

The Sefirot:
A Hasidic Perspective on the
Spiritual Journey

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INTRODUCTION

Elijah began to expound:

“Master of the world, You are one, and beyond all accounting.

“You are higher than the highest, more hidden than the most hidden.

“No thought can grasp You at all” (*Patach Eliyahu*).

Beyond all universes, beyond all thought, beyond all conception, is the one primal Being Whom we call God.

“The true nature of this Being,” teaches Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, “cannot be understood by anyone besides Him. All that is known about Him is that He is totally perfect” (*Derech Hashem* 1:2).

The Jewish mystical tradition teaches that in order to create the many planes of being that culminated in our world, God brought into being ten sefirot, or vessels. These sefirot consecutively filtered God’s spiritual light so that universes separate from Him could emerge.

In this way, God could bestow love on others. He could be

revealed to others as a giving king (cf. *Likutei Halachot, Yoreh Deah, Tolaim* 4:5).

These ten sefirot are still active, for God continues to recreate all of creation at every moment.

The pattern of the ten sefirot exists on many levels. Every object and every process in the world is a working through of the energies of the sefirot. Every Jewish practice and holiday presents a theater for the energies of the sefirot to flow.

In addition, like an infinite hologram, each sefirah contains within it all the other sefirot (*LH, Hoshen Mishpat, Geneivah* 4:6).

And in our own personalities and our own lives we can find analogues to the divine processes of the sefirot.

Thus, the classic work, *Tomer Devorah*, in which every sefirah is linked to an ethical quality states, “It is fit for a person to be similar to his Maker.”

And Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the sixth rebbe of Lubavitch, taught, “God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image’ (Genesis 1:26). All the heavenly levels are found in man. The word adam—man—is related to the word edameh—I will be similar—as in the verse, ‘I will be similar to the One above’ (Isaiah 14:14). Man below is an image of the sefirotic lights and vessels above. All levels above are found in man below.”

Because we contain an analogue of the sefirot within ourselves, we can intuit the spiritual truth of the upper worlds. Furthermore, through our acts here below—acts of goodness and of religious meaning, such as keeping the Sabbath—we can influence the heavenly sefirot and draw down their positive energy (*Likkutei Dibburim*, p. 246).

In particular, we can use the sefirot as a model when examining and attempting to improve our spiritual lives and struggles.

This analogue between the sefirot and our personal work in relating to God in a profound and deeply-felt way is a theme that is discussed at length in the Breslov Hasidic literature.

This is particularly so in *Likutei Halachot* (Collected Discourses on Jewish Law), an eight-volume collection of essays by Rabbi Nossan, a major student of Rabbi Nachman. This work parallels the sixteenth-century collection of Jewish law, the *Shulchan Aruch* (The Prepared Table). But whereas that work, the foundation of modern halachic practice, is a practical manual, *Likutei Halachot* uses the halachah as a take-off point for brilliant expositions of Breslov Hasidism.

Likutei Halachot forms the basis of this book.

The Ten Sefirot

The first sefirah is called keter: crown. It is the most transcendent of sefirot, the closest to the blazing, inconceivable light of the Infinite One.

Then the light of keter is filtered down to the second sefirah, chochmah: wisdom. Chochmah is the incipient flash of what the structure of this world will be.

From chochmah comes binah: understanding. Binah is the broadening and development of that primal flash of insight.

The culmination of chochmah and binah is daat: knowledge. Because keter is so exalted and hidden, it is sometimes not counted as a sefirah. In such a case, daat is counted. Daat represents the union

and integration of chochmah and binah. Now the balanced flow of Divine energy can proceed.

The next sefirah is chesed: lovingkindness. A much more tangible form of creation is taking place. This first step is an untrammled outpouring of limitless love.

This is balanced by the next sefirah, might. This is the sefirah of holding back and constriction. It is a necessary placing of boundaries on the exuberant force of a loving creation.

These two forces are integrated and balanced in the following sefirah of tiferet: beauty. Now love and withholding are in balance, with a slight tilt toward love.

After this comes netzach: victory. This is again, on a more tangible plane, a sefirah of giving. This time the giving is one of overpowering and overcoming.

Netzach must be balanced by hod. Hod is related to gevurah. It is more gentle, a receiving openness to Divine energy.

These two sefirot of netzach and hod combine in yesod: foundation. Foundation is the conduit for all the sefirot above it. Through it, like water through a sluice, energy flows down in a directed stream. It is a holy energy that must be directed and controlled wisely. Therefore, it is analogous to human sexuality.

The final sefirah is malchut: kingdom. This sefirah, which has received the energy of all the sefirot above it, rules the world over which it hangs and which it permeates.

Each one of these sefirot has a wealth of characteristics, and can be known by a plethora of names.

Besides this, the sefirot interact in a complex set of relationships.

A primal dynamic of the sefirot is the balance between male and female energies. The sefirot are arranged in three columns. The right-hand column is male, the left-hand female, and the middle column blends the two.

The paradigm of the sefirot is repeated infinitely, one set within another.

Imagine a series of infinite universes. At the very bottom is our own world, with its billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars, spanning distances of billions of light years.

This universe is merely a small part of the more spiritual universe directly above it. And so does creation rise, level after level, in a scope of unfathomable greatness. The higher universes contain a profusion of spiritual energies that we can barely imagine, filled with spiritual beings and processes. Higher and higher do the universes ascend. And in each one, we are aware of the progressively more powerful flow of divine energy coursing down.

We rise from level to level, like an explorer tracing the source of a mighty river. Finally, we come to a level that totally baffles us, that overwhelms our most evolved and purified spiritual being. It is as though we stand beneath a roaring, battering, brilliant Niagara Falls of overpowering spiritual energy. All our thoughts, conceptions, our consciousness and awareness are shattered. We have come to the limit of any created being to understand Godliness. Beyond this is the great source of Being that created beings can only experience as an exalted Nothingness.

And the energy that flows through all these universes is the dynamic flow of processes running in a complex and never-ending interplay of balanced and interacting energies and vessels. These are

what we call the sefirot.

The Jewish mystical tradition teaches that even this conception is a corporealization of processes that transcend our human intellect. In the upper worlds, there is no space and there is no time. Therefore, all the words and concepts that we use to describe the sefirot are hopelessly impoverished.

Just as a poem can recreate the mood of a magnificent vision, so can the descriptions of sefirot give us a taste of the spiritual world that flows above and about us.

But the prime purpose of this work is to discuss the sefirot in a way that can provide inspiration and direction for our own spiritual journeys.

This writing proposes to present one way of viewing the model of the sefirot: a modern interpretation of Breslov Hasidism. It is by no means an attempt to be definitive or even to cover the bulk of the subject. The approach is not technical, but impressionistic. And the characteristics of the sefirot are not hermetic. Thus, the same quality—such as joy—may be related to different sefirot.

Two other English-language books are recommended. Aryeh Kaplan's *Innerspace* has been described as the best English-language introduction to Kabbalah. Mattis Kantor's *Ten Keys: A Guide for the Entangled* is an original study of the sefirot as psychological paradigms.

The Sefirot and Beyond

“You are He Who emanated ten rectifications and called them ten sefirot, to rule with them the hidden, unrevealed universes and the

revealed universes.

“In them, You are hidden from humanity.

“You are He Who ties them and unites them.

“Because You are within, whoever separates one from another of those ten sefirot is considered as though he had separated within You.

“These ten sefirot proceed in order.

“One is long, one is short and one is in-between.

“You are He Who rules them.

“But no one rules You—neither above nor below nor from any side.

“You made them garments from which blossom souls for humanity.

“You prepared a number of bodies for them—called bodies in relation to the garments that cover them” (*Patach Eliyahu*).

Higher than all the sefirot is God Himself. But what is His exact relation to the sefirot?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (a major Kabbalist of the eighteenth century) writes, “The sefirot are God’s traits that He made for Himself to serve creation. They are not traits in regard to His completeness and primal true Being, but are created from His will and desire, for the sake of the beings that He desired to create....

“They are not God’s character, for ‘character’ is a concept that refers only to created beings, not to the Creator. These traits are types of Providence and illumination that are brought to shine on His creation....

“The sefirot are not something outside of Him. They are

literally His traits: His compassion, grace, judgment, charity, and so on. These are not like the character of a soul, but rather like types of illumination and providence” (*K’lalim Rishonim*, in *Daat Tevunot*, p. 247).

The sefirot are so to speak the attributes of God. They are a part of God, and, at the same time, crystallizations and formulations.

The sefirot are our means of relating to God, for His attributes are a function of the sefirot.

God’s essence before the sefirot is unknowable. Yet at times, in the depths to which the ten sefirot do not seem to descend, when we seem beyond God’s lovingkindness, when we cannot cling to any of His attributes or manifestations, we can turn to Him directly and be answered by the ineffable God Who exists beyond the ten sefirot.

When Hannah wept bitterly that she had no children, her husband Elkanah consoled her, “Am I not better to you than ten sons?” (Samuel I 1:8).

In this way does God console every individual who has descended into his own subjugation: “Am I not better to you than the ten sefirot?”

God told Jacob, “I will descend with you to Egypt.” And He continued with a promise: “And I will also bring you up.”

God is the true “I” of the universe. He is the center of being, the monadic identity behind all shifting manifestations.

It is God Himself that we yearn for. In the depths of exile, whether a bitter moral ugliness or a pervasive sense of a life leached of holiness and meaning, our soul yearns for release, for transcendent holiness, for the essential, unknowable, refreshing and redeeming God.

God’s sefirot, His attributes, are His “ten sons.”

God consoles us all—for every individual suffers his own Egypt: “Am I not better to you than ten sons?” I, the primal and most exalted God, am close to you and ready to redeem you, even when you cannot reach My attributes.

“God is close to all who cry out to Him—to all who cry out to Him in truth” (Psalms 145:18).

When our heart is emptied of lies and truth rushes in, we cry out to the highest Being: at that moment, in the exile itself, we are redeemed.

After that, we can attach ourselves to God’s attributes, which are His garments, so to speak, and correspondingly purify our own attributes, engaging in the slow and steady work of healing (cf. *LH, Orach Haim, Channukah* 6:17).

The Vision of Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw heavenly beings “running out and returning.”

In our service of God, we also go through these two phases repeatedly.

In a state of spiritual inspiration, we run out to God, to the highest level that we can reach. We can be nullified in the overwhelming Presence. In that place, all is Oneness, all is hidden. No thought can grasp that place. We are cast beyond conception, thought and self. “You are One, yet not in number. You are higher than all high, more concealed than all concealed. No thought can grasp You at all” (*Patach Eliyahu*).

But we return to a normative state. We again becomes a

vessel able to absorb God's light in a limited, effective measure. We again relates to God as the Creator of the sefirot. "You are He Who emanated ten rectifications. They are called the ten sefirot" (*LH YD, Milah 5:17*).

The Sefirot are Measures

Ultimately, we must approach God through the sefirot. The sefirot are vessels that hold God's light. That is why they are also called midot—measurements. They measure out God's light so that it is graduated. In this way, we can receive the light without being overwhelmed and destroyed by its great power.

When God began creation, He first created a state of chaos, tohu: "the earth was void and without form" (Genesis 1:2). God's light exceeded the vessels. The light pouring into the vessels shattered them, and bits of light were scattered to the lowest depths. This created the possibility of free will—and concomitantly of evil.

Then God created the universe again—the creation that we know, which is called tikkun: rectification. In this reality, there are many vessels and few lights. Although the light may be hidden by the vessels, the universe is steady and substantial.

We need the vessels to hold the light. This is a lesson that is sometimes learned too late by those who, intoxicated by the flight of mystic ecstasy, deny the reality of spiritual law. It is precisely these constraints that in limiting the light make it absorbable.

We reflect the sefirot above, and thus we contain within ourselves lights and vessels. Our light is intellect, and our vessel is physical service of God.

In itself, intellectual appreciation of God—even a broad understanding—is *tohu*: a precarious state that can at any moment collapse.

Active service of God, even without intellectual understanding, is *tikkun*: rectification. Even though the amount of light is small, it is safely set in protective vessels. By acting correctly, even without understanding, we rectify our moral traits, treat others well and develop our awe of heaven.

The ideal cosmic state will be reached when the light of *tohu* will be drawn into the vessels of *tikkun*.

On a personal level, we must work to achieve a balance of principled action nourished by intellectual, emotional and aesthetic richness (cf. *Likkutei Dibburim*, p. 246).

God is in the Sefirot, Yet Beyond the Sefirot

In the ideal future, “the earth will be filled with knowledge of God like water covering the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

In order to create the universe, God vacated a space of His Being. (This vacating takes place only from the point of view of His creation; from God’s point of view, He never changes—see *Tanya*.)

In this vacated space, God created the universe with ten sayings (*Pirkei Avot* 5:1)—e.g., “Let there be light.”

These ten sayings correspond to the ten *sefirot*.

The ten *sefirot* served as conduits of energy which flowed down to create the world.

It would seem that the vacated space is truly empty.

But this is not so. The empty space is both empty and filled

with God's life force. In a deeply paradoxical manner that human intellect cannot fathom, it is empty to allow the creation to proceed, yet it remains filled.

Thus, all of creation stems from the inaccessible wisdom that fills the vacated space.

In that vacated space, where Godliness exists yet is hidden, the answers to all the questions of faith and providence are concealed. In that realm of bewilderment, one question opens the door to a dozen more, and perplexity can lead to denial of faith.

Although the heart can reach directly to God beyond the sefirot, the mind must admit its finite capabilities. In the face of unanswerable mysteries, it must remain still: "Be silent before God" (Psalms 37:7).

But in the future, this hidden knowledge will flow through the world. Everyone will gain a direct, immediate knowledge of God (cf. *LH YD Tolaim* 4:8).

In Exile from the Sefirot

Today we live in an era of exile. We are separated not only from the wisdom that is hidden within the "vacated space," but we are also separated, in various degrees, from the light contained within the sefirot.

The first three sefirot—keter, chochmah and binah—form a unit that is known as "a father in wisdom."

As a result of sins committed here on earth, this upper unit has risen and left us behind as orphans: "we were orphans without a father."

What is the nature of a sin? Ideally, our soul is in harmonious unity with the illumination of God's wisdom, which unifies the entirety of creation. A sinful act rips apart that unity. Then our soul stands outside the stream of life. The wellspring of God's divine energy no longer flows upon our desecrated will and being. Only a return to God brings back the primordial harmony (cf. *Orot Hateshuvah*, chapter 9, paragraph 6).

Here on earth, the analogue of the three sefirot known as the "father in wisdom" was the holy Temple—the Beit Hamikdash—in Jerusalem. With the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, the Jewish people went into exile.

"Elders no longer are at the gate; young men no longer sing" (Lamentations 5:14).

When the "elders"—the first three sefirot—are no longer at the gate, the young men no longer sing.

Our souls yearn to relate to God in joy and song. But when the first three sefirot rise, joy no longer streams through the universe. "The joy of our hearts has ceased, and our dance has turned to mourning" (ibid. 15).

Now our inheritance has been given over to strangers, and the Beit Hamikdash has been destroyed (cf. *YD OH, Shabbat, 7:16*).

But through repentance, through a return to our innate wholesomeness, our despondency is healed. Our internal Beit Hamikdash is rebuilt.

As the sefirot devolve, there is a progressively greater constriction of light until this lowest universe is formed, where physical creatures such as ourselves can exist.

When a person sins, he increases the constriction of the divine

light, cutting himself off from God's primal wisdom. A spirit of foolishness, far distant from God's wisdom, enters into him (cf. Sotah 3).

The cohen gadol would enter the Holy of Holies in the Beit Hamikdash on Yom Kippur. The Holy of Holies, the repository of the Ten Commandments, is the place of God's wisdom. Here the cohen gadol would attain forgiveness for the Jews.

So too must a person enter his own mind and heart, his own wisdom, and carry out a personal inventory. When he does so, he is aligned with truth and Godly wisdom, and his sins are forgiven.

By sacrificing an animal in the Beit Hamikdash, one would sacrifice one's foolish, animalistic behaviors and state of mind.

But one could not offer a burnt-offering from a stolen animal.

Our repentance, our self-renewal, is acceptable only when our intent is matched by our action. When we return to the Beit Hamikdash, we are accepted in love and communion. But when we have stolen the sacrifice—when we have hurt another and not made up the damage—we cannot enter the circle of love and communion. Our spiritual constriction is so intense that we are cut off from our source in God's wisdom.

When we rectify the theft, we reconnect ourselves to God's wisdom. Our offering in the Beit Hamikdash of our heart is accepted (cf. *LH HM, Gezeilah* 2:8).

Then we are again in resonance with God and the sefirotic structure. We are unified with the wholesome current of the universal energy.

The Wisdom of Action

The sefirot are found in everything, for with them God gives life to and guides the entire universe. The sefirot are thus found in our intent, speech and acts.

Our intent relates to the first three sefirot, the “mental” sefirot.

Our subsequent speech or action relates to the following seven sefirot. These correspond to the seven days of creation, actualized being.

The first three sefirot are totally holy and good. As they devolve into greater actuality, the energies grow more constricted. At last, a very corporeal evil inclination can emerge.

When we have a pure intent to engage in a redeeming action, we can become overwhelmed by the destructive tendencies of the past.

These tendencies are a result of the constriction of divine energies that our previous unenlightened way of life brought about. This constriction resulted in a corporeal evil inclination. It now makes it difficult for us to break out of the inertia of the consciousness and way of life that has become our darkened pattern.

Often, we are not strong enough to engage these thoughts in conflict. We must tolerate the continued presence of these negative influences and proceed with our good intent. We learn Torah, pray or in some other way engage in a holy, wholesome way of life.

Eventually, as we create a new, more wholesome pattern, the old, sclerotic forces no longer appear so strongly or frequently.

This is part of the process of redeeming the fallen sparks of holiness. Some of the sparks fell because of our confusion and

misdeeds. Some fell because that is part of the human odyssey after the fall of Adam.

How do we redeem these sparks? Through learning Torah, praying to God, and engaging in good deeds (cf. *LH YD, Shiluach Hakein* 4:2).

The Song of the Future

All systems have three basic phases. The first is giving. The second is receiving and restraining. The third is a blending of the two. This blending does not reduce the phases of giving and receiving, but rather balances them.

Some of the sefirot are primarily givers. These appear in the right-hand column of the sefirotic structure. Other sefirot are more engaged in receiving, holding back and preserving. They appear in the left-hand column. And the middle column contains the balancing forces.

The three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were vehicles for God's will. Abraham represents the side of unbounded giving. Isaac represents restraint. Jacob is the blend of the two: compassion. Thus the three patriarchs form the archetype of the ideal Jew.

The Torah that we have is an expression of these three streams of energy. The Torah is sometimes very loving, sometimes firm, and at times a rich balance. "Blessed is the Compassionate One, Who gave us a Torah divided into three parts" (*LH YD, Milah* 5:17).

Our singing voice can also be divided into three parts: the voice; the echo of that voice; and the combination of the voice and its echo.

These voices mirror the right, left and middle energies.

We combine these three energies and composes songs to God.

We serve God when we sing to Him in joy and exultation.

Energy came down to us in the form of ten sefirot. Now we raise up our heart to God, binding together the sefirot.

All the sefirot and all the universes, which themselves are garments of Divinity, are contained in our song.

When we align ourselves with God and His sefirot, our inner nature is balanced. Then our song to God reverberates within all reality. “Sing to God a new song; sing to God, all the world. Sing to God, bless His name; announce His redemption from day to day” (Psalms 96:1-2) (cf. *LH, Even Ha’ezer, Ishut* 3:17).

CHAPTER ONE: KETER

The Crown of Nothingness

Keter is the crown. Just as a crown is higher than the head, so is keter beyond thought. So profound is it that it can only be conceived of as a supernal Nothingness. Thus, it is also known as Ayin–Nothing.

Keter is the first frame of God’s thought, blinding us into darkness (Rav Kook).

And when the letters of Ayin are re-arranged, they spell out the word Ani-I. God is the “I” of the universe (Baal Shem Tov).

The Loving Countenance of Keter

Keter is the first emanation of the infinite light of God. It is therefore a manifestation of complete giving and love. It is in regard to this aspect of God’s relationship to the universe that the

prophet, Michah, glorified God: “Who is a god like You? You forgive sin, and You pass over the iniquity of the remnant of Your inheritance. He does not hold forever onto His anger, for He desires lovingkindness. He will again have compassion on us. He will subjugate our sins and cast into the depths of the sea all of their sins. You give truth to Jacob, lovingkindness to Abraham, as You have vowed to our forefathers, from the days of old” (Michah 7:18-20).

Just as God relates to the universe in utter love, so must a human being relate to others lovingly.¹

Keter does not look up at its magnificent source, the Light of the Infinite Creator, but it looks down, sending its rays to the lower universes.

God looks down at His world with love, allowing only goodness to enter before Him and showing respect to even the slightest creature (for if He had any lack of respect for it, it would immediately cease to exist). So must a person look lovingly at others, not considering their flaws.

We should honor all beings, recognizing that they were created by God’s wisdom. We should recognize that by not respecting them, we do not appreciate He Who made them.

We should fill our heart with love of humanity. We should even think lovingly of those who do evil, wishing, “Would that they repented and became pleasing to God.”

¹In Tomer Devorah, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero delineates these thirteen types of love. See Appendix A.

Keter sits upon a head, so to speak, and that head is subsumed within keter.

In our head are our thoughts. The “thoughts” of keter are a continuous outpouring of goodness and love. They are thoughts of the primal Torah, the blueprint of creation. So should a person have only thoughts of goodness and love, and only meditate upon the Torah and upon God.

The “forehead” of keter is involved in ameliorating all harshness and judgments. So should we quiet the anger of others when we can, and act in a soothing manner.

The “ears” of keter do not allow entry to harsh judgments or slander. So should we not listen to empty and ugly words, words which arouse anger, but only to good and useful things.

The “eyes” of keter gaze down always at goodness. So should we not look at any ugly or immodest sight. Instead, we should only look to help the unfortunate.

The “nose” of keter refers to God’s acceptance of man’s prayers, which are “a pleasing scent to the Lord” (Leviticus 1:9). So should we always strive to be calm, even when provoked. We should always desire to help the oppressed, overlooking provocations.

The “countenance” of keter gives life, as in the verse, “In the light of the King’s countenance is life” (Proverbs 16:15). So should we look at people pleasantly and kindly.

The “mouth” of keter is always speaking goodness. Similarly, we should not speak curse words, violent words or empty words. Instead, we should only speak good of others, and our mouth should be filled with blessings.

It is true that we must often act with strictness and firmness. Those traits stem not from keter but from lower emanations of Godliness.

But in certain situations, we should only act with the traits that are appropriate to keter.

Such times are the Sabbath and holidays—particularly Yom Kippur. And during a regular day, there are the times of prayer and learning Torah (cf. *Tomer Devorah*, chapter 2).

Keter: Protective Screen

Keter is a screen that stands between our consciousness and the infinite, unfathomable light of Divinity. Keter is the curtain between the Emanator and that which is emanated.

The thoughts of a God-intoxicated person might run into the infinite regions and be swallowed up forever.

Keter prevents this. Keter allows us to rise to the heights of spirituality without self-annihilation. Therefore, Keter represents the greatest possible rectification of our consciousness.

The ability to access keter marks the difference between human beings and angels.

Angels are called seraphim, which means fiery beings. They burn up and are aflame in the light of their great insight and God-intoxication. Because they cannot access keter to receive God's light, they are overwhelmed by that light.

A human being can access keter because he has the ability to do good deeds. The Jews have been given the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, and gentiles have been given the 7 Noahide laws.

Jewish tradition calls the universe that we inhabit the world of “Asiyah”: the world of action.

When we serve God with action, we lift physicality to Godliness until it reaches the level of keter. We infuses physicality with spirituality.

This is the purpose of existence: to raise the most corporeal aspect of existence to keter, the root of thought and consciousness.

Eternal Joy is a Crown Upon the Jews’ Heads

When we carry out God’s commandments, we should do so in a state of joy. The prophet speaks of “Eternal joy on their heads” (Isaiah 35:10).

Keter is “on their heads.” The realm of keter is a realm of eternal joy.

When we carry out good deeds and God’s commandments in a joyous spirit, we can lift ourselves to the state of keter.

And when we reach keter, we are able to access the light of the Infinite One.²

Angels, on the other hand, cannot bear the test of living in this low world. And correspondingly, they have no filters to

²No created being on any spiritual plane can reach God, for He is extraordinarily high, beyond all concepts.

But when we prepare keter so that we can absorb the Light in a graduated manner, our mind can run up to that level of Divinity and then return. It arrives at that level although it does not fully arrive. This ability is made possible by keter.

receive God's great light. Thus, human beings have the potential to reach a level of Godliness beyond the ability of angels.

At times, we may be dismayed by the frustrating boundaries of our human condition. It may seem that our physicality, our upbringing, our emotional problems, our everyday limitations keep us distant from God. We may feel that the desires and needs that constitute our makeup are a barrier to Godliness.

We may envy the angels, who are free of all earthly desire and needs.

Yet it is precisely on this earthly plane that we can actualize the will of God in perfecting His universe (cf. *LH OH Nefilat Apayim* 4:9).

The Path of Action

“Those who go down in ships, who do work on the great seas, They have seen the works of God and His wonders in the depths” (Psalms 107:22-23).

There are holy and good people who carry out God's commandments in joy. They rectify the level of keter, and so their consciousness can run joyfully to attain the light of the Infinite One. They go down to the sea of wisdom and do their work in the water of knowledge. They truly see and know how great are the works of God. They have seen His wonders in the depths.

But sometimes, a storm wind blows up. “He spoke and brought up a storm wind, which raised the waves. They rose to the heavens and sank to the depths. The [sailors'] spirit melted in fear” (ibid. 25-26).

Sometimes keter does not adequately hold back their consciousness. Then they are battered and confused. “They circled and staggered like a drunkard.” Lost in the storm of supernal energy and consciousness, they are flung about by the overwhelming light, rising to the heavens and being cast to the depths.

Because they were not adequately prepared when they rose to the heights, they receive no insight, and they are cast down.

All of us experience such a process to some degree.

And by engaging in joyful and holy action in this world, we redeem the delusions of the world. Here, so far from the fountain of Divinity, we wander amidst palaces of illusion. Here desire masquerades as reality; entanglement as maturity; confusion as truth; distance from God as sophistication; intellect as understanding.

By actively working our way through these issues, we prepare our keter so that we can regain our natural, healthy state. Then not only our body and psyche, but our soul as well, are in a state of well-being.

The Path of Silence

The more we try to rise to holiness, the more do our delusions begin to clamor. And barriers may also arise from without.

This is similar to stirring the clear water in a barrel. The refuse that had lain in the bottom now swirls throughout the water.

Such a time represents a precious opportunity to rectify these

matters. We can best do so with the aid of a teacher. And we must always seek friends and colleagues. Then we can extract holiness from the palaces of illusion and raise the sparks of holiness to their source.

And we need a great deal of patience. We must often wait in silence as the trials of living endure. “Silence is a fence to wisdom” (*Pirkei Avot* 3:17). Keter—the crown—is a surrounding fence. Silence and acceptance before God provide a vessel in which wisdom can be contained.

“They rejoiced, for [the waves] were silent” (Psalms 107:30)—which can be read, “They rejoiced, yes, they were silent.”

Via the accomplishment of good deals in a joyful spirit, we attain keter, the holy inner silence. And then, “He led them to the port of their desire” (cf. *LH OH Hodaah* 6:5).

“Be silent before God and hope in Him” (Psalms 37:7). The essence of returning to God is silence before Him. It is via this silence, a state beyond words, that God has compassion—and we attain repentance.

This is the level of keter.

The Torah defines man’s distinction from animals as his ability to speak. The Aramaic translation of “a living soul” is “a speaking soul” (Genesis 2:7).

When we acted in a way not consonant with the illumination of Godliness, we allowed ourselves to be overwhelmed by a this-worldly consciousness. We acted on a clouded level. We were, was, to a greater or lesser extent, animalistic.

We must rectify all that we flawed. We must again make ourselves wordless like an animal.

This silence is higher than speech. It is the level of keter.
We can call out to God in a wordless cry.

This is the cry of the shofar, which is blown on Rosh Hashanah, the time of judgment and repentance. The shofar, the wordless cry, awakens a person from his sleeping state of consciousness: “Awaken sleepers from your slumber.”

When we return to God, there is a time to stand before Him and before our own conscience in silence. Our words—our patterns of thought—are still tied to our previous, unenlightened state. Were we to begin speaking prematurely, we would only precipitate ourselves back to our previous state. Sometimes a person talks endlessly, trying to extricate himself from the morass of his life. But although he uses all the proper phrases of self-growth, he remains blocked. First, we must remain silent. We must allow ourselves to rise to a different sphere of perception. Then our speech is clear and new.

The shofar does not try to explain or defend. It does not even plead over our sins. It is a wordless call to God.

So too does a person feel within himself a wordless cry for cleanliness and redemption.

At that point, our animal nature is augmented by our human essence. Our animal nature is symbolized by our blood—in Hebrew, dam. When we connect wordlessly to God on the level of keter, we connect ourselves to the Master of the world, the *Aleph* (Alpha). The letter *aleph* prefixed to *dam* spells *adam*—human being. Now we regain our link to Godliness—that is, our humanity (*LH OH Rosh Hashanah* 4:2).

The Path of Confession

We can only rectify a situation of exile by descending into the depths and raising the sparks of joy and holiness.

We do so by confessing our wrong-doings. We cast ourselves down in order to raise joy from the depths of exile. We admit the reality of our lives—to ourselves, to God, to another human being. We take responsibility for the flawed state of our lives.

Now we can rectify our level of keter, our joy. Now we can access the light of the Infinite One (cf. *LH OH Nefilat Apayim* 4:2).

In Shacharit, the morning prayers, we confess our wrong-doings to God immediately after the Shmoneh Esrai prayer, the apex of the morning service.

In the course of our prayers, we are, ideally, raising all the worlds to God.

Having finished Shmoneh Esrai, all the universes have been lifted up. Now we must incorporate them into the Light of the Infinite One.

This is only made possible when we confess our wrong-doings. Then we rectify keter, and we can access the Light of the Infinite One.

When confessing our wrong-doings, we lower our face: we lower ourselves to the level that we are actually on.

When Moses stood before God, he “hid his face, for he feared looking at God” (Exodus 3:6). It was at that time that God blessed the Jews with the thirteen traits of compassion.

The Path of Hope

Whatever level we find ourselves on, we must struggle to lift ourselves. Despair, the acceptance of degradation and incompleteness, removes us from the possibility of self-transcendence. And because it is always possible to grow, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov exclaimed, “Despair does not even exist” (*Likutei Moharan II 78*).

“If [your sins] will be red as scarlet wool, they will become like cotton” (Isaiah 1:18).

Scarlet wool is *tola*. When rearranged, the letters spell out *olat*—a raised offering. Cotton is *tzemer*. When rearranged, the letters spell out *meitzar*—straits.

Even if our sins are as red as scarlet wool, we can raise ourselves. Even from the straits, we can purify ourselves.

When we never give up but rise from the most precipitous fall, we come to *keter*.

Our only hope is to act in a manner consonant with God’s will, and constantly to approach His glory.

“Where is the place of God’s glory?” The Jewish spiritual tradition teaches that the word “where” refers to *keter*. The constant search for self-improvement, the constant pushing for goodness raises us from distance and degradation to a point where we are able to gain access to the light and clarity of Divine glory (cf. *LH YD Tolaim 3:3*).

When a person remains stale and unchanging, when he repeats the spinning cycles of weary time, when the course of his days is an unending corridor lined with closed doors, then he may

be said to have accepted the corruption of his station. “That soul shall be cut off, its sin is in it” (Numbers 15:31). His “evil,” that part of his life which must be improved and clarified, is in him. Because such a person makes no effective effort to transform his life, his life shall not change: “that soul shall be cut off.”

There are two avenues of relating to Godly consciousness. One: for every specific area in our life, there is a corresponding specific consciousness. And two: there is a general, over-arching consciousness that can envelope the entirety of our life. This second consciousness is related to keter.

The specific consciousness is on a lower level—but it is accessible. The general consciousness, on a higher level, is more hidden.

When we sin, acting in a life-denying manner, we cut ourselves off, from the vines of the specific Godly consciousness.

Then our life is maintained only by the mercy of the general consciousness. The Divine energy that we receive from that general consciousness is constrained and narrow. We live a life that is shrouded in shadows. Yet it is also a life that is maintained by great Divine compassion.

Whenever we wish, we can gain greater access to that Divine energy. When we are ready to rectify our state of being, our fall can turn to a great ascent.

Then our state of being “cut off” is transformed.

The Hebrew word for “cut off” is karet. When rearranged, the letters spell out keter (cf. *LH EH Gittin* 3:29).

The Experience of God

God created the world to give of His goodness to others. Closeness to God gives a person fulfillment. It is through knowing God that we experience satisfaction.

The more that people experience Godliness in their lives, the more can it be said that God's greatness and honor grow. Therefore, the more that those who experience Godliness bring such an experience to others, the more do His greatness and honor grow.

“Speak of His wonders” (Psalms 105:2). God's “wonder” refers to keter. Keter is wondrous because it is beyond the level of cognition. It is experienced as wonder.

But keter is also the filter via which the light of the Infinite Being is made accessible. Thus, it is possible to “speak of His wonders.”

Another verse says, “They thank God for His mercy and His wonders to man.”

What is mercy? Mercy relates to our raised state of consciousness, for then we are solely aware of God's mercy. Such an exalted state of being is something to thank God for. We have reached the level where our consciousness runs after God to receive His light.

But this is not perfection. Remaining on such a level, we would be nullified out of existence. The rest of the world would not know of His greatness.

We must have both the elevated state of consciousness and the ability to conceptualize and communicate that exalted state to

others (cf. *LH OH Hodaah* 6:6).

The Place of the World

In the rhythm of life, we sometimes work hard to come close to God.

But when the light is not apparent, we seem to be in a state of darkness, and we rest.

Our sages taught, “He who comes to be purified is told, ‘Wait’” (*Yoma* 39a). This is the level of *keter*, for the word *keter* also means “Wait” (*Job* 36:2).

Sometimes, after an initial burst of enthusiasm, we encounter obstacles and complications. Sometimes we must wait for years, making our way through thickets of this-worldly complications and personal entanglements. This is part of the process of growth.

It is during this period of comparative rest and darkness that we deal with this-worldly reality. Our spirituality will not help us solve or escape those issues.

It may be dismaying to find an apparent drop in our spiritual level. But we may also make discoveries about the imperfection of what had seemed ideal. We may discover that our spiritual superiority had masked a fear of other human beings. We may discover that our drive for purity had masked feelings of unworthiness.

It is during this often painful, slow process that we work to lift the holy sparks that have fallen amidst the refuse.

As we proceed in this work, integrating and clarifying our

being, we come to a true and mature wholeness that we can then lift back to holiness.

