

*When something bad happens to you and you did not have the power to avoid it, do not aggravate the situation even more through wasted grief.*¹

The *middah* of *savlanut* engages us at a different level than the *middot* of *seder* or *menuchat ha-nefesh*, though it presupposes our previous engagement with both of those *middot*. *Seder* and *menuchat ha-nefesh* shape our soul. *Seder* by allowing us to make room for the other and *menuchat ha-nefesh* by allowing the other to fill the space that *seder* makes such that the truth of our soul is revealed to us. *Savlanut* addresses what we might call the adventure of the soul moving into the world. This soul, which has taken root within us, is interminably vulnerable. It will encounter, no let's not speak abstractly here, we will encounter impediments to the soul's desire for fulfillment at every turn. These encounters are the source of pain and suffering in our lives. There is much here to explore. Let me explain how we will approach the subject of *savlanut* in this context. We will review the reasons for the soul's vulnerability. We will explore what we mean by its desire for fulfillment. We will discuss the various layers of impediments that it encounters and out of this discussion we will try to fashion an understanding of how *savlanut* functions in our everyday lives.

However, as a preliminary, it is important to know that the root of the word *savlanut* in Hebrew is the word for suffering. Thus *savlanut* should be translated more accurately as “sufferance.” Sufferance and patience are close in meaning to one another, but recognizing the link between suffering, sufferance and patience will help us understand the full range of meanings of this *middah*. It recognizes the fact that at every level suffering or pain is present in human consciousness and must be taken into account in understanding human behavior. In fact, at the very birth of the soul, so to speak, not unlike the very experience of physical birth, pain and suffering are present. While we have spoken of the contraction of the self in order to make room for the other as the revelation of the soul, we have spoken as if this were somehow a benign movement. It is not. The revelation of our soul emerges out of a cauldron of violence not dissimilar to the thunder, lightening and quaking that are described as accompanying the moment at Sinai, or more picturesquely described in the Rabbinic *midrash* of the mountain being suspend

¹ Rabbi Mendel of Satanov. (1845). *Chesbon ha-Nefesh*. (D. Landesman, trans.) Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1995. Pages 108-115.

by a thread over the heads of the people Israel. Similarly, the kabbalistic idea of *tzimzum*, is not far removed from the kabbalistic idea of *shevarei ha-kellim*, the breaking of the vessels intended to hold the emanation of the godhead. That is to say, violence, pain and suffering are an intrinsic part of the experience of the world. *Savlanut* both recognizes this fact and helps to guide us in the face of this fact. The ability to cultivate patience or sufferance in the face of the smallest inconveniences of life is connected to a much larger and deeper level of spiritual accomplishment.

So we return to our list of questions. What is the source of the soul's vulnerability? Obviously, it is the other! The other (the future) is unpredictable. The other is as potentially as mired in the grip of his or her *yetzer hara* as we (the self) are (is.) From the perspective of the self that does not disappear in the transformation into a soul, the other, part of its own soul, is always a potential threat. Only at the level of *hasidut*, which we are not addressing in these *shiuirim* is it possible to speak about transcending this existential reality. (And so we will not discuss here how that is possible – have patience; we have years of study ahead of us.) Thus, *savlanut* requires that we experience this threat and nonetheless agree to suffer it. We will return to this. Let's continue with our questions. What do we mean by the soul's desire for fulfillment? To put it simply, the soul's desire for fulfillment is its desire to eliminate the threat to it. However, this desire operates on two levels (minimally!) On the level of *kibbush* it desires to minimize the pain implicit in the encounter with the other. On the level of *tikkun* it desires to transform that pain into pleasure on behalf of the other (this returns us to the subject of *hasidut* which we are not speaking about.)

Finally, our last question: What are the various layers of impediments that trigger this defense mechanism resulting in impatience, which, in the end, is the futile refusal to recognize and deal with suffering? It is in answering this question that we arrive at the everyday choices between patience and impatience. We may be confronted, on the one hand, with a situation as trivial as waiting in line at the supermarket or as serious as waiting for a loved one (or for ourselves) to recover from a life threatening illness, whether such recovery is expected or not. In either situation if we are not prepared for the inevitability of suffering we rebel. This rebellion is characterized by *Heshbon Ha-Nefesh* as “wasted grief.” This term is suggestive. Grief is our innate response to suffering. It is a

process by which we recognize the inevitability of suffering and loss and come to terms with it. When grief is considered wasted is precisely when it does not lead to acceptance and reconciliation; when it can't lead to reconciliation because there has been no acceptance. Worse still, of course, since wasted grief is an act of rebellion, it precipitates further impatience, which, in turn, precipitates more wasted grief and the harm that we do to others by refusing to reconcile ourselves to the inevitable pain that being in relationship with them, even the most fleeting relationship, continues to grow. Every human interaction is a potential threat to our self from the perspective of our *Yetzer Hara*. But every human interaction is also an opportunity to suffer the birth pangs of the soul. The difference between rebelling against the threat to us and suffering the ongoing birth pangs of our soul is the difference between patience and impatience.

We have often spoken about the fact that every moment presents us with a choice between the *Yetzer Hara* and the *Yetzer Hatov*. We have further explained that this choice is a choice between the self and the other. We can now begin to understand more clearly how our middah work creates the practical pathway by which we become aware of the choices before us and endeavor to make them. In particular we have seen that the *middah* of *seder* helps us garner the energy that we need to bear the burden of the other; how the *middah* of *menuchah ha-nefesh* helps us to transform our self into a soul by virtue of contracting to make a (metaphorical) place for the other within ourselves, and how this in turn engenders an inevitable suffering that we learn to suffer and eventually will learn to transform from suffering into joy.