitent are great. This is especially true when it comes to redressing sexual transgression since the penitent is called upon to redirect life’s most powerful urge from an egotistical quest for personal pleasure to a fervent love and attachment to G-d.

As the Rambam writes: “Nothing is more difficult to overcome for the majority of people as sexual prohibitions” (Rambam, Laws of Forbidden Relationships, 22:18).

However, when the decision is made to stop, the desire gradually weakens,

as the Talmud teaches, “A man has a small organ – when it is starved, it is satisfied; when it is fed, it is hungry” (Sukkah 52B).

The essentials of repentance are that a person abandon his transgression, remove it from his thoughts, regret his past action and resolve never to do it again. He must make an oral confession, verbalizing the resolutions he made in his heart. Moreover, it is necessary to specify the sin (Rambam, Laws of T’shuva, 2:3).

The Rambam writes:

“Some of the ways of expressing repentance are that the penitent cries out continuously before G-d with tears and supplications; gives charity according to his means; keeps far away from that wherein he sinned; changes his name, as if to say that he is another individual and not the one who committed those deeds; changes all of his activities for a better course, on the righteous path; and exiles himself from his former residence, since exile atones for iniquity, inducing as it does, humility, meekness, and lowliness of spirit” (Ibid., 5).

In effect, in starting off on the road of t’shuva, the penitent has already succeeded. For in reaching out to G-d, he has already attached himself to the true meaning and greatest pleasure of life.

(For a more in-depth study of t’shuva, see the book, “The Art of T’shuva – The Teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook,” commentary by Rabbi David Samson and Tzvi Fishman.)

CONSTANT T’SHUVA

As we have learned, the Zohar states that even the gravest sexual transgressions can be rectified through a great and constant t’shuva (Zohar, Shemot 3b).

What is a great and constant t’shuva?

We can find part of the answer in the Psalms of King David, whose life was constantly directed toward t’shuva, and toward coming ever closer to G-d (Maharal, Netivit Olam, Path of T’shuva, Ch.4).

On the verse in Tehillim, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is constantly before me” (Tehillim, 51:5), Rabbi Shimon explains: “How stringently should people guard against sinning before HaKadosh Baruch Hu. For behold, after each of his sins, his transgression is imprinted in the upper worlds, and is not erased except by a great repentance, as is said, ‘For though you wash thyself with lye, and make use of much soap, yet the stain of thy iniquity is before Me’ (Yirmeyahu, 2:22).

“Come and see, when a man commits a sin before HaKadosh Baruch Hu, it leaves a stain, and when he sins a second time, the stain is deepened. If he sins a third time, the stain spreads from one side to the other. This is the meaning of, ‘the stain of thy iniquity is before me.’

“Observe, because King David sinned before HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the matter of Bat Sheva, he thought this sin would be engraved against him forever. What is written instead? ‘The L-rd has also has commuted thy sin; thou shall not die’ (Shmuel 2, 12:13). G-d erased the stain that was imprinted before Him....

“Behold, even though David confessed his sin and repented, he refused to remove from his heart and his thoughts the memory of the sins he committed, especially regarding the sin involving Bat Sheva. For he was always afraid from them, lest one of them prove to be an accuser against him in a time of danger. For this reason, he never removed them from his heart and his thoughts.” (Zohar, Bereshit, 73b)

Even though King David’s life was epitomized by a burning desire to cleave to G-d through self- examination, supplications, Torah learning, good deeds, and fasts to break his evil inclination; he constantly worried that the stain of his sins remained as a barrier in his worship of G-d.

There are some sins, like the neglect of a positive commandment, that are forgiven immediately upon heartfelt repentance. But there are other sins that require a more intensive course of atonement (See, Rambam, Laws of T’shuva, 1:9).

An explanation for this, and a general overview of t’shuva, can be found in the chapter, “The Gate of Repentance,” in the book, *Orchot Tzaddikim*: “There are many levels of repentance, in accordance with which a person draws closer to the Blessed One. And the soul is never entirely pure – as pure as if the transgressions had never been committed – until one purifies his heart. This is analogous to the state of a sullied garment, which will be rid of filth with a superficial washing, but which will still be left with an impression of this filth and a stain. Only much washing will cleanse it completely, as King David pleads, ‘Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity’” (Tehillim, 51:4).

It is explained in the Kabbalah that certain sins, like sexual transgressions, blemish a person’s entire spiritual blueprint, leaving an impression on the entire hierarchy of his nefesh, ruach, neshama, chiya, and yechida. Because man is a microcosm of existence, these same transgressions simultaneously pollute all of the spiritual worlds of asiyah, yetzirah, beriyah, and atzilut. A superficial repentance may only clean the stain on the nefesh, but not on the

ruach. A greater t'shuva may cleanse the ruach, but not the neshama. So too, an initial t'shuva may erase the blemish to the world of asiyah, but not touch the stains in the upper spiritual worlds to which a person is connected. Because of this, more than a superficial "one-time t'shuva" is needed. This is especially the case with atonement over sexual transgressions, and the wasting of semen, which involve the more strenuous spiritual work of releasing the souls that have fallen captive to the klipot. While it is important for a baal t'shuva to always remember his sin, as it is written, "And my sin is constantly before me" (Tehillim, 51:5), the intention is not to be forever in a state of self-chastisement and despair, but rather to always strive for a higher purity and rectification. The Gemara teaches that a man should spend "all of his days in t'shuva" (Shabbat 153A). In t'shuva, and not in despair. True, in the initial stage of t'shuva, there is a feeling of remorse and despair, but as Rabbi Kook explains, this pain is soon replaced by feelings of exquisite joy, and endless peaks of greater and greater light. He writes:

"Great and exalted is the pleasure of t'shuva. The searing flame of pain cause by sin purifies the will and refines the character of a person to an exalted, sparkling purity until the great joy of the life of t'shuva is opened for him. T'shuva raises the person higher and higher through its stages of bitterness, pleasantness, grieving, and joy. Nothing purges and purifies a person, and raises him to the stature of being truly a man, like the profound process of t'shuva" (Orot HaT'shuva, 13:11. See also, "The Art of T'shuva," Ch. 7).

T'SHUVA FROM LOVE

Because the sexual urge is the most powerful passion in man, in order to escape from its clutches, a baal t'shuva must undergo a process of purification whereby the sexual passion is replaced by a passion even stronger – the passion to come closer to G-d. The pleasure of illicit sexual sins must be replaced with the supreme pleasure of being attached to Hashem.

This t'shuva, motivated by a burning desire to become closer to G-d, is t'shuva m'ahava (t'shuva from love) also called t'shuva ila'a, by the Baal HaTanya, because it is the highest level of repentance (See Igeret HaT'shuva, Ch.8), and t'shuva sichlit by Rabbi Kook, because it is rooted in the intellectual understanding that union with Hashem is the ultimate good (Orot HaT'shuva, Ch. 1).

What characterizes this type of penitent? The Rambam explains:

“Whoever serves G-d out of love, occupies himself with the study of Torah, observes the commandments, and walks in the path of wisdom, impelled by no other external motive whatsoever, moved neither by fear of retribution, nor the desire for material reward” (Laws of T’shuva, 10:3).

These are the basic criteria of t’shuva from love. Such a man follows this course of positive action simply because it is G-d’s will for the world. He understands that this is what brings goodness to all of Creation.

“This standard is indeed a very high one; not every sage attained to it. It was the standard of our forefather Avraham, whom G-d called His lover, because he served only out of love. It is the standard that G-d bids us, through Moshe, to achieve, as is said, “And thou shall love the L-rd thy G-d” (Devarim, 6:5). When one loves G-d with the right love, he will straightaway observe all the commandments out of love as well” (Ibid., 4).

The Rambam explains the qualities of this steadfast love:

“It is to love Hashem with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one’s soul shall be consumed with the love of G-d. One should be continually enraptured by it, like a love-sick man whose mind is at no time free from the passion for a particular woman; the thought of her filling his heart at all times, when sitting down or rising up, when he is eating and drinking. Even more intense should be the love of G-d in the hearts of those who love Him. And this love should continually possess them, just as He commanded, ‘with all thy heart and with all thy soul.’” (Ibid., 5).

T’shuva from love is filled with boundless joy. It transforms all past transgressions into meritorious deeds (Yoma 86B). If a man abandons sexual wrongdoing, not from fear of punishment, nor with the hope of receiving a reward in Gan Eden, but solely to please Hashem, he has reached the lofty level of t’shuva m’ahavah. In doing so, he has succeeded in transforming his hitherto selfish lifestyle, motivated by a lust for self-gratification, into the altruistic desire to bring good to the world.

This t’shuva derives from the lofty understanding that man’s highest purpose lies in pleasing his Maker. Instead of a life of wrongdoing, the baal t’shuva longs to put his life in line with G-d’s will for all of Creation, out of the recognition that G-d’s will, as expressed in the Torah, is directed toward absolute goodness and truth. This is a t’shuva that is not based on anything but the love and devotion to G-d. Inspired by the radiance of G-d’s goodness, the baal t’shuva determines to change all of his negative, egotistical acts into positive, transcendental ideals. He longs solely to add goodness and holiness to the world, and in thus aligning himself to G-d’s

will, to bring joy to the Shechinah which was exiled because of his sins, and because of the sins of his forefathers.

This exalted level of t'shuva not only atones for transgressions, but the transgressions themselves become transformed into meritorious deeds. All of the actions that brought him to this level of love, even his sins, now take on a positive light. For it is precisely his past wrongdoings that aroused his thoughts of repentance and motivated him with a burning desire to achieve this transcendent oneness with G-d.

Rabbi Kook writes:

“A person should not think, how can I ever reach this lofty level? It is not so far away as it seems. For if in contemplating his spiritual darkness, a feeling of deep chagrin fills his heart, he is already on the path of a higher t'shuva. When a person recognizes that his faculties for spiritual perception are blocked because of the blemishes in his soul caused by sin, the anguish he feels works like a cleansing agent, filling his heart with the burning desire to rid himself of the barriers obstructing the flow of Divine light to his soul. This is the way to higher t'shuva, the t'shuva that is worthy of atoning for any misdeeds” (Orot HaT'shuva, 14:1a).

The Zohar itself promises the greatest of rewards for the penitent:

Fortunate are the penitent, for in one hour, one day, even one second, they draw closer to the Holy One Blessed Be He than even the completely righteous who drew close to the Holy One Blessed One after many years. Abraham did not reach that high grade of “completeness-in-days” until he was old, as already was said. So too, David, as is written, “Now King David was old; he came into days” (Melachim I, 1:1). But the baal t'shuva immediately finds entrance, and cleaves to the Holy One Blessed Be He. Rabbi Yosi said, We have learned that the place where baale t'shuva stand in the next world, even the completely righteous do not have permission to stand, because the penitent are closer to the King than anyone else; for their hearts strive more fervently to draw near to the King (Zohar, Bereshit 129a). Having seen the loftiness of t'shuva, we will focus now on specific remedies to wash away transgressions against the Brit.

Chapter Six

THE ROAD TO RECTIFICATION

“YOU SHALL BE HOLY!”

The Gemara teaches that the mere thought of t’shuva atones in and of itself (Kiddushin 49B, Orot HaT’shuva, 2). While this is certainly true, when it comes to the constant t’shuva required to rectify sexual transgressions, there are practical steps a person must take to distance himself from the temptations and habits that have led him astray, and to wash away the stains caused by his sins. These concrete formulas go hand in hand with the higher t’shuva discussed in the previous chapter.

The transgression of wasting semen can come about in several fashions, and each requires repentance. While masturbation and forbidden sexual relations are the most serious offenses, the unintentional wasting of semen (keri) must also be redressed. If a person had an emission of semen while sleeping, though this happened unintentionally, more often than not, it is not really “accidental.”

As we learned, a man is forbidden to look at sexually arousing images during the day lest he come to keri at night (Niddah 13A).

