

Rav Kook on T'hilim

*from an unpublished work
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T'hilim 12 - Circles and Straight Lines

סָבִיב רָשָׁעִים יִתְהַלְכוּן כָּרֵם זֶלֶת לִבְנֵי אָדָם:

The wicked walk around; and the exalted matter is scorned by people. (T'hilim 12:9)

Why does the psalm describe the wicked as those who “walk around”? What is this exalted matter that people fail to appreciate? And what is the connection between the two parts of the verse?

Two Realms

The Kabbalists distinguish between two realms in the universe: the realm of Circles, and the realm of Straight Lines.

The natural world is a world of Circles. The heavenly bodies are spherical, rotating and revolving in space. In this view of reality, there is no right or wrong. There is just constant, eternal movement, turning along the never-ending cycles and gears of natural processes.

The purpose of creation, however, is its moral and spiritual progress.

When we recognize this inner direction, we are perceiving the realm of Straight Lines. When we utilize our free will to choose the correct path, we gain perfection for ourselves and for the entire universe. The realm of Straight Lines is the inner reality of linear progression, of right and wrong, of purpose and meaning.

The Power of Prayer

The Talmud explains that this verse is specifically referring to prayer. Prayer is a wonderful, exalted gift. Many, however, belittle and even ridicule the value of prayer. Why is prayer not properly appreciated?

Because many perceive the world through the viewpoint of Circles. They only see the continual, unchanging, and amoral aspect of the universe. In a world ruled by the laws of nature, what good is prayer? Why should praying influence the outcome of natural processes?

That is why the psalmist describes the wicked as people who “walk around”. They follow the cycles of the natural world. They look at the universe as a harsh reality of unforgiving laws of nature and immutable fate.

But the enlightened are able to discern the realm of Straight Lines within reality. They sense the world's inner purpose and moral direction. They recognize that we are meant to

advance the goal of universal perfection through proper application of our powers of free choice.

With this outlook on the world, the efficacy of prayer is clear. Prayer is effective in refining our desires and directing our choices. It is an integral aspect of the purposeful world of Straight Lines.

*Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 26
on B'rachot 6b*