

Beit Midrash YeshivahAI

A Study in the Rebbe's Maamar

Below the Three Impure Kelipot

Deliberate Sins, Holy Sparks, and Teshuvah

Tanya, Chapter 24, and Parallel Chassidic Sources



Booklet (23)

ז' מרחשוון תשפ"ז

How Can One Fall Below the Kelipot?

A Chassidic maamar on Shemini Atzeret contains a surprising phrase: "הניצוצות שנפלו בזדונות (שהם למטה מגק"ט)" - sparks that fell into deliberate sins, "which are below the three impure kelipot." What does "below" mean, and does it refer to the sins or to the sparks? If the three kelipot represent complete impurity, what could be lower than they are? Is there an error in the text, or a level we have not encountered?

The expression is grounded in the sources. Tanya already teaches that, while committing a sin, a person is lower than the kelipah itself. Maamarim and a sichah reviewed by the Rebbe apply this distinction to deliberate sins and the sparks that fell into them. The sources examined provide no basis for adding a fifth kelipah to the familiar count.

We must first establish what is being compared. The kelipah acts within its assigned mission; the sinner chooses to act against the command. The comparison also concerns embodiment in matter and the descent of Divine vitality. Simply saying that the sinner is "worse" does not explain enough.

The booklet moves from the original statement to Tanya and its sources, then to the sparks: how holy vitality can exist where there is said to be no good, how it is refined, and what belongs to teshuvah out of love or to withstanding a test. Throughout, we distinguish an explicit statement, an explanation based on it, and an unresolved question.

One point is already clear: the depth of the fall does not eliminate the possibility of teshuvah. Nor does it make sin a proper route to a higher root. The explanation and its limits matter as much as the conclusion.

Guide to the Booklet

The argument has three stages: identifying the wording, understanding the comparison with the kelipot, and examining the sparks and teshuvah. Page numbers are linked.

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Three Distinctions to Keep in Mind

- Source and condition:** where vitality comes from, and how it becomes invested in an act.
- Spark and act:** holy vitality can be exiled within an act chosen against the command.
- Fall and teshuvah:** the severity of a sin does not define the sinner’s identity forever.

1. The Statement and Its Context

Our starting point is the maamar **ביום השמיני עצרת**, delivered on Simchat Torah 5736 (1975), section 4, pp. 148–149. It is a hanachah bilti mugah, a transcript not reviewed by the Rebbe. It explains the distinctive greatness of Israel revealed through teshuvah, especially the transformation of deliberate sins into merits.

”ש דברים שהם אסורים וקשורים בידי החיצונים שאי אפשר לבררם ולהעלותם לקדושה. וכיון שע”י התשובה מתבררים ומתעלים גם הניצוצות שנפלו בגק”ט (שמהם נמשכים אסור פסול וטריפה), וגם הניצוצות שנפלו בזדונות (שהם למטה מגק”ט), הרי בזה ניכר מעלתן של ישראל, שהם למעלה מההגבלות דהשתלשלות.”

Some things are forbidden and bound by the external forces, and cannot be refined and elevated to holiness. Through teshuvah, however, even the sparks that fell into the three impure kelipot - from which the forbidden, invalid, and nonkosher derive - are refined and elevated, as are the sparks that fell into deliberate sins, which are below those kelipot. This reveals Israel’s greatness beyond the limitations of the order of spiritual descent.

ג’ קליפות הטמאות abbreviates **גק”ט**, **the three impure kelipot**. **זדונות** means deliberate sins. The sparks are what undergo refinement and elevation; the forbidden things are where they had been bound. By placing forbidden things, the sparks within them, and deliberate sins alongside one another, the maamar explains the power of teshuvah. It distinguishes the ordinary refinement accomplished through mitzvot from the innovation of teshuvah, which reaches even what is held by the external forces.

The preceding passage states that merits arising from deliberate sins surpass ordinary merits: sparks that fell deeply have a high root. The surprising sentence is integral to the argument. It illustrates how far the action of teshuvah reaches.

Nevertheless, an unreviewed transcript calls for caution before building an argument on a single word. We therefore need to establish whether other sources uphold the distinction. Here they do, including a text reviewed by the Rebbe.