During the day, when a man sees an immodestly dressed woman or a provocative photo, an automatic response is triggered, arousing the sexual urge. Usually, an emission of semen does not immediately occur because the light of the man’s soul protects him. But at night during sleep, when his soul rises to heaven, the sensual image retained in his mind is now at the whim of unholy spiritual forces that work to bring about keri. Even though he does not consciously will it, the outcome of a “wet dream” is the same as masturbation. Souls are brought down which are snatched up by the “Other Side.” While an instance of keri can be caused by other factors, such as illness or overeating, in his case, he can not say that he is not to blame. Had he not looked at the woman or the photo, the wet dream would not have occurred.

Another instance of unintentional keri can come about in the sanctity of marriage. In the throes of sexual passion, if a husband embraces his wife and has an emission before the marital act, this too requires soul-searching and t’shuva. Also, if he should have relations with his wife in an unholy manner that brings about the wasting of semen, he must rectify the spiritual damage

he caused (See the book, “Darkei Taharah,” by Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu, Pg. 198). It is precisely in this regard that we are commanded, “You shall be holy!” A person should sanctify himself even in that which is permitted to him (Ibid., Pg. 178. Yevamot 20A).

WAYS OF ATONEMENT

We have already seen the halachic severity of wasting semen. To start off on the path of tikun, we will quote the detailed remedies listed in the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (Ch. 151). In doing so, we don’t mean to suggest that a person follow each and every item on the list. Rather, it is important to see the depth of repentance that the halacha demands.

1. One who desires to avoid this sin should guard his mouth against obscene talk, lies, tale bearing, slander and mockery. He should likewise guard his ears against listening to such speech. One should also be careful to fulfill his vows, not worry too much, and guard himself against lewd thoughts. Before retiring, he should engage in the study of Torah, or he should recite the first four chapters of the Psalms, and he should not sleep alone in a room.

2. The means of salvation for one who has succumbed to this sin are recorded in the book “Yesod Yosef” which the author culled from holy and ancient texts. I will only cite some of them briefly: he should make an endeavor to be a Sandek, to have infants circumcised on his lap, especially for poor families. He should increase his donations to charity, observe the Sabbath properly, honor it and light many candles. He should honor and love students of Torah, pray with fervor and tears, cultivate humility, and when insulted he should be quiet and forgiving. When performing a precept, he should do it energetically and speedily, until it warms him, especially when preparing the matzot for Pesach. He should raise his children in the study of Torah and train them to be G-d fearing; raise an orphan in his house and treat him as he treats his own children. He should engage himself in the noble act of dowering poor brides. He should be called up to the reading of the Torah at least once a month, pronounce the blessings in an audible voice, look into the Torah and read silently with the reader. He should be one of the first ten men who come to the synagogue, and should wake up in the middle of the night to recite the midnight lament (Tikun Hatzot) for the destruction of the Temple. If he is unable to rise at midnight, he should perform this ritual thereafter, and he should love peace and pursue peace.

The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch continues:

Whoever has had a pollution at night, G-d forbid, shall upon awakening in

the morning, wash his hands, and say with a contrite heart, “Master of the Universe, I have done this unwittingly, but it has been caused due to evil musings and reflections. May it be therefore Thy will, O my G-d, and G-d of my fathers, that Thou, in Thy great mercy, erase this iniquity of mine, and save me from sinful thoughts, forever and ever. Amen, so may it be Thy will” (Ibid.).

The Arizal said that to do atonement for spilling semen in vain, a person should make 84 fasts for each transgression. If he sinned many times, he should conduct a cycle of 84 fasts three times in his lifetime, or 252 fasts. Today, because people are weaker than in days past, most rabbis frown on excessive fasting. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the depth of cleansing required to uproot the stain of wasting semen, and the enormous effort required to atone for the egotistic pleasures of one’s past (Tanya, Igeret Ha’T’shuva 83). Today, increased Torah learning, acts of kindness, and the generous giving of charity are recommended instead of rigorous flagellations and fasts (Siddur of the Gra, Pgs.583-584). Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, who has championed the importance of Tikun HaBrit in Israel for over forty years, stresses the role of special prayers, called “Tikunim,” to rectify the transgressions of the past.

LOVE FOR THE TORAH

An initial step in setting out on a path of rectification is overcoming sexual fantasies and temptations. The medicine for this is the Torah. Instead of being preoccupied with unsavory thoughts and pursuits, a Jew should feel a ravishing love for the teachings of the Torah, and a burning desire to come closer to G-d.

The Rambam writes:

“It is forbidden for a man to bring himself to think about forbidden sexual matters. If a sexual thought enters his mind, he should turn his heart away from lewd and polluting matters and focus on matters of Torah which abound with love and charm” (Rambam, Laws of Forbidden Relationships, 21:19).

The Rambam further advises:

“One should turn one’s thoughts to matters of Torah and expand one’s knowledge with Divine wisdom, for thoughts of lewdness grow only in a heart void of the knowledge of Torah” (Ibid., 21: 21).

This same sound advice is found in the Zohar’s teachings on the Torah portion, Vayeshev:

One day, Rabbi Hisda saw a student whose face was unnaturally pale. He said to himself, 'This young man is undoubtedly assailed by sinful imaginations.' So he took him in hand and interested him in the words of Torah until he returned to a better frame of mind. From that day the student resolved not to give way anymore to evil thoughts, but to study the Torah for its own sake. Rabbi Yose said, When a man perceives that evil thoughts are assailing him, he should study the Torah and that will drive them away. Torah study is not only the way of overcoming temptation and cleansing one's mind. It is also a major part of Tikun HaBrit. This is because the Torah, the Tree of Life, is integrally bound up with the sefirah of Yesod. Sexual transgressions that damaged the Yesod can be can be rectified by reattaching oneself to the Yesod through the purifying fire of the Torah. "The violation of the Brit though the wasting of semen – to say nothing of stark immorality, or sexual relations prohibited by the Torah, or the Sages, for the words of the sages are even more grave – causes a blemish in the mind. Therefore his tikun is that he occupy himself with Torah that derives from Divine Wisdom" (Tanya, Igeret HaT'shuva, Ch. 9).

"If one has strayed into transgression and has incurred the penalty of death at the hands of Heaven, what should he do that he might live? If he was wont to study one page, let him study two; to read one chapter, let him read two" (Vayikra Rabbah, 25:1).

The Mishna Berurah states:

"It is known from books that the main tikun for someone who has fallen in this matter, G-d forbid, is to increase his Torah study for the rest of his life. Then the merit of Torah will protect him, as it says in Midrash Tanchumin, if a man sins and is deserving of death at the hands of Heaven, what can he do to save himself and live? If he is used to learning one chapter, he should learn two; if one page, then two. If he doesn't know how to learn, he should busy himself with charity and good deeds. And the main point of his learning should be to practice what he learns... for if not, his learning will not have the power to protect him, G-d forbid" (Laws of Yom Kippur, Prohibition Against Sexual Relations, 615, Section 2. See there, Shaar HaTziun, 5 and 6).

Since the entire Torah is comprised of the Names of Hashem, all Torah study brings about profound tikunim. Additionally, it is proper to study the mussar books of our sages dealing with self-improvement, like "Messilat Yesharim." In atoning for sexual transgressions, a person has to not only change his deeds, he has to change his midot, or character traits. If he was easily provoked into anger, he has to learn to bear insults and abuse without

striking back. If he was prone to depression, he has to learn to face every new day with an orientation of joy. Transformations like these require intensive learning, self-discipline, and the ability to start over with each setback and fall. The t'shuva involved in sanctifying one's life is not a onetime thing, but a challenging, lifelong project.

The love of Torah and the fervent performance of good deeds elevate a person to a higher realm of existence. Instead of focusing on the selfish, personal pleasure of sexual gratification, he now strives to please others, and to please G-d by dedicating himself to His Torah. In doing so, base desires no longer hold him captive. Instead of being driven by a quest for physical pleasure, the baal t'shuva finds true joy in higher, holier spheres.

THE SECRETS OF TORAH

We learned that an alienation from the secrets of Torah damages the Yesod by drying up the flow of Divine illumination that flows to the world of Malchut (Tikunei Zohar, Tikun 44). In the same light, learning the secrets of Torah restores the Divine flow by replenishing the wellspring of waters at their source.

We mentioned that the great Torah scholar, the Chatam Sofer, was wont to discuss the importance of Shmirat HaBrit on the eve of Yom Kippur. One of his sermons explained how the Kol Nidre prayer was mystically structured to rectify transgressions of the Brit.

At the beginning of the Kol Nidre prayer, we recite a verse of Tehillim seven times: "Light (ohr) is sown (zarua) for the tzaddik, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Tehillim, 97:11).

The word, ohr, has the same numerical value as the word raz, meaning secret. Through the influence of raz (the secrets of Torah) a process of sowing, zarua, takes place, whereby the spiritual and intellectual light of the zera (the semen whose source is the brain) is sown in the tzaddik – the Yesod (Matok M'Dvash, Commentary on the Zohar, Tikunei Zohar, Tikun 21, Folio 50a).

This means that learning the secrets of Torah replenishes the waters of the Yesod. The Kol Nidre prayer is thus a rectification of the Yesod. Many others facets of the Day of Atonement are connected with Tikun HaBrit, including the service of the Kohen HaGadol in the Beit HaMikdash. The very day itself, the tenth day of the month Tishrei, is the day the Avraham Avinu performed his brit milah, making it the day for Tikun HaBrit for all generations to come. This integral connection between Yom Kippur and

Tikun HaBrit can be found in the writings of the Safed Emet (See his first essay on the Ten Days of T'shuva), and in the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Halachot, Yom Kippur, 1:1).

As this book makes clear, one of the keys to understanding the importance and necessity of Tikun HaBrit is the study of the holy Zohar which has the cleansing power to sanctify and transform a person from within. Of course, one should not, and cannot, dive into the secrets of Torah before he has learned how to study Mishna, Gemara, and works of halacha, as our rabbis have warned. Rather, a person should strive to learn each discipline of Torah, each in its proper place, time, and measure, by learning both the simple and inner meanings as well. To do this properly, one needs the inspiration and counsel of a sage versed in all aspects of Torah, including the secret understandings of the Brit.

Shmirat HaBrit and the secrets of Torah are interconnected, as the verse of Tehillim implies: "The secret of Hashem is with those who fear Him, to make known to them His Brit" (Tehillim, 25:14). This means that only the person who delves into the secrets of Torah will come to understand that guarding the Brit is the foundation of all moral and spiritual life. In parallel, Hashem only reveals the secrets of Torah to those who guard the Brit in uppermost purity. In other words, the secrets of Torah are not meant to be learned as an exercise in intellectual discovery, but rather only in concurrence with an intense course of spiritual and moral cleansing, as books like "Mesillat Yesharim" and "Shaare Kedusha" make clear.

TIKUNIM

While the cleansing power of the Torah is vast, Torah learning, in and of itself, does not necessarily uproot all of the deep stains caused by transgression to the Brit. As we learned, to rectify sexual transgressions, a focused, pinpoint t'shuva is needed.

The revered and holy Kabbalist, Rabbi Yaacov Abuchatzera, z'tzal, of Morroco, grandfather of the saintly Baba Sali, wrote in his commentary on the Torah that the frightening warnings and tribulations described in the Torah portion, Bechukoti, have their root cause in transgressions of the Brit: "The early and later Torah authorities stated that the majority of major tribulations that men suffer, whether pestilence, famine, or war, the majority stem from transgressions against the Brit.... Therefore, if a man comes to serve G-d, he should first properly rectify blemishes to the Brit, and afterward begin to serve G-d. And it is all of the transgressions against the

Brit, and the evil occurrences that stem from it, that are hinted at in the admonishments of this Torah portion. And the things that are written, “But if you will not hearken to me...” (Vayikra, 26:14), and, “and if you despise My statutes...” (ibid) does not mean that they do not perform any commandments, nor study the Torah. Rather, even though they study Torah and observe the commandments, the principle thing is missing, because the Brit, which is the main thing, is blemished and they did not rectify it. And since the Brit is blemished, and was not rectified, everything is considered as being nullified and non-existent.”