We must take care even while in the darkness and difficulty of the process to retain a memory of holiness, to tie our thoughts and heart to goodness and purity: to the strength of the Torah. Even if we do not understand, we still keep our thoughts linked to the level of keter. Then, although we may be spiritually asleep, we are asleep in the midst of words of Torah.

And after we have gathered the holy sparks, we can ascend in health to heaven.

The Story of Jacob

This process can be seen in the story of Jacob.

On his journey, Jacob came to a place that would be the site of the Temple, the transfer-point between heaven and earth. The word used in the Bible for “came to” is “pagah,” which implies “to hit upon.” Jacob’s mind hit upon and was blocked by the “place”–keter. (“Place” is one of the names of keter. Keter is called Place because it is the root of spatiality.)

Here, it grew dark, and Jacob lay down to rest. This is the level of relative spiritual darkness.

Before falling asleep, Jacob gathered stones and placed them beneath his head. He gathered the holy sparks in his situation and fell asleep in the midst of holiness.

And while he slept, he “saw a ladder reaching to earth and its head reaching to heaven.” This is the ascent to heaven that we can make to heaven after clarifying the holy sparks here on earth.

The Awe of God

Then, when Jacob awoke, “he feared and said, ‘How awesome is this place’” (Genesis 28:17).

Approaching keter brings us to a state of awe.

“The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God” (Psalms 111:10). The beginning of wisdom, that is, the source of wisdom, is keter. On this level, we have an awesome awareness of God’s greatness.

The level beyond our consciousness, beyond our ability to conceive and interpret reality, is a level of great fear. It is also a level of great compassion.

On a this-worldly level, when we come to the border of our preconceptions and courageously step into a new way of life, we are filled with a fear that is mixed with excitement. It is the level of the unknown. It is in the acknowledgment that we do not know that we truly grow (cf. *LH OH Hodaah* 6:24).

The Path of This-Worldly Love

As was noted earlier, keter is the region of joy—“eternal joy on their heads” (Isaiah 35:10).

Through joy, we reach strength: “They will rejoice in strength” (Job 39:21).

And what is strength? Strength is love: “for love is strong” (Song of Songs 8:6). In particular, strength is related to well-directed sexual love.

One man who controlled and directed his passions correctly

was Boaz. When he awoke to find the young woman, Ruth, lying at his feet, he did not touch her, but agreed to marry her. The meaning of Boaz is “in him is strength.”

Only by connecting our physical life to holiness can we, to whatever degree, reach the level of keter.

When the Jews stood at Mt. Sinai, ready to receive the Torah, they exclaimed, “We will do and we will listen” (Exodus 24:7). The Talmud teaches that as a result of these two commitments, each Jew merited two crowns.

These two commitments express the energies of male and female.

Man and woman are filled with the tension of incompleteness. When they join together in holiness, a great joy is liberated. This joy leads to strength: the strength of holiness permeating this-worldly reality.

In opposition to this great power of holiness is the strength of a lust that focuses solely on physical pleasure. Such lust is both a spiritual and a psychic degradation.

Rather, we infuse physicality with the joy that comes from the male and female crowns of holiness. Thus, the Talmud teaches that it is a mitzvah—a holy deed—to give joy to the groom and bride. This joy infuses them with the strength of holiness (*LH EH Pirayah Viriviah V'hilchot Ishut 4*).

The Root of Man and Woman

The Bible tells that “a woman of valor is the crown of her husband” (Proverbs 31:10).

Because keter is so high, when its energy devolves to the earthly plane, it is very hidden, surrounded by the illusions of physicality.

The holy level of woman is surrounded by a mystique of lust.

It is for this reason that Judaism invests value in the concept of modesty. Precisely because the beauty of woman and sexuality is drawn from the highest level of holiness is it prone to degradation and perversity.

Sexuality is holy in its source, necessary in its expression, hypnotic in its power. It constitutes the basic arena of spiritual struggle.

In order to connect sexuality to its root in holiness, to lift it out of the realm of delusion, the Talmud surrounds it with joy. We are obligated to give joy to a newly-wed couple. And similarly, the Talmud teaches that “if a man does not have children, he should give joy to his wife with the mitzvah” (cf. *LH EH Ishut* 4:2).

The Pure Soul

One of the first blessings recited in the morning begins, “My God, the soul that You have placed in me is pure” (Prayerbook).

Every individual has a pure soul.

We have to work to live an outer life that will resonate with that gift of inner Godliness.

Many people believe that they are in essence not holy. This is an false modesty that originates in the palaces of illusion. It is a self-limiting thought that makes it difficult to surpass our

circumstances and come close to God.

Many people assume that a spiritual life is not for them.

But spirituality and religiosity are very broad.

A person who takes pleasure in the sensuous being of life can come to serve God with his joie de vivre.

A person who loves to relate to others and nurture them can realize how by doing so she is emulating God and nurturing the Godly spirit in others.

A person who is a dynamic, social personality serves God by making the most of himself, creating events that are dedicated to the expansion of goodness.

An aggressive leader can lead others in a path of integrity.

Whoever has come to a higher state of healthy spiritual consciousness and closeness to God has done so as a result of a great deal of hard work. We can spend years, decades, working to improve and heal our emotional and spiritual self.

This is the job of a lifetime. It is the role that is meant to be filled by everyone.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook taught that “as long as the revelation of one line in a thinking and feeling spirit has not yet emerged into actuality, we are obligated to bring it out through the creative act” (*Shir Hashirim*).

Our sages teach that “the Messiah will not come until every soul comes into the world.” Every soul in the world must fulfill its unique potential in order to serve God with complete joy (from conversation with Nechama Nadbourny).

Everyone who has attained a level of spiritual authority has done so only by great struggle and by overcoming many obstacles.

Everyone has free will. Everyone can achieve this.

As the Talmud states, “Aaron took the crown of the priesthood. David took the crown of kingship. But the crown of a good name lies before us. Whoever wants to can take it” (cf. *LH OH* 3:6).

CHAPTER TWO: CHOCHMAH

The Beginning of Creation

Chochmah is the second sefirah. Chochmah means wisdom.

Earlier, the ineffable nature of keter was stressed. Chochmah too cannot be conceived of. In relation to keter's state of "nothingness," chochmah is "being." Nevertheless, chochmah is incomprehensible and very refined (*Tomer Devorah*, p. 169).

Keter can be thought of the "global origin" of all reality. It is the "idea well" from which all things come. Whereas keter is totally transcendent, chochmah is the arena in which things and ideas begin to be formulated (cf. *Ten Keys for Understanding Human Nature*, by Mattis Kantor, p. 31). It can be thought of as meaning "conception").

Chochmah thus represents God's first creative activity (*Tomer Devorah*, p. 169).

Emulating Chochmah

The Bible begins, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). And the Psalm exults, “How many are Your works, O God; You have made them all in wisdom” (Psalms 104:24).

Chochmah—wisdom—is “the beginning” of creation, from which everything else derives (*Tomer Devorah*, p. 169).

Ultimately, the sefirah of chochmah can be attained—but only as it manifests through the following sefirah of binah, understanding (*Tomer Devorah*, p. 169).

God declares that “My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8). The thoughts of God’s chochmah are completely beyond us, for they oversee and pervade all of reality. God’s chochmah is an absolute expression of His compassion. All of His chochmah is devoted to drawing the most degraded levels of humanity close to Him. “He thinks thoughts so as not to allow any to remain cast off from Him” (Samuel II 14:14).

The entire skein of creation is intended to lead to a universal betterment. Then we will see that all those incidents of pain that had seemed random were part of a pattern of wisdom. “‘I know the thoughts that I think about you,’ declares God. ‘They are thoughts of peace and not evil, to give you a hopeful end’” (Jeremiah 29:11).³

³These verses refer specifically to the Jewish people. But the process of the rectification of the world is universal and all good people are a part of it. “The redemption of Israel is the redemption...of the entire world and of all

How can a person emulate the sefirah of chochmah?

Just as wisdom pervades the world, so should a person's wisdom pervade his life. Maimonides taught, "As a sage is recognized by his wisdom and knowledge...so should he be recognized by his activities: his eating, his drinking...his speech, his walk, his dress..." (*Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Deiot 5:1*). The discipline of attaining wisdom is a life-long process that includes all aspects of our lives.

Chochmah has two aspects. One looks up to keter, receiving energy. The other looks down to the other sefirot, nurturing them with holiness.

Similarly, we should spend part of our day communing with God in solitary meditation in order to increase our wisdom. The rest of the day, we should share our wisdom with others.

We should use our wisdom to help others, acting kindly, justly and charitably.

When the sefirah of chochmah pours forth, it does so in an limited manner so that each sefirah beneath it gets exactly what it needs.

In the same way, when we share our chochmah with others, we do so in a manner that is most appropriate for them. With one

that is in it" (*Arp'lei Tohar 13*).

The Jewish people are known as a chosen people, for God told them, "You will be chosen to me more than the other nations" (Exodus 19:5). From here we learn that the Jews are the most chosen, the most beloved of nations—implying that in fact the entire human race is chosen and beloved to God (Seforno on Deut. 33:3).

person, we may share an insight. Another needs a favor. A third person might need to gain the confidence to accomplish something on his own.

When we try to give too much, to force chochmah onto others, we cause harm.

Just as God gazes on His creatures with the wisdom of compassion, so do we emulate Him by looking to improve the lot of others. When we see that someone has fallen morally or spiritually, we provide him with the resources to recover. Just as the sefirah of chochmah guides the other sefirot, so do we guide others.

“Wisdom gives life to those who possess it” (Ecclesiastes 7:12). God created the world with His wisdom, and so His wisdom imbues all of creation with His life-force.

We emulate God by giving life to others, by helping others attain the virtues of both this world and the world-to-come.

Hasidic tradition tells of a tzaddik in peltz—a spiritual master in a fur coat.

In the winter, we can warm ourselves by wrapping ourselves in a fur coat—but other people remain cold. Alternatively, we can light a fire so that everyone is warmed. The tzaddik in the fur coat emulates that aspect of God’s wisdom that turns its face up to receive from the Infinite Light. But he is not emulating the nature of God’s wisdom that gives openly and selflessly.

God’s wisdom is the progenitor of all creation. Not only in the past was the universe created with wisdom. Even now, everything continues to exist because it is constantly being imbued with God’s wisdom.

We should similarly relate to all of God's creatures as a loving, wise parent. Just as a parent tolerates his children's foibles and treats them lovingly, so should we treat others lovingly. Just as a wise parent guides each child separately, so should we guide others according to their nature. Just as a parent desires the best for his children, so should we desire the best for others.

This holds true particularly for our fellow-Jews. Just as we feel the pain of our own children more than that of other children, just as we have a special responsibility to our own children, so is our relationship to the Jewish people.

But we must also care about the injustices against gentiles and their suffering.

Beyond that, we must cultivate a sensitivity to the animal world.

We should even be sensitive to plant life, for instance, not unnecessarily uprooting a plant (cf. *Tomer Devorah*, chapter 3).

The Light of Wisdom

God's chochmah is a state of holiness. It comprises the brilliance of supernal ideas at their height, beyond limitation, unclothed by even the most general particularity. In relation to the breadth and limitlessness of supernal chochmah, everything else is particular and limited.

The form of all the worlds, of all ideals, the highest apex of their being, the height and depth of their life, the freshness of their song, of their gladness, their joyful beauty—all these are as nothing in comparison with the holy purity of chochmah (*Orot Hakodesh* II,

p. 283).

Archetype of Thought

Chochmah is the archetype of thought.

We know, Rabbi Kook teaches, that there are no empty thoughts. There is nothing that does not have its place, for everything comes from the source of wisdom.

If there are twisted or empty thoughts, the twistedness and emptiness affect the outer form only. But when we descend to the inner being of the thoughts, we find in them the foundations of life. This is because wisdom is the source of life.

Everyone's thoughts are filled with a wealth of supernal life. When the world is at last rectified, this supernal life will be purified and continue to exist with an exalted beauty.

The higher we rise, the more are we connected to the inner nature of existence and life. Then we can retrieve the good, eternal essence that emanates from the wisdom in every thought.

As the rabbis said, "Who is wise? He who learns from others" (*Pirkei Avot* 4:1)—without exception.

When our thought is heavy, this is because its fruitful foundation has not been revealed.

It is the work of every straight-hearted individual to draw to every thought the thread of its original logic: the line of life, the sign of truth. Then that thought will give us life (*Orot Hakodesh* I, 17-8).

Because chochmah is higher than the universe, this world must transcend itself to reach chochmah (*Orot Hakodesh* II, p.

571).

The Life-force of Nothingness

“From where will you find wisdom?” In Hebrew, the word for “from where”—mei-ayin—can be read as “From ayin—nothingness.” In relation to all that comes after it, chochmah cannot be known, and thus it is experienced as nothingness.

This nothingness constitutes our life force: “Wisdom gives life” (Ecclesiastes 7:12). It is the life force of the soul: “The soul of the Almighty gives them understanding” (Job 32:8).

A person who is truly living is one who possesses a continuous consciousness of God. “Living, he will praise you.” “Not the dead”—the spiritually dead—“will praise God, but we will bless God” (Psalms 115:17).

When we possess such a consciousness, our body with its desires are pure. It is in resonance with our spiritual ideals.

Every morning, we draw spiritual purity into our body by reciting the morning blessings thanking God for opening the eyes, freeing the immobile, raising the bowed, and so forth. When we recite these blessings, we awaken the life force of our limbs. We fill them with chochmah.

In a sense, the body is the soul’s antagonist.

Our soul comes from chochmah, “nothingness,” complete nullification before the essential, overwhelming shining of God.

The body, on the other hand, is being, physicality. It is differentiated and individuated. It has its own drives, many oblivious to or in opposition to the desires of the soul.

But ultimately the body also derives from the level of “nothingness.” The Talmud states that “Wherever you find God’s greatness, there do you find His modesty” (Megillah 31a).

“Modesty” refers to nothingness, chochmah, the soul. “Greatness” refers to the body, which demands its own greatness.

In their source, the soul and the body come from God.

Why is this not apparent to us? Why can we live our entire lives oblivious of God, drawn after our desires?

The story of Adam and Eve presents the history of the mind/body split.

At one time, mankind stood before God in a state of innocence and natural wisdom.

But a choice was made for individuation that would run counter to the Divine order pervading creation—the choice to sin.

Previously, the inclination of physicality to run its own course independent of God’s will was external to humankind. The snake was an independent creature.

We today have inherited a reality in which the snake lies coiled within us. It is the snake that persuaded mankind that it could become like God—the snake that can only, after God’s curse, taste dust.

Similarly, within us are animal urges that, when fulfilled without care for our emotional and spiritual health, leave us with grief. We were convinced that if we were to act “freely,” we would be as gods. Instead, we find that we have only tasted dust.

This is because our spiritual identity is real. Just as we must take into account the needs of our body and psyche, so must we nurture our soul.

It is our work to imbue our body with Godly chochmah. Then our limbs are filled with the true modesty, the “nothingness,” of our Divine soul.

The Torah teaches the importance of modesty. Moses is praised primarily for this quality: “The man Moses was very humble” (Numbers 12:3).

At the same time, the Torah teaches the importance of a strong character, a “holy arrogance” (*LM* 22:4). “A shame-faced person cannot learn” (*Pirkei Avot* 2:6).

We need both the soul and the body. We attain true holiness when self-nullification and self-definition are blended within ourselves (cf. *LH OH Tefillin* 6:21).

Wisdom gives us strength to overcome our lusts and harmonize our energies.

In Hebrew, the word wisdom, chochmah, can be rearranged to read, “ko’ach mah”—the strength of mah, which has the numerical value of adam—man. The strength of a human being is wisdom. “Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten leaders who were in the city” (Ecclesiastes 7:19).

Our higher consciousness functions as a screen against unhealthy desires. Our wisdom therefore functions as compassion for ourselves. When we are in touch with this compassionate wisdom, our mind is opened to holiness, and it is as though we are receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

At that point, we can teach and illumine others.

And the act of teaching itself can trigger our connection to our inner wisdom (cf. *LH HM Sh’luchin* 8).

We must believe that we have the inner wisdom to overcome

unhealthy drives. “Why were certain sages punished?” the Talmud asks. “Because of their lack of faith in themselves” (Sotah 48b, cf. Sihot Haran #140). By not trusting in our strength, we do not struggle to access it.

And we are aided by other necessary resources: a tradition, teachers, advisors and friends. We must allow ourselves the wealth of these resources. We must not allow ourselves to be impoverished (cf. *LH OH Birkat Harei'ach* 4:1).

Ultimately, the body as it is cannot serve as an adequate receptacle for the soul. The body dies and the soul leaves. The body turns to dust, achieving its rectification of humility.

Then the body will be restored in the post-Messianic resurrection. Having attained a cleansing humility, it will be fit to turn to its awaited role as an individuality with the strength to house the soul (cf. *LH OH Tefillin* 6:21).

The Vacated Space

When God began creation, He so to speak constricted Himself. He cleared a “space” that would be apparently empty of Him. Within this “vacated space,” He emanated His energy that culminated in creation.

This vacated space is a function of God’s Wisdom.

The vacated space is apparently empty of wisdom, of God’s divinity.

When we meditate incautiously and break through to a level too high for us to bear, we enter the realm of the vacated space. Everything seems darkness and confusion.

We can ask questions that cannot be answered. These questions multiply and overwhelm us. They come from the realm of the vacated space.

Really, God's wisdom permeates the vacated space. The constriction itself was created with Godly wisdom. But we cannot sense this.

In the Messianic days, this wisdom will be revealed. On all levels, God's wisdom will be uncovered. Then "the earth will be filled with knowledge of God like water covering the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

Water is a symbol of Torah, wisdom. It is also a symbol of mercy.

God's wisdom, although concealed in a world filled with pain and confusion, is ultimately merciful. It will ultimately be revealed (cf. *LH YD Tolaim* 4:8).

Prayer

But we do not have to wait for that final era. We can seek God's wisdom now.

"Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten leaders who were in the city" (Ecclesiastes 7:19).

Life comes from wisdom. And so does strength. The word *chochmah* contains within it the word "co'ach"—strength.

One way to connect to God's wisdom is through prayer. When we pray with great strength, we draw down God's wisdom, like a river that rolls forward from Eden to water the garden.

The surge of wisdom is so irresistible that we overcome all

evil and rectify all flaws (cf. *LH OH Beit Hak'nesset* 6:22).

Wisdom and Truth

Wisdom consists of knowing a thing as it is. Falsehood is the region of multiplicity; truth the region of oneness and unity.

Some people create confusion between truth and falsehood. Even those who speak in the name of peace can use the deceptive language of falsehood. The prophet Jeremiah cried, “Woe to those who call good evil, to those who cry, Peace, peace—but there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14).

To search for truth within all things is very difficult. This is particularly so in a world that is flooded with falsehood, where truth is caught up like flotsam amidst the waves.

It is very hard in the midst of this flood to connect ourselves to the good waters of wisdom flowing within ourselves, within the companions that we choose wisely and within texts of wisdom (cf. *LH YD Shavuot* 2:13).

Wisdom and Action

Wisdom is very great. It is the means of creation. It is the life force of all.

We might feel justified in believing that the purpose of life is the attainment of this divine wisdom.

But wisdom is a means to an end: “the beginning of wisdom is to fear God” (Psalms 111:10): to serve God with a sense of awe.

“The beginning of wisdom is to fear God.” The “fear of

God” flows from our recognition of God. Such fear comprises the beginning of an attachment to God’s transcendent wisdom.

When our preconceptions and boundaries have been knocked down, when an unsettled, fluid consciousness of a reality greater than ourselves flows through us how do we maintain balance and wisdom?

We make sure that our this-worldly good deeds exceed our psychological and spiritual attainments. “If a person’s good deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom will last. But if his wisdom exceeds his good deeds, his wisdom will not last” (*Pirkei Avot* 3:12) (cf. *LH YD Shavuot* 2:19).

“I said that I will gain wisdom, but it is far from me” (*Ecclesiastes* 7:23). When we try to attain wisdom, we realize that it is unattainable. We must surrender before God’s infinite wisdom, realizing that all that we can ultimately know, in relationship to God, is that we does not know anything.

This is also true psychologically. Engaged in self-exploration, we can realize that the process is endless. We will never complete our insight. We will never adequately understand our motives and complexes. Every door that opens up leads to other doors. An infinity of internal universes appears.

Self-understanding must be balanced with principled and effective action.

The commandments of the Torah provide a template for wise and holy behavior. “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God—good consciousness to all who do them” (*Psalms* 111:10). This good consciousness comes not to those who learn the commandments, but rather to those who carry them out (*Berachot*

17).

Good action provides a vessel in which the light of insight can be gathered.

It provides a framework for strong growth.

It provides the environment and challenges that can lead us to serve God with simplicity. Then we come to true wisdom, which is to know God via the route of faith. “You shall know today and meditate in your heart that the Lord is God” (Deuteronomy 4:39).

When we learn the Torah and carry out its commandments that we connect with the Torah, which is called wisdom: “I am wisdom...I am understanding” (Proverbs 8:11).

Only then can we know God: “Be wise and know Me” (Jeremiah 9:23) (cf. *LH OH Tefillah* 4:9).

The Torah remains incomplete until it culminates in wisdom. When we fill our life with correct action connected to Godliness, we fill our life with sanctity. Sanctity is the fulfillment of the Torah.

A life of grudging, minimal dedication to good action is inadequate. Nachmanides, the thirteenth century Spanish sage, coined the phrase, “a wretch who observes the Torah.” Our life must be suffused with a spirit of holiness, which flows from actions of holiness and refraining from unholiness (cf. *LH OH Rosh Chodesh* 7:24).

Using the Things of This World

“Who is wise? He who sees what is to be.”

We live wisely when our acts are in consonance with our

awareness of the direction of our life.

We must avoid a random, trivial life. Yet on the other hand, we must not deny ourselves God-given pleasures. “Every person will have to give an accounting for not having made use of the pleasures of this world” (cf. *LH OH Shabbat* 6:3).

We are supposed to make use of the things of this world with wisdom. “Wisdom gives life” (Ecclesiastes 7:12).

Everything in the world is filled with God’s wisdom. By using things with a sense of their sanctity, we elevate the wisdom within them.

When we bless God before taking pleasure from an item—e.g., before eating—we connect ourselves to and raise the wisdom hidden in it.

We bring it to the realm of the world-to-come, of God’s oneness (cf. *LH OH Betziat Hapat* 2).

The Hidden Wisdom

The Talmud teaches that God created the world with ten statements. A Talmudic sage protests that the phrase, “And God said,” appears only nine times in the opening chapters of Genesis. The Talmud resolves the question by stating that the phrase, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” is also a statement—albeit a hidden statement.

Each statement of God fills the things of this world with His wisdom. “You made them all with wisdom” (Psalms 104:24). That wisdom is unlabeled. It is for us to find and use correctly.

The hidden statement is the aspect of “Wisdom—from where

(from nothingness) will you find it?” It is the hidden wisdom.

Sometimes God’s wisdom is especially hidden in an aspect of reality. That is because that aspect was created by God’s hidden statement.

In such a case, although possibility is concealed there, it is easy to see only limitation.

Sometimes, when we feel that we have sunk to degradation, we have the opportunity to create a more profound redemption than a person living an even, wholesome life. “From the depths have I called You, O God” (Psalms 130:1)—precisely from the depths. And “If I go up to the heavens, there You are; if I make my place in Sheol, You are there” (Psalms 139:8).

Wherever we are in the world, we can redeem ourselves and our situation. Perhaps we were specifically cast into such a painful experience because we have the strength to rectify it.

Even a spiritual master can be insensitive to the scope of the power of redemption.

Elisha the prophet carried out two strict, justified actions. When a group of children mocked him, Elisha saw prophetically that no good would come of them. He prayed to God, and two she-bears emerged from the woods and slaughtered forty-two of the children. Later, when his student, Gehazi, acted unethically, Elisha summarily dismissed him.

The Midrash tells that Elisha grew ill as a result of each of these episodes.

Rabbi Nosson of Nemirov explains that although Elisha could justify his actions, as a spiritual master he was expected to have greater vision. He should have tried to help the children reach

some level of goodness. He should have seen that Gehazi could be redeemed. Because Elisha did not labor to find the deeply hidden sparks of wisdom, he grew ill (*LH HM Sh'luchin* 5:20-22).

Raising the Hidden Wisdom

Attaining wisdom of the hidden statement means that we realize that we know nothing at all.

After the Shmoneh Esrai prayer, we put down our head and confess our misdeeds to God.

We purposely descend into the world of misdeeds, where God is hidden, in order to raise the hidden wisdom, the holy sparks that have fallen into exile.

Our face reflects wisdom: “The wisdom of man illumines his face” (Ecclesiastes 8:1). Now we put our face down.

It is the task of individuals of all backgrounds to work on liberating the fallen sparks of holiness.

And in particular, this is the task of the Jewish nation. “At that time, all the nations will gather for the Lord’s sake in Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 3:17) (cf. *LH OH Nefilat Apayim* 6:3).

Silent Wisdom

Keter is the sefirah of silence.

Because Wisdom represents primarily the realm of holy thought, it too is a realm of silence: a silence that nourishes the lower emanations, which are, in relation to Wisdom, physical. “All my days I have grown amidst the wise men, and I have found

nothing better for the body than silence” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:17).

An inner silence and a respect for words connects us to that realm. “Those who delve deeply into holiness flee unnecessary words and attain the hidden light that is filled with life. Their every word opens conduits filled with supernal brilliance” (*Orot Hakodesh* III, p. 281). In silence, we are attuned to the whispers of our soul (R. Charlap, *Mei Marom*).

God’s wisdom fills the entire world. So great is that wisdom that the world could not bear it. An inner, meditative silence is the vessel with which we can receive it. “Silence is a fence to wisdom” (*Pirkei Avot* 3:17).

Wisdom wells out of silence. And it is received in silence (cf. *LH HM Shutfim B’karka* 5:5).

Sometimes it is through silence that the most profound wisdom is transmitted from one soul to another, a communication of the greatest intimacy.

Once Rabbi Aryeh Levin paid a visit to Rabbi Kook with an urgent question, and found Rabbi Dovid the Nazir, Rabbi Kook’s student, in the study hall. Rabbi Levin recounted, “I greeted him. He said hello and with a slight smile motioned me to sit. I sat down next to him and we gazed at each other without saying a word for about half an hour. Then I rose and took my leave. When I got home, I felt that all my questions had been answered. Everything that I had wanted to ask appeared so simple to me, so clear, and this was a marvel” (*Mo’adei Harayah*, p. 385).

Wisdom in Speech

Then wisdom is found in our speech. “My mouth shall speak wisdom” (Psalms 49:4).

And then this wisdom spreads into our entire being, via the understanding of the heart: “the speech of my heart is understanding.”

Wisdom in Love

This Divine wisdom is the sphere of holy love. When we access this wisdom, we reach the realm of forgiveness. Then we can draw an atoning light down to illumine our heart and rectify our being.

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement. On that day, Moses brought the Torah—the blueprint of wisdom—down to the Jews from Mt. Sinai.

When the Temple stood, on Yom Kippur the Cohen Gadol (the high priest) would enter the Holy of Holies, where the tablets of the Ten Commandments were stored. From here, he was able to draw down Divine love that would forgive the misdeeds of the Jewish people.

We can enter our internal Holy of Holies. We can purify ourselves by learning and fulfilling the wisdom of the Torah. Our prayer can shine upon the heart of understanding.

The Torah purifies the world. The spiritual master purifies the people. Every individual purifies himself.

In each of these is contained the point of wisdom and

breadth of understanding (cf. *LH OH Nesiat Kapayim* 5:5).

The root of our soul is wisdom. Within ourselves we can find great wisdom. But we must also draw from the Torah, whose root is also wisdom (cf. *LH YD Shechitah* 4:2).

Wisdom and Parents

The Torah tells us to “honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12). By bringing us into the world, our parents have provided a garment for our soul. It is with this garment, which shields us from an overflow of God’s light, that we can illumine our soul.

When we have an unrefined garment, we live in illusion. As the garment of thought and perception is refined, it is transformed into clear faith.

Because our parents have provided us with the means to illumine our soul, we honor them.

Also, when we honor our parents, we help their souls attain their root. Then their souls can awaken and begin to be revealed.

The Torah continues, “Honor your father and mother so that you may have length of days” (Exodus 20:12).

“Length of days,” referring to life, indicates wisdom, for “Wisdom gives life” (Ecclesiastes 7:12).

In a healthy relationship, we remain connected to our parents. When we honor them, their souls grow, and consequently our own garment, our character, which is drawn from them, shines. We attain life: the realm of wisdom (cf. *LH YD Kibud Av V’Eim* 1).

Wisdom and the Teacher

The Talmud teaches that our duty to honor our parents is superseded by our duty to honor our spiritual teacher. Our parents give the garments to our soul. Our teacher gives Torah, which is wisdom and the source of our soul.

Ezekiel tells of a vision in which he saw a trickle of water flowing from the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The trickle grew gradually stronger, until it eventually became a great river.

At first, the wisdom that we receive from our teacher is like a trickle of water. As we continue to learn, that trickle expands until it is a mighty river.

When we honor our teacher, we increase the amount of Torah that our teacher transmits.

It is important to search for teachers in spirituality, even though that search may be long and frustrating.

Part of the difficulty in finding a spiritual teacher lies in learning how to receive from him. Many issues of control and ego—both on the seeker's and the teacher's side—may be present.

Often, even as we are consciously looking to receive from a teacher, we are acting in a way that inhibits the teacher from giving.

Often, a teacher is plagued by egotism. His misuse of the student's respect inhibits the student from receiving.

When the teacher acts as a selfless lens of spiritual teachings, he exhibits the two-faceted nature of wisdom. He receives from above and transmits to his student.

Then, in accord with the growth of the student, the flow of

wisdom increases from a trickle to a mighty river (cf. *LH YD Shavuot* 2:23).

Wisdom from the Darkness

“As the advantage of light over darkness, so is the advantage of wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 2:13).

Wisdom is daylight. Night time represents lack of wisdom. [At that time we sleep. Our soul rises to heaven and is renewed while our body is strengthened, and the next morning we can again engage in life.

Sometimes we are overwhelmed by darkness. Sometimes we have to act without light, without wisdom. Sometimes we literally can neither act nor understand, and we go to sleep. Then, our psyche may be illumined with wisdom. We may have dreams that help us work out our situation.

Now we have regained strength, and can again act effectively and wisely.

It is important to intuit when we are worn out and should rest in order to be renewed (cf. *LH OH* 3:2).

In the daytime, things are in order. At night, things are out of order.

In general, the physical world is considered to be “out of order” in comparison with God’s wisdom.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they went from light to darkness, from being in order, in line with God’s wisdom, to being out of order, removed from His life force. Thus, death was decreed upon them.

When we act in a holy manner, we merge into the state of alignment with God's wisdom, the state of being "in order."

This world contains the level of lower wisdom. The Torah represents the level of upper wisdom. When we live a life in accordance with upper wisdom, we draw not only ourselves but our environment into the realm of upper wisdom.

When the Jews left Egypt, they were on a level of supernal wisdom. God provided an extraordinary illumination in order to bring them out of their exile. Then this light was removed so that they might develop their own inspiration to receive wisdom in the proper measure.

People sometimes find themselves beginning a powerful spiritual process that breaks them free of a personal exile. They may experience a higher state of consciousness and supernatural phenomena. They are excited, joyous, enthusiastic. Yet this stage dissolves. In its place comes a harder reality. They now have to slog through the difficulties of life. Years and decades can pass without those illuminations that before had seemed so common and matter-of-fact.

It is through this second process that we align our lower wisdom with God's upper wisdom.

It is only through our efforts here below that such an integration comes about.

The great illumination of the Exodus from Egypt lasted for only one day. For the next forty-nine days, the Jews travelled through the desert until they arrived at Mt. Sinai, where they received the Torah: the upper wisdom.

Each one of those days represented a rectification that they

brought about in their character, so that they would eventually be prepared to receive the Torah.

In the Tabernacle (and later in the Temple), a barley offering was offered up on the second day of Passover. Then forty-nine days were counted until the holiday of Shavuot, the giving of the Torah. Today, although there is no Temple, it is still a mitzvah—a holy act—to count these forty-nine days.

Barley is primarily animal fodder. We offer up to God the mundane details of our life. This mundane reality is, when directed properly, lower wisdom.

The barley offering was waved in four directions. We bind the entirety of our life and raise it up to God.

Then, in forty-nine ways, we see how we can align our life with Godliness. Then we can receive God's wisdom, the Torah.

These forty-nine days are forty-nine gates of understanding.

The fiftieth gate is wisdom. It is hidden from all eyes. No limitations can grasp it. Therefore, it is not counted. It is a region beyond number and time.

By counting forty-nine days, we have tied our constricted reality to the unconstricted actuality of God's wisdom. We have connected time to a region beyond time; limitation to the infinite; flesh to spirit and spirit to a level that is beyond spirit.

Then upper and lower wisdom are one (cf. *LH YD Tzeddakah* 2:4).

Wisdom and Money

Although this world comprises the category of lower wisdom, it can be sub-divided into areas of comparatively higher and lower wisdom.

Charity is higher wisdom. Money is lower wisdom. By giving charity, we connect higher to lower wisdom.

Giving charity is comparable to the sun shining onto the moon. When the sun shines directly on the moon, the moon is full. The Jewish people is compared to the moon, receiving light from God's wisdom.

When we give charity to others, God shines His charitable light of wisdom, which is a compassionate wisdom, unto us (cf. *LH YD Tzeddakah 2:2*).

“Torah is good when combined with earning a living, for the toil of both of them leaves no room for sin” (*Pirkei Avot 2*).

We must sanctify our business by earning money ethically, with the purpose of leading a good life.

Money is a constriction of wisdom, meant to be used wisely. We take in order to give. Ultimately, we give money away as charity. This is the highest use of money.

Wisdom is hidden in money. When we are charitable, the wisdom within the money shines. When the wisdom in our money shines, we rectify our day-to-day life. Then we can receive the holy wisdom of Torah (cf. *LH HM Geviat Chov M'karka'ot, Aputki 3:2*).

That is why God commanded the children of Israel to take the wealth of Egypt with them.

Egypt represents our spiritual exile, the misguided use of our mind.

It is not enough to flee our consciousness. We must transform our consciousness. We must take along the gold and silver vessels. When we fill the mind with the light of faith and Torah, the gold and silver of Egypt shine with wisdom.

A person's sensitivity and character are his gold and silver.

These gifts are part of our character. To the degree that we are serving God with only a portion of ourselves, our service of God is diminished.

God commanded: "Request the vessels of gold and vessels of silver" (Exodus 3:22). Even if we are uncomfortable with the totality of our lives, we must bring all of ourselves to a consciousness of Him.

In the desert, part of this gold and silver was used to build the Tabernacle: the center of the service of God.