2. Parallels That Confirm the Distinction

The maamar **ולא תשבית מלה**, 5725 (1965), section 3, makes the same distinction: sparks that fell into deliberate sins are lower than forbidden things, because deliberate sins oppose the Supreme Will. The accompanying note refers to Tanya, chapter 24.¹

A further strong source is **Likkutei Sichot, vol. 7, p. 23**, in a text reviewed by the Rebbe. The deliberate sins are described in Yiddish as "נאך נידעריקער פון די דברים האסורים" - "even lower than forbidden things." The reason is explicit: deliberate sins oppose His blessed Will. Here too, there is a reference to Tanya, chapter 24.²

This reviewed parallel does not reproduce the exact abbreviated wording of 5736. Its importance is that it confirms **the substance of the distinction and its reason**. There is therefore no basis for attributing the underlying idea to a local printing error.

1. Maamar VeLo Tashbit Melach, Shabbat Vayikra, Parashat Zachor, 9 Adar II 5725, section 3, especially note 30: "ראה תניא פכ"ד" ("See Tanya, chapter 24"); an unreviewed transcript.

2. Likkutei Sichot, vol. 7, Vayikra III, pp. 22-23, especially p. 23 and notes 23-24. The reason given is that deliberate sins oppose the Supreme Will.

An earlier, closely related expression appears in the Rebbe Rashab's **Kuntres U'Maayan**, discourse 2, chapter 2. The soul is described as descending to the place of the three kelipot, "ועוד למטה מהם" - "and still lower than they" - with a reference to Sefer Shel Beinonim, Tanya.³

The subject of each sentence already matters. In Kuntres U'Maayan it is the soul that descends; the maamarim and sichah concern deliberate sins and the sparks that fell into them. The passages are parallel in substance, but their different formulations should not be treated as identical sentences.

3. Tanya: The Kelipah and the Sinner

Tanya, chapter 24, describes the soul's three garments originating in kelipat nogah - thought, speech, and action - when they are invested in transgressions, together with the soul invested in those garments. At that moment they are more separated from holiness than the sitra achra and the kelipah themselves: "גרועים ופחותים ממנה מאד", "far worse and lower than it."⁴

This is not because the kelipah is holy or good. Tanya says of it: "כי היא אינה מלובשת בגוף חומרי, ויודעת את רבונה, ואינה מורדת בו" - it is not clothed in a material body, knows its Master, and does not rebel against Him. Its activity conceals and separates, but does not exceed its authorization. The sinner acts against the command addressed to him.

This is the point of the Zohar's parable of the king's son and the courtesan sent to tempt him. The king tests his son

3. Kuntres U'Maayan, discourse 2, chapter 2; p. 67 in the 5774 edition.

4. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 24. Read the sequence from "זוה לעומת זה", through the reason for the comparison with the kelipah, to the distinction between the moment of the act and afterward.

through a courtesan whose assigned task is to entice him. She carries out the test; the king's will is that his son withstand it. Her mission does not mean that yielding to temptation fulfills the king's will.⁵

The words "יודעת את רבוּנָה", "knows its Master," do not remove the kelipah's impurity. Recognition of the Master can coexist with a sense of separateness, as in Tanya's expression אֱלֹהִים "דאָלֵהיא", "G-d of gods." What is being examined is the relationship between the testing power and the Supreme Will. That power is authorized to test; the person is commanded not to yield. The sinner can therefore be lower than the power through which he was tested.

Tanya adds that even a gnat and impure animals precede the sinner "בהשתלשלות וירידת החיות מרצון העליון" - in the successive descent of vitality from the Supreme Will. They do not change their assigned function. The comparison concerns the spiritual condition in which vitality is received, beyond its force as a rebuke.

This also sets a limit on the explanation. The parable must not be read as assigning equal standing to two wills, as though the command and its violation were equally desired. Divine vitality sustains the very possibility of acting; the choice of transgression opposes the command.

4. The Material Body and the Dregs of the Kelipot

It is easy to explain the chapter solely through the difference between an agent and a rebel. But that omits part of its explicit reason: the kelipah "אינה מלובשת בגוף חומרי", "is not

5. Zohar, vol. 2, 163a-b: the parable of the king's son and the courtesan. Tanya, chapter 24, refers to it in explaining the sitra achra's activity as an agent.

clothed in a material body.” In the human sinner, vitality descends and becomes invested in the material world, where concealment is coarser.