In order to assist the penitent in his path of rectification, masters of the Kabbalah composed special prayers called “Tikunim” which have the power to erase the blemishes caused by sexual transgressions, and to rectify the souls that fell into captivity through the spilling of semen in vain. These prayers, when recited with heartfelt remorse, repair the damage caused to all spiritual worlds by rectifying the sefirah of Yesod, which, as we learned, is the all-encompassing channel of Divine illumination and blessing.

These Tikunim include:

The “Tikun HaYesod” of holy Gaon, Rabbi Yosef Chaim, z’tzal, also known as the Ben Ish Chai.

The “Tikun Clalli” of the holy Tzaddik, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, z’tzal.

The “Tikun Yesod Yeshuat Eliahu” of the holy Tzaddik and Kabbalist, Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, shlita.

The Kaballistic version of “Pitom HaKetoret,” as formulated by the Ari HaKadosh.

These unique and profound Tikunim, when incorporated into a penitent’s daily regimen of prayer and Torah learning, have the ability to purify the deepest recesses of the soul, and to free a person from the mistakes and temptations of the past. The verses of the prayers, the Divine names they contain, and their Kaballistic codes act to obliterate the klipot created through the emission of semen in vain and other sexual transgressions. They help liberate the penitent from the invisible, negative spiritual forces which darken his life. In awakening hitherto dormant powers of holiness, these tikunim also strengthen the penitent to overcome the temptations and challenges of the future. In addition, they serve as a lifeline, providing an important sense of security. For, if a person should weaken in the battle against the evil inclination and fall back to erring ways, he knows he has a ladder with which he can climb back up out of the imprisoning clutches of sexual sin.

The prolific author and lecturer, Rabbi Yisrael Hess, z’tzal, counseled

thousands of young people throughout Israel, most notably at Bar Ilan University where he taught for many years. In an essay on Shmirat HaBrit, he emphasizes the importance of relying on the secrets of Kaballah to purify a person from the spiritual pollution of spilling semen in vain:

“The sin of spilling semen in vain is, at the same time, a transgression like all Torah transgressions, and yet much more severe in its devastating influence, in that it causes deep and high reaching damage, far greater than other prohibitions of the Torah. Because of this duality, we cannot understand the magnitude of this transgression and its powerful influences according to standard explanations. Rather, our understanding must come from the inner explanations of the Torah, from the spiritual realm that extends beyond our ordinary physical orientation. This understanding derives from powers that are beyond human intellectual reasoning, which are found in the world of Kaballah.

“Within the physical drop of semen emitted from our material bodies is to be found a Divine creative power hidden from our eyes, beyond our conceptual understanding, beyond our ability to create it ourselves.

“When we recognize this wonder, it becomes clear that the rectification of any blemish to this Divine essence cannot be among the ordinary paths of correction that we are familiar with. We cannot even understand how or why a particular tikun works to rectify the transgression, or how some particular advice can make whole what was blemished and erase the damages incurred.

“With the help of G-d, when we merit to increase our learning and knowledge, when we fill ourselves with Torah and deep faith, with the fear of G-d, and with greater purity, then we will merit to fathom what is hidden from us now.... Until then, our desire to emerge from our quandary and to improve ourselves, brings us to proceed forward with the willingness to bow our heads and submit to the giants of the inner workings of the soul, the masters of Kaballah. In doing this, may there be a balancing atonement – a sin that we committed wantonly, without thinking about its consequences will be rectified through tikunim that are beyond our thinking processes and intellectual grasp” (Essay on Shmirat HaBrit, in the book, “V’Hayitem Kidoshim,” Pgs. 150-151).

MIKVAH

Immersion in a mikvah, is an essential part of the purification process. With each immersion, myriads of klipot are drowned in the mikvah’s spiritually cleansing waters. When one remembers that with each emission of semen,

hundreds of thousands of souls are released and imprisoned by klipot, one can appreciate the great number of tikunim and tevilot (immersions) needed to rectify the damage. The atonement over sexual sins, as we learned, is not a onetime thing. Little by little, the darkness that surrounded the soul begins to disappear and a powerful, holy light fills the penitent with a new sense of being.

Starting out each day at the mikvah is a wonderful thing. If this is too difficult, then a regimen of immersion several times a week is excellent as well. Immersion in a mikvah before the Shabbath and the Jewish holidays will help a person experience their profound spiritual light. For married men, a visit to the mikvah before and after marital relations is important in maintaining a high level of holiness in one's marriage.

In letting lusts and fantasies overcome us, we heated our passions and our bodies and brought ourselves to sin. Immersion in a cold mikvah is a remedy for this. However, since many people are sensitive to cold water, this should only be done when it will not impinge on a person's health. Immersion in a warm mikvah is effective as well.

In the case of spilling semen in vain, whether willfully or inadvertently, a person should shower thoroughly and immerse in a mikvah as soon as one can. Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, shlita, advises that a person should immerse his whole head and body in the water three times in succession, then make a quiet, heartfelt and detailed confession of all his wrongdoings. This must include a commitment not to continue in one's errant ways. This is followed by immersing oneself another seven times in succession.

If the mikvah is not crowded, and spending more time in the water will not interfere with anyone else, then a person can immerse himself 26 times, equaling the numeric value of the Name of G-d. He should immerse 10 times then say, "Whatever damage I caused to the first letter Yud of Your Name, please forgive me." Then immerse another 5 times and say, "Whatever damage I caused to the second letter Hai of Your Name, please forgive me." Then immerse 6 times and say, "Whatever damage I caused to the third letter Vav of Your Name, please forgive me." Then immerse 5 times and say, "Whatever damage I caused to the last letter Hai of Your Name, please forgive me." Since each letter in the sacred Name of G-d parallels a specific spiritual world, this type of immersion is very effective in the process of spiritual cleansing.

It is also proper to have in mind that while one's body is completely immersed in the purifying waters of the mikvah, his soul root is concurrently being immersed in the purifying waters of Gan Eden above.

At the conclusion of the mikvah, Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, advises saying the following prayer:

“I have sinned, I have transgressed, I have acted iniquitously. Please Hashem, my Father in heaven, please have mercy on me in the merit of the t’shuva that I am doing, and in the merit of the 26 times that I immersed to repair what I have blemished in Your Name. Please have compassion on me and on the souls that fell to the depths of the klipot, that they return to their holy source and be immediately rectified, may it be Thy will, amen.”

Because it is also forbidden to look at a man’s sexual organ, a person should behave with modesty in a mikvah. He should wrap himself in a towel to and from the immersion pool, and he should guard his eyes from looking at other men. It is best not to talk in a mikvah, and not to linger unnecessarily. Also, as in the case of all other tikunim, one should be especially happy after immersing in a mikvah, knowing that G-d is surely pleased with his efforts. But one should guard against feelings of pride, since the poison of pride can nullify all of the positive effects of t’shuva.

If a person immerses after a kerit, Rabbi Levi further advises a half-day fast and the heartfelt reciting of the “Tikun HaYesod, Yeshuat Eliahu.”

VIDUI

Vidui means confession. We learned that one of the essentials of repentance is the need to verbally confess one’s sins and make the commitment not to repeat them. In addition to recent transgressions, a sincere baal t’shuva should strive to confess every sin he can remember from his past. For a person who sets out on a path of constant t’shuva to rectify sexual sins, one time vidui isn’t enough. The Rambam rules that transgressions confessed on one Day of Atonement are once again confessed on the following Day of Atonement, even if one has continued penitent, as is said, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Tehillim, 51:5. Laws of T’shuva, 2:10).

Because the stains of sexual sins are so deep, and because they pollute layer upon layer of spiritual worlds, an ardent scrubbing is needed. This can be seen in the structure of our Day of Atonement prayers. The long, Yom Kippur vidui starts during the Mincha service on the eve of Yom Kippur. In the course of the day, we repeat the detailed confession another five times, to cleanse deeper and deeper levels.

Confession with tears shatters all barriers, as is said, “The sacrifices of G-d are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O G-d, Thou will not

despise” (Tehillim, 51:19).

According to mystical understandings, tears atone for the drops of semen which were spilled in vain. The main thing is to pour out one’s heart before G-d in anguish over the damage caused by his sins.

Since thought, speech, and looking at forbidden images also cause great spiritual damage, transgressions of this nature have to be included in one’s repentance. For example, a vidui might begin like this:

“Master of the Universe, merciful and gracious G-d, I have sinned before Thee. O L-rd, who is filled with compassion, have mercy on me and accept my supplications.

“Forgive me for thinking erotic thoughts. Forgive me for reading erotic literature. Forgive me for my sexual fantasies about the girl next door, and about the woman I saw on the bus. Forgive me for making lewd jokes. Forgive me for looking at sexy photographs of women in magazines, in the movies, and on the Internet. Forgive me for gazing at girls on the beach. Forgive me for looking with lust at my friend’s wife and for desiring to have sexual relations with her....”

This is a very partial list, without even mentioning the sins of masturbation and illicit sexual relationships, just to indicate the scope and detailed specification involved in a proper confession.

HITBODEDUT

Hitbodedut – pouring out one’s heart before G-d – is one of the main teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. A personal, heartfelt conversation with G-d, whether in the seclusion of one’s room, or in the solitude of a forest, is a powerful tool in bringing G-d actively into our lives. Hitbodedut, the fervent, unrepressed outpouring of the soul, contains everything – the confessing of one’s sins, one’s fears, and one’s shortcomings, and pleading with G-d to help in every endeavor in life. In the following chapter on the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, a sample of hitbodedut composed by his foremost pupil, Rabbi Natan, is included as a guideline to opening a conversation with G-d. Hitbodedut gives expression to the baal t’shuva’s desire to climb ever higher and higher in G-d’s service. In effect, all of King David’s Tehillim, are examples of hitbodedut – the yearning of King David to maintain a constant closeness to G-d throughout all of life’s trials. This constant yearning of David, expressed in the outpourings of his soul and unsurpassed beauty of his Psalms, is the secret of his triumph over all of his many adversities. (See the Commentary of the Malbim, Tehillim 23.)

TEHILLIM

The Psalms of King David are eternal. They speak to everyone, and for everyone, throughout all generations. The praises of G-d and the supplications of the Psalms apply to King David in his personal life, and to the national life of the people of Israel throughout its long history.

According to their inner understandings, they also are addressed to the spiritual world of the sefirot and the war against the forces of evil. For this reason, the earnest recital of Tehillim is a powerful rectification of the holy souls that, due to sexual transgressions, have fallen captive to the realm of impurity.

To prevent an unintentional seminal emission on Yom Kippur night, G-d forbid, the sages have recommended reciting the first four chapters of Tehillim before retiring to sleep. This is also an excellent remedy for people who have a reoccurring problem with keri at night.

INGATHERING OF THE EXILES

The spilling of semen in vain causes innumerable souls to be scattered in all directions without a fitting body to receive them. Instead they are doomed to wander in exile among the klipot. These outcast souls must be rectified and returned to their heavenly source.

In addition to the actual ingathering of the Jewish People to Israel, this inner understanding is one of the meanings of the blessing in the Amidah prayer, “Tekka beshofar gadol.” This should also be in our mind when we say, “Blow a great shofar for our freedom, and raise a banner to gather in our exiles, and gather us together speedily from the four corners of the earth to our land.”

THE BEDTIME SHEMA

The Arizal writes that the thoughtful, heartfelt recital of the three paragraphs of the Shema Yisrael prayer (Kriat Shema al HaMitah) before retiring to sleep is a powerful tikun for rectifying transgressions to the Brit. Most prayer books contain the Bedtime Shema along with the Tehillim and verses that accompany it. All of these contain erudite Kaballistic codes and formulas specifically designed to rectify the souls that have been taken captive through the spilling of semen in vain. This is true with each of the four recitals of the Shema in the course of the day.

If in the past, we made personal pleasure our master, in reciting the Shema and accepting the yoke of G-d's Kingship, we make Him our Master instead. If in the past, we lived for our personal pleasure, when we read the Shema with the willingness to sacrifice our lives for the sake of G-d's Name, we bring about a great sanctification and rectification of all of the worlds and the souls that we damaged.