Our gifts and sensitivities will ultimately serve as the most valuable part of our connection to God.

In *Orot Hateshuvah*, Rabbi Kook teaches that a complete return to God strengthens both the soul and the body. All are tied to the wisdom of God (cf. *LH HM Geviat Chov M'karka'ot, Aputki* 3:3).

Wisdom and Tefillin

"God looked into the Torah and created the universe." The Torah that we possess, words written on a scroll, is a distillation of an immensely powerful wisdom that will only be revealed in the future, in the Messianic age.

Had Adam not sinned, he would have been able to access

that extraordinarily high wisdom. In Hebrew, the words for light–ohr–and hide–‘ohr–are almost homonymous. Adam should ideally have been clothed in God’s wisdom, in garments of light. But after the sin, God clothed Adam and Eve in garments of animal hide.

This was an act of kindness. Adam and Eve were now unfit to receive the primal wisdom of Torah. The light of Torah would have overwhelmed them and the world would have returned to a state of chaos.

So God clothed Adam and Eve in hides–He made it possible for them to use the limitations and constrictions of this world to receive His light of wisdom (cf. *LH HM Eidut* 4:4).

That is why Jewish men wear tefillin, made of animal hide, during prayer. In this garment of leather, sanctified with small scrolls that contain passages from the Torah, we draw down God’s wisdom in a graduated form.

The letters of a Torah scroll represent lower wisdom. They are vessels filled with God’s upper wisdom. Therefore, a Torah scroll possesses great holiness. God’s wisdom is synonymous with holiness.

Every individual is an incipient Torah scroll. We are filled with holy attributes, like letters on a scroll. When we receive wisdom from a teacher, we receive upper wisdom.

When we receive wisdom, our constriction is ameliorated.

Then even our environment is refreshed. The world is filled with the atmosphere of the land of Israel: an atmosphere of purity and wisdom (cf. *LH EH Pirivyah Virivyah, Ishut* 1:1).

Bestowing Wisdom

When you wish to receive something, first give to others (Talmud).

In order to receive wisdom, we bestow wisdom to others. Everyone has within himself an aspect of a spiritual master.

The greatest spiritual masters bring the greatest amount of wisdom into the world.

“God’s Presence only rests amidst a group of people” (cf. *Pirkei Avot* 3:3,7).

The Jewish tradition teaches that only when people are joined together in harmony can holiness enter among them.

We cannot gain true, balanced wisdom by ourselves. We cannot gain a level of holiness in a society to which holiness is at best irrelevant.

We must connect ourselves to others who will serve as our fellows, teachers and students.

While exposed to the stream of present-day culture, it is difficult to raise ourselves from its level of illusion.

You may wish to set aside the Sabbath as a time of meditation and withdrawal from television and radio, newspaper and telephone. You may wish to meet with others who observe the Sabbath and share with them an exposure to the wisdom of the Torah and prayer.

The more that people connect with each other in such commonality, the more powerfully do they transform their consciousness to one that is life-affirming, whole and holy, in alignment with God’s wisdom.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Rabbi Akiva commented, “This is a great principle in Torah.” The word “principle”—in Hebrew, *k’lal*—can also mean “all-inclusive.”

When all Jews—and beyond that, all people of good will—join in a spirit of amity, receiving knowledge from genuine spiritual masters and sharing that consciousness with each other, the light of wisdom that they attain can overcome the darkness.

“On that day, the sun will shine seven-fold, and the light of the moon shall be like the light of the sun” (Isaiah 30:26). The light of wisdom shall shine ever more strongly, and the lower wisdom that we can attain in this physical world shall mirror that upper wisdom.

“God clothes Himself in light” (Psalms 104:2). On that day, we too shall be clothed in light. Then we too shall be able to gaze at the wisdom immanent in all reality.

CHAPTER THREE: BINAH

The sefirah that follows Chochmah is Binah—understanding. Understanding is the continuation and evolution of Wisdom.

Chochmah is a flash of brilliance. Binah is the development of that flash as it turns into a delineated and detailed structure.

Binah is therefore an understanding of something not fully or directly perceived. It is a derivation of one matter from another. It can be described as comprehension (*Ten Keys for Understanding Human Nature*).

Chochmah is the potential intellect—co’ach mah: the strength of “mah.” “Mah” literally means “what?” Potential intellect is called “what?”, for it cannot yet be grasped.

This expands into binah: active intellect. We draw chochmah from a potential to an active state. Binah is the process of intuiting a matter from another matter (cf. *LH HM Geviat Chov M’karka’ot, Aputki 3:3*).

Only through the expanded medium of binah can chochmah be apprehended.

Simultaneously, binah is a shell that holds back the

expanding chochmah.

Chochmah is a point of light exploding in lines of blinding brilliance. As these lines expand into marvelous complexity, they form a great shell about the original point of light. This shell is the expansion and development of chochmah. It is also holding back and limiting the further unfettered expansion of chochmah.

Chochmah is the fertile seed that lies within the womb of binah.

Binah is thus the nurturer and incubator of chochmah.

And because Binah is also that which holds chochmah within itself, Binah is a manifestation of the power of holding back.

Binah is completely good, sweet and holy.

But the quality of holding back will undertake a new nature as God's energy devolves level after level.

The holding back of energy can appear as sternness and severity. Eventually, God's energy and holiness can be held back to such a degree that evil appears.

All of this is implicit in the nature of binah.

Binah and Repentance

It is from the power of binah that sin can be rectified. When one wishes to heal the etiology of a disease, one returns to its source. When we wish to heal ourselves from distance from God, we return to binah. Binah is the realm of teshuvah, repentance—literally, return.

(Of course, if you have harmed to others, you must also make restitution.)

By sinning, we have effected a change in our consciousness and in the energy of reality. A sin is not merely an event that occurred at some moment in the past. The energy of a sin is ongoing. Rectifying a sin is not merely regret over some past event. It is a remaking of energy. We can remake our past.

By healing our past, we also heal our future. We make ourselves healthier and stronger, for we have gone to the root of our illness and transformed it to health.

Sin is a form of illness. Repentance is health.

When we repent, we bring our sin to binah. At that level—healthy, sweet, maternal—the corrupted energy of sin is nurtured and healed. The energy of our sin is not wiped out but transformed, becoming positive and life-giving.

Our sin is transformed into merit.

This is the nurturing power of binah (cf. *Tomer Devorah*, notes).

Teshuvah is a return to wholesomeness, in tune with the harmony of Godliness pervading the universe. This return acts on all levels, personal and societal. It is a return to physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and moral health; a return to cultural, political and economic health. “They are all one unit, not separate from each other” (*Orot Hateshuvah* 4:3).

The Talmud teaches that we should spend all our days in repentance (Shabbat 153a). This does not mean that we spend our time in morbid guilt and anxiety. Rather, we constantly move forward. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said, “If I thought that I am now the same as I was an hour ago, I would not want to live.”

Rabbi Nachman taught that there are two levels of teshuvah.

First, one does teshuvah for having been wrong in some matter. Then one realizes that one has outgrown one's earlier teshuvah. One does teshuvah over the first teshuvah.

For example, an atheist may come to a realization of his relationship to God. This realization contains within itself a process of teshuvah over his past disconnectedness from God and joy in his new relationship.

Later, his conception of Who God is expands. As he takes on a new, more mature conception, he automatically does teshuvah on his initial concept.

Rav Kook points out that teshuvah is not simply a joyful process in which we turn our back on the past and stride forward. Teshuvah is a complex matrix involving joy and anguish, strength and weakness, clear recognition of the past while facing the present and future.

As a young person, you may have believed that at some point you would be a finished human being; that after a period of struggling, you would arrive at maturity and completion. You may continue to believe this and view with great upset any reminders that you are less than perfect—that, in some areas, you may have grown little since your childhood.

Teshuvah is the recognition that we never arrive at being a finished person. From one perspective, the need for constant growth is a burden. From another perspective, the ability for unending growth is a great opportunity.

Thus, we should spend all of our days recognizing our past, refining our present, aiming toward our future, seeing our life as part of an overreaching process illumined by Godliness.

When we spend our days in teshuvah, binah—understanding—illuminates our life. We not only return from misdeeds, but continue to come closer to God. In response to our efforts, the illumination of binah infuses our life.

Doing teshuvah is not a matter of finding our pleasant characteristics and casting aside those elements of our nature that we find disturbing. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5)—meaning, the Talmud teaches, with both your good and evil inclination.

Jungian psychology speaks of the “shadow self,” the dark side that a person must face and integrate.

Teshuvah incorporates all parts of ourselves. It embraces and transforms even that which has until now been bad. “If a person has a desire to be a murderer, let him be an animal slaughterer.”

The “evil inclination” is central to the existence of the world and to the make-up of a human being. The “evil inclination” is a powerhouse of mis- or undirected energy; when it can easily drag us after it; or else we can harness and guide it.

Teshuvah is the process of integrating ourselves so that all our disparate forces are aimed toward goodness and illumination.

How does teshuvah rectify an evil act? When we do teshuvah, we uproot that act from its root in unholiness and plant it in holiness, in binah.

This was true even of Cain, the son of Adam and the world’s first murderer. His soul itself, according to the Jewish spiritual tradition, derived from the evil influence of the serpent. Even such a person can choose good.

If Cain had done teshuvah, it would have been accepted. As

God said to him, “If you do well, will you not be uplifted?” (Genesis 4:7). “If you do well” and put yourself into the realm of teshuvah, then “will you not be uplifted?”—you will raise your soul to the level of teshuvah, where all bitterness is sweetened in its source (cf. *Tomer Devorah*, chapter 4).

With the lower, simpler level of teshuvah, we rectify our misdeeds. But with the higher level of teshuvah, we raise our soul to its source beneath the Throne of Glory.

As a general principle, the souls of the Jewish people are said to come from under God’s Throne of Glory, and whereas the souls of other nations are not hewn from such an exalted plane.

Therefore, the higher level of teshuvah would be particularly relevant for the Jews.⁴

⁴Looking at nations as a whole, we may often be appalled at their limitations. Nations can exist for thousands of years expressing tendencies to cruelty, unconnectedness to G-d, and immorality.

Entire nations act as though they are literally insane. Cultures can be swept up into ugly and enthusiastic hatred and bigotry.

Nations can seem unable to transcend their animalistic, self-serving drives. Even when such drives seem to have been eliminated, they can rise up again with frightening power.

The Jews have been consistently different. As a whole, the Jewish people has been a separate, saintly nation.

There are many inexplicable aspects of the Jewish people. For instance, they have continued to exist, even thrive, in conditions that no other nation has been able to tolerate. They have done so while maintaining a superior level of civilization in their regard for human life, a charitable spirit and a close relationship to God. They have over the millennia influenced all of humankind with their concept of “ethical monotheism.”

With eyes of flesh and blood, we cannot see soul levels and soul roots.

But when a person, Jewish or gentile, seeks God and recognizes providence, God and His providence appear in his life. When we wish to return to God, God will provide a ladder.

Understanding and Joy

Binah is found in the heart.

Binah is thus a realm of joy. “You have placed joy in my heart” (Psalms 4:8).

When our heart is joyful, it receives the Torah of chochmah–wisdom. From here, the understanding heart emanates the Torah to the following seven sefirot, like a mother nurturing her young. “She carved her pillars seven” (Proverbs 9:1). From binah, the wisdom of the Torah is drawn into the seven days of creation—that is, into the reality that can be accessed in this world. After growing in binah, the Torah permeates the universe. From binah, the Torah can enter the entirety of a person’s being, according to the seven aspects of human character (cf. *LH OH*

On the individual level, things are not as clear. There are immoral Jews and highly-evolved non-Jews.

An individual Jew can cut himself off from the source of his soul. A non-Jew can draw to himself a higher level of soul.

The non-Jew in our day who seeks an ethical relationship with man and a meaningful relationship with God is not comparable to the nations of this or, especially, previous times.

Netillat Yadayim Shacharit 4:6).

Binah: The Mothering Force

Chochmah is a fathering force—“a father in wisdom.”

Binah is a mothering force.

The Talmud speaks of women as having “binah yeteirah”—an extra measure of understanding. This is a subtle, sensitive feeling, an ability to gaze at the wholeness of reality and intuit its details and particulars (Rav Kook).

Binah is the root of the human soul (Rav Kook). Thus, it is the root of the soul’s perfection.

Binah is the river that flows from Eden (Rav Kook).

It is the ideal of how the world should be in its ultimate state of goodness, sweetness and happiness, beyond limitation, a state of freedom and completion (*Orot Hakodesh* II, p. 571).

This world of freedom is filled with song and joy (*Orot Hakodesh* II, pp. 283-4). It is a world of trust, certainty and solid action (*Orot Hakodesh* I, p. 211).

Binah is the “mother to wisdom.” Although binah comes from chochmah, binah is a mother to chochmah, for chochmah grows in binah like a child in the womb. Binah nurtures chochmah, and when chochmah matures and is born, binah sends it forward into the world: into the following seven sefirot. The heart is in the region of the breasts, which feed the growing chochmah.

The Talmud states that a mother’s milk is manufactured from blood: “[the blood] is clouded and becomes milk.”

A person’s basic life force is in the blood. “The spirit is in

the blood” (Leviticus 17:11). When we act wrongly, it is due to the energy of the blood. When we do teshuvah, we raise our blood to binah. Then our blood turns to white, to the milk of binah. Binah then nurtures chochmah, which is passed down in good measure.

Binah is a shining garment that clothes chochmah. This white garment is alluded to in the white prayer shawl, adorned with white strands, that Jewish men wrap themselves in when praying. The prayer shawl has eight strands to a corner, thirty-two in all. In Hebrew, the word heart–lev–is numerically equivalent to thirty-two.

When he prays, a man wraps himself in the white robe of the mothering, nurturing binah.

A woman has her heart and her breasts. A woman has the womb in which she mothers the developing soul. A woman is herself a vehicle of mothering, a being of binah (cf. *LH OH Tzitzit* 1).

The Mother of Life

Binah and the preceding two sefirot form a unity of the transcendent sefirot. But Binah is contiguous to levels of reality that we can begin to comprehend. Binah thus has within it a necessary tinge of constriction that later has the possibility of being converted into harshness.

But in its place, binah is the mother of all life.

Binah is the throne of glory on which God’s chochmah is seated. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that only a true man is able to sit on the throne. It takes a great deal of work to rise to

understanding. We rise to the throne of glory via teshuvah.

Teshuvah means “return.” When a person rises to binah, he has returned home. Because Binah contains the source of all souls, it is the mother of all life.

There is an idiom: to have a “Jewish heart.”

When we have a good heart, we are connected to binah. We transcend time and space. Our heart is in tune with the holy, transcendent reality.

The Talmud says that “God is called Place, for He is the Place of the world, but the world is not His place.” God’s place is in our heart. This is a state of compassion, modesty and good acts.

The Torah is the realm of God’s wisdom and modesty. The commandments of the Torah are good deeds. The two are tied together in the compassion of our heart.

“You have given joy in my heart.” In binah, we can straighten out the crookedness of the heart. Then we come to joy (cf. *LH OH Pesach* 8:7).

Binah: The Nest

“When the nest of a bird happens to be before you on the way, in any tree or on the ground, chicks or eggs, and the mother is hovering on the chicks or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the offspring. Send the mother, and take the offspring for you, so that it may be good for you and you may have length of days” (Deuteronomy 22:6-7).

The mother hovering over her offspring is binah.

Binah is transcendent, hovering. In many ways, it is

unattainable. We cannot force ourselves to that realm, no matter how fervently we desire to be holy. “Regarding that which is hidden from you, do not investigate.” And: “The glory of God is to hide a matter” (Proverbs 25:2).

But even if we cannot presently reach binah, we can be assured that binah, and with it, keter and chochmah, permeates the world. “The whole world is filled with His glory” (Isaiah 6:3).

We can reach out to holiness via learning Torah and engaging in holy acts. Although this may be filled with ulterior motives, the most uninspired and self-serving action contains some kernel of good.

The Talmud states, “Out of doing something for the wrong reason, you will come to do it for the right reason.” This statement is not only descriptive, but prescriptive. Sometimes it is unrealistic to believe that we will act in a disinterested, holy manner. We still wish others to admire us. It is enough to recognize such desires and work together with them, tolerantly and amiably.

We train a child to do good not by being intolerant to his childish self-interests but by utilizing them. It is important to guide ourselves in the same accepting spirit.

Thus, the Talmud states that “a person who gives charity in order to be saved from harm is called a righteous man.” Even if we have ulterior motives, our actions are still proper and our intent is at least in part idealistic.

We may be far from Godliness, “on the way.” But can we reach out to God through holy meditation and good acts. Torah and good deeds are the offspring of binah, the mother bird. Binah is constantly hovering over them. When we engage in them, we are

under its protection.

No matter how imperfect, our Torah learning and good deeds are still precious and redemptive. They still are drawn from and connected to binah. “From the distance, she brings her bread” (Proverbs 31:14). Even from a distance, binah brings her sustenance.

No matter how far we are from Godliness, we can return. God has instilled in the world the mechanism whereby whoever seeks Him can find Him. “He thinks thoughts so that no one be cast off from Him” (Samuel II 14:14).

Nevertheless, we are not yet ready to rise to the level of binah. “Do not take the mother with the offspring.” The offspring are the changes in character and developments in our life that have resulted from our Torah study and good deeds.

Transcending them are the hidden processes and thoughts of binah, the mother hovering over the offspring.

Our spirituality may be immature, unable to survive in our personal exile. Therefore, God helps. Binah hovers over our spirituality and protects it.

But we do not yet have any grasp of what binah is. we may not yet gaze at binah, which is the level of complete redemption, the world-to-come. “In things too high for you, do not seek.”

Therefore, we must “send away the mother.”

There are books that teach meditations employing the pronunciation of God’s holy names. Some claim that if one gazes at pages of the Zohar, one will gain great spiritual growth. Some people find a spiritual leader and believe themselves part of an exclusive club of salvation. Some believe that their study of Torah

and acts of piety automatically place them on a superior plane of being.

But short-cuts do not exist. We must value our efforts and recognize our growth even as we eschew an inflated idea of our accomplishments. Self-esteem cannot be used to mask lack of accomplishment.

We must send away the mother while taking the offspring: the Torah and good deeds that we are engaged in. In His compassion, God has sent them so that no one will be blocked from Him. They are our connection to God, to spirituality, to goodness, to the supernal mother of life, binah (cf. *LH YD Shiluach Hakein* 5:3).

Binah Amidst Constriction

When we have a holy insight, it is contained within the mind. We develop it and express it to others. Perhaps it is published. But it continues to remain in our mind.

Similarly, when binah gives forth understanding, first it develops the understanding in itself like a woman whose fetus develops within her womb. Then, after she gives birth, she nurtures the child and helps it grow.

Even as a holy concept devolves from the level of binah into this low world, binah remains with it. Therefore, when we grasp a holy concept, we connect ourselves to binah.

But in this low world, all holiness is surrounded by constrictions. Whenever we attempt to rise in holiness, we find ourselves plagued by attacks.

We may be overcome by desires that, we thought, had already been dealt with and left behind.

When we access binah, we access the constrictions that have devolved from binah. The Talmud states that “the greater a person, the greater his evil inclination.” Thus, “In sin my mother bore me” (Psalms 51:7). When the mother, binah, brings forth a holy concept, it is surrounded by constricting forces.

If we try to battle these thoughts and impulses directly, we are likely to be overcome. Instead, we must set them aside and resolutely go forward in our work—particularly, in learning Torah and in prayer.

“When the nest of a bird happens to be before you on the way” (Deuteronomy 22:6). When we are on the road of wandering and exile, we come across eggs and chicks—the immature thoughts of holiness. It is our work to raise them to God. In all areas of our life, we can act in a redemptive manner. We can help others, and we can lift ourselves out of our own morass.

“And the mother is hovering on the chicks or on the eggs.” The mother is that aspect of binah that has accompanied these lost sparks of immature holiness into their exile. It is surrounded by constrictions that are aroused by our holy and redemptive intent. If we attempt to battle them directly, we are likely to fail.

So “do not take the mother with the offspring. Send the mother.” We send away the mother—binah as she is in this plane, surrounded by constrictive forces. Instead, “take the offspring for you.” We take that spirituality and goodness that we can attain.

A bird represents words, as in the verse, “A winged being will tell a matter” (Ecclesiastes 10:20). These eggs and chicks are

our new words of Torah and prayer, which we must develop until they grow, so that our lives are filled with words of grace and understanding (cf. *LH YD Shiluach Hakein* 4:2).

Binah and the Shofar

On Rosh Hashanah, the blowing of the shofar fills our heart with joy and trembling, inspiring us to turmoil and repentance, feeling judged and yet cared for. The shofar is an expression of the cry of the heart (cf. *LH HM Shiluchin* 4:15).

“From the depths have I called You, O God” (Psalms 130:1). This psalm is recited during the ten Days of Awe, from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. From the depths of this world do we call up to God, Who is beyond time and space.

We call up to God with the shofar. The shofar represents the realm of teshuvah and binah, beyond the level of time.

The shofar is a ram’s horn. After Abraham was prepared to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, he found a ram with its horns caught in the brambles. Abraham offered up this ram instead.

Isaac represents the realm of constriction. Abraham represents the realm of freedom, from which constriction devolves.

When we blow the shofar, we reach from the world of constriction–Isaac–to the world beyond constriction–Abraham. We are blowing from our this-worldly reality to the realm of binah (cf. *LH OH Rosh Hashanah*).

The shofar is the wordless call from the world-to-come: the voice before it has been constricted into words.

The shofar is represented in the verse, “The voice is the

voice of Jacob” (Genesis 27:22). When Jacob was in conflict with his brother, Esau, Esau attempted to constrict the blessing that would flow to Jacob. But on the day that Jacob received his blessings, Isaac, his father, pronounced, “the voice is the voice of Jacob.” On this day, Esau’s constrictions did not help.

The shofar is the voice of Jacob. We rise to the source of constrictions, and there we ameliorate them. At that point, we begin to rectify the constrictions.

Binah and Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the day of atonement, the day of teshuvah. On Yom Kippur, our sins rise to the level of binah, where they are rectified.

Because Yom Kippur is on such an exalted plane, we remove ourselves from our physicality by fasting, refraining from marital relations and so forth.

On the day before Yom Kippur, we must eat. The Talmud states that it is as important to eat and drink on this day as it is to fast on Yom Kippur.

When we eat and drink, we are connected to this world. Then we raise up our physical life to the level of binah. Only when we offer the entirety of our physical life to God is our connection to binah meaningful.

When we serve God from this physical world, eating before Yom Kippur, we increase God’s honor. By raising this world to an exalted spiritual level, we attach ourselves to spiritual bliss. This is the level of fasting on Yom Kippur.

The proselyte, Ruth, represents God's honor in this world. From her came King David, who served God with song and praise—with his this-worldly being. Her mother-in-law, Naomi, represents spiritual bliss. The name Naomi comes from the root noam—bliss.

Naomi and Ruth worked together to serve God. The levels of increasing God's honor in this world and spiritual bliss in the upper worlds are inextricably linked. They are the level of eating the day before Yom Kippur and fasting on Yom Kippur.

In the days of the Beit Hamikdash, the cohen gadol would enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. It was on this level, binah, repentance, that all sufferings and judgments were ameliorated. Suffering is connected to sin and incompleteness. Forgiveness of sins is connected to the rectification of misunderstanding. From suffering, we come to sweetness; from death, we come to life.

In the future, all of reality will be on the level of Yom Kippur, binah (*LH EH Gittin* 3:5).

Now, humankind must raise God's honor from this world. In the future, God's honor will be increased without being clothed in the things of this world.

Then everything will be rectified. The Talmud teaches that on Yom Kippur, Satan is powerless. But in the future, Satan will be powerless all the time. Satan represents constriction and judgment. The future will be the realm of binah, teshuvah, when constriction and judgment no longer apply. That will be the time of an unbounded freedom (cf. *LH OH Minchah* 6:8).

Binah and Succot

Five days after Yom Kippur, we celebrate the holiday of Succot. For the seven days of this festival, we dwell in a succah, a thatched booth. The succah represents the life of the Jews in the wilderness when they were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory.

The clouds of glory were God's spiritual power manifesting itself in this world. The succah represents binah. After Yom Kippur, we are cleansed of our sins. We are like a newly-made human being. We sit inside the succah as though we are encircled within the womb.

This is the realm of the world-to-come: "There will be a succah for a shade in the day from the heat" (Isaiah 4:6). It is the realm of binah.

Succot is described primarily as a festival of rejoicing: "the time of our rejoicing" (prayerbook). Binah is the realm of joy.

We draw the joy of the world-to-come into this world. By doing so, we demonstrate that we reached the level of atonement on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Now, we rejoice in the act of sitting in the succah. The Talmud states that the greatest joy of a commandment is not in seeking a future reward but in experiencing the joy of the commandment itself. That joy of the commandment is an aspect of the world-to-come.

When we sit in the succah and rejoice, we experience the joy of the world-to-come. We are assured that our teshuvah on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur was accepted (cf. *LH HM Chezkat Karkaot* 3:9).

In the course of history, the kingdom of David—representing wholeheartedness and faith—fell. At times in our lives, our ability to rule ourselves falls; we lose faith in ourselves, in life, in God. Succot is the time of lifting up “the fallen booth of David” (Amos 9:11).

How do we pick up our shattered mood, our profound loss of esteem?

We rectify this brokenness through the energy of the embracing succah. The succah is the realm of support, sanity and insight.

In truth, everyone wants to return to wholeheartedness and wholesomeness, to the face of God. But we are battered by life, by our inadequacies, by mediocrity and failure. The glorious adventure that we thought life would be seems drained.

The realm of the succah restores our faith and reconstructs the glory of the fallen booth of King David. The realm of the succah gives us counsel and wisdom. The succah represents a wise leader, a friend and counselor who can speak to our reality.

There are two aspects of the Torah: the written and the oral. The written Torah is the core of wisdom, but it is set down—we must go to it. The oral Torah is fluid and changes in every generation. It is the level of the true wise leader who counsels every individual according to his needs.

The succah, binah, is the level of advice that we draw from the true wise counselor.

We can enter the realm of binah by attaching ourselves to wise teachers. Then we rectify the booth of David that lies smashed within ourselves (cf. *LH OH Succah* 7:5).

We leave our house, our habit, to dwell in a succah, to accept new insight. Then we can rebuild our house, for “with wisdom he builds a house.” It is out of the succah that a house can be built. “Yaacov traveled to Succot and built for himself a house” (Genesis 33:17).

The nimbus of the succah protects us from the evil and distracting influences of the world. So do we protect ourselves and others from harm, and so do we ask that God protect us from harm: “Stretch over us the succah of Your peace” (prayerbook).

When we care for others, God shows care as well. When we act towards others like a loving mother, God treats us as would a loving mother.

When a Jew falls, God’s presence is injured. When we help someone else, or when we help ourselves, we are lifting up God’s presence, “the fallen succah of David.”

Through the ring of companionship called binah, the succah, we exalts our humanity, we take refuge in God, we create community (cf. *LH HM Maakah Ush’mirat Nefesh 2*).

On Succot, we wave the lulav, the palm frond, in the six directions (the four corners of the globe and up and down). In this way, we signify our consciousness that God is everywhere and that His life force permeates all reality.

No matter where we have fallen, we can still come to God.

The palm frond, straight and firm, represents the wise counselor. When we connect ourselves to such a person, we draw down wisdom, which is transmuted into holy advice (cf. *LM OH Succah 7:5*).

Binah and Rebuke

The Torah commands us to rebuke those who are acting incorrectly: to awaken them to realize what their present is and what their state should be.

In Hebrew, the word rebuke, *tochachah*, is related to the word for “proof.” When we rebuke someone properly, we are not humiliating him. We are presenting him with a proof, a clear awareness, of his state of being and what it could be.

When we rebuke another incorrectly, from a stance of superiority and judgment, we arouse those very incorrect acts that we are admonishing.

But we can rebuke from a heightened state of sweet consciousness, where we judge others favorably and see how their sins can be turned into merits. Then, “my bundle gave forth its scent” (Song of Songs). The bundle of misdeeds that we are rebuking another for gives off a good scent.

We have shown another person the reality that transcends his way of being. We have inspired him to raise his consciousness and transform the energy of his sins to merits. We have inspired him to rise to the level of love and freedom called *binah* (cf. *LH YD Maachalei Akum* 2:8).

Binah and a Vow

We make a resolution to return to God, goodness and wholesomeness. This resolution is a vow. The vow reveals the splendor of *binah*.

The heart of every Jew yearns to purify itself in the commandments of the Torah. This is because our inner flame reaches up to the most supernal level of Godliness.

But we are lost and defeated by the mass of details of this life, and the piercing light of spirituality seems unattainable.

It is a light that is so great that we cannot even conceive of absorbing it into our life.

But when we make a resolution to do good, we have shaped a vessel for that light. This vessel is binah. When we enunciate our resolution to improve our ways, the words themselves are containers of holiness holding the endless light of God.

Our vow and intent are so exalted that they become, for ourselves, a part of the Torah. We have transformed our will into Torah, and it has risen to our volunteering heart, to the light of the Infinite One that rests in our heart. We have lifted up our heart and speech to repentance and binah (cf. *LM YD Nedarim* 3:5).

Binah and Clothing

Because binah is an enveloping force, it is related to the idea of clothing. Clothing covers up a person's nakedness. Only when they descended from holiness and gazed with eyes of flesh did Adam and Eve put on clothing. Clothing covers up the holiness that we cannot gaze at, so that we will not be drawn after physicality. Clothing creates the separation between people that allows them to communicate in brotherhood and spirituality. So does binah cover wisdom and make it accessible.

Clothing, binah, concepts, guard the inner point of truth. In

the midst of this physical world, we wrap ourselves in clothing, which indicate the world of spirituality, which is all truth, where there is no shifting ground and no falsehood. Clothes protect us from the falsehood of viewing the world as a physical phenomenon; looking at others as objects; seeing ourselves as an intelligent animal.

Then the binah in our heart is expressed in the binah that surrounds us like a garment; then we can radiate the binah of our heart into our environment (cf. *LM HM Halvaah* 1:4).

Binah and Mikvah

In the Messianic age, Isaiah prophesies, “the earth will be filled with knowledge of God like water covering the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). Even today, we can immerse ourselves in the cleansing waters of the mikvah: a body of natural, earth-centered waters.

In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, people attained ritual purity by immersing in the mikvah. Nowadays, the mikvah is used primarily by married women after their menstrual period, and by men before special occasions, such as Sabbath eve.

The mikvah represents the enveloping, healing embrace of binah. We immerse ourselves, so to speak, in God’s heart of love, and then we can attain consciousness of Him (cf. *LM YD Nidah* 1:3).

The word mikvah means not only “pool” but also “hope.” God is called the “mikvah” of Israel. He is the hope of the Jews, for they take refuge in Him. When we do not feel God’s presence, we suffer. When we attain consciousness of God, we have taken

refuge in Him, we have submerged in His waters of knowledge.

Thus, “God is the mikvah of Israel, saving Israel in a time of trouble” (Jeremiah 14:8).

When we enter the mikvah, we close our eyes. We are no longer swayed, tantalized, hypnotized by the things of this world. We are no longer distracted by nature, by this-worldly cause and effect. We can turn our heart to God.

Thus, the mikvah is the realm of binah (cf. *LM OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit* 2:1).

Mikvah is the hidden light of the world-to-come. Nothing imperfect reaches this level. Here, everything is good. Uncleanliness and depression are nullified. Separation from God comes about when the full link with God has been hidden and interrupted. When we enter the mikvah, its light illuminates all, and our uncleanness is dispersed.

Similarly, many dark areas in our lives, bad habits and ingrained addictions, gain their strength because knowledge of their source is hidden. When we immerse in compassionate understanding, our heart is soothed; our mind is illumined. We are able to draw down love for ourselves and others.

“I am first and I am last; I have created light and darkness, good and evil” (Isaiah 45:7). Only when we understand and experience that even evil draws its life-force from God—for God’s life-force permeates the universe—will evil dissolve and, as it was meant to be, become simply a constriction through which His light can be secured.

The book of Genesis teaches that the creation of water preceded the creation of the earth. The realm of understanding and

love precedes and upholds this physical existence. “The world is built on love” (Psalms 89:3).

When the waters of binah spread throughout the world, they will disperse the hidden light that was visible during the pristine first week of creation. Then all reality will be transformed, all eyes enlightened, all hearts awakened. Then, “everyone will know that You made him; and all beings understand that You made them” (prayerbook) (cf. *YD Nedarim* 2:11).

The seven days of creation encapsulate this world. The number eight represents reality beyond time and space. This is the world of binah, which is, counting from the bottom up, the eighth sefirah.

Binah and Hannukah

The holiday of Hanukah is eight days long. Each night we light candles. These candles draw down the light of binah. This is the light that existed in the Garden of Eden before the sin, a light by which one could see “from one end of the world to the other.” This light will again illumine the world in the Messianic era, when the world will be a new creation.

Even in the midst of nature and reality, we can draw down lights of transcendence. Although we do not experience the light, we can have faith in its existence. That faith is attained from exposing ourselves to the presence and teachings of great spiritual masters, who still are illumined by the light of binah (cf. *YD Kibud Rabo V'Talmidei Chachamim* 3:16).

These spiritual masters are “elders,” for they have

transcended the boundaries of this world and attained “length of days and years.” Each of their moments is a “length of days.”

It is up to us to light that flame within our environment so that the light of transcendence flickers in our everyday lives (cf. *HM Shomer S'char* 2:3).

The miracle of Hanukah took place when the Maccabees entered the destroyed Beit Hamikdash and found one cruse of oil that had remained pure. Our life might be contaminated with uncleanness, small-mindedness, entrapment within the world of details: credit cards, career, computers and modems, cable television and VCRs, warranties and accounts. Nevertheless, there is still one cruse of oil left undefiled. That cruse of clear consciousness, binah, exists within all moments. By the act of lighting the oil, we can awaken from our sleep and know that there is a higher reality that we can attain. We light the candle and tell the story of freedom and liberation in history, in our lives and in the fabric of reality (cf. *EH Kiddushin* 2:2).

The light of binah is the light of truth, love and compassion. It is possible to draw this transcendent spirit into our daily life so that the mundane necessities acquire a halo of the invisible spiritual reality within which we dwell.

If a soldier forgets that he is undergoing training, he will believe that all that exists is his present situation. But he can recall his life among his comrades. He draws down to where he is the reality of the place from which he came.

Every day, we can draw down to ourselves the light of the world of truth and compassion. In every part of our lives, there is a point that can be attached to the illumination of binah (cf. *OH*

Hashmatot L'Hanukah).

Choosing Good

Everyone has the power to choose his or her fate. But to choose wisely, we must cling in thought to the world-to-come. Our world is a world of constant choice. It is a world of darkness. We can easily confuse evil for good, falsehood for truth, war for peace.