Tanya immediately cites Etz Chaim: the evil of this material world consists of **שמרי הקליפות הגסות**, **the dregs of the coarse kelipot**. The image of dregs describes the coarse bottom of that same domain; it does not announce another species of kelipah.⁶

The two elements must be read together: embodiment in matter and acting against the command. Materiality explains the intensity of concealment; the parallels single out deliberate sin as opposition to the Supreme Will. Materiality alone does not explain why a forbidden act is lower than a forbidden object.

“Below” therefore need not introduce a new location in a diagram of the worlds. It describes a real descent in coarseness, separateness, and the darkening of vitality within the domain already discussed. This is an interpretive conclusion based on the sequence of sources, rather than a new Kabbalistic name those sources gave an additional level.

5. The Source of Vitality and Its Descent

The question now becomes sharper: if a transgression is lower than the three kelipot, where does it receive its vitality? Tanya, chapter 6, attributes the existence and vitality of forbidden action, speech, and thought to the three impure kelipot. Chapter 37 again associates transgressions with that domain.⁷

6. Etz Chaim, Heichal 7, Derushei ABYA, end of chapter 4; Tanya 24 refers to “שער מ”ב סוף פ”ד”. Distinguish this from the Kelalut ABYA unit mentioned below.

7. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapters 6 and 37. Chapter 6 specifies the action, speech, and thought of the 365 prohibitions; chapter 37 associates transgressions with the three impure kelipot.

Etz Chaim likewise describes a garment of the soul that has become evil attaching itself to the three kelipot. It does not refer to a fifth source of vitality.⁸

We may therefore summarize: **the source of vitality is the three kelipot; the condition in which it is received in a deliberate sin is lower.** This, however, is our explanatory formulation. It should not be presented as a quotation from Tanya or as a detailed enumeration of levels of reception established in Kabbalistic works.

Distinguishing “source” from “condition” does not disconnect them. Tanya itself speaks of the successive descent of vitality. Separateness is expressed in how vitality descends, becomes invested, and is concealed. This is not a moral plane detached from spiritual structure.

A helpful example is the distinction between a forbidden object and the choice to use it against the command. The object belongs to the domain of prohibition before anyone chooses to sin with it. Deliberately sinning adds a choice against the Divine Will. The example does not encompass every transgression, but clarifies why a common source does not require equal standing.

This leaves the familiar framework intact: kelipat nogah, containing good and evil, and the three impure kelipot. “Below” here describes a relationship within the descent of vitality and separateness. The sources examined do not require a fifth kelipah to be added to this framework.

8. Etz Chaim, Shaar 49, chapter 5, on the soul’s garments and their attachment to the three evil kelipot; for context, see chapters 3–5.

6. A Holy Spark Where There Is No Good

Tanya, chapter 6, says that the three kelipot contain no good at all. How, then, can holy sparks have fallen into them? We must first distinguish three questions: whether there is an admixture of good available for ordinary refinement; what sustains the thing's existence; and whether holy vitality is captive and concealed within it.

Chapter 22 describes receiving from holiness through *achorayim*, the external aspect, in concealment. The presence of vitality does not show that its recipient is nullified to the Divine Will or that evil has become good. Without that vitality, even the place of concealment would not exist.⁹

Derech Mitzvotecha speaks explicitly of sparks swallowed up in the three kelipot. *Hemshekh Ayin Beis* sharpens the description of this darkening: a spark can be swallowed up until it is "כמו רע", "like evil," with no evident awareness of G-dliness.¹⁰

The statement "there is no good in them" cannot simply be dismissed as an error, and the sparks need not be excluded from the discussion. The sources distinguish good that can be recognized and refined in the ordinary way from holiness exiled so deeply that it is not apparent in the thing's functioning.

Igrot Kodesh also explains this distinction: the possibility of elevating vitality that fell deeply does not turn impurity into an ordinary admixture of *nogah*.¹¹

⁹. Tanya, *Likkutei Amarim*, chapter 22: receiving vitality through *achorayim* and its exile in concealment. Sustaining existence must not be equated with an admixture of good and evil as in *kelipat nogah*.

¹⁰. *Derech Mitzvotecha*, *Biur Acharei*, 191a; also *Hemshekh Ayin Beis*, vol. 2, chapter 374, pp. 769-770.

¹¹. *Igrot Kodesh*, vol. 1, letter 14, pp. 24-25; letter 95, pp. 176-177. The explanation also directs further study of the difference between *nogah* and the three kelipot.