TIKUN HATZOT

We mentioned that to uproot the damages caused by sexual transgression, a person has to transform his former, egotistical pursuit of pleasure into an altruistic orientation to life, devoted to helping others. Instead of focusing on himself and his personal desires, he focuses on pleasing G-d. When he realizes the great anguish he has caused the Shechinah through his sins, he longs to cause her joy. To make up for his shameful desecration of the Brit, he is stirred to devote himself to magnify the honor of G-d in the world, the honor of Torah, and the honor of the Jewish People. In drawing closer and closer to G-d, the penitent comes to feel true anguish over the destruction of the Temple, the exile of the Jewish People, and the exile of the Shechinah with them.

The foremost expression of this anguish is the tearful Tikun Hatzot prayer, composed of chapters of Tehillim and special supplications recited at midnight over the destruction of Jerusalem. Repeatedly, the Zohar extols all those who rise at midnight to mourn over the pain of the Shechinah, to learn Torah, and to sing the praises of their Maker. The Zohar calls this the most praiseworthy service:

At midnight, all of the true tzaddikim rise to study the Torah and to sing its praises. Behold, it has been said that the Holy One Blessed Be He, and all the tzaddikim in Gan Eden, listen to their voices, and a thread of grace is drawn over them by day, as is written, "The L-rd will command his grace in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me" (Tehillim, 42:9). Therefore, the praises that ascend in the night before Him, this is the most perfect praise (Zohar, Bereshit 82b).

We have learned that the pain of the Shechinah is the pain of the sefirah of Malchut which, because of transgressions to the Brit, is no longer watered by the river of the Yesod. Thus our prayers at midnight over the exile of the Shechinah, and the Torah that we learn afterward, act to replenish the flow and bring about a reunion between Malchut and Yesod, effecting a great tikun.

To quote once again from the Zohar:

“I have sworn to David, My servant” (Tehillim, 89:4), this is the secret of faith (Malchut) that it is always bound up with the tzaddik (Yesod). And this is the foundation of the world, that they (Malchut and Yesod) never be separated. Except in the time of the exile, when the flow of blessing is cut off (because of transgressions) and the secret of faith is impaired, and all joy (caused by the union of Malchut and Yesod) is stunted. And when nighttime (the exile) comes, joy does not enter before the King.

And even though joy is not awakened, nevertheless, outside of the palace the angels still sing. And at midnight when the stirring from below ascends on high, the Holy One Blessed Be He arouses all the hosts of heaven for weeping, and strikes the firmament, causing upper and lower worlds to tremble. And there is no comfort except at the time when those below awaken to study the Torah. Then the Holy One Blessed Be He, and all the souls of the tzaddikim with Him, listen with joy to that sound of learning, and comfort is felt by all. For from the day the Temple was destroyed below, G-d swore that He would not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until Israel should enter the earthly Jerusalem, as is written, “until holiness be in the midst of you, I will not enter the city” (Hosea, 11:9), as we have learned. (Zohar, Bereshit 231a).

Tikun Hatzot brings about the Yichud-union of HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the exiled Shechinah, and effects great rectifications in all of the worlds. In the same way that sexual transgressions brought about the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, separating the exalted spiritual union of the sefirot of Malchut and Yesod, so do our sexual sins today exacerbate this spiritual damage and lengthen the exile. As it says in Tikun Hatzot, “Our sins have withheld the good (Yesod) from us” (Yirmeyahu, 5:25). Tikun Hatzot comes to reawaken the love and flow of blessing that was lost. Thus its heartfelt recital, a few times a week, or as much as one can, is a vital aspect of Tikun HaBrit. Those who are able to keep awake to learn Torah afterward will be rewarded with an exalted spiritual light.

DIVINE ASSISTANCE

In the Rabbinic literature written on Tikun HaBrit, many other methods of rectification are emphasized, for instance, guarding one’s speech, giving charity generously, and special Kabbalistic intentions in prayers. However, in order not to confuse and overwhelm the reader, we have focused on a selection of the major methods. Also exceedingly beneficial to one’s

spiritual development is forming a connection to Torah sage who is well versed in matters concerning the Brit. The important thing is not the sheer number of tikunim, immersions, and pages of Gemara and Zohar, but rather the sincere contrition in the heart of the penitent over his wrongdoings. Not from fear of punishment, but out of a profound regret over the spiritual damage caused by his sins. When a person raises himself to the level of t'shuva from love, wherein his sole desire is to please His Maker by living a life of Torah and good deeds, he can know that he is a true baal t'shuva. The main thing is the constant striving for a higher level of Divine service, filled with a fervent love and fear of G-d, and the commitment to sanctify oneself in all of one's endeavors.

In the beginning, it often happens that when a man comes to purify himself, the evil inclination battles against him with great force. Nonetheless, he can overcome his yetzer (evil inclination) and sexual fantasies, since a man's intellect has the power to overcome the urgings of the heart (Tanya, Ch.12). Rather than being discouraged by reoccurring temptations and lapses, a man should fortify himself with the knowledge that each time he pushes a lustful thought out of his mind, or turns away from looking at an erotic image, he makes a great tikun in all of the spiritual worlds. Every victory over his yetzer weakens the power of the Sitra Achra in the world, and exalts the Name of G-d more than any other action (Zohar, Shemot 128a).

Our Sages have promised that a person who comes to purify himself is granted Divine assistance.

“When a person comes to make himself impure, the doors are opened for him. When he comes to purify himself, he is assisted... If he sanctifies himself a little, he is given great sanctity. If he sanctifies himself below in this world, he is sanctified above and in the world to come” (Yoma 39A).

As Rabbi Nachman of Breslov teaches, the main thing is that the penitent be happy that he has found the right path, and not let setbacks drag him back into the darkness of sexual passion.

Chapter Seven

RABBI NACHMAN'S TEACHINGS

Rabbi Nachman of Breslev formulated the “Tikun Clalli,” a grouping of special Tehillim and prayers designed to rectify transgressions to the Brit. Throughout his writings, he stresses the importance of Shmirat HaBrit. This chapter presents a small sample of his teachings, as recorded by his foremost student, Rabbi Natan.

ADVICE FROM THE BOOK, “LIKUTEI ETZOT”

If you guard the sacred Brit in purity you will be worthy of true prayer. The sexual desire is the source of all impurity. Confronting the sexual desire is the main test a person has to face in the world.

Sexual desire is subject to the eyes. The mitzvah of tzitzit is protection. When you wrap yourself in tzitzit, concentrate on the desire to live a life governed by the purity of the Brit and the counsel of the tzaddikim. Have faith in the tzaddikim and don't get involved in their disputes. The guidance of the tzaddikim and their followers is the foundation of the Brit.

The struggle to make a living comes from sexual impurity. A person who guards the Brit will learn to find wisdom in all things. Having relations with one's wife in purity is also guarding the Brit. The highest level of marital relations can be achieved only on Sabbath night. A man must conduct himself in perfect holiness. Then the secrets of the secrets will be revealed. Great yichudim (unifications) are achieved in the upper worlds through this.

A beneficial tikun for transgressions to the Brit is to help one's friends overcome their spiritual difficulties.

Pride can bring a person to sexual immorality.

By guarding the Brit a person will find the light to lead him back to G-d. The gentile nations are characterized by sexual impurity. G-d has separated Israel from the other nations through the Brit. More than anything, a Jew must guard himself against sexual desire. This is the foundation of the holiness of the Jewish People. Man has the power to uproot this impulse from himself completely.

A key to subduing sexual desires is to sanctify one's speech with Torah and prayer. One should strive to master the Holy Tongue, but even when speaking one's own language, one should always speak in a holy fashion. Only through actually hearing the words of the tzaddik who has mastered his sexual desire can a person free himself from his passions. You must go to him yourself.

The main force of the evil inclination is directed to the area of sexual desire, as is written, "Sin couches at the door."

Because of the desecration of the holy Brit, a sword is let loose in the world, "the sword that executes the vengeance of the Brit" (Vayikra, 26:25).

Crying out loud is a remedy for sexual impurity. This is why we read the Passover Haggadah out loud.

Guarding the Brit protects against the desires for materialism.

The Brit is the source of true enlightenment, called hadrat panim, the shining glory of the face.

The more you stand up to sexual temptation, the greater your revelations in Torah and devotion to G-d, and your ability to draw the world closer to G-d. Immorality leaves a blemish on the mind. This blemish blocks the true understanding of Torah.

A person who has not reached the level of sexual purity should not drink wine, since it stirs up the blood, leading a person to sin.

The Brit is the source of true freedom.

Before a person can receive a new revelation of Torah, he is tested in the crucible of sexual passion.

Once a man breaks his sexual desire, he can break all desires. This is why the tikun for sexual impurity is called the Tikun Clalli, the all-encompassing tikun.

The level of spiritual perception that a person can attain depends on the degree of purity he has obtained. It is a fundamental principle that one can only comprehend the words of the tzaddik if he first purifies himself.

A person who abuses the Brit will not be able to pray with the fervor of total devotion.

One who worries about his physical attractiveness to women will fall into the futility of vanity, and will become a slave to the charm he feels he must project.

Depression and anxiety are the main causes of sexual immorality. The foundation of the Brit lies in joy.

Today, publicity and fame go to false figures whose arrogance brings sexual immorality to the world and the wanton waste of semen. The remedy is to

honor the tzaddikim.

The more strongly you are assailed by sexual temptation, the greater tikun you bring when you fight and break them. Holiness is released from the power of the husks. Sexual fantasies are sent to a person so that he will transform them and elevate them to holiness.

One who breaks his sexual desires will have holy dreams.

When a person is beset with sexual desire, he must remind himself of the superiority of the spiritual world.

The spirit of Mashiach cannot tolerate sexual immorality.

One who obtains sexual purity is perfectly free. His whole being becomes infused with the spirit of Sabbath. He can go into the world and rescue others caught in the net of passion, leading them to a fear and love of G-d.

A person who experiences a nighttime emission should recite the following ten Tehillim on the same day: 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, 150. One who recites these Tehillim on the same day need have no further fears about the harm such an emission can cause. Any damage will certainly be repaired through this. It is a very great tikun.

(From "Likutei Etzot". Based on the translations of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, from the book, "Advice.")

FROM "RABBI NACHMAN'S WISDOM"

The Zohar states that t'shuva does not help for the sin of spilling one's seed in vain. Rabbi Nachman said that this is not so. T'shuva helps for all sins. He also said that no one understands the meaning of this passage in the Zohar except for him. The truth is that t'shuva certainly helps for this sin, even if one has carried out this sin many times. True t'shuva involves never repeating this sin again. You must go to the same place and be placed in the same situation as you were before, and be exposed to the same temptation. Only this time, you must take care not to do the same thing as you did before. You must break your desire and withstand the temptation. This is the essence of t'shuva" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom, 71).

FROM THE BOOK, "LIKUTEI HALACHOT"

[The "point" referred to in this section is the point, or "nekudah," which radiates Divine life and loving-kindness to the world.]

The holy drop of semen that emerges from the Yesod is the light of the holy "point." It is forbidden for a man to discharge it unless in the context of a

holy marital union, in the vessel of Malchut, embodied in his wife, for this makes a great tikun, the tikun of the “shattered vessels.” For all of the holy marital unions act to separate the holy from the unholy, and to rectify the shattering of the vessels, as has been explained (See the book, “Innerspace,” by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Ch. 10, for an explanation of this concept). This is the reason that the principle time of marital relations is the Sabbath when the “point” is most illuminated.

However, when the drop of semen is spilled in vain, G-d forbid, then the light of the “point” of the Yesod is drawn outside of its holy sanctum. This is tantamount to destroying the world, for in doing so a man gives power to the realm of evil outside, and this renews the shattering of the vessels, as explained in the writings of the Arizal. For not only does he not rectify the shattered vessels through the light of the holy “point,” on the contrary, he reenacts the primal shattering and draws the light of the “point” outside the boundaries of holiness. This causes the vessels to shatter again, since there is no proper vessel to contain the light. For this reason, it has been said that he uproots his life constellation (mazal,) G-d forbid, by uprooting the “point,” which is the principle root of his life.

This is the reason why it is stated that t’shuva is impossible for one who spills his seed, because he has nowhere to return to. Where should he return now that he has ruined the “point” itself, which is the very root of his life? T’shuva is possible as long as a person’s “point” remains intact. But as for one who ruins his “point” and, as it were, uproots it, G-d forbid, to where can he return?

