

Abstract

Diploma thesis "Netiv haprišut. Sexuality and Asceticism in Judaism" deals with the "Path of Restraint" written by rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, the MaHaRaL of Prague. The Path of Restraint is sixteenth chapter of Maharal's philosophical and ethical tractate "Netivot olam". The treatise brings in Maharal's recommendations regarding human acts in intimate sphere of life. The submitted work deals with selected texts from the Path of Restraint, especially with the prohibition of men's autoeroticism. The thesis provides coherent view on Maharal's writings and on the meaning of the term "prishut" within the framework of Maharal's writings. The author of this thesis believes, that the term "prishut" has an essential meaning for Maharal's universe. The true "restraint" has the power to emancipate the man from the destructive influence of the matter and to unify the sphere of the matter with the sphere of divinity. The author then focuses on the passage from the *Sefer Zohar* (1:18a). Maharal cites the passage three times in his entire work - in the Path of Restraint, in *Hiddushei Aggadot* and in *Be'er ha-Golah*. The aforementioned text of the *Zohar* describes the emanation of the divine creative potency through *sefiroth*. Latter on Maharal interprets this emanation as a flow of the sperm from the brain to the genitals. Masturbation is then presented as a violation of this direct flow, which may (in the context of the *Zohar*) lead to strengthening of the "Sitra achra" – the "Other side". Masturbation is subsequently presented as a succumbing to the demonic powers. Out of the sin of masturbation are then the demonic powers reciprocally gaining their strength. In presented context is masturbation therefore considered as a serious defiance of the Divine order – in other words as idolatry. The final chapter of this thesis deals with the question of the sources of Maharal's ethical attitudes. The author is convinced, that among the traditional rabbinical treatises cited by Maharal, the book *Zohar* and the traditions of the Hassidei Ashkenaz occupy a special position. The exploration of these two currents of influence could make the centre of another study. The concept of this study is proposed in the conclusion of this thesis.