Even so, we must avoid an overly uniform definition. “Sustaining vitality,” “a swallowed spark,” and “an admixture of good” are not necessarily three names for precisely the same thing in every source. The sources suffice to resolve the fundamental contradiction; a precise account of each expression requires its context.

A Captive Spark and a Kelipah Created by Sin

Mitzvat Vidui U'Teshuvah in Derech Mitzvotecha also describes **a kelipah that a person creates through sin**.

Desire forms its soul; the letters of thought and speech, and the act, form its body. In teshuvah, regret uproots the will that animated it, and confession also acts to nullify its body.¹²

The two discussions must be distinguished. A **holy spark** is captive vitality seeking elevation; the **soul of the kelipah** is the vitality of the kelipah created by the sin. The passage does not identify them. This distinction allows us to understand how teshuvah includes both elevating vitality to holiness and nullifying what the sin brought into being.

The maamar **אם יהי נדחך**, 5727 (1967), further distinguishes a fall within the created order from the rejection caused by sin. Even sparks that descended as far as the three kelim are not described there as “נדחים”, “cast away,” by virtue of creation itself. When a person acts against G-d’s will, he becomes “נדח” and causes the sparks to be cast away too. The difference concerns the choice against the Divine Will, without introducing a new source of vitality.¹³

¹². Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Vidui U'Teshuvah, chapter 1, 38b: desire, thought, speech, action, regret, and confession. The “soul of the kelipah” is not identified there with the “holy spark.”

¹³. Torat Menachem - Hitvaaduyot, vol. 50, maamar Im Yihyeh Nidachacha, Shabbat Nitzavim-Vayeilech, 25 Elul 5727, section 2, pp. 378-379; an unreviewed transcript. Section 3, pp. 380-381, also discusses the kelipah’s soul and body, regret, and confession.

7. An Example: Vitality in Shimei's Curse

Perhaps the entire discussion of sparks concerns only forbidden food: there is food, and the energy a person receives from it. Derech Mitzvotcha, however, gives a broader example: **Shimei's curse against David**. The speech is evil, while holy vitality sustains both the kelipah and the person speaking at that moment.¹⁴

The foundation is Iggeret HaKodesh, epistle 25: Divine vitality sustains the person endowed with choice even while he speaks hurtfully. Nevertheless, he remains responsible for his choice. Divine sustenance neither commands him to sin nor absolves him.¹⁵

The example separates two propositions that can both be true: the act is a transgression, and the power that makes its existence possible is not independent of holiness. Refining that vitality does not mean that the curse itself becomes a commandment or a good quality.

This provides a basis for discussing sparks in actions and speech beyond the spark of an object or food. It does not yet fully answer how many sparks there are in any act, or precisely how the object, the person's powers, and speech contribute to each kind of transgression.

8. A Higher Root and a Deeper Fall

The maamar connects the superiority of merits arising from deliberate sins with the principle that what fell lowest has the highest root. Derech Mitzvotcha, 191a, is an important

¹⁴. Derech Mitzvotcha, Biur Acharei, 190a, in the passage on Shimei's curse and holy vitality, followed by the discussion of the 288 sparks.

¹⁵. Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, epistle 25, the passage on Shimei ben Gera: the responsibility of the person endowed with choice alongside the vitality sustaining him during speech.

foundation for explaining the high root of sparks that fell deeply.

A complementary source is **Mitzvat Vidui U'Teshuvah, chapter 3**, in the paragraph beginning **יִבְזֶה יוֹבֵן פִּירוּשׁ בְּרַכַּת סֵלַח** "לְנוֹ". This is a different unit in the same book. It connects deliberate sins with what fell from the "kings" of the world of Tohu; the impure kelipot came into being from that fall. After teshuvah, the depth of the fall reveals the height of the root.¹⁶

The words **"וְנִתְהוּ מִזֶּה קְלִיפוֹת הַטְּמֵאוֹת"**, "and from this the impure kelipot came into being," are explained in the context of the fall from the kings. They do not mean that human action first brought the three kelipot into existence. The passage also explains that forgiveness draws forth a renewed will from **"רְעוּא דְרַעוּיִן"**, the source of wills, beyond the will as specified in the mitzvot. This explains the greatness of the closeness following teshuvah without making the sin itself an advantage.

To understand the principle, we must distinguish **the root of the vitality** from **its condition after the fall**. The high root explains its potential power after refinement; in its fallen condition, the holiness is hidden and captive. There is no contradiction in describing the same spark differently with reference to its root and its condition.