And yet, the truth of the matter is that “nothing stands in the way of t’shuva,” as is mentioned throughout the holy literature. If a person repents, he will surely be forgiven.

However, the essence of his t’shuva can only come about with the help of the Tzaddik of the era [the embodiment of the Yesod] who is the comprehensive “point” from which all the other “points” draw. The sinner who spilled his seed and ruined his own “point” is obliged to receive the light of the “point” anew. This is only possible with the help of the Tzaddik of the era, who is the root of all “points,” and who therefore has the power to radiate the “point” to him anew. For he is the root of all the “points.”

This is the meaning of the teaching of our master, Rabbi Nachman, on the Hatzotzrot (Likutei Moharan, there, section 5), that when the ear hears rebuke, renewed life is granted, for the principle tikun for this matter is through the Tzaddik of the era.

Strict justice demands that the sinner should not be given the opportunity of

t'shuva. Nonetheless, if he is filled with regret and pleads before G-d, even the t'shuva of one who is unworthy of being granted forgiveness will be accepted through G-d's gratuitous Chesed-kindness.

This indeed is the remedy itself – that the sinner succeeds in arousing G-d's mercy, so that G-d accepts his repentance. This t'shuva thereby arouses and reveals a totally new dimension of G-d's kindness that has not existed before. For the Chesed-kindness that already exists in the world does not extend to granting atonement for his sin, because t'shuva does not help in this case. And this is appropriate because the sinner who has ruined his “point,” which is the light of Chesed-kindness, has thereby damaged the light of Chesed itself. This is why there is no repentance for him, for the light itself is damaged. Therefore when G-d wishes to take pity on him, He shows him a new Chesed-kindness which has never existed before. G-d reveals a new dimension of kindness in order to heal and forgive even one who has committed this sin. This is in itself the essence of his tikun, in that he has caused a new facet of G-d's kindness to be revealed, and this effects his rectification, because the sinner receives a new “point” through this Chesed-kindness. Because the “point” is kindness, as explained above. And since he has succeeded in attracting a new kindness, this in itself brings him to receive the light of the “point” which is kindness, and this is his tikun. The only way this tikun can come about in its entirety is through the Mashiach, may he come soon in our time. For the Mashiach will come to rectify this sin in its fullest, as it is written, “and gather together the dispersed of Yehuda” (Yishayahu, 11:12). He will gather the outcasts and those who have been dispersed to the four corners of the earth, and this is the overall tikun for this sin. For Mashiach embodies the light of this new Chesed-kindness which comes to remedy everything, as is written, “And He does kindness to His anointed one” (Tehillim, 18:51). This is the meaning of what is written, “A redeemer will come to Zion and to those of Yaacov who return from sin, says the L-rd” (Yishayahu, 59:20). Those who return from this sin specifically – the ones who repent from the vain emission of seed. This is referred to in the verse, “Are you not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood” (Yishayahu, 57:4)? It says in the Sefer HaKavanot of the Arizal that this verse is speaking about this sin. It is precisely to these people that the righteous redeemer will come, because all of the remedies come about precisely through him. When he comes and rectifies them, then the “point” will return and radiate within them. This is the meaning of the words that follow (Yishayahu, 59:21), “And as for Me, this is My Brit with them...My spirit that is upon you, and My words that I have put in your

mouth....". This refers to the "point" which exists where the Brit of shalom is observed, and this is the source of ruach hakodesh, which, as our master of blessed memory, explained is the meaning of, "My words that I have put in your mouth."

(Likutei Halachot, Orach Chaim, Part 1, Tefillin, Ch. 2, Section, 11 and 12.)

HITBODEDUT

As mentioned, one of the foundations of Rabbi Nachman's teachings is the importance of Hitbodedut in serving Hashem. The essence of Hitbodedut is pouring one's heart out in personal prayer before one's Maker. Rabbi Nachman emphasizes that this practice should be practiced in seclusion, and that it is especially effective when conducted outdoors in a field or a forest. In his books, Likutei Tefillot, and "Torot and Tefillot," Rabbi Nachman's devoted student, Rabbi Natan, presents many examples that can help every Jew rise to more fervent outpourings of the heart. Here is one such example: "Please, most honored and awe-inspiring G-d, honored King, You who created the entire world for Your blessed honor, as is written, 'Everything I created and formed and made, for my Name and My honor I created,' help me in Your great compassion, that I merit to increase and elevate your praise and honor.

"Help me to nullify myself completely before You, and to diminish my own honor, that my own honor be as if void and non-existent. Help me that I do not raise myself up to declare my own honor in any way, but rather that I only endeavor to enhance the honor due You, and that all of my doings and thoughts and desires be directed exclusively to Your great and blessed honor alone.

"Assist me in your great mercy to shatter and remove all feelings of arrogant self-pride from my heart, that there shouldn't rise in my heart any trace of conceit at all, and that I merit to achieve true humility. Give me the intelligence and wisdom so that I can find the way to true humility, and to flee from false humility, from humility which is really to win honor from others. Please help me in Your great mercy and kindness that I merit to attain true and absolute humility.

"Please, G-d, in Your infinite mercy, have mercy on Your creation, and open my mouth in prayer that I be able to pour forth my speech before You in a manner that awakens Your mercy to extend over me, that You have compassion on me this very moment and that You aid me to sanctify and purify myself in the holiness of the Brit, that I may be saved from this

moment onward from every transgression against the Brit in the world.
“And for all of the blemishes in which I blemished the holy Brit until now, please forgive me, please forgive me and cleanse me in Your towering mercy and kindness, in everything that I blemished by my thoughts, and my speech, and my deeds, by looking at forbidden things, and hearing unholy matters, smelling unholy smells, and in all of my feelings, whether intentionally or unintentionally, whether willfully or unwillfully. In every way that I blemished the Brit, please forgive me and have compassion on me, and shatter, and weaken, and subdue, and nullify all of the ropes and knots and chains binding me to the Sitra Achra, which were strengthened because of my numerous sins, which overcome me at every moment and seek to pull me from sin to sin, and not allow me to purify myself as I should, keeping me far from guarding the Brit in true holiness, as a Jew should, a son of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, whom You chose.
“Master of the World, may it be Thy will that all of my transgressions be transformed into merit through my t’shuva, even though I have not even begun to return in true repentance. Even so, grant me the gift of Your forgiveness as a gratuitous gift, and have mercy on me in Your great mercy, and rescue me from the trials and tribulations that pursue me at every moment.

“And even if I myself am my worst enemy, for indeed I have free choice, and no one can force me to stray from the true path, and I confess that I am guilty, and that I myself am responsible for my transgressions, but what can I do for I am weak, and I don’t know how to escape from my pursuers, nor how to overcome all of the lusts and evil fantasies that overwhelm me at every moment. I have no hope if not for Your infinite compassion, that You help me and grant me the strength to overcome all of the lusts and fantasies, to subdue them and cast them into the dust, to shatter them and expel them from my mind, from this moment and forever after, that absolutely no evil fantasy enter my mind or thoughts at all, rather that my mind and thoughts be holy and pure at all times to the utmost measure of sanctity.

“And help me in Your great mercy to purify and sanctify myself, that I be able to sanctify myself in things that are permitted to me, and that I merit to add more and more holiness to my life until I achieve true holiness and separation from all evil things, that through me all the worlds be unified... may it be Thy will, amen.”

(Abridged from, “Torot and Tefillot,” Tefillah L’Torah, 11)

Chapter Eight

FOR MARRIED MEN ONLY

Many people erroneously assume that Shmirat HaBrit deals only with the problems that young people face. The truth is that married men also have to be on their guard to retain a high standard of sexual purity in their marital relations. We have seen several passages in the Zohar which emphasize the importance of sanctification during the marital union, especially in its influence on future offspring. Married men must be careful to guard their eyes and their thoughts with their wives, and to behave in a modest fashion, since these constitute the essence of holiness. To insure a holy, healthy, and happy marriage, a husband must sanctify himself in what is permitted to him, and not be like a rooster with his wife, as the Sages have taught. In addition, married men also have to be careful not to spill semen in vain. Given the great passions surrounding the sexual urge, the spilling of semen in vain can occur before, during, and after the marital act. For instance, due to excessive arousal and foreplay, a premature emission of semen may occur unintentionally; nevertheless the souls that come into the world are captured by the Sitra Achra and need to be rectified. Improper positions can also bring about the wasting of semen. The marital union is a holy mitzvah and not acrobatics. Although the marital act is permitted, a Jew is warned not to be licentious under the banner of the Torah. Thus, a man must always be on guard not to let his yetzer overcome his reason and cause him to sin. At the outset, it is vital to mention that the laws of family purity (taharat hamishpachah) are the foundation of married life. While it is not in the scope of this book to discuss this subject in depth, these laws must be observed in all of their detail and stringency.

It is not enough to learn the many laws regarding taharat hamishpachah in the weeks preceding a person's marriage. These laws should be studied again and again, including the laws governing the modesty of the sexual act. Since the sexual urge is one of man's most powerful lusts, it is easy to fall into laxity and error. A man can offer a thousand excuses, but the damage that occurs during momentary lapses must still be redressed like all other transgressions.

As a reminder of the holiness of the marital union, and to strengthen a husband in his service of G-d, we are listing some practical guidelines from the books "Tzaakat Yisrael" and "Kedushat Yisrael," written by the holy

Kabbalist, HaRav Eliahu Leon Levi, shlita. There are many laws and precautions that concern the performance of marital relations, and we are citing only a few, including stringencies that are emphasized in the Kabbalah. The reader is urged to study all of the laws in full, in all of their detail, since the well-being of a marriage, and the well-being of one's children, depend on the holiness of the marital union. Kabbalists stress that in the area of sexual relations, one should not be content to observe the basic laws alone, but rather each and every Jew should strive to uphold the more stringent applications of the law by sanctifying himself even in permitted matters. At the same time, they emphasize that this holy mitzvah should be performed with mutual happiness, enjoyment, and love. A couple should aim to rise up the ladder of holiness together, and not let one's yearning for saintliness come at the expense of one's spouse.

KEYS TO A HOLY UNION

1. Before marital relations, a husband should ask G-d to forgive him for all transgressions to the Brit which he committed in the past, including brazen conduct with his wife, which gave strength to the Sitra Achra and caused pain to the Shechinah. His intention should be that in engaging in proper and holy marital relations, the souls that fell captive to the klipot through his sins should be rectified and returned to their Maker. Both husband and wife should have the intention to bring a holy soul into the world. They should long to unite the Holy One Blessed He and the exiled Shechinah. By guarding his eyes and his thoughts, the husband will radiate holiness and blessing to all of the spiritual worlds that were damaged through his former wrongdoings.
2. In preparation for the exalted holiness of the marital union, it is proper to wash one's hands from a vessel, first pouring water over the right hand, then over the left, repeating the procedure another two times – similar to the washing of hands in the morning, but without reciting a blessing.
3. During marital relations, the husband and wife should not think of anyone else, for in addition to damaging spiritual worlds, this brings great harm to the children who are born from such unions.
4. The exclusive position of the marital union is with the wife lying on her back, facing up, and the husband lying upon her, facing down. Any other position is brazenness and almost certain to bring about the spilling of semen in vain. If the woman is on top of the man, this is brazenness and the pull of gravity will surely cause the wasting of semen. The same is true if they are

standing or sitting. Unnatural positions upset the Divine order in spiritual realms and bring harsh judgments to the world. Anal intercourse is forbidden, and is considered an act of loathsome brazenness. Besides the absolute spilling of semen in vain, this is considered in the Kabbalah like sacrificing one's children to the idol Molech. Intercourse from the back is also brazenness, even if the organ of the Brit is inserted into the proper place, for it will lead to the spilling of semen in vain from the wife, since she lies on her stomach and gravity will cause the semen to spill out.

Furthermore, because the strongest of klipot surround the buttocks of the woman, when the Brit passes by this impure area, it will be polluted by klipot that will be subsequently transferred to the wife's sexual organ and to the offspring of such a union. Only in the case of physical handicap or advanced pregnancy may this positioned be approved by a qualified rabbinical authority.