But when we attach ourselves in thought to the world-to-come, when we attach ourselves to God and to the light of binah, we choose good. We attach ourselves to a surety, to a oneness that transcends this world of multiple paths. “Behold, I have given you today life and good...and choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

When we learn Torah, we draw the source of life from the world-to-come. Then the physicalities and limitations of this life are permeated with the understanding of the world-to-come. In all of our choices, we choose life (cf. *OH Purim* 1:2).

From the Midst of the Night

It was in the midst of the night that God raised Abraham to a knowledge beyond this world: “Look now to the heavens and count the stars.” Our sages teach that God lifted Abraham above the heavens.

“And He said to Him: So shall be your seed.”

A Jew is beyond the stars. Avraham was naturally barren. But, in the words of our sages, “God told Avraham, ‘Leave your

astrology'; and He lifted him above the heavens"—above nature.

The exodus from Egypt too took place in the midst of the night. The night was set ablaze by the pillar of fire—and the processes of nature were nullified by God's miracles and providence (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit* 2:4).

The Talmud teaches that every midnight, the north wind would blow upon the strings of a harp that hung above King David's bed. King David would then arise and serve God.

When the Jews were saved at midnight, that was an act of God. When King David arose, that was an act of his own volition.

In the midst of darkness, we can be woken by the northern wind blowing upon the harp.

From the north comes both wealth and war: spiritual wealth and our battle within this world. The harp is our heart. In the middle of the night, our heart can ring with the chords of an awakened state. Then, even while others are asleep, we can learn God's Torah and attach ourselves to Him in prayer.

This freedom, this sweetness, this supernatural extension in the midst of oppression and sleep, is the realm of liberation, truth, compassion, understanding and the world-to-come. It is the gift of binah, the companionship of God, the mothering of His compassion, the womb from which all life comes, the well from which all living waters flow, the thread of light which glows within the warp of every place and time. Binah is the comfort of our lives, our consolation when we are lost, our refuge when we wish to despair, an ever-loving mother. Binah is Rachel upon the road to Jerusalem crying for her children, remaining with them in their exile (cf. *EH Yibum* 3:7). "A voice in Ramah is heard...Rachel

weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted....The Lord declares: Do not sob and do not weep: there is a reward for your effort, and your children shall return” (Jeremiah 31:15-16).

CHAPTER FOUR: DAAT

Keter, chochmah and binah constitute a class of transcendental sefirot. Before God's energy descends into sefirot more directly linked to our reality, it passes through an intermediate phase. This is called Daat—knowledge or consciousness. It might also be called perception (Kantor) or connection (Kaplan).

Daat is in a sense the flip side of keter. Keter is a supernal light and state of being beyond perception. Daat is the first balanced fullness of keter after its original impulse has been developed by the complementary energies of Chochmah and Binah. Daat is thus a blending of chochmah and Binah. And daat is the new self-expression of keter.

It is the expression of that which has until now been uncommunicated (*Innerspace*, p. 52).

In the schemata of the sefirot, there are always ten: “ten and not nine, ten and not eleven” (*Sefer Hayetzirah*). When keter is counted as the first sefirah, daat is not counted. When daat is counted as a sefirah, keter is not counted.

Daat is the actualization of keter, the knowledge of God's presence in all of creation. "You have been shown to *know* that the Lord is God." The name "Lord" (the Tetragrammaton) indicates God Who is beyond nature. The name "God" (*Elokim*) indicates the Divine presence acting within nature.

When we awaken to see the beauty of God in a leaf trembling upon a tree, in the golden dust of sunlight, our consciousness is rectified. Then we are removed from sin. "A person only sins when a spirit of foolishness has entered into him" (cf. *YD Nedarim*).

Daat is the conduit to keter. It is remembrance. Even when we do not feel Godliness, we can remember. Daat connects the life of this world to the transcending reality within this world. Daat allows us to be children of God and students of His illumination (cf. *YD Melamdin 2*).

Daat is the giving over in love of our inner being. "Adam knew Eve" (Genesis 4:1). Daat is connecting with another on a profound level. It is a uniting of forces which are then linked to the invisible point of origin, keter.

This connection rises very high—for it is in reality keter—and it goes very low as well. From every point, we can connect to God. "If I go up to the heavens, there You are; if I make my place in Sheol, You are there" (Psalms 139:8). Daat comprises both knowledge and faith, since faith too is a lens of knowledge of God (cf. *OH Kriyat Hatorah 6:11*).

Daat and the Beit Hamikdash

Because daat is a raising of consciousness so that we see Godliness in the world, it is a vehicle of love and mercy. It is the gateway to binah, the world of “length of days.”

In the past, the confluence of heaven and earth existed in Jerusalem: the Beit Hamikdash. There the judges interpreted the Torah, and in the most physical of rituals—animal sacrifice—the Jews transformed, so to speak, God’s non-physical will.

The Beit Hamikdash exemplified the unity between the spiritual and the physical. The sages stated, “When a person has daat, it is as though the Beit Hamikdash were built in his day.” When a person has daat, he builds his own personal beit hamikdash—a “small sanctuary” (Ezekiel 11:16). Wherever he goes, the light of that sanctuary shines. He is illumined by the heavenly Beit Hamikdash that has yet to descend upon the earth (cf. *YD Shiluach Hakein* 5:14).

The holiest part of the Beit Hamikdash, the Holy of Holies, contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments: the essence of the Torah. The Torah—the illumination of the daat of Moses—is the means of knowing God and His will (cf. *YD Nedarim* 4:5).

Our senses are symbolized by the seven orifices: eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth. The seven-branched menorah of the Beit Hamikdash represents the illumination of the human senses (cf. *Pidyon Petter Chamor* 3:4).

The walls of the Beit Hamikdash represent the walls of daat, a holy consciousness guarding against this-worldly desires (cf. *OH Tzitzit* 5:6)

The Beit Hamikdash was built with walls of holiness, which contain the holy consciousness. These walls are drawn from the level of silence. Our sages taught, “Silence is a fence to wisdom” (*Pirkei Avot* 3:17).

Not only the painful but also the joyful must be received with internal silence. Our mind must be stilled, our thoughts erased. The universe was made with wisdom. But we cannot receive this blazing wisdom unless we create filters. These filters are silence. With interior silence, we can welcome God’s light into our consciousness and know Him. This silence is the wall of the Beit Hamikdash.

From the Beit Hamikdash, Godly knowledge streams out to the world. “Isaiah” Similarly, when we attain daat through the walls of silence, our daat spreads to others.

But if our daat is surrounded by a wall of silence, how can we reach it? There is an entrance to this daat. This entrance is faith.

The entrance must be well-protected, for when we open ourselves to that which is greater than ourselves, we are subject to doubt. The guardian of holiness is the Torah, daat. On the doorpost, we place a mezuzah, a parchment on which is written a section from the Torah: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (cf. *HM Shutfim Bikarka* 5:5).

Even a very holy person must maintain these walls of silence. Even when we grow in holiness, we must do so within the walls of silence, the boundaries of our mind. If we overstep the bounds, we can become unbalanced and foolish. The quest for God must be guided by normality and regulation. As Rabbi Nachman

taught, “One need not be clever. On the other hand, one must not be a fool” (cf. *YD Dagim* 1:1).

The walls about our daat are walls of Torah. The Torah is a filter, a means of accessing Godly consciousness. One reason for this is that the Torah is built upon faith, as in the verse, “All Your commandments are faith.” And faith is called a wall, as in the verse, “I am a wall”—strong in faith like a wall (Rashi) (cf. *YD Tolaim* 4:2).

Knowledge and Faith

Because daat is knowledge of the unknowable keter, it is an acknowledgement that we cannot truly understand. The true understanding of God’s reality will be attained only with the coming of the Messiah. Then, via the Torah, which is daat, the light of keter shall shine upon us.

At that time, knowledge and faith will be bound together.

Knowledge is the path of the intellect. It sees a great deal with clarity, but it cannot see past the darkness. Faith is the path of the heart. It may not see very clearly, but even in the darkness it yearns for the light to come.

Moses represents the path of knowledge. King David represents the path of faith. Our sages teach that on the night of the exodus, Moses did not know the exact moment of midnight, of liberation. Yet King David knew the exact moment of midnight, and then he would arise and serve God. Perhaps this is because Moses operated on the basis of knowledge and could not perceive the greatness of mercy that would operate in the midst of the

darkness. But King David, author of Psalms, man of the heart, felt that at the very point of darkness is hidden the joyful song to God and the law of God.

The intellectual is like the sun, shining with the light of Torah. The man of faith is like the moon, reflecting the light of faith; and, like the moon, his faith can wax and wane.

The intellectual rises up to God's light, but sometimes his intellect outruns his faith and goodness. The man of faith maintains his connection to God even when he sees only darkness.

Every individual contains within himself aspects of an intellectual and a man of faith.

The Messiah will draw down the light of keter. Then our intellect and faith will be united. We will see God's light and know not to overrun our boundaries but, at the edge of our limitations, to rely on faith.

When Adam sinned, he damaged his consciousness. The shining of keter upon intellect and faith will rectify that damage. Because Adam contains within himself intellect and faith, his name is the acronym of Adam Moses David.

Every individual can begin to bring down the light of keter and to spread the awareness of daat. We do this when we link our observance of the Torah–daat–to joy: “In joy shall you come out” (cf. *OH Nefilat Apayim* 4:24).

We can have daat only when we have faith in a reality greater than we can perceive. Faith is the ability to clarify our mind, to see beyond our prejudices, to free ourselves of our personal needs. This is another reason that a Jew puts a mezuzah at the entrance to his or her house. A person's home, the center of

his being, is his daat. The only way to enter that daat is via the creed of faith written on the mezuah parchment: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.”

Faith is the imaging of what we cannot understand. We can only enter the home of the mind through imagination. Throughout the day, our imagination is bombarded by a myriad of self-interested and exploitative forces: advertisements, television, magazines. We are manipulated with sexual images and demagogic statements. A dazzling and hypnotic technology absorbs our time and fascinates our mind. The first step in freeing ourselves is to redirect our imagination. When we sanctify the entrance to our home, we are able to enter. We have aligned our this-worldly imaginative faculties with holy consciousness (cf. *YD Sefer Torah* 4:16).

The more faith we have the more can our daat grow. And the more daat we attain, the more faith do we attain, the more do we realize how much is beyond our boundaries. “The end purpose of knowing is to realize that one knows nothing at all.”

The road to achieving such consciousness and faith is learning Torah and serving God (cf. *YD Cheilev Vedam* 4:2).

Daat and Torah, Daat within Ourselves

Daat is in the mind. But to be truly realized, it must be drawn into the heart, as in the verse, “You should know today and place it in your heart.” Then the flame of free will burn in our heart. When we sense the presence of God, we are raised beyond the addictions of this world. We are connected to free will.

This daat must be given shape and direction by our connection to Torah (cf. *HM Gezeilah* 5:29). The Torah itself is a manifestation of daat, for it is called “the beginning of daat” (cf. *HM Hefker V’nihsei hageir* 3:1). Torah is the repository of light of prophecy, the light of day (*OH Chol Hamoed* 4:9).

The Torah (the Kabbalists teach) consists of the name of God. When we speak the words of Torah, we draw Godly consciousness upon ourselves. Then we can know that God’s being is clothed even in the most hidden places. The hiddenness is transformed into light, revelation and daat.

When we learn Jewish law, we are directly developing our daat (cf. *YD Cheilev Vedam* 4:2). The books of Jewish law reconcile varying opinions. When we study them, we achieve peace and reconciliation within ourselves. We are then able to reply to the questioning spirit within our heart (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 3:2).

“Great is study, for it leads to action.” When we are connected to the Torah, we draw daat from our heart into all of our acts by carrying out the mitzvot (cf. *OH Yom Hakippurim* 2:3).

The written Torah is incomplete without its counterpart, the oral Torah: learning from a teacher. We cannot lift ourselves from the quagmire of our lives in isolation. A person with even the most magnificent potential is fooling himself if he believes that he can develop his spirituality alone or in opposition to others. We must search for friends, family and teachers with all our strength; we must sacrifice a great deal to attain them, for they comprise the essence of our spiritual success (cf. *EH Yibum* 3:21).

Belief in and subjugation to a wise teacher rectifies our daat,

for we open ourselves up to a daat greater than our own. These teachers give specific advice for our soul. This is the essence of the oral Torah, for all of the Torah's mitzvot are called "good advice" (cf. *YD Shechitah* 5:2).

Daat and This World

When we are trapped within time, we see the world running according to natural process. We see that things can change only gradually. We feel trapped in circumstance like an insect in amber. As a result, we stray from God. But when we are inspired with a broader vision, a new enthusiasm, we can again strive for the ideal self-revelation of our soul (cf. *YD Milah* 4:2).

Through meditative concentration on God, we draw our awareness of Him into this world. Then all that is stale, tired, dusty, hopeless and worn-out is given new life (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit*).

When our daat rises, we are liable to fall into great errors and stray from the path of God. Thus, the greater our recognition of God's greatness, the more must we draw daat into our heart. More, we must draw daat into our body. We must ask, "Is my heart complete with God? Are my actions in accordance with my wisdom? Are my body's desires nullified before God?"

Filled with a great awareness of Divine presence, of a joyful reality, many people on the spiritual path lose sight of their limitations. Not drawing daat into their heart, they grow egotistical. Not drawing daat into their bodies, they engage in unprincipled behavior.

How much more beautiful is the person who leads an uninflated life, his actions decent and integrated, his heart calm, his mind open to God. Such a person is like the etrog used during Succot, an object used to serve God in action. Such a person is freed of the restraints of his limited consciousness (cf. *OH Yom Hakippurim* 2:3).

Just as water seeks the lowest level, so does daat dwell with a person who is not grandiose. The Talmud states that the Torah can only be acquired by a person who is humble. Thus, Moses, the paradigm of daat, is described as “the most humble of men” (Numbers 12:3) (cf. *YD Mikvaot* 1:2).

Connecting the World to Daat

Daat connects us to the ineffable. It is a halo of consciousness, for it can only surround and not be limited by our physicality. This is why Moses’ face shone after he received the tablets from Mt. Sinai. His face shone with the halo of daat. When we are connected in our mind, heart and hands to daat, we can transform the things of this world to a sphere that transcends time and space.

An animal cannot have a halo. It can only have horns. On Rosh Hashanah, we take the horn of a ram—the Jubilee horn, the horn of freedom. With it, we declare our psychological and spiritual freedom. We offer physicality up to God (cf. *OH Rosh Hashanah* 5:6).

Awe

An animal fears the things of this world. A man can lift that fear and realize an awe of God. When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn was imprisoned on false charges by the Russian government, a prison official pointed a pistol at him. Rabbi Schneersohn responded, “You are afraid of that toy because you have one world and many gods. But I am not afraid of that toy because I have one God and two worlds.” When our daat and awe are developed, we are not fearful (cf. *YD Bechor Beheimah Tehorah* 4:4).

When we are connected to the Torah, we draw down the daat that “The Lord is God.” Then we chase away the spirit of foolishness, the animalistic state of stale custom, the habit of wrong-doing that separates us from Godliness. This awakened state is awe (cf. *OH Pesach* 9:24). Although the ultimate revelation of daat is love, the beginning of the revelation must be awe (cf. *OH Sefirat Ha’omer* 2:3).

Daat and Joy

Knowing that “The Lord is God” represents the acme of joy. In such a state, we see with illumined eyes. We see that all that happens in the world is ordered and patterned, that everything, no matter how painful, is for the good (cf. *YD Kilei Hakerem* 2:5).

This was the state that humanity was supposed to have attained immediately. But by eating of the fruit of the tree of good and evil, Adam attained a consciousness that there is a difference

between good and evil.

In the future, our sages teach, people will make the same blessing on both good and bad events: we will realize that they are both phenomena of the same compassionate God. This daat is a transcendence beyond our own measure. It is an absorption into the light of the infinite Creator (cf. *YD Kilei Hakerem* 2:3).

Daat and Compassion

Because daat is a transcendent level of compassion, we can emulate and attain it by our own transcendent act of compassion, which is charity. When we give to a poor person, we activate our daat and awakens the other's daat as well, for we take him from a consciousness of poverty to a consciousness of wealth (cf. *HM Geviat Malveh* 2). Charity saves us from becoming dead to our spiritual nature: "Charity saves from death" (Proverbs 10:2) (cf. *YD Matnot Kehunah* 1:1).

Daat is itself compassion. It is the amelioration of all strict judgment. It is the revelation of God's presence in the most painful, degraded, hopeless situations (cf. *YD Tolaim* 4:9). It is the illumination of others so that they are able to leave behind their self-destructive behavior, their transgressions against the principles of health and life (cf. *YD Ever Min Hachai* 2:1).

From God's point of view, our suffering may be a form of compassion, since He sees things that we cannot. But we ask that He put compassion into our hearts and hands, as we understand it. When God's daat clarifies our eyes, we can see His presence. We no longer need to be rebuked with pain (cf. *OH Eiruvei Techumin*

3:1).

Daat, Night and Day

When we do not sense the existence of God, when we believe rather in nature, our daat has been removed. We are asleep, in a state of night and darkness. Day represents the light of God: “God is my light and savior” (Psalms 27). God is compared to the sun: “The Lord God is a sun and shield” (Psalms 84:12).

The Baal Shem Tov taught that even when a wisp of straw falls from a wagon filled with hay, God has decreed exactly where that straw will fall. Once, the Baal Shem Tov told his students to pick up a leaf lying on the ground. They saw a worm crawling under it. The Baal Shem Tov said that the worm had been harmed by the heat of day, so the leaf fell on it to give it shade (*Raza D’uvda*). When we know that behind the machinations of nature rules God’s providence, we have accessed light.

When we do not see this light, we dwell in exile. Because our mind and heart are asleep, our actions are unenlightened.

When a Jew awakens in the morning, he or she washes his hands. This water represents daat: “the earth will be filled with knowledge of God like water covering the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

How can we begin to awaken? We can transform the sleep itself into holiness. We can acknowledge, “I know nothing, I am asleep. And thus I open myself to a daat greater than myself.” Being open to a greater paradigm of holiness is faith.

Through sleep, we enter the realm of faith. When we are overcome with problems, with questions that cannot be answered,

we are overwhelmed. The best we can do is to remove our mind. Then we are open to a daat greater than our own (*OH Hashkamat Haboker* 3:2). Night is the time of judgment and constraint. Then we sleep. We remove our daat, and this allows our mind to be refreshed. When we awaken, we are transformed, for our mind is new. Even our physical self is strengthened (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit* 3:2).

It is only in the darkness that we can develop faith. Only then can we leap to God (cf. *YD Bechor Beheimah Tehorah* 3:7).

Only in lack of knowledge, in the vacated state of confusion, can we come to knowledge. If the world were only filled with clarity, there would be no room for faith and thus no room for free will and pride in our accomplishments. Even before He created the world, God created faith (cf. *OH Tefillin* 5:32).

Day represents daat; night represents faith. With our faith, we illuminate the night. This is why the prophet says that in the Messianic era, night will shine like day “verse.” The two will be as one: we must fill our night with daat and our day with faith (cf. *OH Birkat Hashachar* 5:30).

The Baal Shem Tov taught that “in all that you see, remember God. If you love, remember the love of God. If you fear, remember the fear of God. Even before going to the bathroom, think, ‘I am separating bad from good.’...And when going to sleep, think, ‘My consciousness is going to the Holy One, blessed be He’” (*Tzavaat Harivash* 22).

When we awake, we wash our hands with the water of knowledge that pours down from binah, understanding. Our pains are alleviated, for troubles are a result of a lack of daat. We are

purified, for daat is purity (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit* 2:21).

We wash our hands because it is with the action of our hands that we bring holiness into the world. Even in the womb, the patriarch Jacob “grasped the heel of Esau.” The hands are called faith, as in the verse, “His hands were faithful” (Exodus 17:12). Through correct action in this world, we actualize our faith (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 5:6).

Midnight is the point at which darkness can be infused with light. At midnight, God delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. The exodus was a demonstration of God’s providence. At that time, nature was nullified. God’s demonstration of miracles was an infusion into the world of the world-to-come.

During the tenth plague, the killing of the Egyptian first-born, the first-born of Israel were saved. The first-born represent daat. When the limiting, idolatrous consciousness of Egypt is destroyed, the consciousness of Israel is liberated. Egypt represents reliance on this-worldly forces, belief in the supremacy of nature. But God, daat and the children of Israel are above nature. All who cling to God transcend the rules of this world (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit* 2:4).

At that time, the children of Israel removed their limited consciousness in order to be open to daat. They had to receive God’s revelation with faith. The waters of daat split before the Jews, and they walked on dry land with faith (cf. *OH Pesach* 7:19).

Imagination

Imagination properly directed is faith, the vessel of daat. It is the tool we use when we lack knowledge.

No thought can grasp God. But we can draw consciousness of God into ourselves through prayer, song and praise, imaging God's greatness and compassion. In this way, we make ourselves vessels for the knowledge of God (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim* 4:3).

Daat characterizes a human being (cf. *HM Sheailah* 1:5). An animal has only the spirit of imagination: it can only perceive things of this world. But a man can soar beyond the constraints of his condition. He can see that which is not before him. He can see beyond his condition to freedom. He can see beyond the physical to Godliness (cf. *YD Treifot* 2:1).

When we lose our connection with daat, we descend to a more animalistic level. We can descend to the level of sin. The overpowering presence of this world, its physical wealth, can make us lose our connection to daat. Our emotional and physical drives can overwhelm us, causing us to slip away from a consciousness of God. We can fall into a spiritual torpor. This is the level of the six workdays of the week.

The Sabbath, on the other hand, is wed to God. On that day, we can awaken from our sleep and return to God. The Torah instructs us to remember the Sabbath even during the week. It is our job to draw down the daat of the Sabbath into our mundane, complex and confusing lives (cf. *OH Shabbat* 3:7).

Memory, This World

Our life is a trial of memory: guarding the memory of the world-to-come that we once experienced. To have Godly consciousness in heaven is no great achievement: it is like lighting a floodlight on a sunny day. Our work is to attain this enlightenment in the darkness of this-worldly life.

Such a consciousness is the level of the Torah. The Talmud teaches that when a child is in the womb, an angel teaches it the entire Torah. At the time of birth, the angel strikes the child, causing the child to forget what it learned. So why did the angel teach the child in the first place? Commentators say that a residue of memory remains. This residue gives the child the ability later on to learn Torah.

The Torah taught in heaven is infinite. Here on earth, it is expressed in a finite form: a parchment, letters of ink. The Torah is a soul encased in a body. We, as souls in bodies, connect to the Torah.

The nature of this world is constriction and forgetfulness. We work to attain the infinite and Godly consciousness from our physicality and forgetfulness.

This is why God created the world: so that we would reach Him from our physicality. This achievement represents His glory (cf. *OH Birkat Hapeirot* 3:6).

The physicality of this world is represented by the six workdays of the week. During these days, we clarify the good from the bad in and around ourselves. We clarify what is right and wrong, true and false, genuine and counterfeit. In doing so, we lift sparks of holiness scattered in all things and gather them within ourselves.

The Talmud teaches that “a prisoner cannot free himself.” When we are caught in this world, we free ourselves via the Sabbath. It is from the Sabbath that the six work days are blessed. The Sabbath is our inner rest, the calmness of consciousness, as in the verse, “On tranquil waters He will guide me” (Psalms 23:2). The Sabbath is a wise, true elder whose consciousness is tranquil and who no longer wars with his thoughts (cf. *OH Tefillin* 6:33).

The Sabbath is like the world-to-come, transcending time.

It can be reached via faith. Faith opens us to knowledge, daat, beyond our boundaries.

Then we pour this inner freedom into all aspects of our lives, into the six workdays. We are not tied after the desires of this world, its vanities and pains, which are contained within the matrix of time.

This is freedom from slavery.

Similarly, in Torah law, a Jew who sold himself into slavery would work for six years and on the seventh year go free. The six years represent the six workdays. The seventh year is the Sabbath, the world-to-come (cf. *YD Milah* 4:13). Guarding our memory means that we overcome our lethargy, illusion and flawed imagination. It means that we cling in thought to the world-to-come. We are aware that the Divine life force permeates everything. The Baal Shem Tov taught that “the life force of all physical things is a portion of supernal Godliness” (*Tzavaat Harivash* 90) (cf. *YD Reishit Hagaz* 2).

Seeing Holiness in All Things

When we know that God created something, our consciousness draws holiness into that object and liberates the holiness that was hidden in it. God originally constricted His holiness until the universe could appear. When our daat is raised and we see holiness in all things, we liberate the hidden holiness.

The essence of holiness is to know that everything is from God. God Himself is called “holy.”

“Without daat, a nefesh is not good.” Only with the attainment of daat do we attain true goodness (cf. *OH Beit Hak’neset* 1).

We draw this holy consciousness down via the Torah, which is the name of God. Our name is a constricted representation of who we are. The Torah is a constricted expression of God. When we study Torah, we connect to God’s life force, which is a tree of life. Then we draw that life force into this world.

With daat, we realize that God is found even in hiddenness. Through that realization, the hiddenness turns into daat. And when we reveal that, we illumine not only ourselves but others (cf. *EH Gittin* 1).

Daat and the Animal Spirit

Being a human being is daat. Being an animal is the level of foolishness. In serving God, both these levels are needed. Daat is reaching out to God. The animal level is holding back, not breaking beyond our boundaries. We recognize our lack of daat in the face of God’s reality.

Then we can be open before God’s daat. And we are able

to accept in a balanced way the direction of a spiritual master—we do not egotistically reject direction nor do we meekly accept improper guidance. When we quiet our inner voices, we are open to our inner self. We can accept a teacher’s constructive words (cf. *HM Chezkat Metaltelim* 4:6).

When we set aside the drives that are inflated by a superficial culture, we look at the naked truth. This is faith, which is so integrally connected to daat.

Now we are able to accept the words of a spiritual master. This is possible even if we have not perfected our consciousness (cf. *OH Kriyat Sh’ma* 4:5).

Making ourselves as simple as an animal is a high level of daat. As King David stated, “I have been like an animal with You” (Psalms 73:22). It is the means of receiving daat. The Talmud teaches, “The Torah remains only with a person who makes himself as though he doesn’t know.”

At every point that we receive a new level of daat, we remind ourselves that we still doesn’t know anything. Because we do not confine ourselves with our own limitations, we continue to receive new levels of consciousness.

In this way, the simplicity of being like an animal opens us up to consciousness of God. Such a consciousness is the true definition of a human being (cf. *HM Pikadon* 4:4).

Wealth

Through daat, a person receives both spiritual and physical wealth. As the sages stated, “If you lack daat, what have you acquired? If you have acquired daat, what do you lack?” (Nedarim 41).

Daat is the root of plenty, as in the verse, “In daat, rooms are filled” (Proverbs 24:4). True wealth is not money, but the proper use of that money—specifically, for charity. A wealthy household filled with empty values and bitterness is not wealthy. Ideally, we serve God out of all aspects of wealth: emotional, spiritual, happiness, good relationships, and, as well, physical wealth (cf. *HM Aveidah Um'tziah* 1:13). Wealth is analogous to the manna that the children of Israel ate in the wilderness (cf. *YD Hechsher Keilim* 3:2). We transform our food into manna. We transform money into daat (cf. *EH Ones Um'fateh*).

Strife

Godly daat is the level of peace. With daat, we are in harmony with God’s will, which is peace.

But there is a higher level of daat: strife for the sake of heaven. Sometimes opposites cannot be reconciled; a dialectic must be maintained. This is like marriage: a man and woman are opposites. They do not combine into one being but maintain the tension of their individuality and balance each other.

The Talmud sometimes comments regarding two opposing opinions: “These and those are the words of the living God.” The paradigm of differing authorities was Hillel and Shammai, who, the Talmud teaches, were very close to each other (cf. *EH Yibum* 2:5).

Daat is the balance of right and left, day and night, chochmah and binah. It balances the tendencies of tenderness and strictness.

People often seek uniformity of belief. But there is a higher level of Godly consciousness: the awareness that there are many different, sometimes opposing forces. These forces must battle with each other. Although there is strife, this is a strife that heals. Strife between parent and child helps the child grow into newer responsibilities and can also help the parents grow. Strife between friends and couples helps them mature. The strife within a person helps him see deeper aspects of reality and his own being. The ability to disagree is a necessary precursor to the ability to reconcile. And on the contrary, the desire to crush disharmony can lead to hate, which is the opposite of daat (cf. *HM Geviat Malveh* 2).

Food

Adam's eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge represents an internalization of passions. It is perhaps analogous to the process of becoming an adult. After the purity of childhood and the idealism of adolescence, we come to terms with our limitations. Often, we compromise with flesh: we cannot maintain the burning idealism of our younger years, when we thought that we could reach the greatest heights by virtue of our will. This "realism" involves a giving up of our earlier dreams. We capitulates to triviality and mediocrity (cf. *YD Nidah* 2:24).

Now everything is confused: the spiritual and the physical,

the human and the animalistic, clarity and trauma (cf. *YD Treifot* 2:1). And our relationship to the world has changed as well. We no longer see the world “charged with the grandeur of God” (Hopkins). Instead, we are dragged down by the world, its obligations, its weariness: “In the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread” (Genesis 3:19).

We lift ourselves ourselves from this morass by connecting ourselves to God. When, for instance, we make a blessing on food, we elevate the food to the level of the fruit of the tree of life. The food becomes a conduit of daat.

By making a blessing on food, we transform it into the manna that fell from heaven. Our eating is connected to our personal exodus from bondage (cf. *OH Betziat Hapat* 3:2).

It is said of a great Hasidic teacher that whereas most people make a blessing on food in order to eat, he would eat in order to be able to make a blessing. When we eat in holiness, we eat in order to serve God. When Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, he confused good and evil. He could no longer think straight; he was able to fool himself.

When we eat food in a holy manner, we clarify our human spirit from our animal nature, our good from evil. Therefore, we should eat in joy, for we are connecting our consciousness to a joyful reality (cf. *OH Betziat Hapat* 3:2 and *YD Treifot* 2:1).

Daat and Sexuality

The most physical aspect of man is denoted by his sexual nature. When a person is ruled by his sexuality, his daat is flawed. The first ceremony that a Jewish male takes part in, initiating him to the community of Israel, is circumcision: the sanctification of his sexual organ. One demonstrates that the most physical part of one's being will act as an expression of Godliness. Thus, the Torah calls circumcision a covenant with God.

The Torah tells us that a person must also circumcise his heart. This is because daat rests in the heart. There is an integral connection between how we sanctify our sexual urge and how we allow daat to spread through our heart (cf. *YD Milah* 2:3).

Daat is a screen against physical passion. Daat is prayer; it is also compassion. Prayer connects us to God; compassion is the gift of God. When we open ourselves to God through prayer, we attain a spiritual consciousness, which comprises His compassion. God's compassion is the consciousness that allows us not to be trapped by our physical urges (cf. *EH Ishut* 2:1).

Similarly, when we hold ourselves back from committing sexual transgressions, we keep our daat pure (*YD Treifot* 3).

Daat and Marriage

“It is not good for a man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). The human male represents truth. Truth alone cannot prosper, for we cannot achieve truth without the aid of faith. The human female represents faith. When a man and woman join together, they join truth and faith. From their union comes a consummated knowledge of Godliness: daat (cf. *YD Ribit* 5:22).

This daat must be drawn into the world. That is why a man and woman have children. Their children are an expression of daat. They are the new generation, which spreads God's daat throughout the world (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker 5:10*).

In the End of Days

In the end of days, Ezekiel teaches, a trickle of water, the water of daat, will well from the Beit Hamikdash, the storehouse of daat. The stream will grow gradually until it is a great river. With the flowing of this river, a great song will resound throughout the world, a song from which will flow the essence of joy. This will be the joy of fulfillment, the joy of knowledge, the joy of seeing and knowing the latticework of reality of which this-worldly existence is only a part. It will be a joy of a higher consciousness; a joy of awareness of cause and effect; a joy of awareness of God's presence, of incipient goodness, of the life force that flows like a river throughout all creation: throughout the night sky, the anemone and the nebula, the mountain range, a strand of hair. It will be a joy that permeates our physicality so that our limbs all praise God, so that we experience the burbling of the river as clapping its hands in homage to the spirit of Divinity. It will be the transformation of existence into shimmering, tremulous life force; the transformation of physical light into spiritual brilliance. It will be the transformation of the mind, heart and hands. It will be consummation and not abnegation; self-nullification but not self-immolation. It will be the current of Godly consciousness flowing throughout our normal life. It will be the realization that "the Lord

is God”; “there is none other but He.” The incipient visions of a thousand visionaries will be actualized, so that they become the fabric of reality. The transformation of daat will not be the transformation of individuals’ view of reality. It will be the transformation of reality itself.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHESED

The propulsion of chochmah and binah into a more easily grasped state of consciousness brings them to love. This is the sefirah of chesed. God lovingly pours sweetness into our heart, and we are impelled to pour forth love to God and to others.

When our heart is filled with love for God, we devote ourselves to serving Him without distraction. We yearn to cling to Him in divine worship. “My soul has thirsted for You, my flesh has yearned for You” (Psalms 63:2). Even if God treats us harshly, we return to Him as one returns to one’s lover.

“Beloved of my soul, compassionate Father,
Draw Your servant to Your will,
May Your servant run like a deer,
Bow before Your glory,
For Your friendship is sweeter to him
Than the honey comb and all delicacies” (*Yedid Nefesh*).

Nothing matches this. We are entranced. In all that we see and do, our mind and body resonate with this fervent love.

We are aflame, impassioned, raptured. Even in suffering, we feel God's love course through our being, branching through our body and filling us with ever greater awakening. We regard the suffering itself as God's love. "Beloved are the blows of a friend" (Proverbs 27:5).

The Torah admonishes us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your...might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). The word "might"—*m'od*—is related to *midah*—measurement—which is another word for *sefirah*. All the *sefirot* are enveloped in *chesed*. All of our being is enveloped in this great love.

The Talmudic sage, Nachum was called Nachum Gam Zu—Nachum "This Too." Whenever he suffered, he would state, "Gam zu l'tovah"—"this too is for the good." Whatever would befall him in this physical world, he would raise and suffuse with goodness. He incorporated his suffering into sublime love. Thus, he liberated suffering and placed it within mercy.

Emulating Chesed

When doing good to others, we should cling to God's pouring forth love. The Zohar states, "Who is loving? He who is loving in relation to his Creator." In giving love to others, we give love to God. By giving love to God, we channel His energy through the *sefirot* in a way that softens severity.

The first love we show an infant is to assist in its delivery

and to feed it. When we do so in a state of clinging to Godly love, we effect an spiritual birth in the realm of the sefirot.

On the eighth day after its birth, a Jewish boy is circumcised. On the spiritual level, there is a shell that hides God's light. When the infant is circumcised, disfiguring "foreskin" in the spiritual realm is removed. This allows God's energy to flow into the world and circumcise people's hearts. Then they return to God.