The maamar **נֵר הַנוֹכַח**, 5670, distinguishes a holy spark that fell and is figuratively called evil, the soul's descent, and the evil rejected through Divine service. The word "evil" does not necessarily have precisely the same subject every time it appears in a passage.¹⁷

¹⁶. Derech Mitzvotcha, Mitzvat Vidui U'Teshuvah, chapter 3, 39a-b. Distinguish it from Biur Acharei, 191a, cited by the maamar of 5736.

¹⁷. Sefer HaMaamarim 5670, maamar Ner Chanukah, pp. 102-105, especially p. 103. Follow the changing subject: the spark, the soul, and evil.

It does not follow that sin itself is an advantage or that one should fall to attain a high root. The greatness in question is revealed **through refinement and teshuvah**; choosing transgression opposes the command. Nor can a ranking of sparks be turned into a simple ranking of people: having sinned more does not confer superior standing. This also limits the principle as an answer to our question. A person's greatness cannot be measured solely by the depth of his fall.

A high root explains the greatness of the ascent; the lowness of deliberate sin is explained through its opposition to the Divine Will in Tanya, chapter 24, and the parallel sources.

9. Teshuvah out of Love and Withstanding a Test

Yoma 86b distinguishes two results: through teshuvah out of fear, deliberate sins become like inadvertent sins; through teshuvah out of love, they become like merits.

Tanya, chapter 7, explains teshuvah out of great love, in which thirst for G-d intensifies precisely because of the former distance. Deliberate sins can then become merits, and the vitality bound in the forbidden can ascend.¹⁸

The maamar of 5727 also explains how regret and confession affect the soul and body of the kelipah created through sin. In every source, we must follow the object of the action: what is nullified, what is brought close, and what rises to holiness.

Four things are related but not identical: forgiveness of the sin, the person's closeness to G-d, the elevation of vitality, and the transformation of deliberate sins into merits. A statement

¹⁸. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 7, on forbidden things and teshuvah out of great love. Read the distinctions and qualifications later in the chapter; do not generalize one result to all sins.

about one does not automatically establish that all the others have been completed at the same moment.

Return after the act is likewise not an automatic, complete process for every transgression. Chapter 24 qualifies its description of return according to the kinds of transgression; chapter 7 makes distinctions that also depend on what the act produced and set in motion. We therefore cannot say that every regret immediately reverses every consequence of every sin.

Is a fall a prerequisite for refinement? No. Derech Mitzvotcha, 191b, also explains refinement through withstanding a test and breaking the kelipah's hold. A person can refine precisely by refusing the temptation.¹⁹

This naturally continues the parable of the king's son. There is service through teshuvah after failure, and service through fulfilling the king's will by withstanding the test from the outset. The sources do not restrict all refinement of the three kelipot to one route.

Even the statement that "evil is transformed" requires context. Does it concern holy vitality being released, deliberate sins becoming merits, or a future transformation? Hemshekh Ayin Beis itself distinguishes kinds of explanation. A particular answer must not become a sweeping claim about all evil at all times.

10. To Whom Does the Comparison Apply?

The parallels discuss deliberate sins. Applying the comparison to inadvertent sin or an inclination requires

¹⁹. Derech Mitzvotcha, Biur Acharei, 191b, on tests and refinement through withstanding them. This limits the claim that elevation is possible only after falling in action.

further evidence; lack of evidence does not prove exclusion in every context.

Inadvertent Sin and Unknowing Consumption

Tanya, chapter 8, also discusses eating forbidden food unknowingly: the food's vitality belongs to the domain of prohibition and does not ascend like that of permitted food. This concerns **the vitality of the thing**. The chapter alone does not rank the inadvertent sinner against the deliberate sinner in relation to the kelipah itself.²⁰

Unchosen Desire and Forbidden Thought

Chapter 29 describes the potential of the beinoni's faculty of desire to be attracted to forbidden things. Its comparison is with impure animals, rather than the same formulation concerning the spiritual kelipah itself.²¹

The mere emergence of temptation therefore does not suffice to attribute to a person the sinner's condition during a transgression. Yet "there was no bodily act" does not suffice to establish the absence of transgression either: chapter 24 explicitly includes thought and speech. We must establish whether the case involves an inclination, forbidden thought chosen by the person, or an act.