5. All forms of oral sex are forbidden.

6. The use of condoms is forbidden.

7. The wife should continue to lie on her back after marital relation for another ten minutes, and not turn on her stomach or side, and not immediately rise from the bed to go the bathroom, so that her husband's semen should not flow out from her and cause the wasting of semen.

8. Similarly, the husband should not withdraw from his wife immediately after relations, but rather remain lying upon her another several minutes, and not withdraw while his organ is rigid, for this causes drops of semen to spill out.

9. The marital union should not be engaged in during the day. Children resulting from such unions, when the klipot are strongest, will be afflicted with sufferings throughout most of their lives, G-d forbid. If a man cannot control his lust, and if there is thus a danger of spilling semen in vain, then relations may be conducted in a completely dark room, under blankets or sheets.

10. It is forbidden to look at the sexual organ of a woman, and also that of a man. This damages the eyes both physically and spiritually, and one will not be able to see the face of the Shechinah when the L-rd returns to Zion.

11. It is forbidden to have relations in a lighted room, whether by lamplight, candle, or moonlight, for this causes suffering in the children who are born from such unions. Rather, the marital union should be in a dark room at night, preferably after midnight when the klipot are weakened, and the couple must cover their bodies with a blanket or sheet out of modesty. Sabbath night after midnight is the most suitable time for a holy union.

12. A wife should not dress or undress in the presence of her husband during the time of her menstrual impurity, for this causes him difficult temptations, and it could lead to his having an emission of semen in vain.

13. When a woman is in her menstrual period (niddah) it is best to separate the beds of husband and wife as much as possible, preferably 45 centimeters. Couples who take leniency with this are tempting the yetzer hara.

14. A Torah scholar should endeavor to engage in marital relations once a week, on Sabbath night after midnight. On the night of the wife's ritual immersion, or when she hints that she would like his favor, he can engage even during the week, preferably after midnight. It is known that marital relations on weeknights are more accessible to the influence of klipot, therefore one should strive for added holiness.

15. After going to the bathroom, it is proper for both husband and wife to wait ten minutes before engaging in marital relations. Otherwise impurity will be transferred to the offspring of such a union, adversely influencing their spiritual make-up.

16. It is a severe transgression for a husband to force himself upon his wife against her will, or when either of them is angry, for this results in children who are aggressive and crude. Rather, relations should be with the wife's consent, in holiness and mutual joy.

17. It is the man's duty to please his wife, to make her feel loved, and to take the time needed to make sure that her pleasure is complete. He should embrace her and kiss her during the marital union.

18. A man who regularly experiences unintentional seminal emissions, should take extra precaution in guarding his eyes from looking at women. He should recite the full order of verses and prayers of the Bedtime Shema with extra intention, word by word. He should sleep wearing his tallit katan, and he can even wear it during relations, if it doesn't interfere. These things will help him to guard his thoughts in holiness.

The aspiration to endow marital life with holiness is one of life's greatest challenges. It is helpful to remember that when a man comes to purify himself, he is aided from Above. Even though a person may have made many mistakes in the past, our Sages assure us that nothing stands in the way of t'shuva.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven, may it be Thy will that in the merit of the holy Zohar, and in the merit of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, and in the merit of all of the

tzaddikim and their exalted teachings, that everyone who comes to purify himself from transgressions against the Brit will be granted the strength and the Divine assistance to discover the great light and joy of Your salvation.

Chapter Nine

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PLAGUED BY SEXUAL FANTASIES

Question:

I am a yeshiva student who is plagued by sexual fantasies. I know that the Sages advice dragging your evil inclination to the Beit Midrash (study hall) whenever it attacks you, but my imaginations and sexual urgings follow me there even when I am trying to learn Torah. What can I do?

Answer:

First of all, you shouldn't succumb to despair. You should know that the higher a person rises in the spiritual world, the more he is tested. This is how G-d builds spiritual champions. Be confident that you have the inner potential to overcome your trials. A man is never tested by something beyond his means. So keep up the battle, cry out for the help of the Almighty, and you will surely win in the war against the yetzer.

While Torah learning is certainly a powerful weapon against the evil inclination, sometimes it isn't enough on its own. In a war, an army needs to call upon all of its forces, and this is true in the war against sexual fantasies. Try making immersion in a mikvah a part of your regular daily routine, or as many times a week as you can. Little by little, the darkness haunting you will give way to purification and light. You will feel that you are getting rid of tons of klipot, by drowning them in the healing waters of the mikvah. Also the daily recital of tikunim like the Tikun HaClalli of Rabbi Nachman, or the Tikun HaYesod Yeshuat Eliahu, will give you added ammunition in your battle. These tikunim not only blast away at the klipot, they build up the inner spiritual fortification to continue the battle. As more and more of your spiritual power is uncovered, your physical urgings will grow less tenacious. They may not abandon you altogether, but you will have the spiritual power to push them away with your mighty threefold arsenal of mikvah, tikunim, and Torah study.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov offers the following advice:

“When sexual fantasies come upon a person's thoughts, and the person breaks his passion and averts his mind from them, this is his main t'shuva and the principle way that he rectifies his past transgressions to the Brit, each person according to his deeds. This is doing repentance measure for measure. Thus, a person shouldn't become depressed when he sees that

wicked and ugly sexual fantasies are overwhelming him. On the contrary – this is his way of repentance and rectification, for precisely when these fantasies come to him now and he overcomes them, this is his main t’shuva and tikun, and in this manner, he liberates sparks of holiness that fell into impurity through transgressions to the Brit. This is the way he merits to rectify the Brit.” (From “Likutei Etzot,” Thoughts and Fantasies, 4).

SEX UNLIMITED

Question:

Hasn’t the Torah forbade enough things that you come and add more? A man can have sex with his wife any time he wants as long as she is not in her menstrual cycle, day or night, seven days a week. Having sex once a week on Sabbath night might be OK for holy tzaddikim, but not for normal people.

Answer:

You are right that having sex once a week on Sabbath night is an ideal for all those who want to sanctify themselves with a special holiness. The Torah understands that people have different natures and aspirations, and thus does not forbid marital relations during the week. Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, shlita, recommends having relations on Sabbath night and one night during the week; also on Rosh Chodesh, on certain holidays when relations are permitted, and when the wife hints that she would like to have intimacies. But in all cases, a man should strive to perform his marital duty in holiness and not out of lust for personal enjoyment alone.

In his book, “Darke Tahara,” former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Mordechi Eliahu, shlita, writes on the verse:

“And the L-rd spoke to Moshe, saying, Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, you shall be holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am holy” (Vayikra, 19:1).

“This holiness is expressed not only by distancing yourselves from forbidden relationships, but also in distancing yourselves from things that are permitted. For the Torah has not come to grant those driven with lust room to wallow in their lechery and to be degenerate with the permission of the Torah” (“Darke Tahara,” Laws of Modesty, Pg. 178).

Rabbi Eliahu continues:

“However, someone who does not need to have relations in order to quiet an aroused sexual passion, since his urge is not pressing him, but rather purposefully arouses his desire and excitement just to fill himself with the lusts of this world, then his behavior is not a mitzvah. The opposite – this is

the counseling of the evil inclination. From the permitted he comes to the forbidden, as it says, ‘Whoever purposefully arouses his sexual organ to excitement will be banished’ (Niddah 13A). This resembles a man who is satiated, but nevertheless eats and drinks in abundance until he is drunk and vomits up what he ate.... Thus a man must strengthen himself, and overcome his passions, and battle to save himself by subduing his lusts, so that his soul will reign over his animal nature which knows no limits in seeking to fulfill its lusts” (Ibid., Pg. 182).

DANGER OF DEPRESSION

Question:

When I discussed this subject with my rabbi, he said that a person who had a problem in this area could get depressed if he understood the full gravity of his transgressions, and that his depression could cause him to fall even further into a cycle of transgression and despair. What do you say about this?

Answer:

A person with a problem is likely to get depressed if he feels that there is no way of overcoming the problem. However, when he is offered a way out, he immediately gains hope and new vigor. A person caught in the quagmire of sexual transgression is indeed in a serious spiritual pit. But do you just leave him there, or do you throw him a rope that he can grab onto in order to help him climb out? Most people experience a great sense of relief when they discover the rope ladder of mikvah, Torah study, and prayer. In the matter of sexual transgression, it isn't knowledge that causes depression – it is the lack of it.

EXAGGERATED WARNINGS

Question:

I am not suggesting that your Torah sources are in error, but it seems to me that you have exaggerated with all of your fire and brimstone warnings. I can see a movie, or go to a crowded beach, or spend an evening with an attractive woman and never experience a wet dream or the desire to masturbate. I am sure this is true for most men, not only me.

Answer:

This reminds us of man who works in a boiler room. On a hot summer day when everyone else is sweating, he says he feels cool. He simply has become accustomed to being hot. Because he works in a boiler room, he is insensitive to hot weather. So too, a man who is accustomed to immodest

dress and immodest behavior does not feel their impact on him. His spiritual radar has become insensitive and dull. This is the case with any transgression. If a person does not keep the Sabbath, he does not feel the loss of the spiritual high that the Sabbath brings to a Jew. If he eats cheeseburgers, he thinks he is just as spiritual as his Orthodox friend who keeps kosher. In the same way, a merchant who regularly cheats his clients, comes to believe that he is not doing anything wrong. The fact is that seeing immodestly dressed women at the beach and in the movies dulls a Jew's spiritual world and distances him from G-d and the Torah. For a person who has an aspiration to live a sanctified life, this is certainly not the way. In his book, "Kuntres HaAvodah," Rebbe Sholom Dov Ber of Lubavitch, one of the early great Admores of Chabad, writes the following: "Everyone who is concerned about his soul, not to pollute it, G-d forbid, should guard over his eyes. And if this is difficult for him, he should endeavor to restrain himself with all of his strength and might. He must take to heart that this matter is instrumental to the well-being of his soul. If he does not guard himself in this matter, then all of his Divine service is accounted as nothing, and all of his achievements are as naught, and his service of G-d will fall lower and lower.... "Behold, there are people who are far from actually committing evil deeds, G-d forbid, but their hearts pull them to look and stare (at women). They gaze with a seemingly cold detachment, and they do not feel any immediate excitement when they look, but the reason for their being attracted is because they experience an inner pleasure... This gazing, even with seeming detachment, creates an impression and a great stain on the psyche, which will not go away without arousing some actual evil in its wake, G-d forbid.... "Thus, it is every man's duty to control himself and to guard over the things he sees. In so doing, he will save himself from evil, and his service of G-d will find favor. He will bring salvation to his soul, and he will rise higher and higher" (Kuntres HaAvodah, Ch. 2. For an English translation and commentary, see the book, "Love Like Fire and Water," Moznaim Publishing Corp).

BEATING MASTURBATION

Question:

Is there any advice you can give to a non-religious person to help break the habit of masturbation?

Answer:

We doubt that a person can be free of sexual sin without a strong connection

to Torah. The sexual flame is so fierce, it can only be properly directed and doused by the power of Torah. Nonetheless, it is generally true that a person who is busy does not have time to get into trouble. People with lots of free time on their hands fall into all kinds of traps. So try keeping busy, with work, with learning, with sports activity, hobbies, clubs, or by joining a volunteer organization. Also keep away from sexual stimulation like erotic photos, movies, pornography on the Internet, and the like. What you don't see doesn't fill your mind. And try not to be alone. Get out of the house. Be with a friend. And even though you are not religious, try learning Torah. It is your heritage as a Jew. You are sure to like it.

MAKE YOUR WIFE HAPPY

Question:

I would very much like to follow the counsel of our Sages and the teachings of the Zohar by limiting marital relations to Sabbath night. However, my wife is unhappy with this and wants to have relations several times a week. What should I do?

Answer:

Just as a man has the obligation to sanctify himself in his marital relations, he also has the very important mitzvah from the Torah to please his wife and to satisfy her needs. A man cannot adopt a course of saintly behavior for himself if it will cause friction with his wife. If this is the case, then his conduct is not saintly behavior at all. It is selfishness.