Another expression of loving activity is visiting and healing the sick. God's presence in this world is in exile, sick with longing for the redemption, for the unification of this world with His will: "I am sick with love" (Song of Songs 2:5). Through this-worldly actions, human beings rectify the spiritual imbalance and unite this presence with God. "Sustain me with dainty cakes" (Song of Songs 2:5). The word for dainty cakes is *ashishot*, a combination of *ish* (man) and *ishah* (woman). By properly combining male and female energies, love and containment, we provide a conduit for God's love to pour through the ten sefirot and rectify all things in heaven and earth.

We give charity to the poor. In the heavenly worlds, this mirrors the pouring down of Godly energy.

We extend hospitality to guests. When we feed our guests, we so to speak cause the sefirot to be fed. "I have come to my garden....I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey" (Song of Songs 5:1).

The dead are prepared for burial, being washed and clothed in white. When Israel sins, the sefirot "die"—they rise up and are hidden. When we repent, we wash them of our sins and clothe them in white purity.

A bride is brought to the wedding canopy. This relates to the unity that we can achieve in prayer.

We bring about peace between people. We thus bring about peace between all balancing sefirot (cf. *Tomer Devorah*).

The World is Built on Chesed

The sefirot of chochmah and binah are potential goodness. Chesed is the sprouting of the seed in the loam. It is the growth of an incipient vision, the consummation of God's will to give goodness. Chesed is a desire to give without limitation.

“The world is built on chesed” (Psalms 89:3). The world is a result of and maintained by the constant drawing down of God's love and our reciprocity. God wishes to give His infinite goodness to all His creatures; in this way, He lifts all creatures from level to level. God created us in order to pour His love upon us.

When we forget this, we suffer constriction, the balance to God's love. But when the revelation of God's love takes precedence, constriction and forgetfulness are wiped away. There is only remembrance, a living shimmer of chesed, even for those who had forgotten God's compassion for them. “Open for me as little as the eye of a needle and I will open it up like gateway.” And this raises the dustiness of this physical world beyond forgetfulness to a glistening, life-filled energy, awash with the experience of love (cf. Rav Kook).

Time

Chesed is the creation of time so that God's holy love can spread. "At day, God will command His chesed" (Psalms 42:9). It is the fabric that permeates all days. "The world is built on chesed."

Only in the realm of time can free will exist. And free will is the vehicle for drawing down God's chesed. Free will makes us more than robots and angels. It allows us to earn God's sweetness so that it not be transmuted into a reward that we did not earn, a "bread of shame."

The process of time allows us to improve ourselves. It allows us to rise beyond our instinctive nature to understanding and wisdom.

In love and charity exists the root of the transcendence of time. Love of God is the eternal now incorporating all time into a moment that is real and sweet, alive and vibrant.

Love of God and His creatures is the channel between time and the life beyond time. It provides for the influx of charity from a world in which the sweetness of charity is still abstract.

Therefore, we must give charity and engage in good deeds. As a result, our instinctive lack of trust and selfishness are overcome. We see beyond the boundaries of self-interest and the limitations of resources. We open ourselves to receiving and giving chesed (cf. *YD Hilchot Avodat Elilim* 3:9).

And our acts of love allow the world of time to continue to exist. Through our chesed we give life to the universe, so that we may continue to rectify ourselves and the world (cf. *YD Melamdin*

4:13).

Hidden Chesed

In this world of drama and darkness, it is our role to reveal the hidden chesed. When God's love is manifest to every consciousness, He can be said to be great. This is why another name of the sefirah of chesed is gedulah: greatness. God's greatness is in accordance with awareness of Him.

Man, a heavenly soul made in the image of God, is thrust into this tempestuous world subject to forgetfulness and corruption. Our sages say, "It would have been better for man not to be born. But now that he is born, he should engage in good deeds." Once we are in this world, we have the opportunity to accomplish far more than we could have done as ethereal souls. "The purpose of descent," our sages teach, "is ascent."

We may have descended into addiction, depression, mediocrity and compromise. But we can rise farther than a person whose feet have never been soiled. "Greater is a penitent than a perfect saint." We bring back the fallen sparks of Godliness that are sprinkled throughout time and space.

With the help of hitbodedut, spontaneous prayer, we can raise the entire world to God so that all of reality is suffused with Godliness and nullified before Him.

The strength that gives us the ability to rise from the foulness and confusion of exile is faith in God's love. That faith reveals His chesed in the most unlikely and hidden places, in the midst of perversity and adulteration. The penitent reveals God's

goodness and demonstrates that God's love permeates even the grimmest crevices (cf. *HM Matanah* 5:15).

Waters of Chesed

Revealing God's love in a world that is polluted by hatred and debased by indifference is like digging wells in a desert land. This was the work of the Patriarchs. Therefore, the Torah teaches that they dug wells to bring forth living waters. The first to dig wells was Abraham. Abraham was the paradigmatic man of love: the man who fed strangers and pleaded for the wicked of Sodom. When he drew the waters of daat into this world, they were manifested through his love as Godly love (cf. *EH Pirivyah Virivyah*, *Ishut* 1:8).

This consciousness, brought about via faith, is a renewal of the world. In our time, it is only in a hidden, potential manner that "the world is built upon chesed." But it can become a revealed and solid reality (cf. *YD Kirchah Uk'tivet Ka'ka* 2), marked by clarity and purity (cf. *YD Beheimah V'chayah Tohorah* 1:6).

Chesed and Prayer

Prayer reveals the wells of chesed. The goal of prayer is to raise and incorporate all worlds into chesed (cf. *EH Ishut* 4:6).

Prayer draws chesed into the world. God created the world *ex nihilo*. When we bring chesed into the world, we see that it is not an infinite reality in itself but a continuous creation of love. This awareness awakens the song of chesed that shall be sung in the

Messianic days, when Godly love will openly permeate everything. This state is reached through the songs that we sing to God today (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 5:11).

This powerful ability of prayer is strengthened when we are connected to a spiritual master. The spiritual master is a conduit between this world and the world beyond time.

In addition, this powerful ability is strengthened when we pray to God in our own words: *hitbodedut*. Even though we may be on a low level, with *hitbodedut* we are able to draw down great levels of *chesed*.

And the gates may be opened when we least expect it.

Similarly, Rabbi Nachman taught, the Messiah will arrive only when everyone has been distracted. This is because when we pray to God, we reach up through love to knowledge, and through that to a level higher than knowledge. Thus, God's salvation comes even when it is beyond our knowledge, when we feel that things are ordinary. There can be a phone call, a change of plans, a decision that changes the tenor of our life. In the middle of a walk, a conversation, a thought, our reality can be transformed (cf. *HM Matanah* 5:32).

In this world, truth has been swallowed up by vulgar propaganda; intellect prostituted to demagoguery and self-interest; spirituality co-opted by corruption; idealism diverted by false and destructive ideologies. When we pray with great strength, we rescue these swallowed-up sparks of goodness. We redeem Godly consciousness—*daat*—and the consciousness of love—*chesed*.

Dependence and Independence

Our sages teach that initially God desired to create the world through strict judgment. In such a world, we would be given a great deal of autonomy and responsibility. With our hard labor, we would overcome strict judgments and battle our evil impulses without any help from above.

But God saw that the world could not exist this way. Human beings would not have the strength to lift themselves up. Therefore, He preceded compassion to strict judgment.

Ideally, we should have as much independence as possible so that we can make our own choices. Yet we are liable to fail. It is important that we be aided and guided by God, but too much guidance prevents our growth.

We have free will. Yet the fact that compassion preceded strict judgment means that God's love permeates our reality in a hidden way. Our sages state, "Every day, a person's instinct rises against him. If not for the help of the Holy One, blessed be He, he would fall into its hand" (Kiddushin 30). God's love is part of the fabric of the universe. That love inspires us to awaken from our torpor, withdraw from wrong and return to God.

This ubiquity of *chesed* is (in a sense) a concession to our weak nature. Some spiritual masters do not need this concession. They serve God through strict justice. Such people suffer, for they are treated very sternly. When they pass a test, they go to the source of God's judgment and reveal that the cause of their suffering, in the beginning of Divine thought, is goodness. This gives meaning to and ameliorates their suffering. More than that,

it liberates the suffering in the world and universally reveals God's presence in strict judgment.

We await the time when every wound shall be healed, every blow bandaged, every tear wiped away; when every confusion, trauma and outcry shall be explained; when every hurt and disease shall be illumined by the light of God's love (cf. *OH Tefillin* 5:27).

Charity

The world is filled with constrictions that we must rectify.

For instance, when we give chesed to a poor person, we rectify his situation. A debtor serves his creditor almost as an idolator serves an idol. When we help him, we redeem him from idolatry, depression, a downcast face, falsehood and death. We restore him to truth and chesed (cf *YD Ribit* 2:1).

“A tzaddik is gracious and gives” (Psalms 37:21). Giving charity and chesed characterizes a tzaddik. A holy person gives to others. He transforms the quality of people's lives by demonstrating that a reality of hope, love and Godliness is possible. A tzaddik animates our spirit and impels our actions. In his presence, our doubts dissolve.

Every person can, on his own level, be a tzaddik. We attain this when we give charity and love.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught (*Sefer Hamidot* 6) that before giving a new-born child a name, one should engage in acts of chesed. A name is a vessel: it has nothing of its own, only receiving the quality of what it describes. But it is our role to be givers. One of the most important ways in which we give is to pass

on that role to our children, so that from generation to generation chesed spreads throughout the world.

When we engage in chesed before naming the baby, the name is transformed: the receiver becomes a giver. The name originally was like the moon, receiving light from the sun. Now it becomes self-illuminated, like the sun (cf. *HM Ha'oseh Shaliach Ligvot Chov* 2:19).

Chesed and Modesty

Chesed is modesty and self-effacement. When we are concerned for others, we are not self-referential. We are humble. Our goal is not to be honored and to do chesed; to be appreciated and do chesed; to be served and do chesed. Our goal is to do chesed. Therefore, chesed is modesty (cf. *OH Tefillin* 6:16).

Chesed and Exile

Through chesed, we restore the world from its exile. Our world is caught in the chains of the four classic exiles of Persia, Babylon, Greece and Rome. When we engage in and connect ourselves to God's chesed, we free the world of those entanglements. When we engage in chesed and other mitzvot, we raise the consciousness of the world to the joy of the heart (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 4:4).

Chesed and Forgiveness

In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, on Yom Kippur a goat would be sent to the wilderness with a strand of scarlet wool tied to its horns. If the wool turned white, the Jews knew that their sins had been forgiven. This strand of wool represents chesed. The actualization of Godly chesed can cleanse our heart: it can replace depression with hope, obtuseness with joy, confusion with love (cf. *OH Tzitzit* 1).

Chesed and Idolatry

Through chesed, the land of Israel is delivered from the hands of idolaters. Idolatry is narcissistic self-regard. Even the land of Israel, the physical realm of holy living, can be polluted by such idolatry. Then piety is condescension and worship of God becomes self-admiration. But through chesed, giving without ego gratification, the land of Israel is liberated (cf. *YD Milah* 3:3).

Hidden Chesed

God gives us a light of chesed. This light is analogous to the written Torah. We reflect this light back to God and to others. That reflected light is analogous to the oral Torah. Ideally, these two are united: direct and reflected light, providence and faith. Then we serve God with complete chesed. The oral Torah is a direct vehicle of the written Torah. Our lives of action, of self-motivation, are in tune with God's giving (cf. *EH Kiddushin* 3:17).

But there is a level that goes beyond that. If God's chesed is comparable to the Torah, how did His chesed shine before the giving of the Torah? How does His chesed extend throughout the world today when people are not learning and keeping the Torah?

God created the world with ten statements. These statements correspond to the Ten Commandments—they are God's hidden Torah. With them, God created a physical world in which His chesed is hidden. But it is—in potentia—on a very high level.

There are two types of secrets: one is a piece of information which one keeps hidden. The other is a state of mind. How to open a combination lock is a secret that a child can learn. How to have the mind of an adult is unfathomable to a child, no matter how much we explain it to him.

God's hidden chesed in the ten statements of creation constitutes the second type of secret. It can be discovered only when we become a spiritual adult. Then, we become the joyful recipient of an infinite abundance of chesed beyond what we could earn with our finite capabilities.

When the Torah is not being learned and kept, when there is no chesed on a normative level, the world must exist via the higher, hidden chesed. But because that chesed is so hidden, it can disappear. At such a point, the world would return to chaos. Even today, we see how the world has been plunged into moral and political ruin, how goodness and evil have been reversed.

Ultimately, chesed must be channeled through the study of the revealed Torah. Then it can be drawn down in a normative, robust, well-established manner.

And the Torah can be studied by anyone, in any language,

at any time. “It is not in the heavens... nor beyond the sea... but the matter is very close to you “ (Deuteronomy 30:12-14) (cf. *YD Nedarim* 2:2).

The written Torah is like the soul; the oral Torah like the body. The masters of Torah in every generation bind the soul and body of the Torah in a dialectic so that life may flow through them. The soul and body are two opposites, yet only when they are bound and at peace with each other does life exist. Similarly, the Torah consists of a changeless, ideal form (the written Torah) and a flexible, changing, this-worldly part (the oral Torah). By itself, idealism cannot impart life; by itself, this-worldly change is not of the spirit. The two must accommodate and balance each other.

The ability to lead a productive, this-worldly life while engaged in a healthy relationship to the Torah is the actualization of chesed in our life (cf. *EH Yibum* 3:21).

A tzaddik, a spiritual master, is able to channel the life-force of the Torah to everyone, Jew and non-Jew. But not even he can be involved with the Torah at all times. At the moments that he is not involved with the Torah, he draws his sustenance from the hidden chesed. This chesed is given with no merit on the part of the recipient.

This chesed is the hidden Torah. As such, it is the path to the land of Israel: the path of revealing and illumining God’s love in this-worldly life, uniting spirit and flesh. The land of Israel is a “holy land”: physicality sustained by holiness. “The strength of His acts He told to His people, to give them an inheritance of nations” (Psalms 111:6). It is a land that is especially imbued with “the strength of His acts”: the ten statements of creation, the hidden

Torah, supernal, hidden and pervasive love (cf. *HM Gezeilah* 3:1). Thus, the children of Israel could only conquer the land of Israel via “the strength of His acts.” Only when they could reach the greatest level of His love were they able to enter its physicality and plant the seeds of God’s love upon its soil (cf. *YD Milah* 3:1).

Rabbi Nachman stressed that “there is no despair in the world at all.” Even when a person has fallen to a place of darkness, he can gain access to God’s love—because it is precisely in a place of dark hiddenness that God’s unconditional chesed exists, waiting to be unveiled.

Anyone can imitate and thus initiate this spiritual movement by giving freely to others. A present given with a giving heart, charity given with no conditions attached, mirror God’s unconditional giving to the world (cf. *HM Matanah* 3:2).

The Land of Israel

The central place where a Jew can sanctify this world with chesed is the land of Israel. It is there that He revealed the “strength of His acts.” But through this “strength of His acts,” we can sanctify any place we come to (cf. *OH Beit Hakneset* 5:1).

Circumcision

The conquering of the land of Israel is analogous to the revelation of the chesed that occurs when a circumcision is performed. The *orlah*, the foreskin, conceals the purity and holiness of ideal sexuality. The foreskin represents the lust that

must be removed so that we can raise sexual energy from a physical to a spiritually-aware state. Then, earthly and heavenly love flow, for at that time heaven and earth kiss.

Judaism discourages celibacy, the idea that sexual expression is an unfortunate concession. Through sexuality, we are able to draw down chesed to unite male and female and to bring children into the world who themselves can receive and spread chesed. Therefore, it is not only sexual profligacy, the descent into sexual greediness, that is imbalanced and immature. It is also the inability to engage in relationship, the holding back from this world, from intimacy, from parenthood. These too are a flaw in the ability to connect to God's giving.

Sometimes, unworkable ideals appear especially entrancing, for the great spiritual vision they present seems perfect, glimmering, beyond the corruption of the flesh. But this vision is an illusion. True life is lived when the flesh is imbued with spirit. Chesed is not the holding back of our self from the world; it is the integration of our spirit into the world (cf. *YD Milah* 3:5).

Chesed and Halachah

The Torah speaks of the “faithful mercies (chasadim, plural of chesed) of David” (Isaiah 55:3). Rabbi Nachman of Breslov teaches that this refers to halachah, Jewish law. King David was the head of the Sanhedrin, the court of Jewish sages and that his halachic decisions were always accepted (Berachot).

It is precisely King David, author of the heartfelt psalms, the man who relates to God with prayer, who was able to draw down

God's chesed not by believing himself to be greater than the Torah's laws but rather by helping fashion them (cf. *HM Chalukat Shoftim* 5:14).

The Cohen

The Beit Hamikdash was the realm of daat. This daat was drawn into chesed by the cohen (cf. *OH Nesiat Kapayim* 3:2). Chesed is drawn from a spiritual level that precedes creation. On that level all is one, all is good. The cohen who served in the Beit Hamikdash had the power to lift creation to its root and bring it to a state of oneness. The cohen thus brought offerings, lifting physical creation to God.

The levites, on the other hand, represented the service of this world after creation. They served God with song, reaching up to God with human will.

The level of post-creation—the levitic service—was joined to the level that precedes creation—the cohanic service (cf. *HM Sh'luchin* 3, p. 206a).

Abraham

Another indication that the cohen is a man of chesed is found in a verse addressed to Abraham: "You are a cohen forever." The idea of being a cohen is related to the patriarch who more than any other exemplified the experience of chesed. It is not only that Abraham was a kind man. Rather, his entire state of being was an attainment of chesed. "Abraham's eyes were opened and he saw

with his consciousness the Creator's world of love" (*Maggid Devarav Lyaakov*, #61) (cf. *YD Pidyon Shevuyim* 2:2).

Abraham was thus also an exemplar of modesty, which is a trait of chesed. As he said to God, "I am dust and ashes" (cf. *YD Beheimah V'chayah Tohorah* 1:6).

Wherever Abraham pitched his tent, our sages teach, he left the doors on its four sides open so that travellers from the four directions could refresh themselves.

Chesed is found in the midst of a dry land. The path that we walk upon to find that chesed is learning Torah. The Torah was originally given on Mt. Sinai, in a desert. Often, the discipline of learning Torah becomes dry and oppressive. It is precisely when we keep and learn the Torah even during the dry periods that we come to chesed (cf. *OH Rosh Hashanah* 3:1).

Holy Longing

Sometimes we wish to come close to God and advance on a path of holiness, but we do not know what to do. At that time, the essential practice is holy yearning—in a sense, an adolescent passion which is the beginning of mature love. It is possible to receive the Torah only after first imagining it—this imagination is provided by the ardor of longing.

This was the state the Jews were in when they left Egypt. This longing is analogous to the "points of silver" set in the "bracelets of gold" (Song of Songs 1:10). (The word for longing, *kisuf*, is similar to that for silver, *kesef*.) These points of silver give form to the letters of the Torah (the word for bracelets, *torei*, is

similar to that of Torah).

The Jews received the Torah after their exodus from Egypt as a result of their sustained longing for the Torah (cf. *YD Dam* 1:1).

We have to express our longing aloud. Such expression constitutes a vessel with which we can receive God's chesed. It comprises the vowels of the Torah (the Torah text is written without vowels). This is why we learn Torah and pray aloud (cf. *OH Nesiat Kapayim* 3:2).

The Sabbath

The Sabbath represents the apex of chesed. God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day, He rested. Nowadays, we work for six days of the week and rest on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, we do not have to do any work, for the world is maintained solely by God's chesed, drawing down the fresh spirit of chesed, a reverberation of the primal Sabbath.

More than that, it is even forbidden to engage in work. When a person violates the Sabbath and engages in his own productive labor, he interferes with the phenomenon of God maintaining the world solely through an unconditional chesed that requires no awakening from below (cf. *OH Shabbat* 2).

Ultimate Chesed

Ultimately, "strangers will stand and take care of your flocks." Those who are fit to serve God through meditation, prayer

and learning Torah will have the free time to do so. This is possible only when God pours His chesed upon us. This chesed depends upon the awe of God, which in turn depends upon God's will.

It is our work to gain access to an awed realization of God's presence. Then His chesed will flow (cf. *YD Giluach* 2:3).

In that future era, everyone will know God and experience His presence. It will be our awareness, as surely as we experience the warmth of the sun, that everything is under God's providence and that nature itself is His vehicle. Then the warmth of chesed, the fearlessness, the pride, the love, the giving, the happiness, the sharing will be not a transitory phenomenon. It will be the basic state of reality. When we are enriched with the revelation of God's oneness and chesed, we will be graced as well with our own undying generosity. It is a generosity that relates to God and to others. This is the era of chesed (cf. *HM Arev* 3:22).

CHAPTER SIX: GEVURAH

Gevurah means might. The sefirah of gevurah is the power of constraint. As such it balances the extravagant giving of chesed.

We cannot only give endlessly and unconditionally. Our giving must be weighed with holding back. Discipline and setting limits are often the most important expression of our chesed.

It is a tendency of idealistic persons to disparage the concept of gevurah as loveless and legalistic—as opposed to the compassionate and egalitarian chesed. But unmitigated chesed is as harmful as unmitigated gevurah.

Only the mix of chesed with gevurah advances the cause of love.

The Talmud states, “He who is merciful to the cruel will end by being cruel to the merciful.” The desire to see only good in those who are destructive is not a healthy chesed. It is a squeamish inability to recognize the hurtful realities of this world.

At times, love of life requires us to be militant. Even Abraham, the exemplar of chesed, engaged in a military action when his

nephew, Lot, was captured.

Because untrammelled chesed is so unrealistic, even its advocates swing to the other polarity and balance it with violence and oppression. Those who fought monarchies in the nineteenth century, for instance, created the Soviet totalitarian state in the twentieth century.

The book of Proverbs states, “The chesed of nations is erroneous (*chatat*)” (Proverbs 14:34). When our chesed is off the mark, not balanced with gevurah, it results in an unhealthy and destructive expression of gevurah.

But actually the holding back of gevurah is an outgrowth and function of giving.

Emulating Gevurah

Tomer Devorah discusses the interplay of chesed and gevurah from the viewpoint of the spiritual and physical.

A person must give his yetzer hatov—good inclination—to God. Our yetzer hatov is our inclination for complete goodness without admixture of the instincts and desires that bind us to this world.

But a person also has a yetzer hara—an evil inclination. The yetzer hara is a necessary inclination for this-worldly matters that involve self-preservation, but which can become ends in themselves. Yetzer hara is a shorthand phrase meaning “an inclination that can lead to evil.” The “evil inclination” is an “uncontrolled inclination.”

The Talmud compares the yetzer hara to soup, and the Torah

to spice that flavors the soup. A person has a mass of undirected forces, which the Torah properly directs.

The greater a person, states the Talmud, the greater his yetzer hara. The more power we have, the more potential is there for it to be misdirected.

Indeed, the Talmud states that “It is better to serve God with a yetzer hara than without.”

In serving God, we must turn to Him only with our yetzer hatov. But in relating to this-worldly matters, we must apply our yetzer hara.

Tomer Devorah teaches that one way a man exercises his control of his yetzer hara, his this-worldly, physical energies, is to treat his wife with love. He should see that she is well-clothed and that the house is comfortable for her. In doing so, he should have in mind, “When I make sure that my wife has clothing, I am rectifying the Shechinah (the female aspect of God, so to speak).” Insofar as a husband and wife grow close, they mirror and even help cause the growing close of God and His world.⁵

⁵The Bible teaches that God made the human species “in His image.” This means that men mirror the “male” sefirot; women mirror the “female” sefirot.

Chesed is a male energy and gevurah female. In some ways, this designation is counter-intuitive. One thinks of the male as more physical, worldly and aggressive; and of the female as more bonding and compassionate.

But there are other aspects of the male and female. The male is generally more extravagant, pouring forth in his energy. This can come forth as love or aggression. The female is more inner-directed—that can also mean that she guards things and she puts up barriers. The extravagant giving is called chesed; the holding back and keeping safe are called gevurah.

Then gevurah, which is liable to be dragged into physicality, is turned to a perfect service of God (*Tomer Devorah*).

Gevurah and Crystallization

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook teaches that the restrictive nature of gevurah is not only positive but a necessary part of creation. Only through constriction does the world take on a character independent of God. Gevurah allows us to gain individuation and the ability to turn to God as free beings. Above, in the spiritual worlds, the process of gevurah means that when we serve God, our service is rewarded in graduated measure.

Chesed pours forth God's greatness. The constricting power of gevurah channels that chesed. This makes it possible for chesed to enter every one of the innumerable particulars of this universe, filling them with worth. Through gevurah, God's providence relates to the slightest detail of creation.

This providence puts every detail in its place, for the betterment of the world and not its destruction.

Gevurah allows us to stand up against those who destroy the good, who pervert the Divine energy that flows into the world to rectify all things.

Via the power of gevurah, we can bring our grandiose schemes to fulfillment. Gevurah is the power of reality: the ability to crystallize our dreams, to turn our greatness of spirit into realized accomplishment (Rav Kook).

Balancing Gevurah and Chesed

Should we accentuate chesed or gevurah? Should we be a this-worldly warrior or an other-worldly renunciate? Chesed and gevurah balance each other. We need to nurture them both. To accomplish this-worldly goals, even if they are charitable, is not sufficient in serving God. Nor is extreme piety marked by incompetence in the ways of this world, an inability to lead a successful, responsible life, a sign of spiritual greatness. We must combine humility with strength, alacrity with spirituality, modesty with self-respect (cf. *OH Tefillin* 6:16).

Only when we have both chesed and gevurah, love and rebuke, can our face shine with the light of God's compassion (cf. *YD Giluach* 1).

Creation and Gevurah

So great is the attribute of gevurah that, our sages teach, "at first God considered creating the world with judgment." However, "when He saw that the world will not bear it, He joined compassion to judgment" (cf. *OH Aravit* 4:7).

God's thought to create the world with strictness was itself chesed: He wanted to create a creature with free will that would earn its reward, rather than being given a present that it did not deserve (cf. *HM Matanah* 5:1).

Thus, gevurah us the strength to praise God (cf. *EH Ishut* 4:6).

Suffering

The world is filled with confusion and pain: suffering of the flesh and suffering of the spirit. Outside rages violence and inside despair; outside is a world of debased values and inside a daily struggle to continue.

It is a time of darkness, night, shadow and hiddenness. It is a time when the power of gevurah has spread beyond its boundaries and been dragged down so that its feet wallow in the mud. It is a time when judgments rise and conceal consciousness of God (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit* 1).

And depression grasps gevurah, dragging it down into solipsism and dismay.

The guide to overcome this state is seen in the story of the Biblical personality associated with gevurah: Isaac, the son of Abraham. Just as gevurah must balance chesed, so does Isaac balance his father. In Isaac's life we see the qualities of serving God through self-restraint, through guarding and intensification of what has been accomplished rather than through original achievement. Isaac was acted-upon rather than active during the akeidah, the attempted sacrifice of his life by his father on Mt. Moriah. Later, rather than dig new wells of water, he unstopped those that had been dug by Avraham

Yet Isaac's name, rather than denoting some grim or dry quality, means "he will laugh."

The essence of joy comes from the level of gevurah.

The one time that the word laughter is used in the course of Isaac's adult life occurs when he and his wife, Rebecca, are among

the Pelishtim. The king of the Pelishtim, who desired Rebecca for himself and believed her to be Isaac's brother, was disturbed when he saw "Isaac sporting (*misachek*) with his wife." Abimelech realized the intimate, even sexual nature of that play. The root of the rectification of gevurah is true life in this world.

Isaac's ability to rise to joy is prefigured in the episode of the Akeidah. God ostensibly wanted suffering and self-sacrifice. But at the last minute, He showed that He desires, rather, the sacrifice of a ram, its horns caught in the brambles. The horns of the ram represent the shofar that is blown on Rosh Hashanah, the time of judgment. This shofar represents the awakening of song. And the song of the heart for God comes from brokenness, from gevurah: "From the depths have I called You, O God" (Psalms 130:1).

The Talmud teaches that a harp hung above King David's bed; at midnight a northern wind would blow upon its strings, and David would arise to serve God. The north represents gevurah. It is from gevurah, from constraint, that the inspiration and compulsion of Godly melody comes. "Indeed, He will give forth with a strong voice"—the strength of gevurah.

Then our groans are turned to song; the bitterness of gevurah is turned to sweetness. And thus the root of Isaac's name is "laughter" (cf. *EH Pirivyah Virivyah, V'hilchot Ishut* 3:12).

Isaac could only be rectified on Mt. Moriah, the site of the future Beit Hamikdash. That is the level of connection to what is meaningful, true and enduring, that which gives comfort and sanity, the will to live and the effervescence of joy. The site of the Beit Hamikdash is connection from the mesh of this-worldly reality to

a truth that is refreshing and greater than place. That is the level of God, Who is called “the Place of the world, though the world is not His place.”

From that level of ultimate compassion, every individual is judged favorably. “Do not judge your fellow until you have been in his place.” Only God can judge another; only God can empathize with every individual in his suffering on whatever level he is on. Thus, the intense suffering of depression can be ameliorated only when it is lifted via empathy and compassion to a level higher than our restricted outlook (cf. *HM Shluchin* 4:8).

This is why Rosh Hashanah—the day of judgment—is actually a day of great chesed—it is a time that judgment is ameliorated and brought into line with chesed (cf. *OH Tzitzit* 3:7).

Evil

Gevurah marks a significant step in the development of the possibility of evil. When, due to man’s actions, there is too much gevurah, too much holding back of God’s light, evil comes into existence. Yet this too has a positive side: only when good and evil exist can a person engage in free will. But in this world of confusion, with its thousands of claims for truth, how can we know what is the subtle root of good and evil? How can we know why evil exists? We can only believe in God, Who is all good. We believe that God so to speak contracted Himself with great wisdom, until the root of gevurah was created, from which the possibility for evil came about. And all this was so that man might enjoy free will.

It is possible to know God only through this belief (cf. *HM Ha'oseh Shaliach Ligvot Chov* 3:26).

In our intense longing for God, we reveal our our own will and desire. This is a process that may be extended even over years. We relate to others with a good will, chesed and charity. As we do so, we slowly transform the world, revealing, in the midst of anger and this-worldly struggle, God's will (cf. *HM Aref* 3:10).

Hiddenness

The essence of the nature of gevurah is that daat is hidden. When Godly consciousness is hidden to a certain degree, we can serve Him with our will. When it is hidden more, we are lost and confused. When it is hidden even more, the world is tenebrous, and corruption and evil spread.

We can correct this only by rising to the root of those constrictions. But not everyone can accomplish such a feat. Only a great spiritual master, such as Moses, can do so.

In our own lives, it is not enough to make superficial changes, behavioral improvements, scattered resolutions. To heal our constrictions, we must return to their source, to the place where knowledge began to be constricted and compassion was hidden. Only with the help of a compassionate and able teacher can we ameliorate our bitterness. We then replace judgment with compassion (cf. *YD Tolaim* 4:9).

We can ameliorate each constriction and judgment individually. But it is possible to rise to such a source of being that we can correct them all, as if with one master key. That level is the

knowledge that we does not know. It is the level of rising beyond our conceptions of ourselves and the world—all those standards and conventions that keep our old script of reality flowing and that guard our sanity by giving a name and an interpretation to everything. But when wne can rise beyond this classification, we rise beyond our limitations. We rise beyond anger, which addicts us to the object of our anger. We rises to the level of Godly will (cf. *OH Birkat Hashachar* 5:1).

No matter how far we have fallen, we can always return to God and to our healthy self. We may think that this is not so, since “one sin draws another sin after it.” Yet the Talmud states that “God does not act cruelly with anyone.” A person is tested in accordance with his strength.⁶

As Rabbi Nachman stated, “No one has blockages that he cannot stand against.”

This is particularly true on the level of the soul. Every Jew contains a precious soul that has great power to stand against the desire to act wrongly. Even the lowest Jew has great power to withstand temptation.

Why, then, do people act wrongly? The reasons are many

⁶Yet sometimes we see people given tests that they apparently cannot overcome. Rabbi Tzaddok Hacoen teaches that at times when, despite a person’s struggles, he commits a sin, that sin contains a necessary rectification. However, one can never know whether one really had the strength to overcome that sin—therefore, one cannot ab initio engage in wrongful behavior (Tzidkat Hatzaddik).

and complex. But they can be summed up in a word: foolishness. We have not clarified good from evil; we have not removed the effective from the ineffectual; and we have not realized our own ability. Our consciousness is so constricted that we see no alternatives to our behavior; we are hypnotized by our situation and believe ourselves to be prisoners. But the weakness is an illusion. Our *gevurah* is in our heart. When we irradiate that *gevurah* with the wisdom of the mind, then, instead of experiencing the *gevurah* of being overwhelmed by lust, we experience the *gevurah* of withholding from our harmful passion. Usually, this accomplishment involves the intercession of a teacher who himself has overcome such self-limitations. Such a master is able to pray on the level of *gevurah*. Such prayer dislodges all the holiness that the side of evil has swallowed and even transforms portions of that side of evil to good. When *gevurah* in our heart is balanced, directed and healed, we can transform our life to good (cf. *OH Birkat Hareiach* 4:1).

Night

Sleep is the level of unrefined imagination and instinct. A person who goes through life without self-awareness or awareness of the spiritual is asleep. When we pray with vigor, we so connect to holiness that we attain a spirit of prophecy, a clear connection to understanding God's will.

This is also why the Talmud stresses the importance of learning Torah at night. Night-time is the time of instinct—Torah is the means of enlightenment (cf. *OH Tzitzit* 5:6).

The time of confusion and lack of knowledge is a time of dark hiddenness, the time of night. On awakening in the morning, we recite the blessing thanking God for “giving the rooster understanding”—binah—“to distinguish between day and night.” This rooster, the Zohar explains, is a cosmic force that cries out, awakening the world to serve the Creator. We emerge from the tunnel of darkness with the expansion of binah, transcendent understanding, into our experience (cf. *OH Birkat Hashachar* 1).

Then our gevurah is saturated with daat. At that time, the rooster is able “to distinguish between day and night.” When we illumine the constricted areas of our life so that we know how and when to hold ourselves back, we separate ourselves from Sheol. As we open ourselves to daat, we hear the inner Torah calling us to return to health and God. In this way, we attain life—being connected to God—and the sap of Godly pleasure—this is length of days (*OH Birkat Hashachar* 1). Only when night is connected to day, gevurah to chesed, can the consciousness of God shine through them both (cf. *HM G'viyat Malveh* 2).

The voice of the rooster is like the blast of the shofar, like God’s thunder pealing through the sky: “Who can gaze upon the thunder of His might?” (Job 26:14). This awakens us from sleep (cf. *OH Tefillin* 4:2,3).