The Soul and the Moment of Sin

Tanya describes the Divine soul in exile during sin and its true desire to cleave to G-d. This does not mean that this desire is always revealed in the sinner's consciousness. Its

²⁰. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 8, on forbidden food eaten unknowingly even for the sake of Heaven. Distinguish the vitality's condition from the person's culpability and degree of separateness.

²¹. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 29, on the faculty of desire and the comparison with impure animals. A possible inclination in a beinoni must not be identified with actually choosing a deliberate sin.

concealment can be precisely what makes the contradiction in his conduct possible.²²

The severe ranking describes a condition during sin and within the context discussed. It does not define the person’s essential identity forever or erase the possibility of teshuvah. The table distinguishes what the sources establish from what they leave unresolved.

The Case	What the Sources Examined Establish
An actual deliberate sin	The parallels place it below forbidden things because it opposes the Divine Will.
Forbidden food eaten inadvertently	The food’s vitality remains in the forbidden domain; this does not settle the degree of the inadvertent sinner’s separateness.
An inclination or temptation not chosen	This does not suffice to attribute chapter 24’s description of the sinner.
Chosen thought and speech	These can be transgressions without a bodily act; the kind of case must be distinguished.
Teshuvah out of great love	There is a basis for transforming deliberate sins into merits; the details do not apply uniformly to every transgression.
Withstanding a test	Derech Mitzvotecha explains refinement even without the person failing in action.

11. Precision in Wording and References

What Does “Which Are Below” Refer To?

In the sentence of 5736, Hebrew grammar allows ”שהם”, “which are,” to refer either to deliberate sins or to sparks: both nouns are masculine plural. Grammar alone does not

²². Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, end of chapter 24 and chapter 25: the Divine soul’s exile and unwillingness to separate. Its true will need not be identical with the will revealed during sin.

decide. The parallels supply the explicit reason: deliberate sins oppose the Divine Will. Thus the lowness refers to the sins, and the sparks are discussed in terms of their fall into them.

This reading is strongly supported by the parallels and need not be described as a grammatical necessity. The spark is holy in its origin; being captive in a low place does not make its root contrary to the Divine Will.

What Does Note 33 Actually Say?

In the maamar of 5736, the note reads "רֵאָה תַּנְיָא שָׁם. וְעוֹד", "See Tanya there; and elsewhere." It accompanies the mention of sparks that fell into the three kelipot. The sequence and wording indicate that "there" refers to chapter 7, already cited. It must not be quoted as explicitly saying "chapter 24."

Chapter 24 is indeed fundamental to the explanation, but the explicit reference to it appears in the parallels of 5725 and Likkutei Sichot. This preserves both the source's wording and the correct substantive connection.

Why Does "Shaar 42*" Sometimes Appear?

In Etz Chaim, we must distinguish Derushei ABYA from Kelalut ABYA. In the printed edition examined, two units appear under similar running headings for Shaar 42. The chapter about the gnat is in Kelalut ABYA, chapter 4, first recension. An asterisk in a transcription distinguishes the units; it has no significance as an additional spiritual level.²³

There is no need to posit a change between editions to explain two units within the same printing. Nor should a place or year of publication be identified from a text-recognition

²³. Etz Chaim, Heichal 7, Shaar Kelalut ABYA, chapter 4, first recension, on "תּוֹשׁ קְדָמָךְ". Distinguish this from Derushei ABYA, chapter 4, cited concerning the dregs of the kelipot.

error in a running heading. These details do not change the explanation of the concept.

12. Conclusions and Open Questions

Explicit and established: the wording of 5736 is not an isolated idea. It has parallels in 5725, in the reviewed text of Likkutei Sichot, and in Kuntres U'Maayan, with a clear foundation in Tanya, chapter 24. The sources read contain no evidence for a fifth kelipah.

An explanation supported by the sequence of sources: the sinner is lower than the kelipah because he acts against the command, together with the concealment of embodiment in matter. The descent concerns how vitality is received and darkened. “The same source, a lower condition of reception” is an explanatory summary of this relationship, rather than a technical term quoted from a book.

Concerning the sparks: the sources themselves explain holiness present in exile, even where there is no good as in nogah. They give an example of vitality in evil speech, beyond food. The captive spark is also distinguished from the soul and body of the kelipah created through sin. We still lack a detailed, uniform account of the sparks in every kind of transgression.