In his book, "Darke Tahara," Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu, shlita, writes that while it is important for a man to strive for sanctity during marital relations, one must approach this level of saintliness gradually, and not at the expense of his wife:

"In order to reach this holy level, a man must ascend the ladder of holiness slowly, and be careful not to sanctify himself by saintly behavior and abstinence, and in doing so, nullify mitzvot which the Torah commands, or bring himself to spill semen in vain, which is a very serious transgression. "Relating to this it is said, 'An ignoramus cannot be a saintly person' (Avot, 2:5).

"A man is obligated to make his wife happy by having marital relations with her at the appropriate times, and even at other times, when she so desires. This is an obligation from the Torah, as it says, 'Her food, her clothing, and her duty of marriage relations he shall not diminish' (Shemot, 21:9). Someone who abstains from relations with his wife, and causes her chagrin, transgresses a Torah commandment. Even if he abstains without the

intention of causing her chagrin, there are authorities who say that this too is a Torah transgression. In any event, in doing so he transgresses a rabbinical injunction.”

To illustrate the severity of improper saintliness concerning one’s wife, Rabbi Eliahu cites the case of Rav Rachumi who would learn Torah for long periods with his teacher, Rava, and come home on the eve of Yom Kippur (Ketubot 62B). Once he became so preoccupied with his studying that he forgot to return home. His wife waited expectantly every moment for him to arrive. Eventually, she became grief-stricken and started to cry. Because of her grief, the roof of the study hall collapsed and her husband was killed. Hence, while it is meritorious for a man to strive for spiritual sanctification, he should not do it at his wife’s expense. Rather they should rise up the ladder of holiness together.

KABBALAH CLASSES

Question:

A while ago, I read a feature magazine article about the growing popularity of Jewish Mysticism. Recently, classes in Kabbalah have started in our community. While I am curious to see what it is all about, the rabbi of our synagogue says that Kabbalah should only be studied after someone has first learned the Torah, Mishna, and Talmud. Since I have only been a baal t’shuva for a little more than a year, I am still pretty much a beginner. What is your opinion?

Answer:

First, it is important to understand the growing interest in the study of Kabbalah.

According to reports in the media, Hollywood personalities, stockbrokers on Wall Street, and students in college are flocking to Kabbalah classes. While the efficacy of this learning is questionable so long as the would-be mystics remain ensconced in their usual, unholy lifestyles, it reveals a spreading yearning for spirituality. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook teaches that the reason behind this spiritual quest stems from a deep, common source. He writes:

“In the last generations, in which the darkness of lust has so greatly increased, and the strength of the body has weakened, until it has become impossible to stand firm against this material onslaught, it is imperative to illuminate the darkness with the mystical secrets of Torah, which know no boundaries, and which elevate seekers on wings of lofty freedom to the highest ascents, and which spread the transcendental joy of the beauty of

holiness to depressed and spiritually darkened souls” (Orot HaKodesh, Part 1, Pg. 92).

Living in a capitalistic, consumer-oriented society, we are bombarded by material messages, and accompanying sexual images to promote them. An obsession with sex and the material world can block out spiritual light completely. Only an intense inner purification, and a connection to transcendental realms, can free people from the physical lusts that block the connection to G-d. It is precisely the secrets of Torah which can lighten the path of repentance needed to return to our original holy source (See, “The Art of T’shuva,” by Rabbi David Samson and Tzvi Fishman, Chapter 18). Long ago, the Sages of the Talmud warned that as the time of Mashiach approached, a great darkness would envelope the world and the traditional learning of Judaism would be scorned (Sotah 49B). Today, the world is ready to embrace a universal vision of unity, where all particulars are recognized as part of the whole. The great popularity of the Internet, which connects every household with the global, cyberspace village, is a sign of this quest for universality. In contrast, the normative study of Torah is seen as something specifically Jewish, bounded on all sides with restrictive laws, like kashrut or family purity, which seem to sever practitioners from the wide world and its infinite horizons.

However, to an experienced “surfer” in the great sea of Torah, endless horizons and expanses of unity can be discovered by delving into the secrets of Torah!

Nonetheless, your rabbi’s advice is well taken. It is true that before G-d allows a person to understand the secrets of Torah, a student must first be well-grounded in the foundations of Torah study, including the study of Talmud and the Halachic codes.

Furthermore, in order to enter the secret chambers of Jewish learning, a person must concurrently undergo a great spiritual purification. He must strive to put his life in line with the great moral light of the Torah. This involves the difficult work of refining character traits and abandoning sin. A person who seeks to get closer to G-d must embrace the commandments of the Torah with all of his heart and might. And one must make a supreme, constant effort to sanctify one’s sexual life.

Kabbalah and a commitment to the moral teachings of the Torah go hand-in-hand. To the extent that a person purifies himself through repentance and self-sanctification, his study of the secrets of Torah will be blessed. Without this, a class in Kabbalah is mere self-delusion and another passing fad.

STRINGING PEOPLE ALONG

Question:

The last time I was at the Kotel, someone tried to sell me a red string for the purpose of warding off the “evil eye.” Do these kind of charms really work?

Answer:

It seems to us that such a purchase would be worthless. There certainly do exist things called “segulot,” which can have very worthwhile effects. If a holy rabbi, who is known for his fear of G-d and devotion to Torah, gives a person some specific advice or guidance, like lighting a candle in the memory of some great rabbi, or saying certain prayers, or performing a certain act, these indeed can have a very great influence in a person’s life. Accepting the advice and guidance of a holy rabbi and tzaddik demonstrates a willingness to acknowledge the existence of a spiritual world beyond our rational comprehension. It shows that a person is ready to step beyond the constraints of his ego and open himself to a higher wisdom based on a respect for Torah sages and a reverence for G-d. But the key factor is that in addition to a person’s desire to get closer to G-d, he or she must be certain that the rabbi is a true servant of G-d and known for his selfless devotion to Torah.

RABBI KOOK AND SHMIRAT HABRIT

Question:

While I cannot say that I am an expert in the writings of Rabbi Kook, I have read several of his books. If Shmirat HaBrit is such a fundamental pillar of Judaism, why doesn’t Rabbi Kook emphasize it in his writings?

Answer:

Rabbi Kook does indeed write about Shmirat HaBrit, albeit in his own unique style. In his prolific writings on holiness, “Orot HaKodesh,” the importance of sexual holiness is a constant underlying foundation. In many places, he addresses the subject directly, both for the individual and the nation (See, Orot HaKodesh, Part 3, Pg. 396, “Tikun HaYesod;” Orot HaTechiyah, 35; Otzrot HaRiyah, Pg. 910).

While Rabbi Kook was noted for his great love and acceptance of all people, he emphasized that the separation of men and women in public life was a foundation for the building of the Jewish nation. In a chapter on modesty in his book “Midot HaRayah,” he writes:

“The virtues of love and friendship, in all of their appearances, should have been the same for both men and women, but because of the supreme value of modesty, the virtue of polite, social behavior (derek erez) is superseded, to

the extent that the Sages advised men not to greet married women” (Kiddushin 70b).

In addition, his own personal and public life was an example of holiness to everyone, so much so that if he had to address women, he would do so with his eyes closed, or by staring over their heads.

Furthermore, Rabbi Kook stressed the importance of learning the secrets of Torah, especially the Zohar, where the subject of Shmirat HaBrit is found in all of its all-encompassing profundity (See, Orot HaTehiya, 57).

While there were certainly breaches of modesty in Rabbi Kook’s time among the secular pioneers in Eretz Yisrael, the situation was nothing like the open brazenness of our generation. Rabbi Kook focused on the major issue of his time – the rebirth of the Jewish nation and its resettlement in the Land of Israel. If Rabbi Kook were alive today, there is no doubt that he would stridently raise his voice to call for the continuing settlement of the Holy Land in its fitting, holy fashion.

FOR WOMEN ONLY

Question:

The subject of Shmirat HaBrit seems to be almost completely directed toward men. Besides dressing in a modest fashion, is there anything else Jewish women must adhere to when it comes to sex?

Answer:

First of all, the Jewish People have survived until today because of the modesty and sexual purity of its women. The Jewish woman is not only the keeper of the home, but also the builder of the Jewish Nation. In tribute to her, the song, “A Woman of Valor,” is sung in Jewish homes every week at the commencement of the Sabbath meal.

Regarding sex, the Torah views the marital act as a holy commandment abounding in spirituality. A woman is called upon to approach this holy union with holy thoughts and holy aspirations, and not for physical pleasure alone. To help her, there are special prayers for women that can be recited before the marital act.

A Jewish woman can only have sex with her husband at the times permitted by Jewish law when she is menstrually pure. She must carefully observe all of the laws of family purity (Niddah) and immerse herself in a ritual bath (mikvah) in the proper time and fashion.

It goes without saying that premarital sex is strictly forbidden. A Jewish woman is called upon to be holy and not to play the part of a harlot. It is forbidden to marry a non-Jew.

The holy Kabbalist, the Arizal, teaches that women also have to guard against the spilling of semen in vain. They should be careful not to lead their husbands into transgression. In his book, “Mishbatzot Zahav Livusha,” Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi explains that after marital relations, the wife should remain on her back for ten minutes so that her husband’s semen doesn’t spill out. Getting up immediately after marital relations, or rolling over to sleep on her stomach, will cause semen to spill out and be wasted. Also, she should approach the marital act with proper modesty and not demand positions that cause semen to be wasted. For instance, conducting relations in a standing or sitting position, or when the woman is on top of the man, these will lead to the spilling of semen in vain. This is also the case with sexual intercourse into her vagina from the rear. Since the woman is on her stomach or knees, facing downward, the semen will spill out of her vagina. Oral sex is likewise forbidden, as all the semen is obviously wasted. While physical pleasure is a healthy, integral part of marital relations, it must not be attained at the expense of a transgression. While feelings of love, happiness, and pleasure are a vital part of the marital union, both husband and wife must strive to sanctify themselves and keep within the boundaries of modesty and Jewish law.

THE GOOD LIFE

Question:

According to what you say, a person whose life is filled with sexual misconduct should be plagued by illness, poverty, and other disasters. However, the opposite is true. Look at all of the actors, artists, rock stars, and rich people who enjoy the good life with endless pleasures, money, and fame, and yet they can hardly be said to be sexually chaste.

Answer:

Just because these people are always photographed with big smiles on their faces, this does not mean that their private lives are free of personal tragedy and pain. Like everyone else, they suffer from financial worries, problems with children, marital strife, and illness.

But assuming there are people who do enjoy the “good life” while living a life of sexual transgression, this can be the worst punishment of all. When a person has everything he wants, he can easily forget about G-d. His arrogance swells, and he thinks he has achieved everything by himself. G-d is not a part of his life, and this is the worst punishment, for the true life is a life filled with G-d. In effect, this person is a beast, who eats, drinks, has sex, and fills up his days with pleasure, but he is already dead because he has

alienated himself from what life is truly about – man’s relationship with his Creator.

In His kindness, G-d allows a person to live, though his life be filled with transgression, in the hope that he will repent and return to the Torah. For whatever good deeds a man does, he is rewarded in this world. But when he arrives in Heaven, all of his money, fame, and sexual conquests won’t help him. His extra-marital affairs and sexual escapades won’t impress the Heavenly Court that awaits him. The suffering which he seemingly escaped in his brief sojourn on earth will await him – multiplied by a million.

As the Zohar teaches:

It is written regarding the wicked, “The way of the wicked is darkness; they do not know that they stumble” (Mishle, 4:19). In truth they do not know, for they walk in a crooked path, and they do not pause to consider that G-d will one day judge them in the world to come and punish them with the chastisements of Gehinom. Then they will cry out every day, saying, “Woe to us that we did not turn our ears and take heed” (Zohar, Bereshit, 59a).

SEX GODDESSES AND KABBALAH

Question:

What do you say about teaching Kabbalah to Hollywood sex goddesses?