A person who is in a constricted state must cry out to God with great power. Our lamentation is a prayer of strength. We must even quarrel with God and argue our case. Such powerful prayer brings down daat. It improves our state of mind. It redeems knowledge and compassion from hiddenness; it redeems souls and sparks of holiness. When we pray with power, we show that we

have has self-definition and worth. This redeems our good points that were before submerged (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 5:2).

Sometimes, when our life is confused and we are at the mercy of destructive behavior, we cry out to God, “What shall I do?” We cast our burden on Him. This draws down inspiration within and openness to answers from without. Then all judgments are ameliorated—our sins are forgiven, our slate wiped clean (cf. *OH Taanit* 4:23).

Time

Time is the medium through which a human being can attain God’s chesed. Yet, it is our job not to be trapped by time. Time as a subjective feeling is a constriction caused by the lack of daat. The essence of time is within gevurah. We can rise to the level that transcends time. We do not avoid or retreat from the limitations of our lives. Rather, we raise them to their source (cf. *OH Rosh Hashanah* 5:2).

Too Much Light

Sometimes we must refrain from too much light. In promising Adam, “You shall be like God,” the serpent promised him a profusion of light: light that would not only expand his delineation, but a light so unrestrained that his substance would be shattered. When light shatters the vessel of self-restraint, evil is able to grasp that vessel.

God’s infinite light shines in our heart. How do we accept

that light without being overwhelmed—without reaching for grandiosity, without rebelling? We proclaim with humility, “All that I know is that I know nothing.” Then we do not seek to invade our boundaries with the passion of knowledge; we open our arms not to encircle knowledge, but to accept light (cf. *OH Minchah, rashei perakim*, p. 456).

Rebuke

“All love that is not tied to jealousy is not love.” The love of chesed must be balanced with gevurah’s jealousy, which is rebuke. “Better is open rebuke...faithful are the blows of a friend...” (Proverbs 27:5-6). This is why Abraham’s work in digging the wells of inspiration was insufficient. His chesed could not be fully revealed until it was shaped and directed by his son, Isaac, who embodied gevurah. It was precisely via gevurah that chesed could be experienced. And so Isaac dug up the wells that the Pelishtim had sealed with earth, with physicality (cf. *EH Gittin* 4:15).

Rebuke gives chesed the ability to free the world of the four exiles of animal nature, of external wisdom that is not linked to God. This rebuke is a person’s holy strength. And we must also have holy strength in refraining from doing evil. In the book of Ruth, Boaz awakens to find Ruth asleep at his feet, and he restrains himself from sin. This is his strength; and his name, Boaz, means, “in him is strength.” This holy strength is related to our powerful prayer to God. It is related to our study of Torah with enthusiasm, even in trying circumstances (cf. *YD Giluach* 3:3).

Sometimes we see that others seem to be treated well by God. Yet we feel rejected by Him, rebuked and ignored. We might think, Am I less special than anyone else? Have I not tried to serve God? How much have I not sacrificed to do good? How much have I not already suffered? Why does God not already open the gates? Why do I continually stumble and again taste bitterness? Why does the testing never cease and the difficulty never abate?

Within God's unaccountable rebuke is hidden love. As the verse states, "The teaching of God, my son, do not reject, and do not be upset with His rebuke; for he whom He loves does the Lord rebuke" (Proverbs 3:11-12).

The rebuke and sufferings constitute God's love. They are chesed clothed in rebuke. Lack of daat makes suffering bitter. If we were to have the eyes of knowledge to see all of our circumstances—stretching back into previous incarnations and forward to what we can become—our bitterness would be alleviated; the specter of chesed would emerge from the shadow of gevurah and rebuke (cf. *YD Nidah* 1:2).

There is a level on which we can accept rebuke—even contemptuous rebuke—without self-abnegation but with equanimity. The Baal Shem Tov taught, "In the verse, 'I have placed the Lord before me always' (Psalms 16:8), the word 'placed' is related to 'equanimity.' No matter what happens to us, whether we are praised or insulted, as well as in all other matters...it should all be the same, since we have totally removed the yetzer hara from ourselves. Whatever occurs, we should say, This comes from God. And this is a very high level to attain" (*Tzavaat Harivash* 2). When we can maintain such a state of mind, a great deal of chesed is

released and revealed (cf. *EH* 4:13).

Clothing

Before their sin, Adam and Eve were naked. Their misdeed made it necessary for them to be constricted—clothed. According to Jewish law, a garment with four corners must have ritual fringes upon the corners. These fringes rectify the constriction that is inherent in the clothing. The four corners of the garment are like the four corners of the world. The fringes are like ropes that lift up those four corners to spirituality that transcends place—where, like God Himself, we can judge ourselves and others favorably.

This concept is found in the idea that “the Lord has been king, clothed in pride. The Lord is girded in strength, the world will stand and not shake” (Psalms 93:1), which refers to Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah, the time of judgment, God is so to speak clothed in judgment. But God judges—since He is the Place of the world—with great compassion. The fringes enable us to do the same. Therefore, the strands of the tzitzit are made of wool—the emblem of chesed (cf. *OH Tzitzit* 3:7).

Wine

This idea is also found regarding wine. Wine is on the level of gevurah. Yet we sanctify the Sabbath over wine and we must drink wine to the point of inebriation on Purim.

Our sages teach that “one only sings over wine.” What is the song? It is the song of the northern wind that played upon the

strings of King David's harp. This wind is drawn from gevurah. Holy gevurah is the necessary constriction of spirituality to bring about differentiated human souls.

When we drink wine in a holy spirit, we reach the level of the northern wind. We can transform and overcome gevurah that constitutes distance from God. We enter the source of gevurah and bring down its positive, ameliorative side. We learn to celebrate our strength and self-restraint (cf. *HM Ha'oseh Shaliach Ligvot Chov* 3:21).

Passover

On Passover, we are forbidden to eat chametz—leavened bread—a food that is allowed the rest of the year. It would be burdensome if not impossible to avoid leavened grain. Chametz is a necessary condition of existing in this world: it is gevurah. Yet there is a time to remember that although we live within nature, we are not of nature; although the mountain ranges and the seas are magnificent entities, they are expressions of a power greater than the laws that they obey. Thus, on Passover, the breaking free of bondage via nature-shattering miracles, we refrain from eating leaven—the symbol of our daily condition, a condition which we strive to transform (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim Shacharit* 2:6).

Business

We can free gevurah from the grasp of unenlightened forces by engaging in business in a holy manner.

Our sages say that one of the first questions a person is asked in heaven after his death is “Did you engage in business faithfully?” The Torah gives many rules on honest business practices. We cannot overcharge, make false claims, engage in illegal practices or cheat on one’s taxes; we must pay an employee on time; and as employees, we cannot misuse our time on the job or pilfer. Acting honestly is called acting “faithfully.” In giving up an immediate gain because the Torah forbids it, we demonstrate our one’s faithfulness to the Torah and God.

The world is filled with exiled holy sparks. It is our role to liberate as many of these as we can. Such sparks are hidden in all physical things and transactions. When our business transactions are in accordance with the guidelines of the Torah, they are sanctified and the sparks liberated. In the course of our business day, we rectify the sefirah of gevurah.

The Talmud states that “Earning a living is as difficult as was the splitting of the Red Sea” (Pesachim 118). The Red Sea was split only when Moses raised his staff above the waters. Moses is the spiritual master who can pray with strength. His staff is his powerful prayer. We can only earn a living from which we feel blessed when we pray with such power, and when we connect ourselves to true spiritual teachers.

The sparks that are redeemed when we engage in business faithfully are very holy. Their source is spiritual wealth, and bestow that wealth on the person who earns them (cf. *HM Shutfim* 3:2).

If our business dealings are flawed and dishonest, we can earn money, but that money is not separated from the husks of evil.

To the contrary, we trap the holy sparks in the husks that we are creating and strengthening. We draw to ourselves tainted money, which is not wealth, for it cannot impart happiness and sanctity (cf. *EH Ones Um'fateh*).

The Talmud states that a man should honor his wife, because it is through her merit that he earns his living. Through the female principle of gevurah, wealth is formulated and brought into the world.

The wind that comes from the north comes from gevurah. And a verse teaches that “from the north comes gold” (Job 37:22). In order to gain this wealth, we must control our instincts and not lust after physical money but desire spiritual wealth. A prisoner of lust drags chesed into the ground. Then chesed cannot pour its love into its appropriate receptacle, gevurah. And when chesed and gevurah are not joined, gevurah cannot give forth its wealth (cf. *EH Yibum* 1:5).

When chesed doesn't direct itself to gevurah, gevurah's sustenance is grasped by the forces of evil. Then money is a merely physical resource to be exploited. But when we fill gevurah, the power of self-restraint, with Divine love, we can relate to physical property and wealth in a manner that is life-affirming and productive (cf. *EH Onnes Um'fateh*).

The Song of Gevurah

The spiritual masters are able to pray with strength. That prayer, that song, arises from the depth of the night and the midst of solitude. In emulation of those men of strength, everyone can

enter the darkness of the forest at midnight, and there cry out to God from the depths of the heart. This song, this cry, this yearning, this commitment of the heart, this strength of our resolve, this faith that is burned by discouragement and tinged with ecstasy, this time of despair and time of elevation, sings within our hands and dances within our feet. This song from the depths, from darkness and from emptiness, from loneliness, incompleteness, pain and continuing struggle awakens the song of the future.

And that song of the future is the song of chesed aflame and gevurah illumined and aligned. It is the song of a world whose multifarious particulars glow with the inner resolution of a light seen with the eyes of knowledge. That song is the encomium to God: a song that, rising from the cradle of limitation, opens to reveal its burning, illumined petals. That song to God sings even now when a ray of light strikes upon it in the obscure darkness; and then the physicality of the world is revealed as being the repository of light.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TIFERET

Tiferet is the sefirah of beauty and harmony, combining the two previous sefirot, chesed and gevurah.

The word tiferet means beauty. Its root, p'er, also means a tiara or the crowning branches of a tree. Tiferet is directly beneath keter (crown) and its extension, daat.

Tiferet is also known as rachamim, compassion. When chesed and gevurah combine, wise, measured love—compassion—is expressed. Compassion is the ability to relate to people and give them what they need. Another description of tiferet might therefore be charisma (Kantor).

Learning Torah

Tiferet refers to the study of Torah.

There is a beauty and sweetness in the study of Torah. Reciting the words and contemplating the ideas of the Torah causes

purity to rest upon us.

Torah contains poetry, narrative, legal codes, allegory, advice and heavenly recordings.

If we have a specific failing, we can study the Torah texts that deal with it. But all of the Torah functions as a general reparative, so that whatever we study in the Torah is healing (R. Israel Salanter).

The texts of Torah cover a variety of cultures—many of which are puzzling to us living in twentieth century Western civilization. But these texts, when studied with respect and awe, yield sweetness and holiness.

In learning Torah, there must be room for free expression. We must come to the Torah with vigor. “A shame-faced person cannot learn” (*Pirkei Avot* 2:6). We must question and debate. But if this is done with disrespect for Torah texts and sages, we will not gain the wisdom, understanding and knowledge that are contained within the Torah. The Torah will remain a sealed garden. More than that, such study of the Torah can bring harm.

“This is the Torah that Moshe placed” (Numbers 9:23). The Talmud puns on the word “placed”—sam—relating it to the homonym, sam, meaning a drug. “If one merits, it is a drug of life; if one does not merit, it becomes a drug of death” (Yoma). When we learn Torah with enmity or in a belittling fashion, we re-create the Torah in an unenlightened image.

On the other hand, there are those who learn Torah in a stale, tired manner. Seemingly respectful, they do not allow the Torah to expand the boundaries of their conception and transform their lives. These people too have placed themselves above the

Torah.

Both these groups have transmuted a drug of life into a drug of death. When they learn Torah, their egotistical souls soar. Correspondingly, the sefirah of tiferet rises.

When tiferet rises up, it can no longer shift its energy to the sefirot below it. Thus they wither, and the world withers.

When such people are the arbiters of Torah, the Torah can no longer spread into the world. On the one hand, it is attacked with derision; on the other, it is upheld with self-congratulation. Then the Torah turns into a drug of death. Its life-emanating energies can no longer ripple through the world.

But when we lower ourselves in learning Torah, when we learn with simplicity and humility, we cause the Torah to spread throughout the world. We cause the sefirah of tiferet to remain in its place, to lower itself and send its beneficial energies downward. We spread out the influence of Torah as a life-giving medicine.

The Bible instructs that the Torah should be learned “day and night” (Deuteronomy 6:7). We should set aside even a small amount of time every morning and evening to learn Torah. No matter what our age and expertise, when we apply ourselves to learn Torah, we are worthy of great respect. This is expressed in a letter that the Torah luminary and philosopher, Moses Maimonides, of twelfth century Cairo, wrote to a follower:

“I have received the letter of the honored and precious student, Mr. Yosef. You say that you are an ignoramus. But I can see from your letter that you have toiled hard in learning Torah. . . .

“You are not an ignoramus but my student and my beloved one.

“I regard anyone as my student, even if he understands only one verse or one law, whether he learned it in the holy tongue or in Arabic or Aramaic, as long as he attempts to understand the Torah in any language.

“The main thing is learning Torah....

“Do not insult yourself, and do not give up hoping of attaining perfection.

“The greatest sages began learning when they were already grown, and look what they achieved....”

It is an integral part of the soul-growth of every Jew to learn Torah regularly. We must apply ourselves “to understand and gain wisdom, to hear, to learn and to teach, to guard and to do and to keep” (Prayerbook).

It is important that one of the topics we learn is practical halachah (Jewish law). When we sift through various opinions to determine the practical halachah, we are engaged in what the Talmud calls “a disagreement for the sake of heaven.” We bring chesed and gevurah into harmony with each other. In addition, we so to speak beautify and adorn God’s presence in this world.

Only this type of controversy, for the sake of Torah, helps and does not damage tiferet. As far as other controversy is concerned, the Talmud states that “the end of controversy for its own sake is Gehinnom.” But when we learn with good will and peace, when our arguments are directed not for self-aggrandizement but to determine the truth of the Torah, we attain the Torah, “all of whose paths are peace” (Proverbs 3:17), and which brings, ultimately, love.

Truth

The sefirah of tiferet is related to the third patriarch, Jacob. One of Jacob's defining moments was his wrestling with the angel. According to one rabbinic opinion, this angel was Gabriel. But why would a holy angel wrestle with Jacob?

A possible answer is contained in another important characteristic of Jacob and the sefirah of tiferet: *emet*, truth. Jacob was a man of truth. Even in holiness, he struggled and wrestled with every issue.

It is also our role to struggle with truth. It is easy to live a life based on philosophies that are true in part.

It has been easy for Jews to abandon the Torah and be drawn to new movements with shining, partial truths. Thousands of Jews became Communists in Russia; Jews have been highly represented in all areas of human endeavor where the search for truth is a factor: in science, the arts, philosophy, psychology and politics.

Meanwhile, in the world of religious Jewry, we find those whose beliefs are trite, who are overbearing and insensitive. They too are incomplete in their ability to seek truth.

The person of truth must learn and struggle, wrestle with Torah all the days of his life.

This is truth. This is beauty.

The word *p'er* means not only the crown-like branches of a tree but the action of striking those branches so that the fruits will fall to the ground.

Only when we strike the tree of Torah, when we battle with Torah, when we draw out of Torah its meaning and truth, are we

connected to what the Torah has to offer.

Aesthetics

Jacob blessed his son, Naftali, with the words, “Naftali is a running deer, giving forth words of beauty” (Genesis 49: 21). The name Naftali has as its root the word “wrestling.” One can say that in the world of aesthetics—literature, music and the visual arts—the Torah should be expressed beautifully.

In past centuries, literature and the arts were seen as vehicles for religious expression. Today, they express the private vision of secular seers. More broadly, art has become a propaganda vehicle for mediocre ideologies.

Meanwhile, those who are spiritually and religiously oriented churn out insipid and incompetent material.

Art can be spiritually eloquent without being didactic, elevating without being saccharine. The artist must have intelligence and integrity. He must trust his abilities and his spirituality. By expressing his soul, he must believe that he will communicate that which is beautiful: that he, like Naftali, will be a running deer that gives forth words of beauty.

Without intellectual integrity, a schooled aesthetics and a commitment to expressing an inner truth, we cannot produce beauty that resonates and inspires. Our culture has produced the most sophisticated media. And yet it is banal, superficial and dithering. This is the collapse and degradation of tiferet.

Leaders of Torah

Leaders of Torah must be able to relate respectfully to all Jews.

A teacher must treat his students pleasantly and lovingly, and teach them as much as they can receive.

A teacher of Torah must be sure to treat the poor with respect. The Talmud relates,

“Once, Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon was coming from Migdal Gedor from his teacher’s home...filled with great joy, and self-satisfied because he had learned a great deal of Torah. An extremely ugly man came before him—this was a supernatural appearance of Elijah the Prophet (who came to rebuke him for his self-satisfaction).

“Elijah told Rabbi Elazar, ‘Greetings, rabbi.’ Rabbi Elazar...replied, ‘Empty one, how ugly you are! Is everyone from your town as ugly as you?’

“Elijah told him, ‘I don’t know. But go and tell the Craftsman Who made me, How ugly is this vessel that You made.’

“When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had sinned, he...prostrated himself and told Elijah, ‘I admit [my sin] to you. Forgive me.’...

“They came to Rabbi Elazar’s town. The townspeople greeted Rabbi Elazar, ‘Greetings, rabbi, our teacher, our teacher.’

“Elijah told them, ‘Whom are you calling rabbi?’

“‘The man who is travelling behind you.’

“‘If this is a rabbi, may there not be many like him among the people of Israel.’

“‘Why?’

“‘He did such-and-such to me.’

“‘Nevertheless, forgive him, since he is a man great in Torah.’

“‘For your sake, I forgive him, but only on condition that he does not become accustomed to doing this.’

“Immediately, Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon entered [the study hall] and taught, ‘A person should always be yielding as a reed and not hard as a cedar. And therefore it is from a reed that we make a quill with which to write a Torah scroll, tefillin and mezuzahs’” (Taanit 20a-b).

The Torah is written only with the instruments of humility. It is taught only by people who have compassion.

A teacher of Torah must have great regard for the poor in goods and the poor in spirit and draw them close to him and to the Torah that he represents.

A teacher of Torah must not have contempt for the ignorant. He should regard everyone as worthwhile and important. The Talmud warns that if a Torah teacher insults the masses, he will not merit a son in whom the light of Torah shines.

Just as the sefirah of tiferet shines down on the sefirot below, so should the teacher of Torah shine upon and guide those who have not reached his level (cf. *Tomer Devorah*).

The Inner, Secret Being of Creation

Rabbi Kook teaches that the light of tiferet is the life-force of the written Torah and the living light of all existence. Tiferet is

the inner, secret being of creation that renews and unifies everything as one. This ordered arrangement draws to itself grace and beauty.

Tiferet balances all human spiritual powers: intellect and emotion, the spiritual and the physical, the past, present and future, detail and totality, obligations to other people and obligations to God. When all of these are balanced within us, we reach tiferet (Rav Kook).

The Dialectic of Tiferet

Tiferet harmonizes chesed and gevurah in a dialectic (Inner Space).

Tiferet is not a reductionist approach to our inner reality. It does not demand that we reject aspects of our personality in order to fit into a procrustean bed of religiosity. Tiferet harmonizes and does not flatten out individual characteristics.

This is one reason that Jacob, symbol of tiferet, is described as possessing the quality of truth. Jacob truthfully expressed his emotions: love, anger and so forth. He expressed all his faculties in the service of God. His inner life was consistent with his outer expression. In the language of the Talmud, “his inside was like his outside” (Berachot 28a). Neither suppressing nor self-indulging his character, he was able to be giving in his relations with others. Thus, he fulfilled the quality of compassion that characterizes tiferet (cf. *Innerspace*).

The Test of Truth

It may seem ironic that Jacob is known as a “man of truth.” One of the most famous episodes in his life involved his lying to his father in order to receive the blessing that was to go to his unworthy brother, Esau.

At times, there is a split between spiritual and physical reality. God rules in truth and compassion, yet human beings indulge in falsehood and evil. At such times, the expression aim toward truth must be clothed in falsehood. And the aim toward compassion must be clothed in what appears as unconcern and even cruelty. “With the wise, God is wise; and with the scheming, He is scheming” (Psalms 18:27).

The essence of compassion is to cause the consciousness of God to shine in the world and to remove people from their compulsions and self-imprisonment.

Compassion demands that we set limits on those who hurt themselves and others. The narcissist regards any limit on his behavior as inimical. But compassion for that person and those about him demands that those limits be enforced (cf. *YD Ever Min Hachai* 2:1).

Esau represents the usurpation of goodness by a corrupt power. He is described by the sages as a hypocrite, pretending to be super-pious: asking his father whether he is obligated to tithe straw. In the world of Esau, beauty is transformed into pornography; sensitivity into self-revelation; delicacy into vulgarity; egalitarianism into coarseness. Love is turned into narcissism; virility into oppression; opportunity into exploitation. Esau has

“swallowed wealth” (Job 20:15).

Such corrupt people welcome and promulgate the doctrine that good people are limited to acting meekly and kindly. These narcissists can best remain unaccountable when those about them remain other-worldly, sensitive and mild.

But the man of God, the man of truth, the man of compassion, is a man of power. This-worldly strength, cunning and scheming are foreign and repellent to him. But Jacob’s job is not only to engage in the spirituality that he finds so pleasant, for in the face of Esau’s existence, that is retreat from responsibility.

Jacob had to receive Esau’s blessing from their blind father, Isaac. And in order to do that, Jacob put on a sheepskin that would feel like Esau’s hairy skin.

In his relations with Esau, Jacob must put on the garments of Esau. Isaac, feeling Jacob’s arms, exclaimed, “The hands are the hands of Esau”—and then, hearing Jacob’s voice, he concluded, “but the voice is the voice of Jacob!” (Genesis 27:22). Even when we descend into battle with Esau, our voice and prayer, our spirituality and morality, must remain unsullied.

In the face of aggression, we must respond with forcefulness. This is so even though we may appear as this-worldly and unspiritual; we may disappoint others and even be hated and demonized. Those who deny the right of Jacob to defend himself wrap themselves in the mantle of piety: in truth, they are hypocritical Esaus, who really would like to see Jacob demolished.

Jacob is the persona of truth. When we reveal truth, we evince compassion for ourselves and others. Therefore, Jacob is

also the persona of compassion. When we speak out with courage, truth and compassion, we bring harmony and balance into our lives. This harmony is a somatic and psychological wholesomeness: goodness, beauty. This is the healing and rectification of the sefirah of tiferet.

When we retrieve goodness from evil, we reclaim what is rightfully our own. It returns to us as self-esteem, normality, effectiveness and joy. Esau “swallowed wealth; and he will vomit it up” (Job 20:15) (cf. *YD Matnat Kehunah* 2:5).

Prayer

Isaac blessed Jacob: “God will give you from the dew of the heavens” (Genesis 27:39).

This verse can be connected to a verse describing the first days of creation: “No herbs were yet in the ground, nor were any grasses of the field yet growing, for the Lord God had not brought rain upon the earth, and there was no human being to work the earth” (Genesis 2:5). God had created vegetation, but it was still incipient. The rabbis teach, “Why had God not yet caused it to rain? Because there was no human being to work the land and recognize the goodness of the rain. When Adam came and knew that rain is needed, he prayed for it; the rain descended, and the trees and grasses grew” (Rashi there).

Rain represents goodness from heaven. We only can draw down this rain with our prayer and initiative. The rain turns drought to fecundity, constriction to love. Just as the trees and grasses grow from the ground, so does our soul, fructified by the

rain of love, rise to God.

Then our physicality becomes a vehicle for holiness. Our sustenance comes not from earthly but from heavenly things. “Man does not live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

And so Isaac blessed Jacob, “God will give you from the dew of the heavens.” When we lift our prayer of tiferet to God, God will pour upon us His spirituality: the spirituality of Torah that properly balances chesed and gevurah (cf. *YD Chadash* 3:11).

A Human Being

A fragment of a verse in Numbers states, “This is the Torah: a man” (Numbers 19:14). The rabbis of the Talmud state that only when a Jew keeps the halachot of the Torah is he considered a “man,” a truly human being. It is not enough to be intelligent, for then we are an intelligent animal. Only when we are sensitive to God and compassionate are we “made in God’s image.”

Through keeping the commandments of the Torah, which relate to tiferet, we can attain compassion, the trait of tiferet. Only in this way can we know God. “This is the Torah: a man.”

It does not suffice to reach this level ourselves. We must work to fill the world with human beings.

According to the speculations of some, besides Adam and Eve, there were many primitive men and women.

But Adam and Eve were the first beings to have opened hearts and enlightened minds. Only they are considered truly human.

Today as well, we must struggle to be human beings, beings

who spread the consciousness of God's reality to ourselves and others. A potent way to connect to knowledge of God is to recite, morning and evening, the Sh'ma: "Sh'ma Yisroel, Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." In doing so, we reveal God's Divinity. And that is the essence of compassion. It is the revelation of harmony, beauty and truth: the sefirah of tiferet (cf. *OH K'riyat Sh'ma* 3:4).

The verse states, "The man was a living being" (Genesis 2:7). The traditional Aramaic translation paraphrases, "a speaking spirit." We are human when we allow our spirit to speak and express itself. Spirituality is not prim self-containment nor a dionysian explosion of physical urges. Only a person who has lost touch with who he is believes that he expresses his "self" by engaging in bouts of physical self-indulgence. We are human when we express our connection to Torah. This expression is contained within tiferet (cf. *YD Kil'ei B'heimah* 3:2).

Compassion

Jacob blessed his children, "May God, the Almighty, give you compassion" (Genesis 43:14). There are a lower and a higher compassion. The type of compassion we are able to reach depends on our connection to daat.

We need God to give compassion into our hands so that we will ourselves have compassion on ourselves. Therefore, Jacob blessed his children that God "give you compassion"—that is, that God will give the compassion over to you.

When the compassion remains with God, because our daat

is weak, it can express itself in ways that are painful. In God's eyes, suffering can be compassion. This is the lower level of compassion.

But we ask God for higher knowledge; we ask that He deliver the compassion into our hands, so that we can experience it as comforting (cf. *OH Eruvei Techumim* 3:1).

The essence of compassion is to ameliorate the constrictions of *gevurah*. Then spirit and physical are joined. At that point, our body becomes a vehicle of our soul. Although the body is still physical, it becomes spiritual. This is why, Rabbi Nachman teaches, although a *tzaddik* appears to be the same as a regular person, he is in essence a different being.

The essence of compassion is to draw from the source of life and to extend that energy into all the worlds.

Our service of God and our self-growth are in a constant state of flux. We run up to spirituality and God, and then return to earth. Running up to God is sweet and exhilarating; returning to this physical world can be dismaying. After an ecstatic experience, we come back to find that the diapers still need to be changed, relationships still are difficult, and we still need to painstakingly work on our psychological improvement.

Yet this descent from spiritual ecstasy is the role of *tiferet*. It allows us to suffuse this-worldly reality with Godly consciousness and compassion (cf. *YD Avodat Elilim* 1:1).

Judgment

Judgment is often considered to be a negative trait: the

opposite of compassion, empathy and respect. That is the definition of judgment that has been warped by the power of Esau. But it is attempting to live without any judgment at all that actually allows such perversions of truth and sanity to prevail.

Powerful judgment is a necessary partner to truth. Thus, healthy judgment is also a characteristic of the energy of tiferet.

Ultimately, the ability of judgment comes from God, for “His judgment is true” (Zachariah 7:9).

We connect ourselves to the truth of God’s judgment through the openness of our heart and the lucidity of our mind. Then we can be absorbed into the level of reality that preceded creation (cf. *YD Ribit* 5:12).

In Jewish law, three judges are necessary to oversee a case. These three judges correspond to the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Any approach to truth must contain within itself the three values of chesed, gevurah and tiferet. These are represented by the three judges in a court case.

Our sages state that “whenever a judge judges truthfully, he is made a partner to God in the act of creation” (Shabbat 10a). When we make a proper judgment, when we rescue ourselves or another from oppression and mistreatment, we have rectified creation: we have brought about God’s purpose (cf. *HM Harshaah* 1).

The Hebrew word for “to pray,” “hitpallel,” has an unusual literal meaning: “to judge oneself.” Healthful, positive judgment of oneself means that one judges oneself with truth, harmony and beauty—with compassion. This judgment of prayer is the “middle

column” between chesed and gevurah. We do not turn right or left, but come to the core of the matter.

The technique of spontaneous prayer advocated by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *hitbodedut*, is a meditative technique of *tiferet*, of judgment. Unlike the set prayers, you do not follow a script. Rather, you lift up the burden that weighs on your heart at the moment. Instead of turning to the right or left, you connect yourself to the point of concern within your heart (cf. *YD Melamdim* 4:12).

The aspect of judgment also concerns the Torah (and the learning of Torah is *tiferet*).

Sometimes our this-worldly desires are overwhelming and drive us away from the Torah. Other times, our spiritual desires are so overpowering that we cast aside all balance, limitations and inhibitions, and plunge into passionate service of God. Such passion can lead to a terrible, unchecked fall, to depression, confusion and the sense of being lost when the ecstasy ceases, to an abandonment of Torah and the search for God.

The Torah is the central column that balances a person between these two passions. When we learn Torah and keep the *mitzvot*, we become grounded and centered. The learning of Torah and keeping of its commandments replaces the grandiosity of spiritual self-delusion with a plain and unglamorous attention to detail and living with ourselves in this world.

Torah cools the heart from the lust for this world and the unbalanced desire for God.

When we serve God in measured manner, we can rise to Godliness with all of our faculties, step by step. This is the way-

station of tiferet (cf. *YD Terumot Umaasrot* 3:2).

Beautifying God and Beautifying Israel

The verse speaks of God referring to “Israel, in whom I will take pride” (Isaiah 49:3). The word for “pride” is “hitp’er,” which has the same root as the word tiferet. The verse could be translated “Israel, in whom I will be beautified.”

When we learn Torah and keep its commandments, we so to speak beautify God: we strengthen the sefirah of tiferet and increase its ability to receive and pass on God’s power (cf. *HM M’abeid Mamon Chaveiro Umasur* 2:7).

By means of the Torah, the people of Israel are called the pride and beauty of God. That is why the Torah itself is called tiferet.

When the Jews received the Torah at Mt. Sinai, the beauty of even the most humble Jew was revealed. In order for this to happen, Moses, the spiritual master, “most humble of all men,” bound himself to each Jew and found a divine spirit in him. In this way, Moses was able to bring the Torah into the world.

As a result, Moses received a crown of beauty, a crown of tiferet.

The true spiritual master is a man of compassion who sees the beauty, the divine spark, hidden within even the lowest individual.

The opposite of this is the person who wants to condemn people.

This type of person is personified by Haman, who wished to

“destroy and kill” all the Jews. It was his goal to destroy the beauty that God found in the Jews and the sense of beauty that is so to speak found in Him when the Jews learn and keep the Torah.

The Talmud states that Haman chose the month of Adar to attack the Jews because it was in Adar that Moses had died. Moses had been able to deliver the Torah, God’s presence, to the Jews as a result of finding the beauty in them. Haman chose the anniversary of Moses’ death to try to undo that revelation of every individual’s worthy and beauty (cf. *OH Purim* 2:1).

But the death of Moses is linked to great compassion. “No one knows his burial place” (Deut. 34:6). That is to say, at the time of his death, Moses attained a level that transcends spatiality. That is the level of God, Who is called the Place of the world. From there, great favor pours forth. From that level, everyone is judged compassionately and favorably.

This is connected to tiferet, the sefirah of Jacob. The people of Israel were promised that they would inherit “the inheritance of Jacob,” an “inheritance without borders”—an inheritance that transcends the boundaries of space (cf. *OH Tzitzit* 3:19).

A Fearless Glow

Tiferet is beauty, harmony, charisma. It is the shining beauty that calms the soul and brings peace like a river into our limbs. Tiferet is the voice of the heart singing to God and allowing God’s cataracts of compassion to tumble down. Tiferet is the wholesomeness that we experience when learning the Torah, the home at the core of the heart that we reach when carrying out the

commandments of the Torah.

Tiferet is the thrill of the spirit so that “all one’s bones will exclaim, Who is like You, God!” (*Nishmat Kol Chai*). Tiferet is the beauty and strength of God that channels through our torso and fills us with fullness, song and action.

Tiferet is the rainbow of harmony from above; it is the chorus of voices rising up to God.

Tiferet is the resting of justice upon the land. Tiferet is the turning to the cry of the injured, to the complaint of the maligned and the oppressed. Tiferet is the uprooting of lies, of false propaganda, of vulgar demagoguery. Tiferet is respect for truth and for the individual.

Tiferet nurtures the spark of Godliness hidden within ourselves so that it rises to become a halo, a fearless glow.

CHAPTER EIGHT: NETZACH AND HOD

The sefirah of netzach—victory, or eternity—represents the desire to overwhelm the world with chesed. It is the spirit of the proselyte who, having been inspired, wishes to impress others into a new, enlightened state. A Yiddish Hasidic lyric states, “If I had the strength, I would run through the streets yelling ‘Shabbos! Shabbos!’”

Netzach must be balanced by hod—beauty, glory. Hod holds back that exuberant spirit. It keeps us us from getting caught up in such an ecstasy (*Mystical Concepts*, p. 836).

When Rabbi Nachman of Breslov once gave a lyrical, impassioned description of hitbodedut, meditative prayer, his student, Rabbi Nosson, exclaimed, “I will run through the marketplaces and streets and cry, Gevalt! What are people thinking about?” But Rabbi Nachman grabbed him by his jacket and said to him, “Stay here. You won’t accomplish anything” (*Kochavei Ohr*, p. 12).

Netzach is competition, the desire to excel, to battle against

others. Hod is devotion, compliance and conformity.

Competition is deeply active, waxing and waning. In serving God, netzach strains, pours out the soul, pushes us to the limit. We are extremely active and then we must retreat to rest.

Hod, on the other hand, is a consistent, quiet state of devotion, subordination and consistency.

In serving God, we need both tendencies. Pouring out our strength in serving God can be depleting and unbalanced. But serving God with obedient, simple devotion can degenerate into triviality and lack of thought (Kantor).

Netzach and hod, plus yesod, constitute a triad that is a more active expression of the qualities expressed before them (Kantor). They are so to speak an actualization of chesed and gevurah.

But netzach is not simply an attenuation of chesed, nor hod of gevurah. Because chesed and gevurah were blended in tiferet, netzach contains elements of gevurah, and hod contains elements of chesed.

Netzach and hod work together intimately to process and draw down the energy of the sefirot.

They are a pair: “two halves of a body, like twins” (Zohar III:236a). They are the two legs that support the body (Zohar Chadash Vayera 26d), and thus they are called the “supports of the upper sefirot” (Mystical Concepts in Chassidism, pp. 835-6).