Limits of application: the explicit distinction concerns deliberate sins. It must not be applied automatically to every inadvertent sin or inclination, nor declared inapplicable to every case not discussed. Teshuvah, forgiveness, refinement of vitality, and the transformation of deliberate sins into merits must be distinguished.

Further study has definite questions to pursue: can a more explicit explanation be found of the relationship between the level at which vitality is received and the depth of separateness? How do the sparks differ among kinds of action? What do additional sources teach about the difference between elevating the spark and transforming the deliberate sin? These questions do not undo what has already been established.

“Below the three kelipot” thus emerges as precise language for descent and separateness within an explanation of the greatness of teshuvah. The severity of the description sharpens the novelty of the possibility of return: vitality never becomes independent of holiness, and the fall is not the final word.

Further Study in the Sources

Selected sources in chronological order. Each entry proposes a point to examine in the source itself. Titles are linked.

Yoma 86b

What changes between teshuvah out of fear and teshuvah out of love? Why must every teshuvah not be described as transforming deliberate sins into merits?

Zohar, vol. 2, 163a–b

The king’s son and the courtesan: how does the mission of temptation coexist with the king’s will that his son withstand the test?

Etz Chaim: Heichal 7, Derushei ABYA, chapter 4

The dregs of the kelipot in the material world. Alongside it, see Kelalut ABYA, chapter 4, first recension, and Shaar 49, chapters 3–5, on the garments.

Tanya: chapter 24 and Iggeret HaKodesh 25

Chapter 24: the garments, kelipah, materiality, gnat, and moment of the act. For background, read chapters 6–8, 22–25, 29, and 37. Epistle 25: Shimei’s curse, Divine vitality in evil speech, and the responsibility of the person endowed with choice.

Derech Mitzvotecha: Mitzvat Vidui U’Teshuvah

Chapter 1, 38b: the soul and body of the kelipah, regret, and confession. Chapter 3, 39a–b: forgiveness, the source of wills, and the root of the fall. How do the discussions differ?

Derech Mitzvotecha: Biur Acharei, 190a–191b

Three complementary passages: vitality in Shimei’s curse; swallowed sparks and a high root; refinement through withstanding a test.

Kuntres U’Maayan: discourse 2, chapter 2

The soul descends to the three kelipot “and still lower than they”; p. 67 in the 5774 edition. What does this wording add to Tanya’s comparison?

Sefer HaMaamarim 5670: Ner Chanukah, pp. 102–105

Distinguish the spark, the soul, and evil. When is “evil” applied figuratively to the spark?

Hemshekh Ayin Beis: vol. 2, chapter 374, pp. 769–770

The spark darkened until it is “like evil,” the absence of an awareness of G-dliness, and the distinction between elevating sparks and future transformation.

Igrot Kodesh: vol. 1, letter 14 and letter 95

Pages 24–25 and 176–177: in what sense is there a spark even in the three kelipot, and how does this differ from refining nogah?

VeLo Tashbit Melach: 5725, section 3

Being lower than forbidden things because deliberate sins oppose the Divine Will; the reference to Tanya, chapter 24, in note 30. See notes 27 and 35 on the spark and the will expressed in mitzvot.

Im Yihyeh Nidachacha: 5727, sections 2–3

Torat Menachem, vol. 50, pp. 378–381; an unreviewed transcript. What does sin add to the sparks' original fall? Examine regret and confession in relation to the kelipah's soul and body, and why it says "יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵף עַל פִּי שְׁחָטָא", "Israel, even though he has sinned."

Likkutei Sichot: vol. 7, Vayikra III, pp. 22–23

The reviewed Yiddish parallel, especially notes 23–24. How does it help identify what is being compared? Distinguish the sins themselves from the sparks within them. Examine also "אָרור הַמֶּן" and "בְּרוּךְ מְרַדֵּכִי": how is the power of teshuvah explained without turning the act of sin into the Divine Will?

BeYom HaShemini Atzeret: 5736, pp. 148–149

Return to the sentence that prompted this study within the maamar's explanation of teshuvah out of love and Israel's greatness. Read the preceding paragraph on leaping from the lowest extreme to the highest. What do the parentheses about the kelipot and the sins add to the argument? Note 27 concerns the sparks' high root; in note 33, establish which Tanya chapter "there" refers to, and why it is not an explicit reference to chapter 24.