Answer:

Perhaps if you do it by e-mail, it might be OK, since it is forbidden to look at a woman to enjoy her beauty, especially a woman who makes a living out of purveying her sexual charms. Very few men are able to look at a woman like this without experiencing an immediate sexual reaction or thought. Thus merely looking at these sex symbols would cause a man to transgress the Torah prohibition “not to stray after your hearts and your eyes.”

It should be noted that not only is it forbidden to gaze at a woman’s beauty, it is equally forbidden to hear women sing at concerts and the like, since a woman’s voice is considered sexually provocative.

As far as other celebrities are concerned, if a Jewish celebrity makes a deep commitment to adopting a holy lifestyle in line with the commandments of the Torah, then the study of Kabbalah can be an important addition to regular Torah study. The study of Kabbalah is certainly not to be approached as a hobby or fad. Regarding non-Jews, if a person converts to Judaism with the sincere desire to observe all of the Torah’s commandments, then the study of Kabbalah can go hand-in-hand with his or her other Torah studies. However, regarding non-Jews who do not intend to convert to Orthodox Judaism, it is highly questionable if Kabbalah should be taught to them in

any shape or form.

LEARN HEBREW!

Question:

The tikunim that you write about are in Hebrew, and I only speak English. What should I do?

Answer:

Learn Hebrew. Just as a Frenchman speaks French, and a Russian speaks Russian, a Jew's true language is Hebrew. Part of the overall tikun that the Jewish People must undergo is to return to their original tongue, just as we must return to our original Torah culture, and to our eternal homeland – the Land of Israel.

So take the time and make the effort to learn Hebrew. Some people can do it in a year. For others, it takes longer. In the meantime, speak to G-d in English. No heartfelt prayer is ever turned away. Also, in a Jewish bookstore, you can probably find a Hebrew/English version of Rabbi Nachman's "Tikun Clalli." But since the Psalms and prayers of the tikunim contain hidden kabbalistic codes and formulas in the arrangements and permutations of the Hebrew letters, saying them in Hebrew has a special advantage.

MY PSYCHOLOGIST SAYS

Question:

My psychologist assures me that masturbation is perfectly OK. I have also seen studies where medical experts maintain that masturbation and a robust sex life play an important role in leading a healthy, well-rounded life. Maybe the rabbis are wrong in their orientation to sex.

Answer:

Maimonides Hospital in New York is named after the outstanding physician and rabbi, Moshe ben Maimon, known as the Rambam. His famed treatise, "Mishna Torah," is a monumental compilation of Jewish Law. In the volume, "The Book of Knowledge," he writes:

"Semen constitutes the strength of the body, its life, and the light of the eyes. Its emission in excess causes physical decay, debility, and diminished vitality. Thus, King Shlomo, in his wisdom, said, 'Give not thy strength unto women' (Mishle, 31:3). Whoever indulges in sexual excess becomes prematurely aged, his strength wanes, his eyesight becomes dim, a foul odor emanates from his mouth and armpits, the hair of his head becomes bald, and his teeth fall out. Plus he becomes susceptible to numerous other

diseases. Medical authorities have stated that for each person who dies of other maladies, a thousand are victims of sexual excess. A man should thus be careful in this regard if he wishes to lead a happy life” (Hilchot Daot, 3:3).

This is just the physical side of the coin, without mentioning the spiritual dangers of spilling semen in vain. The world-famous psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, died from cancer of the mouth for having said things like your psychologist says and for scorning the Divine wisdom of Torah. A diploma on the wall and a medical degree are not the only things that matter when seeking sexual guidance. Also important in ensuring a healthy sexual life is the fear of G-d as embodied in the laws of the Torah.

DOGGY STYLE

Question:

An observant Jew conducts his life according to the halacha, not according to the Kabbalah. Jewish law states that a man can do anything he wants with his wife, including relations from the rear, as long as it is into her vagina. Why not tell people the truth?

Answer:

It is true that the halachic authority, the Rama, writes that a man can do anything he wants with his wife (with her approval) but he adds that the husband must take care not to spill his semen in vain. Also, he emphasizes that while many liberties are permitted, it is preferable to sanctify oneself in what is permitted and not to engage in immodest practices (Even HaEzer, 25:10). Furthermore, the commentary, “Hilchat Michukek,” comments on this ruling of the Rama by emphatically questioning the validity of any marital behavior that results in the spilling of semen in vain (see there). In his book, “Darke Tahara,” former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Mordechi Eliahu, shlita, sums up the matter:

“Even though there are things which are permitted for a husband to do, nothing good will come from them. Regarding this, the Gemara lists physical blemishes that can occur to a newborn when the manner of sexual relations was not conducted in a proper way, even though permitted (Nedarim 20A).

“Thus, even though it is permitted to have relations at whatever time one wants, the Jewish People are holy and don’t have relations during the daytime hours (Niddah 17A).

“And even though one may kiss whatever part of his wife’s body that he wants, it is forbidden to look at, or to kiss, his wife’s sexual organ (Even

HaEzer, 230:4).

“And even though it is permitted to have relations from the rear (into his wife’s sexual organ), it is forbidden to do so against her will, for to do so is like rape. And if she does agree, one must be careful not to spill semen in vain, for whomever spills semen in vain is like a murderer. Also, one may not conduct relations in this manner on a regular basis, but only very infrequently (See the Rama, Even HaEzer, 25:2 and 10; Niddah 13A).

EROTIC LITERATURE

Question:

I can understand the problems of watching immodest movies and shows on TV, but what about literature? Most popular novels have sexy scenes scattered here and there within the plot. Are these books forbidden to read?

Answer:

A Jew is called upon to sanctify his thoughts as well as his senses and deeds. There is an expression, “You are what you think.” If you fill your head with the holiness of Torah learning, then your mind will be holy. But if you fill your head with trash, then your mind will be trash as well.

The Mishna Berurah states that it is forbidden to read erotic literature because it arouses the evil inclination. Furthermore, people who write such things and print them cause the public to transgress (Hilchot Shabbat, 307:16).

The Torah injunction to keep far from every evil thing means not to have lustful thoughts by day and come to impurity at night (Avodah Zara 20A and B). Not only seeing erotic images, but also reading erotic literature summons up sexual fantasies in the mind, the seat of the soul. This spiritual pollution causes G-d’s Presence to flee from a person. This is because holiness cannot exist in the same place with impurity. Reading a novel, or seeing a movie, with only a few sexy scenes is like eating a full-course, glatt kosher meal with just a tiny side order of shrimp. To stay spiritually in tune as a Jew, both shrimp and sexy scenes must be avoided.

DO I HAVE TO BE A BARBIE DOLL?

Question:

I would like to dress in a more modest fashion, but my boyfriend wants me to look sexy, both in the bedroom and outside on the street. What should I do?

Answer:

Find another man to marry. A woman is not a sex object or a Barbie doll. If

a man desires you for your body, what will be when he sees a sexier woman, or longs for something new? As our Sages have warned us – any love that is dependent on an external thing will eventually die out.

In his book, “Pininay Halacha, Volume 2,” Rabbi Eliezer Melamed writes that modesty is one of the eternal foundations of Judaism. Throughout the ages, the Jewish Nation has been distinguished by the modesty of Jewish women. Even when we were slaves in Egypt, whose culture was seeped in promiscuity, the Jewish men and women guarded the laws of modesty. Largely in this merit, we were rewarded with receiving the Torah at Sinai. Modesty emphasizes the inner, spiritual basis of human life and relationships. While the physical side of life is also important, emphasis on the physical alone turns life and relationships into superficial, transitory experiences lacking lasting value.

Love and attraction is something to be shared by a husband and wife, not something to be paraded outside. When a woman flaunts her beauty in the eyes of other men, it blemishes the sanctity of the home and the exclusive loving relationship between husband and wife. A woman who is concerned with appearing attractive to other men, certainly cannot be expected to have only her husband in mind. And a husband who wants his wife to be sexy both in the bedroom and on the street, cheapens the unique and private bond of love between them by making his wife an object of public appraisal. Furthermore, Rabbi Melamed explains that in guarding the laws of modesty, a Jewish woman helps preserve the special holy character of the Jewish Nation by not following after the customs of the gentile nations. Modesty not only insures a deeper, more lasting bond between husband and wife, it protects the Jewish character of the family, and adds to the building of the Jewish People.

Thus, when choosing a life partner, it is important for a woman to find someone who shares these deeper spiritual values and aspirations, and not mistake a man’s feelings of physical lust for love.

APPENDIX

The following is a list of additional Zohar sources on the subject of the Brit.

Prologue 3b, beginning, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth....”

Bereshit 8a, beginning, “It is written, ‘The firmament declares the work of His hands.’”

Bereshit 55a, beginning, “Rabbi Shimon said, ‘For 130 years Adam separated himself from his wife....’”

Bereshit 55b, beginning, “Come and see, in any place where male and female are not found together, G-d is not found there.”

Bereshit 56b, beginning, “Rabbi Shimon was once traveling with his son....”

Bereshit 59b, beginning, “Behold, in the lower world, Noach represented the sacred Brit....”

Bereshit 66b, beginning, “Come and see, as long as Israel observe the Brit....”

Bereshit 68b, beginning, “All the sins of the evildoers in the world repel the Shechina....”

Bereshit 72b, beginning, “It is written, ‘And I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting Brit.’”

Bereshit 89a, beginning, “Come and see, before a man is circumcised, he is not attached to the Name of G-d....”

Bereshit 90b, beginning, “Behold, regarding the seed of man, when he is aroused to be with his wife....”

Bereshit 91b, beginning, “Behold, when Avraham was circumcised, he emerged from the klipah of the orlah and entered the holy Brit....”

Bereshit 93a, beginning, “In the meantime, daylight arrived while they were still expounding words of Torah.”

Bereshit 95a, beginning, “An altar of earth thou shall make to Me....”

Bereshit 176b, beginning, “With all the powders of the merchant....”

Bereshit 186a, beginning, “And Er, Yehuda’s firstborn was evil in the sight of the L-rd.”

Bereshit 187a, beginning, “It is written, ‘It is vain for you to rise up early....’”

Bereshit 198a, beginning, “Rabbi Elazar explained the verse, ‘Why should I fear in the days of evil....’”

Bereshit 206b, beginning, “Rabbi Elazar said, regarding the verse, ‘Then

Yehuda came near to him....”

Bereshit 216b, beginning, Rabbi Hiya explained, ‘And Thy people are all tzaddikim, they shall forever inherit the land.’”

Shemot 11b, beginning, “And there went a man of the house of Levi....”

Shemot 41a (Raya Mehemna), beginning, “And the L-rd said to Moshe and Aharon....”

Shemot 60b, beginning, “Rabbi Abba said, Come and see, initially when Israel entered into the Brit....”

Shemot 89a, beginning, “Meeting Rabbi Shimon on the road one day, Rabbi Yudai asked him....”

Shemot 203b, beginning, “However from the Holy Lamp, I have heard regarding this matter, the secret of secrets.”

Shemot 214b, beginning, “There is no transgression as severe before the Holy One Blessed Be He as being false to and blemishing the sign of the holy Brit.”

Shemot 214b, beginning, “It is written here, ‘And Bezalel made the ark.’”

Shemot 220a, beginning, “Rabbi Shimon said, At the time when the world’s dead will be awakened....”

Vayikra 14a, beginning, “Come and see, because Yosef safeguarded the Brit and did not want to deal falsely with it, he merited honor in this world and in the world to come.”

Vayikra 24b, beginning, “Fortunate are the tzaddikim....”

Vayikra 81a, beginning, “Rabbi Abba said, Why is the section of sexual offenses....”

Vayikra 91a, beginning, “Rabbi Hiya cited the verse....”

Bamidbar 125b, beginning, “Rabbi Hizkiah explained the verse, ‘Thy wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the interior of thy house.’”

Bamidbar 213b, beginning, “Rabbi Yitzhak said, Every man who has a portion in the tzaddik inherits this land....”

Bamidbar 214b, beginning, Rabbi Yesa explained the verse, ‘By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and we wept when we remembered Zion.’”

Bamidbar 214b, beginning, “Pinchas merited reward in this world and in the world to come....”

Bamidbar 214b, beginning, Rabbi Yosi said, “The rainbow comes to shield the world.”