Together, they are called “the kidneys that advise.”⁷

⁷In ancient Jewish terminology, advice is seen to come from the kidneys, or the area of the kidneys. Thus, the Midrash teaches that Abraham reached a stage of such divine inspiration that his kidneys poured forth wisdom

Netzach and hod advise and pass on wisdom. A father may want to teach his child some abstract information. On the one hand, he wishes to give as much as he can: that is netzach. It must be balanced with a softer, yielding quality, the ability to withhold what the child cannot comprehend. That is hod.

We can view the previous triad of chesed, gevurah and tiferet as related to giving. Chesed gives; gevurah holds back from giving.

But the relationship between netzach and hod is more interdynamic. Just as netzach gives, so does it receive. In receiving, hod reciprocates. When a teacher gives his knowledge, he receives from the student. When Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked Rabbi Akiva to teach him, Rabbi Akiva replied, “More than the calf wishes to suck, the cow wishes to nurture.”

The sefirot of netzach and hod mirror the complexities of a human relationship. The parties in a relationship perform in a shifting dance of giving and taking, influencing and being influenced, asserting individuality and complying with the other person’s identity.

Netzach is dominance; hod empathy.

A person who is only netzach stifles another; a person who is only hod is submissive to the point of tolerating evil.

spontaneously.

Prophecy

Netzach and hod are the image and voice of prophecy. The image comes from God—that is netzach. It is described in words—that is hod (Kaplan).

Netzach and hod are streams of water through which inspiration flows. Because the prophet is nullified before God's power, netzach and hod are the wheels of the divine chariot.

Learning Torah

Tiferet is learning Torah. Netzach and hod represent those who draw down sustenance from tiferet and learn Torah.

It is important to support these people.

It is easy, particularly in the tensions encouraged by our culture, to disparage those who learn. In our culture, quiet meditation is not pursued. The concept of long-term spiritual self-improvement is seen as self-indulgence. A dedication to developing our relationship to God is not respected or even understood.

Over the course of centuries, the idea of the servant of God devoting his life to meditation and spiritual self-improvement was superseded by the artist who devotes his life to perfecting his craft. Now even this concept has become incomprehensible. Gradually, the veneration for things of the spirit is diminished and choked in a culture that is driven by noisy vulgarity.

As for the student of Torah, he must learn from everyone. As the psalm states, "I have gained wisdom from all my teachers" (Psalms 119:99). We cannot limit ourselves to one teacher. We

must become universal students. Then we attain the level of netzach and hod; and our teachers are on the level of tiferet (*Tomer Devorah*).

The Divine Flow

Netzach is the unending flow of Godly wealth, conquering everything that is not eternal. Hod is the rising of existence to the heights of light and supernal freedom, where the crown of kingship is hidden (Rav Kook).

Song

Because netzach and hod are related to prophecy, they correlate with holy speech and song, which in their most inspired state approach prophecy. The song of a holy person is drawn from netzach and hod, which are called living, pure birds. On the other hand, music that awakens feelings of lust and violence is drawn from an unholy source (*LM I:3*).

The prophets would listen to music in order to be inspired.

Usually, good and bad are mixed together. When we separate them, we clarify our mind and we can receive inspiration from God: prophecy. A melody too is a separation of notes: choosing those that are harmonious and rejecting those that are discordant. In playing a melody, we gather the good spirit, the spirit of prophecy (*LM I:54:6*).

Choosing the correct notes is similar to finding good points within ourselves. If we only see bad, we cannot reach the level of

prophecy and inspiration. Instead, we sink into depression. Depression is a consequence of feelings of worthlessness. When we find good points in ourselves, we find the notes of a beautiful melody. We are able to pray and sing to God. Then we know that it is our very being that praises God: “I will sing to God with my being” (Psalms 146:2) (*LM I:282*).

This is related to prophecy.

The sages state that a prophet can only prophesy in a state of joy. Depression and feelings of worthlessness are the opposite of prophecy and purity.

Depression comes from poisonous advice, from people whose lives and attitudes are twisted. Such people look at life and see corruption; look at endeavor and see meaninglessness. They see the reek of death in beauty, and find worthlessness and even perversion in all movement toward idealism, growth, love, communication and God.

To such a person, love is disgusting because it is physical; belief ludicrous because it has been abused; idealism a criminal folly because it has been perverted. To such a person, the Torah is a heap of dead laws; God a grotesque mime; the world a horrific mountain of corpses, bones, and fools who waste their spirit on striving.

To such a person, the only truth and safe place is the grave: the mocking knowledge that everything is equal, since everything is hopeless and bound to decay. In such a universe, God is the prisoner of an ocean of angels that surround Him like waves of headstones.

Such a person lives in a negative world. There, friendship

is torment; family is a burden; marriage is Auschwitz. All achievement is seen as self-compromise. As though viewed through the wrong end of a telescope, everything positive—love, relationship, beauty, goodness—is viewed as small, distorted and laughable.

Such a person sees only himself. He is the center of his universe. Yet, though narcissistically entranced, such a person is not filled with self-love but bitterness, and waves of darkness flow from him.

This malign influence must be countered by the holy song of the birds of *netzach* and *hod*.

We must “know how to play music” (I Samuel 16:18). We must know how to bring forth the notes of life, meaning, self-worth and joy. This is the good spirit of Godliness, as in the verse, “[With] Your good spirit, lead me in a smooth land” (Psalms 143:10).

We must go up and down the scale of our being, bringing forth tunes of joy (*LM I* 54:6).

Then we turn from the idols of corruption, the fetishes of death, and turn to the cherubim, the bird-like images above the holy ark that contains God’s Torah. Our rabbis taught that when God and Israel were close, these golden statues of the cherubim would embrace like a couple engaged in the act of love. It is only corruption and a twisted, cynical worship of death that sees a divide between physical and spiritual love.

The voice of joy is the attainment of *netzach* and *hod*: the song of prophecy.

Dance

The dynamic balance between netzach and hod, the two legs of the structure of the sefirot, is like a dance. The legs of netzach and hod are lifted toward the heart of tiferet. We raise our feet from the muck of idolatry and depression, and is able to draw down the blessing of Jacob and tiferet (*LM I* 1:8, 41). Then the holy advice of netzach and hod streams through our being.

Advice

Netzach and hod are the conduits of wise, holy advice. This advice originates in binah and flowers in hod. It teaches us how to live our lives to their fullest spiritual expression.

Only when this transcendent wisdom is drawn to netzach and hod does it take on a substantiality that can be interpreted as counsel. “From afar she brings her bread” (Proverbs 31:14) (cf. *HM Hefker V'nichsei Hageir* 4:17).

Advice on the level of binah must be channeled and made specific for our life. We need a teacher, a “man of understanding” who can draw the advice from binah to netzach and hod. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that “there is a light that shines in a thousand universes. This light is so great that a simple person cannot receive it. It needs a great, wise man who can divide thousands into hundreds. This person can divide the great light into smaller portions so that others can receive it bit by bit” (*SH* 93).

Receiving advice from a spiritual master creates new connections, links synapses in our mind, brings about new

awareness and insights. The imparting of holy advice connects a person to holiness the same way that marriage connects two people to each other. That is why advice comes through *netzach* and *hod*, which are analogous to the *k'liyot*, translated in Breslov literature (and Tanya) as the reproductive organs. Just as marriage begets progeny, so does the imparting of advice from a spiritual master awaken spiritual progeny within our consciousness (cf. *LM* 7:3).

It is usually not enough to consult with our heart, for “a prisoner cannot free himself.” Only when we draw the matter down into this world, asking another for advice, is it easy to discover a course of action (*SH* 255).

The Zohar refers to the 613 biblical commandments as “advice.” The ultimate good advice counsels a person on how to lead a Godly life (*Likutei Eitzot, Eitzah* 1).

Advice marks the beginning of action. Our legs are a low part of the body. Through advice, we connect ourselves to the upper spiritual realities (cf. *OH Tefillin* 5:34).

In the evening prayer, we ask God, “Rectify us with good advice before You.” Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that we must recite these words with great feeling. We must ask God to have compassion on us so that we will be wisely guided and know the proper way in which to act (*SH* 238).

Through prayer to God, we can attain true advice (*LM* 49:5).

True advice links us to a power greater and wiser than ourselves: this is the connection to faith. That itself imbues us with humility. When we put ourselves in the company of spiritual masters, people who can inspire us with true advice, we reach

humility (*LM* 10:5).

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to sit together” (Psalms 133:1). When people possess humility, they see each other as brothers and dwell in peace. “Like the good oil upon the head, falling upon the beard, the beard of Aaron, which falls upon the hem of his garments.” The “good oil upon the head” is the advice that begins in binah. This good oil falls upon the “beard of Aaron,” representing the spiritual master. The advice flows into the “hem of his garments.” In Hebrew, the word for garments is *midot*: measured qualities. The spiritual master takes the immeasurable light of binah and channels it into sparks of advice that the ordinary person can assimilate (cf. *HM Nezikin* 5:34).

Netzach and *hod* correspond to the feet that tread upon this sullied globe. Many negative forces surround the advice given by *netzach* and *hod*. Often, it is buried under a barrage of evil counsel. Thus, the verse teaches, “Her feet descend to death” (Proverbs 5:5). The feet of *netzach* and *hod* touch dirty soil.

The majority of modern culture is in the realm of bad advice: vulgarized Marxist thought, utopian sexual libertarianism and commercial manipulation.

The battle between good and evil finds expression on the level of *netzach* and *hod*. Higher than this, these “husks” of evil have no place. But they can grasp at the feet, at holy advice.

Our society is stranded in a morass of confusion. Old values have been overthrown, but the leaders are not harbingers of liberation but mediocre spirits who reduce art, music, religion, literature and education to a banal political jargon.

Meanwhile, the commercial conglomerates lace commercial

with subliminal messages of “personal liberation” and hedonism with the aim of selling their products.

How can people choose between art and propaganda when they have grown up exposed primarily to mediocrity, vulgarity, violence and salaciousness? How can they choose greatness when their professors instruct them that to do so is to be a stooge of repressive, evil doctrines? How can they choose literature when libraries are no longer cultural repositories but entertainment centers?

And how can they choose between good and evil when they are taught that everything can be re-evaluated, that there is no ultimate right and wrong? How can they choose between principle and selling-out when there are no constant values?

This confusion in which abuse is political discourse, slapstick wit, vulgarity humor, in which intelligence is elitism and culture oppression, constitutes the triumph of the “husks” over the sanity of *netzach* and *hod*.

And in the Jewish world, the majority of Jews have no experience of Godliness, no encounter with the Torah, no concept of the Sabbath. Do we respond by creating committees that compose vapid programs and literature? Do we restate the statistics to find something to celebrate? Do we remake Judaism as an amorphous state of being in which there are no ideas and rules? Do we react to the search for spirituality by offering bromides?

Such “husks” suffocate the advice of *netzach* and *hod*, the advice of the spirit that like a river can refresh parched souls.

When we stand in the presence of God, we remove our shoes. “Remove your shoes from your feet, for the ground that you

stand on is holy” (Exodus 3:5). But in this world, we must protect ourselves.

It requires a great effort to protect ourselves from the influences of this culture; an even greater effort to seek out non-manipulative and non-exploitative influences.

We protect our feet from evil influence by clinging to truth.

We must walk upon a path of truth. That path is the Torah: “In the path that I command you to go.”

We must have clarity that one thing is good and allowed, another not good and forbidden. We need a set of rules that has proven itself historically and religiously. The Torah provides those rules.

Only the presence of firm principles gives a person the strength to choose good consistently. Otherwise, we retreat before the persuasive arguments of weakness and evil.

Only when we are connected to the light of truth can we walk upon a path free of corruption and self-deception. That is the path of the Torah actualized: the path of *netzach* and *hod* (cf. *EH Gittin* 3:24).

When putting on our shoes in the morning, we recite the blessing to God, “Who has taken care of all my needs.” Why do we make such a global blessing over this specific article of clothing? When our holy advice is guarded, when we know how to walk on a path of holiness, all of our needs are taken care of.

Thus, the sages taught that “a person should always sell all that he has and take shoes for his feet.” The most important thing we can have in this world is the knowledge of how to act and protect ourselves.

To reach respectable levels of holiness, we need not even exert ourselves unduly. Just shielding ourselves from degrading influences clears our mind and heart.

Merely by limiting or even eliminating our exposure to cheap television, radio and newspapers, we cleanse our mind and heart.

The next blessing we make in the morning, as we put on our belt, is “Who girds Israel with might.” When we are connected to holy advice, we gird ourselves with faith and Godliness, as in the verse, “Righteousness will be his belt and faith his belt” (Isaiah 11:5). Then we emulate God Himself, as in “the Lord is dressed in strength” (Psalms 93:1).

The blessing we make after that is “Who crowns Israel with beauty,” as we covers our head. This corresponds to the verse, “The head of Your word is truth” (Psalms 119:160). Truth is tiferet, which maintains our faith.

By guarding and maintaining a level of holy advice, we rise in spirituality, girding ourselves with faith, and haloing our head with truth (cf. *HM Hefker V'nichsei Hageir* 4:8).

Water

Holy advice has its source in binah, which is the level of the mikvah, a gathering of water.

The water of the mikvah is drawn to the level of advice, as in the verse, “Deep waters are advice” (Proverbs 20:5). In binah, this water is the “wellsprings of redemption” (Isaiah 12:3). Now we bring this water into our daily lives: “drawn water with joy from

the wellsprings of redemption.”

The word mikvah can also be related to a homonym meaning “Hope.” God is called Mikveh Israel (Jeremiah 14:8)—the hope of Israel. He redeems a person on the level of holy advice.

We start every day by pouring water over our hands. We step into the world only after we cleanse ourselves with holy advice drawn from the “wellsprings of salvation.” Our faith is open to the holiness that guards us throughout the day and purifies us from uncleanness (cf. *HM Hefker V’nichsei Hageir* 4:7).

We draw down the water of advice by crying out to God. Then we are “like a deer crying at the streams of water” (Psalms 42:2). The “streams of water” are netzach and hod. Our faith in God is increased, and we cling to holiness (cf. *HM Hefker V’nichsei Hageir* 4:4).

The seventh day of Succot is called Hoshanah Rabbah: “The Great Crying Out.” On this day, we implore God to send us rain in its season so that the streams may flow. We cry from the depths of our hearts—“from the depths have I called You, O God”—so that the streams of holy advice may flow freely.

Isaac had to re-dig the wells of his father to uncover the water of holy advice. The revelation of this advice comes in the midst of drought and confusion (cf. *OH Hoshanah Rabah* 1).

Memory

It is not only when we have no concept of Torah that the wells of holy advice are blocked by the Philistines—by Philistinism.

It is also when we forget the knowledge. Even if it is in our

mind but fading before the stronger impressions of this world, that too is considered forgetting.

At the end of Jacob's wrestling with the angel, the angel crippled Jacob: "He touched [Jacob's] thigh" (Genesis 32:25). The right thigh refers to *netzach*, the first sefirah that is, so to speak, clothed in this world. The angel disabled Jacob's ability to maintain his consciousness of holy advice and the world-to-come.

In heaven, the reality of holiness is obvious. But in this world, it is a struggle to constantly remember a greater reality. It is even a struggle to remember a set of principles by which to live.

We may have a knowledge of these things, yet it pales—sometimes imperceptibly. We can fool ourselves that we have holiness in mind. We can create a philosophy of how by dealing more and more with this physical world we are raising sparks of holiness, integrating our spiritual and physical life, redeeming all aspects of our personality. Often, such a path leads to a lessening of spirituality and a coarsening of sensitivity. Our ostensible search for balance has turned into a compromise with mediocrity.

That is the angel with whom every Jew must wrestle. Jacob was wounded in the thigh, and thereafter limped. And every Jew limps, remembering on some plane the reality of God yet stumbling in the fascinations of this world (cf. *OH Birkot Hariyah Ush'ar B'rachot P'ratiot* 5:4).

Man and Woman

Netzach and *hod*, the thighs, are involved in the union

between man and woman. When a couple unite in holiness, they are connected to God's holy advice. United on the level of netzach and hod, they draw down the holy spirit that originates in chochmah.

We are able to attain such a level of holiness with the aid of the true spiritual master: he who breaks the great light down into smaller streams of light.

Such a union parallels the phenomenon of prophecy, which also draws down holiness from a great source.

The drawing down of holiness by a man and woman attains completion when their union results in the birth of a child who will walk in the pathways of the Torah (cf. *EH Pirivyah Virivyah V'Hilchot Ishut* 5:18).

Spiritual Illness

When our ability to assimilate holy advice is flawed, we are spiritually ill. The Hebrew for "sighing" in the verse "The entire day sighing" (Lamentations 1:13) is *doveh*, which contains the letters, rearranged, of *hod*. When the husks of darkness surround *hod*, we sigh. Only when *netzach* and *hod* are healthy is our spirit healthy. Then we reach a state of inner peace and love among people.

This is connected to the holiday of Lag B'omer, which occurs between Passover and Shavuot. The forty-nine days of this period between festivals represent the seven *sefirot* between *chesed* and *malchut* (each divided into seven subsets). Lag B'omer, the thirty-third day, represents *hod* within *hod*. The Talmud teaches

that because Rabbi Akiva's students spoke with one another disrespectfully, 24,000 of them died. On Lag B'omer, the plague stopped. The drawing down of good advice, drawn from binah, brings peace.

Lag B'omer is also the anniversary of the passing away of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, central author of the Zohar. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was one of Rabbi Akiva's students and he attained that level of peace.

We reach peace when we link ourselves to holy advice, when the details of our lives are in a framework of holy activity (cf. *OH Beit Haknesset* 4:5).

Hannukah and Purim

Hannukah represents netzach, and Purim hod.

Hannukah contains within it the name of Hannah, the mother of Samuel the prophet and the woman from whom we learn how to pray. Samuel declared that "The Eternal One—Netzach—of Israel will not lie" (Samuel I 15:29). Thus Samuel connected the idea of netzach with the acquisition of truth through good advice.

Samuel acted in this world with the good advice, the prophecy, that he gained from God. He also anointed two kings, Saul and David. The oil with which he anointed them was the holy oil that illumines the light of truth, as in the verse, "Like the good oil upon the head, falling upon the beard, the beard of Aaron, which falls upon the hem of his garments" (Psalms 133:2) (cf. *OH Hanukkah* 6:8).

This is why we read the psalms of thankfulness, Hallel, on

Hannukah. When the mouths of the mute are made to speak, we access the true advice of netzach and hod. Then as well, childless women can have children, for when netzach and hod are rectified, man and woman join and draw down a holy soul (cf. *EH Kiddushin* 2:4).

On Hanukah and Purim, work is not prohibited. Even in the midst of our this-worldly life, we serve God with the good advice of netzach and hod. We draw this good advice into the depth of our secular aspects.

We are in exile when we cannot make a pilgrimage to the Beit Hamikdash to receive the light of God's countenance.

So God sends the light of His countenance into our workday world.

Helping Others

Every generation has its great teachers who work to rectify us and revive us with their holy teachings.

We emulate these spiritual masters and God when we help others. When we visit a sick person, we go to him with our feet—netzach and hod. Just as God comes into our midst when we are in exile, so do we go to others who are ill.

When we sit at the bedside of the ill person, we pray to God. This prayer, this outcry of the heart, is netzach and hod. Then "doveh," sighing, is transformed to hod. Sickness reverts to health, and the pathway of the Torah, the pathway leading to Jerusalem, is restored (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 4:14).

The Dance of Netzach and Hod

Netzach is the giving forth of energy. Hod is the yielding. These two forces are ever balanced, ever bound, always in sympathy with each other, creating a dance of holy advice and life. They are the sefirot of going forward and yielding, of embracing and being embraced, of hardness and softness, of communicating intimately yet never melting into one amorphous whole.

Netzach and hod are the two sefirot most obviously mirroring the popular conceptions of man and woman. Netzach is conquering, mighty, sometimes overpowering. Hod is glorious, yielding, giving thanks. Netzach without hod is a mindless army, conquering blindly. Hod without netzach is cloying, clinging, yielding and needy. When hod balances netzach, netzach is brave. When netzach balances hod, hod is inspired. Netzach and hod need each other: they are perfected in each other.

Netzach and hod are the beginning of a dynamic relationship that is only fused and brought to rest with the sefirah that follows: yesod.

CHAPTER NINE: YESOD

Yesod is the basis on which all the prior sefirot rest. The word yesod means foundation.

Yesod receives the energy of the prior sefirot and fructifies everything below. It is the link between heaven and earth. Thus, it is the foundation of creation (*Mystical Concepts*, p. 837).

Linking the upper worlds and this world, yesod is the avenue of communication. And yesod functions as the ability of communication on the human level. The biblical definition of human being as a “soul of life” (Genesis 2:7) is paraphrased in the Aramaic translation, “a speaking spirit” (Kantor). A human being can communicate. In all our relationships, we can communicate goodness to others.

The sefirot of netzach and hod parallel a human relationship of give and take. Yesod is the culmination of that relationship (Kaplan).

We can even communicate with and inspire those on a much

higher spiritual level than we. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that every individual has an area in which he can be another's teacher. We must await and seek that moment when we can give a word of reflection, growth, insight and redemption to another human being.

Yesod parallels the mouth dedicated to holy speech.

The ultimate communication is "daat," knowing. When the Bible relates that Adam had conjugal relations with Eve, it tells that he "knew" her.

Yesod therefore parallels the male organ of procreation, which channels the seed of life.

Because sexual passion is the most overwhelming and difficult to tame, only when a person's spiritual nature rules his sexual urge is he called tzaddik: a spiritual master. The paradigm of the tzaddik is Joseph, a young man in captivity who resisted the sexual wiles of his master's seductive wife (Zohar).

The characteristics of speech and sexuality meet in the realm of talk about sexuality.

We emulate the sefirah of yesod by not engaging in speech that leads to licentious thoughts. Thought is an interior communication—it too corresponds to yesod. We should refrain from any topics that lead us to an unholy state of mind. "Do not allow your mouth to sully your flesh" (Ecclesiastes 5:5).

Yesod is compared to the rainbow. The rainbow is like an archer's bow, shooting its arrow at malchut, the object of yesod's conjugation. Similarly, the proper object of a man's sexual activity is his wife (*Tomer Devorah*).

Sexuality

Yesod is the sefirah of holy sexuality.

The sexual revolution promised an era of sensitivity, tenderness, truth, spontaneity, fulfillment and maturity.

Instead, it has created a culture of people engaged in irresponsible and promiscuous behavior resulting in a population of children born into loveless, abusive households. Meanwhile, exploitative erotic imagery is used to sell products and raise television ratings.

Just as yesod relates to both sexuality and communication, so has both the level of sexual communication and the general tenor of communication grown coarsened and brutalized.

The call for liberation from restraint has led to an enslavement to license.

This license is an addiction to the physical, a grievous divorce from a realization that the universe holds a spiritual element. It is a search for paradise within physical pleasure.

It is an escape from relationship, intimacy and our own soul.

Sexuality touches upon our feelings—upon, one may say, our soul.

Activity outside a relationship of love and commitment leads to feelings of depression and self-reproach. These are the soul's reaction to its mistreatment.

Even within the realm of marriage, the Torah creates prescriptions to insure that physical relations parallel the processes of yesod. There must be love and communication. And the relationship can take place only when there is a possibility for

impregnation: only when the woman is not menstruating.

These prescriptions induce a man and woman to view their relationship as a temple.

The ideal of yesod can be approached by all. Only a very few may be encompassed by that ideal; only a handful attain the state of a spiritual master. But to whatever degree we dedicate ourselves to a dialogue with God and holy communication with other human beings, we are connected with integrity to yesod.

Yesod indicates that our abstract wisdom must be mirrored by the wisdom of our acts. Our acts should be even greater than our intellectual wisdom. As the Talmud states, “If a person’s good deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom will last. But if his wisdom exceeds his good deeds, his wisdom will not last” (*Pirkei Avot* 3:12) (cf. *LH YD Shavuot* 2:19).

The Spiritual Master

Yesod refers to the spiritual master.

We can look to many people as our teachers. But a spiritual master is fundamentally different. Rabbi Nachman taught that “The tzaddik has the same appearance as anybody else. Nevertheless, he is completely different from other people, and he really does not resemble them in the least. A holy Jew appears to go about with the same insides as any other human being, but he is really a totally different being” (*LM* II 116).

The Bible tells us that “the tzaddik is the foundation of the world” (Proverbs 10:25). So purified is the soul of the tzaddik that it is actually identified with the sefirah of yesod, the link between

heaven and earth.

From this aspect, we can understand the striking midrash that when Adam was created, the angels believed him to be God. Although God created the world, the creation passed through a level called *yesod*, with which the soul of the *tzaddik* is identified.

More than that, the fact that the *tzaddik* is the “foundation of the world” means that everything was created for him. To the degree that we align our will and actions with God’s will, God has created the world for us.

This also illumines why God had Adam name the animals. These names represent the spiritual forces with which they had been created. By giving them names, Adam drew those forces into them. In this way, Adam functioned as *yesod*: “the foundation of the world.”

Apparently, the state of experiencing one’s soul as identified with *yesod* has led to the formation of non-Jewish doctrines in which the holy teacher is identified with God. This doctrine appears to be a confused interpretation of the extraordinary experience of being a conduit to the world’s existence.

There is a general recognition of the exalted levels to which a human soul can rise—or seem to rise. How we interpret that phenomenon spells the difference between what Judaism considers acceptable belief and idolatry. Even the most inspired visions of the *tzaddik* are no more than the descriptions of a human being serving God, subject to error and tied to the same strictures as other human beings.

Rabbi Nachman taught that everyone can with hard work transform himself into a *tzaddik*. *Yesod* is the conduit of all souls

(cf. *YD Melamdim* 4:4).

The tzaddik, as yesod, the foundation, is the passageway between heaven and earth. Thus, he includes both heaven and earth within himself. Through his influence, all people can unite their own spiritual and material lives (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim* 6:61).

The tzaddik is able to rectify both those who are spiritual and those who are earthy. Sometimes when a person rises to a new level of the spirit, he becomes grandiose. The tzaddik shows this person that in truth he is still far from what God really is.

Other people feel themselves to be very far from God. Such a person feels within himself a dull, adumbrated spark of holiness. How will he ever rise from the endless layers of particularity to Godliness? The tzaddik shows such a person that “the world is filled with His glory” (Isaiah 6:3) and that he can resurrect the spark within himself (cf. *YD Beheimah V’chayah Tehorah* 2:1).

The Bible tells that at the beginning of creation, a river flowed out of Eden and split into four rivers. These four rivers correspond to the traditional four basic elements of the physical world: fire, air, water and earth.⁸ The Hebrew name for each element is yesod. All of them flow from the one original river, the original yesod, the level of the tzaddik.

The first letter of yesod is a *yod*—the most simple and elemental letter, a dot. The tzaddik is humble, nullified before God. He is able to join together all others, such as the person on

⁸Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan has suggested that these correspond to the four basic forces of nature: the strong force, the weak force, gravity and electromagnetic force.

a high spiritual level and that on a low level. He can influence all levels of reality, since all four elements flow from the original, simple yesod.

In this way, the tzaddik brings peace into the world, for he blends and balances all the energies and elements of this world, placing each in its proper sphere (cf. *HM Matzranut* 4:2).

Just as yesod collects all the qualities of the sefirot above it and pours them into malchut, so does the tzaddik vivify all the downtrodden. He has the ability to inspire all people and reconnect them to God's presence (cf. *OH Tefillin* 5:43).

The tzaddik is composed of all the beautiful qualities of Israel. Thus, he loves and nurtures them. And he can also see the beautiful qualities of God.

The tzaddik therefore shines with beauty, for he is composed of the beauty of the individual human being and the beauty of God.

He reveals God's love for every individual and God's praise of Israel. Then all insult is nullified, and tears are wiped away from every face. The beauty and honor with which God praises Israel are revealed (cf. *OH Birkat Hamazon* 4:11).

The tzaddik, the leader, pours forth compassion. As the verse states, "He who has compassion on them will lead them" (Isaiah 49:10). Yesod is in a direct line under tiferet, which is the sefirah of compassion. The tzaddik draws compassion into this world.

The essence of that compassion is the awareness of how pitiable it is when a human being sins and cuts himself off from the ability to cling to the truth and sweetness of God's presence. The tzaddik feels that the worst sufferings in the world are nothing

compared to the burden of such misdeeds. As the verse states, “Like a heavy burden, [my sins] are too heavy for me” (Psalms 38:5). On the other hand, when we don’t sin, even if we suffer, it is not considered suffering—“there is no suffering without sin” (Shabbat 55a)—for we are still connected to daat, awareness of God.

The tzaddik must know how to handle his compassion, for misplaced compassion can be very harmful. His purpose is to spread a civilization of goodness, kindness and understanding of Godliness. Moses taught the Jews, “You have seen to understand that the Lord is God” (Deuteronomy 4:35). Without such understanding, mankind consists at best of animals in human form. The act of sinning denotes the lack of such understanding, as in the Talmud’s statement that “a man does not commit a sin unless a spirit of folly has entered into him” (Sotah 3a).

The archetype of a man of compassion was Moses. The Messiah himself will carry within himself the soul of Moses: “That which was will be” (Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Moses had true compassion, caring for others without self-interest. When the Jews sinned, God threatened to kill them and rebuild the nation of Israel from Moses’ family: “I will make you a great nation” (Exodus 32:10). But Moses prayed to God, “Please forgive their sin” (ibid. 32).

Before we can receive inspiration from our inner being, we must be inspired by a friend. And even before that, we must receive inspiration from the tzaddik.

Unless we see an example of great art, we are condemned to artistic mediocrity. Until a master teaches us to appreciate a Bach viola concerto, we may not comprehend that there is anything

beyond popular music.

Only when we have been exposed to the teachings of the tzaddik, when our soul has been stretched and illumined, can we seek inspiration with a friend or in ourselves.

More than that, the presence of a tzaddik is itself illuminating. Even when a person on a low spiritual level is filled with charisma, he can be transformed in his presence. How much more can a person who is in contact with the highest levels of spirituality affect those around him.

“Joseph is the leader over all the earth, he is the provider to all the people of the land” (Genesis 42:6). The tzaddik, exemplified by Joseph, has the responsibility of directing blessing to all the people. The blessing and wisdom of the tzaddik provide that food will be available during the years of famine.

When we live a life that is in bondage to this world, we live in spiritual famine.

We can ease the famine by rectifying our sexual nature and by receiving sustenance from the teachings and, if possible, the presence, of spiritual masters.

Then we restore our love of God, which had fallen and become attached to this-worldly things. We repeal the insult of attachment to this world and we roll back the famine of the spirit (cf. *OH Birkat Hamazon* 3:2).

In our times, a true teacher is extraordinarily difficult to find.

Where is the Baal Shem Tov of our era, a man of simplicity, wisdom and holiness who loves every individual, who shows the downtrodden how beloved of God they are and who can humble the

greatest adept?

Where is the man who can touch our heart and draw us up? Where is the man who can look into our soul and lead us to meaning, inspiration and continuous revival? Where is the man who can hear the outpouring of our heart without pursing his lips, who can provide a path of peace and healing?

Every generation must have its leaders, its potential messiah. Yet in our era of spiritual exile, the inability to find one's true teacher is a wide-spread palsy. Many earnest, committed Jews have given up on this quest and settled for the "realism" of a decent life in the company of passable, even exceptional, but not life-transforming guides.

Yet Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that "although the world says that a person doesn't have to look for great things, I say that one has to search only for great things. One has to search for the greatest tzaddik and teacher" (*SH* 51).

Therefore, we do not quiet the emptiness, the ache in our heart, the awareness that we are in exile, that our spiritual appetite has been unfilled. We do not satiate that appetite with spiritual mediocrity. There are many tests: some last a lifetime. "You are not required to complete the task" (*Pirkei Avot* 2:21).

The hiddenness of the tzaddik is a function of our long exile, which began with the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, where God's presence had been revealed. The longer the exile continues, the more do the forces that cloud holiness and beauty drift like a miasm across the lenses of the eye.

We must cry out to God because of the fact that our teacher has been concealed. When we seek refuge in God, that which was

hidden becomes revealed. Then the light of the tzaddik shines upon us (cf. *OH Tefillin* 7:2).

The Holy Covenant

Lust is integrally related to fantasy. How can we rectify our imagination so that it is directed toward holy things? We raise our spirits, our soul, with song and joy.

There is a song and joy of lust. There is another song and joy of spirituality.

The emblem of yesod, the male sexual organ, is created with a foreskin. Only with the act of circumcision is the sefirah of yesod perfected. This represents the human experience. We have our natural and our essential qualities. Natural qualities, such as the desire to fulfill our physical needs, can be secondary to our self-definition. And it can take many years for us to refine and attain our essential qualities.

Only with the aid of others, and particularly of the tzaddik, are we able to perfect yesod, to direct our imagination properly and liberate our human spirit from the domination of our physical desires.

We do so by lifting up our heart in song and joy.

We prepare our heart for this joy by following the guidelines of the Torah in regard to engaging in healthy and sacred sexuality (cf. *YD Treifot* 2:6).

Why did God create the male body in such a way that circumcision would be necessary? This was part of His plan that a hidden chesed fill the universe. Even when things are bleak, God

gives life to the universe on the level of the hidden Torah. If a person sins in sexual matters, he recreates a flaw in yesod. But just as God gave him life before he was circumcised, so does God continue now to give him life.

So in essence, the existence of the world is intertwined with the rectification of human relationship to sexuality (cf. *YD Milah* 3:4).

“These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph...” (Genesis 37:2). Referring to this verse fragment, commentators suggest that Joseph was the most direct inheritor of Jacob’s legacy: and more, that Jacob and Joseph can be considered as one. The sefirot that correspond to them are tiferet and yesod.

Tiferet is expressed in tefillin, worn during weekday prayers.⁹ On the Sabbath, when tefillin are not worn, the day itself expresses the sefirah of tiferet.¹⁰

Yesod is expressed in guarding the holy covenant: sexual purity.

Jacob and Joseph express two testimonies to God’s oneness. Regarding Jacob, the tefillin contain parchment on which God’s oneness is proclaimed, and the Sabbath testifies to the creation of the world by God. And regarding Joseph, sexual purity is marked

⁹Isaiah tells of the day when Jews will no longer mourn, when they shall wear a beautiful crown in place of ashes on their foreheads. This beauty, worn above the forehead, refers to the tefillin.

¹⁰Our sages tell that even before the Torah was given, Jacob kept the Sabbath.

by the covenant between Abraham and God, at which time God instructed Abraham about circumcision.

If Jacob and Joseph both represent the testimony to God's oneness, what difference is there between them?

The difference can be seen in another aspect of Jacob and Joseph: their relationship to the heavens. Jacob, whose sefirah is the light of truth, corresponds to the sun, which is constantly blazing. In the night of exile, the light of truth shines on the world only after it is reflected off the moon (which is represented by malchut, the final sefirah).

Joseph channels the light of the sun to the moon.

Joseph, the tzaddik, yesod, makes truth accessible to all even in their darkness.

And in future days, "the light of the moon shall be like the light of the sun" (Isaiah 30:26). Then the light of truth will be commensurate with our ability to absorb truth.

This linkage of heaven and earth is brought about by Joseph, yesod, the tzaddik (cf. *HM Dayanim* 3:16).

The Vow

In the midst of this physical world, we must know that "the world is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). This is most clearly demonstrated in the Torah scroll: a physical object representing the lights of creation which, encompassed in cosmic letters, poured forth the elemental shapes of creation.

We too, when learning the Torah or fulfilling its commandments, draw down its hidden light.

Even after the Torah has been revealed, there is still a hidden Torah. It is our task to continuously reveal that hidden light, to draw God's divinity into the world. Yet at the same time we must be aware that no matter how much light is drawn down, it is still in essence an awesome, exalted reality that is hidden from us. This world could not bear the entirety of that light. For that reason, we are taught that "the reward for a good deed is not in this world." So great is the heavenly reward for fulfilling God's will that this physical world cannot bear it—the reward can only be experienced in the upper worlds.

What connects these two realities: the upper and the lower, the hidden and the revealed?

When a person makes a vow, he holds an object—traditionally, a Torah scroll—in one's hand. When we vow, we speak about a this-worldly reality and declares its spiritual reality. The vow is on the level of *yesod*, drawing transcendent truth into this world. Therefore, when we make a vow, pronouncing the name of God—the higher reality—we hold a Torah scroll—a physical, this-worldly object that contains in itself the hidden, Divine light.

All of our actions can be on the level of a vow: connecting this-worldly action to the passion for and the reality of truth (cf. *HM Geviyot Chov Meihayitomim* 5:5).

Through the power of a vow, of saturating this-worldly reality with a higher sense of being, we can raise the world to the messianic level of an eternal Sabbath.

The vow is *yesod*, the covenant of circumcision. The Sabbath too is called a covenant: a "eternal covenant."

Thus, the vow draws all of reality into the circle of the Sabbath. Then evil is rejected and goodness is revealed (cf. *HM Toen V'nitan* 1:2).

The Beit Hamikdash

The tzaddik is the basic building block, the “even shtiyah” of the Beit Hamikdash (cf. *YD Ribbit* 5:14). The Beit Hamikdash has been destroyed. But the foundation, the yesod, of faithfulness upon which it stood can never be destroyed.

Similarly, the light projected by the teachings of the great spiritual masters can never be withdrawn (cf. *OH Hodaah* 6:68).

The Beit Hamikdash will be rectified by the light of yesod, the teachings of holiness that are promulgated by holy, wise teachers in every generation.

In this way, the tzaddik corresponds to tefillin. Tefillin are called a “sign,” like the sign of the covenant. In Hebrew, each of the two boxes of the tefillin is called a bayit—a house—like the Beit Hamikdash, which means, literally, the sanctified house.

When we wear tefillin, we open ourselves to the light that rectifies broken vessels.

Even we are a broken vessel, the light of tefillin can breach the tears within our inner being—like the words of a wise and kindly teacher (cf. *OH Tefillin* 2:2).

The River of Yesod

“A river comes from Eden to water the garden” (Genesis

2:10). The primal welling forth of yesod is the element of unity, holiness and connectedness. Under its beneficent influence, all the elements of the world are balanced, and harmony resonates throughout creation.

The element of yesod is expressed in the soul and teachings of spiritual masters.

It is expressed in the proper management of sexuality, that most powerful spiritual and physical energy, that most intense engagement of body and soul.

It is the light that pours from the site of the Beit Hamikdash, source of the teaching of God's oneness and the essential unity of mankind in the light of knowledge that will cover the world as water covers the sea.

Yesod is the conduit of light, the provider of wealth from which all fullness and divine energy flow to this world.

Within yesod are contained all the energies and tendencies of this world. Through a healthy sexual discipline and connection to wise teachers, we can draw Godliness into the multiplicity and actuality of this world.

It is a ladder whose top cannot be seen and whose bottom reaches to but does not touch the earth.

It is the rain that fructifies the ground; it is the head of the household; it is the river that pours forth without cease; it is the inspiration of the Sabbath; it is peace and inner oneness within the multiplicity of this world (cf. *OH Taanit* 3:2).

CHAPTER TEN: MALCHUT

Malchut is the final sefirah. It is the ultimate receptacle of all the qualities that have been heretofore expressed.

Malchut means kingship, or regality.

One might think that the final sefirah should be related not to kingship but to subordination.

But the sefirot continue in an infinite descending series. The malchut of one series functions as the keter of the following. Malchut receives all of the energy that was expressed above. Then it is the regal power of the levels below it.

God's kingship spreads throughout this world. All of His qualities are glimpsed through the lens of malchut. The recognition of His presence may be expressed as awe, humility and faith. These are some of the characteristics associated with malchut.

Malchut is a receiver with no light of its own. Like the moon, malchut draws together the light that shines upon it and reflects it onward.

A person too is a receiver; like malchut, we have the ability

to shine God's light onto our community and family.

We connect to malchut when we inculcate a realistic sense of our station before God. Ultimately, we can rely on nothing but on what God constantly gives. We can only rely on His compassion.

King David expressed this realization in the words, "I am alone and poor" (Psalms 25:16). Only with God do we have safety and wealth. Even a king has no security and no community outside the help that God's presence provides.

This is so during a person's lifetime; how much more at the time of his death. Then none of his earthly comforts will accompany him. He will leave behind all his this-worldly accomplishments and creations.

Sometimes a person finds that he must wander from place to place with a minimum of clothing and possessions. In so doing, he can emulate malchut. God's presence—malchut—has, so to speak, gone into exile. When our wandering through this world is for the sake of heaven, we provide a vehicle for God's presence. Wherever we go, we can engage in good deeds, drawing Godliness into our presence and into those about one. In past centuries, great teachers would undergo voluntary exile, bringing inspiration and Godly feeling wherever they travelled.

We must seek supportive spiritual communities where we can learn Torah and serve God. This moving is for the sake of God's presence. In this way, we connect oneself to malchut.

Another way to connect ourselves to malchut is to cultivate the fear of God. This does not mean the fear of punishment, death or hell. Such fears are external. The fear of God is a recognition

of God's awesome nature.

This-worldly fears—of violence, fire and so forth—are pale reflections of the awareness of God's power. This-worldly violence can attack us ruthlessly, whereas God is long-suffering. Yet a person who recognizes that God's power is infinitely greater than the things of this world will fear acting wrongly. He knows that he stands before God Who watches him at all times, even in his most private chambers.

Our souls are rooted in the sefirot. And the ten sefirot comprise, so to speak, God's palace. When we act wrongly, we pollute that palace. The reluctance to do so is also considered "fear of God."

A healthy "fear of God" is a recognition of God's greatness and of our ability to attach ourselves to that greatness (*Tomer Devorah*).

The Soul of the Jewish Nation

Malchut represents the presence of God in the world.

More specifically, malchut represents God's presence within the community of Israel. To the degree that a Jew identifies with other Jews and connects with them in the path of the Torah, so can he experience God's presence. In his commentary on the Haggadah, Rabbi Kook comments that by denying our link with other Jews, we deny our link with God.

Malchut is the soul of the Jewish nation. It is not enough to serve God in an isolated fashion. We can only cling to God when we cling to our people. Those who were brought up with an

attenuated Jewish identity can have the greatest difficulty feeling a connection with God, because their link to the community of Israel has been so severely damaged. There are some who identify themselves as Jewish leaders, yet who display hostility to traditional Jewish values. Such people constitute a barrier to the ability of all Jews to return to God and to experience the sweetness of Divinity via the streams of Torah (cf. Rav Kook).

Faith

Knowledge of God is comparable to the light of the sun. Malchut, on the other hand, is compared to the moon. Malchut is faith. Even in the dark of night when the light of knowledge has been dimmed, we can still believe in God and goodness. Throughout the generations of Jewish history and particularly of the exile, Jews have maintained faith in God and in the upward progress of the world culminating in the eventual triumph of goodness over evil. This faith comprises the Jews' internal connection to God—the connection of malchut.

In our own life, malchut functions as the faith that no matter how low we may have fallen, we can always return to goodness and God.

We return to God by expressing our faith in prayer. When we cry out to God, we rise past the Torah to repentance. The Torah is limited, expressing laws and rules. But repentance is open to all. The cry of faith from the depths of the heart can liberate our soul and life (cf. *YD Nedarim* 4:27).

Via our faith, we acknowledge that God is king. It is not

enough that our faith remain hidden in our heart. Good things must be shared with others, just as we give charity and extend love to our family and community (cf. *YD Sefer Torah* 2:5).

Only through faith can we draw sustenance from the other sefirot: compassion, love, and so forth (cf. *YD Giluach* 4:15).

From faith, we come to wisdom. But even as we absorb that wisdom, we are faced with a new challenge of faith. We climb from rung to rung: from faith to knowledge and from knowledge to faith. Ultimately, we arrive at the essence of God's will, the source of keter. Above that, a new round of emanations begins, beginning again with malchut.

Faith is the all-encompassing reality. Faith is necessary before we have knowledge; and after we have gained knowledge, we must again face God with faith.

On every level, we are tested. When we accept the trials of ignorance and pain with faith, we allow the glow of enlightenment to descend into ourselves. Then we are illumined until the next challenge of faith (cf. *OH Rosh Chodesh* 6:3).

Faith is the foundation of all reality and of the Torah. Therefore, it appears in the sefirah that supports all the emanations above it.

In order to create the world, God contracted His wisdom so that an "other" could exist. In so doing, He created a "vacated space." This created a possibility for faith.

As soon as that occurred, God filled the vacated space with His Divinity, with the ten sefirot, with all of the universes from the highest level of spirituality to our corporeal world.

At the bottom of everything exists faith.

Our faith connects us to God's wisdom. And that in turn connects us to His essence.

At first, when we see nothing, we must have utter faith: this corresponds to the original contraction of God's being. Then God illumines our eyes so that we can understand. This corresponds to God's sefirot filling the vacated space.

Faith is a vessel that contains in embryo all wisdom. Only with faith can we uncover wisdom, understanding and revelation of knowledge.

On every level, we must blend knowledge with faith. Only with continuous infusion of faith can wisdom in Godly matters endure. Therefore, we are discouraged from investigating beyond our level. With an excess of light, our vessel of faith is broken. And only with faith can we open our hands towards God (cf. *YD Niddah 2:3*).

When God created the "vacated space," a subtle impression of His presence still remained. Similarly, there exists even in our ignorance a subtle resonance of the knowledge of God. It is that which allows us, at times impels us, to have faith in Him. "Even though a person does not see, his mazal sees." Even if our conscious being cannot understand God's being and actions, our hidden soul realizes that it is fit to be connected to God via faith (cf. *YD Niddah 2:2*).

The more our knowledge of God and Torah increases, the greater can our faith be. We are able to infer the hidden from what is revealed. We realize that even the questions that still remained sealed have an answer. We strengthen ourselves with greater faith, and that leads us to more knowledge.

The ultimate knowledge of God is to realize that we know nothing at all. At that level, the highest attainment of knowledge is: faith.

It is certainly reputable, it is only natural, it is necessary and healthy, to allow our faith in God to blossom (cf. *YD Cheilev Vedam* 4:2).

We contain within ourselves a natural attraction towards faith in God. This flows down upon us from above, filling our hearts.

But there is an aspect of faith that we ourselves engender.

To attain that faith, we do not simply believe in God more strongly.

We must rather increase our ability to be a vessel for God. We do so by increasing the scope of our charitable and holy actions.

Then we draw into our vessel of malchut the deep waters of the upper sefirot. And then our faith can shine with a great light, wondrously revealed throughout the world (cf. *HM Hefker V'nichsei Hageir* 4:28).

The Holy Covenant

A tzaddik grasps the sefirah of malchut; by doing so, he grasps the highest levels of being.

“In all your ways, know Him” (Proverbs 3:6). Through the pathways of this world, we can know God. God created everything with the energies of holy letters. When the tzaddik understands the letters within a this-worldly object, he can rise to their other-

worldly source. He can raise all objects to their source.

Then he brings the world to the level where “the end of the matter is first in thought,” where beginning and end dovetail. This unification of God’s will—“on that day, the Lord will be one and His name will be one” (Zechariah 14:9)—is the purpose of creation.

The primary way of attaining that purpose is by guarding the “covenant”: sexual purity.

Then, wherever we look, we only see God: “I am first and I am last” (Isaiah 44:6). We see the faith of malchut.

God’s initial will and His ultimate creation are intimately linked. It was to give compassion to other beings that God created the universe. And in order to make such an arena, God created malchut. “There is no king without a nation.” Malchut only exists in interrelation with God’s nation.

Thus, from our realm of malchut, we are given the possibility of reaching God’s supernal, initial will.

All this depends on guarding our sexual “covenant.” That consists not only of refraining from illicit relationships. It also consists of engaging in a holy, permissible relationship. When man and woman join together, God’s original intent and malchut join together in immaculate embrace (cf. *EH Ketubot 2*).

The Light of the Sun and the Light of the Moon

God’s name is a vessel that contains divinity. His name is malchut. And our realm of existence corresponds to malchut.

When this world is aligned with the world of the spirit, it can be said to be absorbed into God. Then “the Lord will be one

and His name will be one” (Zechariah 14:9). Post-creation will be swallowed into the realm that preceded creation. God’s name, which had been sent forward and outward to herald a separateness of malchut, will be absorbed into God.

This world is a reflecting lens of Godliness. There is another lens of Godliness that shines with its own light. Today these two lenses are separate. But we were created to merge the reflecting with the shining lens. Then the “light of the moon shall be like the light of the sun” (Isaiah 30:26).

How can we achieve this, even in a small way, in the circumference of our lives?

We do so to whatever degree via joy.

And what is the source of the true joy that links this world to divinity?

It is the joy that comes of doing a good deed, of carrying out a Godly commandment.

When we carry out a mitzvah in such a way that we draw joy from the mitzvah itself, the heaviness and sadness of this world are overwhelmed. The world is no longer a vessel passively receiving the light of heaven. Instead, it becomes a giver.

It reaches the level of the tzaddik, who “gives and does not hold back” (Proverbs 21:26).

What every individual does on his particular level, the tzaddikim do for all of creation: they lift creation from the state of receiving to the state of giving. All of creation is absorbed into the shining lens, into the state that preceded creation (cf. *HM Ha’oseh Shaliach Ligvot Chov* 2:15).

The Torah

Just as the name of God constitutes malchut, so does it correspond to the Torah. The Torah too is a vessel of God's might, creativity and compassion.

Specifically, the written Torah corresponds to tiferet: God's truth and compassion. And the oral Torah (the Talmud) corresponds to malchut: it is the this-worldly implementation of God's will. The oral Torah embraces and completes the written Torah. It is the vessel for the written Torah, which is itself a vessel for God.

By connecting ourselves to the Torah, we draw divine life into malchut. The Torah channels the limitless divine energy into the finite measure of letters, words, verses and commandments.

We draw that energy into our lives, into malchut. That energy is the consciousness of God, the wisdom that gives life.

We realize that God can be found in the most hidden corners. Then the hidden areas of our lives become knowledge. Like the Torah, they express the presence of God. All of nature pours forth the song of faith, and the most obdurate repent.

The sages teach that every Jew has a letter in the Torah that corresponds to him. Every Jew has a portion in malchut, in the hidden light that he can reveal with his good deeds. As a totality, the Jews are an "*am segulah*," a chosen nation. It is their responsibility to comprise God's malchut and spread the consciousness of His existence.

God can be hidden in two ways. We may know that God is hidden and seek him out. But sometimes even the fact of God's

being hidden is hidden (cf. *EH Gittin* 1).

Ultimately, we can even overcome the barrier of the double-hiddenness. We do so by learning God's Torah (cf. HM M'abed Mammon Chaveiro Umasur 3:3).

In the messianic days, "the Lord will be one and His name will be one" (Zechariah 14:9). "The Lord will be one" refers to the written Torah. God will be one with the manifestation of His will, and the truth of His being will pour forth into this world. "His name will be one" refers to the oral Torah. His malchut will be perfected. The reality of His total providence will be known to all; nothing will be hidden.

The light that pours forth from God corresponds to the written Torah. But the oral Torah is given over to man. The sages have the responsibility to interpret God's word. Then they reflect a light that shines onto the world and back to God.

The written Torah is like the sun. The oral Torah is like the moon.

When the will of man shall be directly aligned with the will of God, then the straight light from God, the light of the sun, will be aligned with the returning light of man, the light of the moon. At that time, the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun. Along this perfected channel of light, God's providence will be drawn down onto the world. Malchut will be absorbed into the upper sefirot. The oral Torah will become a direct expression of the written Torah. Our free human will shall be nullified before the knowledge of God.

Today, there are two perspectives on the world: the perspective of God and the perspective of human beings. In the

messianic days, only the perspective of God shall endure. Then all human beings shall see with eyes illumined by God's wisdom (cf. *EH Kiddushin* 3:17).

Until that time, it is our role to constantly draw God's life force into malchut, the vessels of this world. We draw down this wisdom by learning Torah.

It is one of the wondrous paradoxes of this life that we constrict God's life force into finite vessels. The more we draw down God's life force via the letters of His Torah, the more is His intent fulfilled.

By learning Torah, we not only draw down the light but we create vessels that are able to contain the light. When we prepare our minds, when we learn Torah and teach others, we create vessels to receive His light. And the children that we raise are also vessels to be filled with light and holiness (cf. *EH Yibbum* 2:1).

What happens to the light that is swallowed up by the darkness of this world, by ignorance, evil, suffering and pointlessness? There is a shadow structure, a perverse reflection of the holy sefirot. This shadow world is the realm of evil. It is known as Amalek: the nation that tried to eradicate the people of Israel and to erase the miracles done for them when they left the exile of Egypt. The power of Amalek is to convince us that that which is prohibited is permitted. When holiness is ceded to evil, the sparks are swallowed up by the malchut of evil.

But malchut of holiness has the power to liberate all of those holy sparks and to transform them into consciousness of God and Torah.

The very fact that God's holiness, the Torah, is hidden is a

victory of the malchut of evil.

When we study Torah, we can transform that which was previously hidden into Torah (cf. *EH Sotah* 1).

Only faith can reveal God's malchut, for we can never understand Him or how He rules His world.

Faith is drawn from the holy Torah, as in the verse, "All Your commandments are faithful" (Psalms 119:86). Our sages taught that the prophet Habakkuk defined the essence of Torah as faith, for he taught that "the tzaddik will live in his faith" (Habbakuk 2:4).

The written Torah reflects a general faith in God. The oral Torah, with its myriad details, reflects a faith in God's providence over every detail (cf. *HM Halvaah* 4:5). The more we learn the oral Torah, the more do we reveal God's rule at every moment over every detail of creation. When this becomes clear, all judgment and condemnation will be dissolved (cf. *HM Halvaah* 4:6).

Malchut can only receive the light of truth and Godliness in limited quanta. These portions of God's wisdom are the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. Each mitzvah creates an image and pathway via which malchut can receive the light and life force of the supernal, ultimate, all-encompassing wisdom, the holy of holies, via which we can recognize God.

But what do we do if we are so steeped in error, confusion and a mismanaged life that the paths connecting us to the Torah have been obstructed?

Then we can rise directly to God's primal wisdom with the yearning of our heart: our regret for our errors, our longing for redemption, closeness to God and meaning. This is the avenue of

teshuvah, repentance, which rises directly to the all-encompassing wisdom. From there, the normative paths of wisdom are rectified. Then our sins are atoned for, the passages are unblocked, and we can commence connecting ourselves to God via the wisdom of the 613 commandments (cf. *EH Gittin* 3:19).

Prayer

But how can we connect ourselves to God through Torah if we are ignorant of even the existence of Torah, if we are truly wrapped in a double hiddenness? Even then, our soul cries out to return to God and to cling to Him.

Malchut corresponds to prayer. Just as the oral Torah is an expression not only of God's will but of man's response to His will, so is prayer our response to God's will. Therefore, one of the major figures associated with malchut is King David, composer of Psalms. The language of tiferet, the written Torah, is the speech of God to man. The language of malchut, the oral Torah and prayer, is the speech of man to God (cf. *OH Tzitzit* 3:4).

By learning Torah, we draw length of days—the inner, holy aspect of time—into malchut—measurable reality. We draw Torah into our prayer. Our prayer is illumined and inspired, filled with sanctity and wisdom.

Then our prayer can draw down the flow of plenty. Because our prayer is connected to God's will, we can draw His inestimable giving down into our own finite receptacles (cf. *OH Kriyat Hatorah* 1).

One way of connecting Torah and prayer is to turn the Torah

that we learn into prayer. When learning of specific commandments, we pray that we will be able to perform them. When learning of morals and insights, we ask God to help us absorb those lessons. Then, just as the Torah has 613 commandments, our prayer can be a magnificent structure (cf. *OH Rosh Chodesh* 5:14).

The Calendar and Time

The structure of the Jewish calendar reflects the travail of malchut. The calendar is based on the lunar cycle, with a leap month occasionally added to reconcile the year with the solar cycle.

We equalize the cycles of the sun and moon, rectifying the patterns of the moon so that, eventually, the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun.

In our world, truth is hidden and received only obliquely—like the light of the moon.

But we constantly keep aligning the light of this world with the light of Godliness and Torah: the sun.

Eventually, the light of the moon will be rectified; and creation, which was for the sake of the truth of God's existence becoming known, will be complete (cf. *HM Dayanim* 3:7).

The midrash tells that initially God created the sun and moon of equal size. But the moon complained, "It is impossible for two kings to wear one crown." So God told the moon, "Go and make yourself small."

Ideally, truth should shine equally in the upper and lower worlds. But the light of truth in this world, malchut, must be reduced, so as to allow the world to attain an independent being.

Then we are able, as independent beings, to seek out the light of God (cf. *OH Minchah* 4:1).

Time is a this-worldly construct. Time rules the world; it is constricted and measured. It is a function of malchut.

In this world of time, the hidden Godly wisdom in all things is hidden—for that wisdom transcends time.

It is our work to redeem malchut and enter the level that transcends time. Adam was created on the afternoon of the sixth day so that he would be able to enter the Sabbath immediately and connect the six days of creation to the Sabbath, which transcends time.

When we today celebrate and keep the Sabbath, we lift all of malchut from this realm of time to a level beyond time.

We lift ourselves up to God's wisdom, which is the force of life.

In the future, this world will be perfectly integrated into the realm that transcends time. All strictures will be ameliorated and all bitterness sweetened.

Even today, when we link ourselves to the realm beyond time, to Godly wisdom, all that is bitter can be sweetened. Everything can be made good. And in the midst of our days, we can experience a realm that is timeless (cf. *OH Rosh Hashanah* 5:11).

Charity

Giving to a poor person is like shining the light of the sun onto the moon. Just as the sun gives its superior knowledge to the

lower knowledge of the moon, so do we provide plenty to the poor.

When the moon's light is full, God's presence rises from exile. Then lower and upper wisdom are joined.

By performing God's commandments—such as giving to the poor—we bring about that union, joining the wisdom of Torah and the commandments to this world (cf. *YD Tzeddakah* 2:2).

Our souls are rooted in a wealth of divinity. When we use our money wisely, it takes on the quality of that wealth. Then we have a right to ask God to shower us with a prosperity that combines both spiritual and material abundance. The way to perfect our money is to give charity. Then our money is malchut, connected to God's wisdom (cf. *HM Geneivah* 1).

Charity is an act of love. When we perform such an act of love, we raise malchut from its exile amidst the four kingdoms of exile.

The enjoyment that we receive from our possessions is also a form of love. When we enjoy our possessions in a way that is connected to Godliness, we raise the malchut in them from the exile of materialism (cf. *HM Umnin* 2:3).

Returning Lost Objects

When we find a lost object, we must return it to its owner. In doing so, we return malchut to its proper place.

The first recorded act of Saul was to seek his father's lost donkeys. Soon after this, he was anointed the first leader over Israel—he attained malchut.

Sometimes souls in this world are exhausted, distant from

their ancient home. They must be returned to God, their owner. Then malchut is restored to its proper place (cf. *HM Aveidah Mitziah* 1:4).

Wealth and Possessions

When used for holy purposes, physical objects partake of the quality of malchut. But they can also be used for unenlightened purposes. Like the moon, whose light can be obliterated, the connection of our physicality to holiness can be obliterated when we behaves unwisely. Yet it is precisely from the darkness that the new moon appears. It is precisely in the darkness that our physical existence is connected, in a hidden manner, to its source of life. The fact that we have fallen to such a place of darkness provides that when we raise our malchut, even those tenebrous areas will be illumined and filled with life. So when we raise our physical possessions from selfish and unenlightened usage, we show, in retrospect, that their initial descent was a portion of their ascent (cf. *OH Beit Haknesset* 2).

Our physical possessions, being in the nature of malchut, are prone to attack by unspiritual forces. We are prone to become enamored of our physical possessions for their own sake. It is very difficult not to be drawn after the physicality of our things. When we succumb to this, we fall victim to unholiness.

Similarly, we can become so enamored of our work that it takes on an independent meaning with no reference to any greater value.

Then the sparks of holiness that inhere in our work and in

our possessions cannot be retrieved. They remain, heavy and sodden, bound to their physicality: unredeemed.

To rectify this, we gaze upon everything in our lives with the awareness that they contain a heavenly wisdom. We see that everything is connected to God. Then the sparks inherent in all things and in all this-worldly work can again link themselves to heaven. Our work, possessions and life regain meaning and spiritual momentum (cf. *HM Pikadon* 4:14).

Whatever we own, we rule. Malchut adheres to all of our physical possessions. Every person has a quality of regality: in this world, and, to the degree that he uses this quality correctly, in his connection to God.

The quality of a king is limitation: he rules a limited domain and he constricts the movement of all things under his control. Similarly, everything under our control is in the nature of limitation. By proper action, we draw divine spirituality into the object. In that way, we truly attain the object. Then we attain wealth (cf. *HM Hefker V'nichsei Hager* 4:3).

When we become greedy, when we earn our money unethically, we ruin malchut, and our life is sucked into forgetfulness. Therefore, we must hate ill-gotten gain as an evil that separates the world from God's will.

By hating ill-gotten gain we attain wisdom, for our goods are gathered into the realm of malchut and connected to God's wisdom. Then our goods are not merely physical means to this-worldly effectiveness, but emblems of spiritual wealth. At that point, our wealth is truly precious.

The sages tell that when Jacob was fleeing Laban, after his

camp passed over the stream Yabbok, he returned alone to gather some clay vessels that had been forgotten. From this, the sages learn that a holy person regards all of his possessions as precious. All of Jacob's physical environment was imbued with his malchut.

Therefore, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that it is forbidden to be slovenly with one's money. A laissez-faire attitude toward money shows that we are not guarding the gifts that God has given us to use and perfect. The possessions of a spiritual person are precious, for they provide the means to reveal God's essence.

When we guard our physical possessions from thievery, we raise malchut from the four forces of exile. Then our goods are no longer symbols of constriction but receptacles of God's love. Our possessions can be irradiated by the light of God's countenance.

Then malchut is filled with God's enlightening wisdom (cf. *HM Umnin* 2:2).

Lust for money is the opposite of wealth and malchut. Lust for money is on the level of heresy, darkness and night. So far removed from life is such a desire that it weighs a person down. The life of such a person is a waking sleep, so far removed from Godliness that it is an incipient death (*Berachot* 57).

Malchut, on the other hand, is faith, the light of dawn. When we break our lust for money, we redeem the potential faith that had been trapped in the darkness. Then we are able to lift not only ourselves but others too. We are able to draw down the energy of the Torah. We are able to use our physical possessions properly.

Then sleep is good for us. Via sleep—the proper use of this-worldly things—we restore our soul, just as literally sleep is

necessary to restore our strength (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 2).

In order to be a person of real wealth—the sign of malchut—we must have the strength to act vigorously: like a leader, a king. Our strength must be linked to the consciousness of the holy. With such a holy consciousness, we connect ourselves to God's will.

The path to attaining this holy strength is faith. We strengthen ourselves with a total faith in God. We believe that He fills the entire earth. No matter what our condition, God is with us always. With such a faith, each one of us can be a person of strength, a person who has attained malchut.

This is what faith is: the ability to strengthen ourselves even in hard times (cf. *YD Pidyon Bechor* 5:19).

We must guard our inner wealth. We do so by guarding the memory of our experience of God's presence, His malchut. The Jewish holidays and ceremonies do not only commemorate historical events but serve as reminders of God's presence in those events and in our lives today.

Even in our exile, there exists a residue of our connection to those times of spiritual exaltation and revelation, such as the exodus and the receiving of the Torah. Through our connection to the Torah, we rehearse those events, and thus recall the shining of that holy, awesome light.

We can nullify ourselves so totally in the light of the Infinite One that we are higher than knowledge.

Only when we return from such an exalted spiritual state and strive to remember its residue can we draw down consciousness of God.

Thus, on returning from such a state, we must guard our memory well. We must sanctify the vessel of our mind and make it fit to receive the light. Then we can attain the Torah in our soul. This is the attainment of God's divinity (cf. *OH Aravit* 4:5).

The Night

When we go to sleep at night, we recite the Sh'ma, the confession of God's oneness. In this way, we draw the Torah, which is the essence of life, into the night of exile, so that God's presence will always accompany us.

The night of exile is split into two halves: before and after midnight. The first half of the night marks the growth of exile, until at the point of midnight, malchut has reached its nadir.

Then at midnight, malchut begins to be rectified.

Within the deepest exile is enveloped a great light and consciousness.

Thus, it is the custom of the pious to arise at midnight and learn Torah.

At that time, the Torah calls out and awakens our heart to serve God. That voice of the Torah can be heard in all the universes.

At that time, the sound of the eventual coming of the messianic age and the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash begins to echo (cf. *OH Rosh Chodesh* 3:5).

With the coming of night and exile, external forces separated from Godliness surround malchut. Malchut descends into exile: precisely in exile can it redeem the most hidden sparks. Sometimes

through our suffering we redeem more than would have been possible had we never been tested.

In this first half of the night, so great is the power of these outer forces that we have no power to overcome them with our clarity of judgment. We must withdraw from the arena of battle and cling to God simply, without a higher consciousness. This is the level of sleep and faith. We give our ability to judge into the hand of God.

Then God gives this ability of judgment to malchut. The ability to judge is a sword of judgment. Malchut descends into the depths of night and cuts holiness free of the grasp of unholiness.

The strength of our faith when we are overcome with darkness can transform reality (cf. *YD Geirim* 3:20).

This is a dangerous time when even the knowledge of the presence of God can be hidden. Sleep is a time of death and constriction.

But after midnight, God's consciousness begins to shine onto malchut so that malchut begins to be rectified. Then the stricture itself becomes knowledge of God (cf. *OH Birkat Hashachar* 1).

Thus the Talmud tells us that King David would awaken at midnight to serve God. From that point on, chesed begins to be revealed and goodness is clarified from evil. From that point on, malchut begins to be perfected (cf. *OH Aravit* 2).

At last, after the long night comes the dawn. Dawn is the time of the revelation of malchut, the growing light of freedom, rescue and safety (cf. *OH Hashkamat Haboker* 3:2).

Liberating Malchut

When the Jews of Persia were threatened with annihilation, Queen Esther, representing malchut, had to enter the palace of King Ahasuerus, the place where God's presence was hidden, the malchut of evil. Only by doing so could she redeem the holy sparks: the Jewish people, each of whom has within himself a spark of malchut.

But Esther could accomplish this only with the help of Mordecai, who represents chesed (cf. *OH Purim* 1:1).

The greater the force of uncleanness, the more must malchut be immersed in exile. Thus, Esther had to actually marry King Ahasuerus and remain in his palace for many days.

Similarly, Sarah, who also corresponds to malchut, was abducted by the king of Egypt, who wished to take her as his wife. At that time, the level of exile was not as pronounced, so Sarah was spared having to live with him. Pharaoh gave Abraham a great deal of wealth. This wealth comprised the sparks of holiness that Sarah's presence had been able to dislodge.

It was because of Sarah's victory over Pharaoh that, years later, Moses had the power to redeem the children of Israel from Egypt.

The experience of these two women in the palace of evil men represents the exile of God's presence when rulership is taken from the people of Israel and given into the hands of idolaters and evil-doers. Such people wish to separate malchut from the consciousness of God and replace it with a pedestal upon which their own images may be worshipped.

It is the strength of women like Sarah and Esther that battles such people. It is the female energy, our sages tell us, that clings particularly to faith. For instance, only the men and not the women participated in the episode of the golden calf (cf. *OH Tefillin* 6:26).

Malchut is also represented by the mother of all life, Eve. The Hebrew name for Eve, Chavah, means not only “living” but also “uttering.” Eve represents the vessel of speech, malchut, into which human potential is fitted (cf. *Eidut* 5:4).

Our sages taught, “A man’s honor is only in his house.” A man’s home is malchut. And the sages also said that “One’s house is one’s wife.” A man is complete, his potential is actualized, only when he has a wife.

A woman is complete and her potential is actualized only when she has a husband. “The honor of the king’s daughter is inward” (Psalms 45:14). The relationship of the man and woman is on an inward level, not a political, public level. Only inside the house of holiness, modesty and of intimacy can man and woman be fulfilled (cf. *OH Mezuzah* 3:2).

Woman represents honor. God’s honor is complete only when malchut is integrated with the highest level of His emanations. At that point, His honor is revealed. And only through His honor can He be attained (cf. *YD Taarovot* 2:2).

Malchut, the “daughter of the king,” is the root of all souls, the source of all worlds (cf. *YD Tolaim* 4:3).

In this spirit, the Bible often recalls the names of the mothers of the Jewish kings. This hints at the revelation of God’s malchut in this world (cf. *OH Birkat Hashachar* 3:26).

Fear of God

Malchut is “a woman who fears God” (Proverbs 31:30) (cf. *EH Yibbum* 3:2).

Malchut is the fear of God. God is greater than any of our thoughts. Yet we can have a sense of Who He is from the impression that pervades reality after He “vacated a space” in order to create the universe.

When we apprehend God this way, we are struck by an unlimited power, and our hearts are filled with awe. When the prophets would prophesy in God’s name, they would role on the ground and quake. We relate to God as a great king through the faculty of malchut. At that point, all we know and believe of God is that, incomprehensible though he be, He is king.

The more we perfect ourselves and our relationship to the Divine, the more do we experience this fear. And the more we experience this fear of God, the more can we grasp the shining sparks of His light. This light is the remaining impression of His presence (cf. *YD Bechor Beheimah T’horah* 4:2).

Fear of God is the opposite of the fear of anything else—it can only exist in the absence of fear of anything else. The fear of other things is a result of the fear of God falling into exile and clinging to inappropriate objects. From malchut, our fear of God rises to chochmah, binah and daat, becoming progressively refined (cf. *HM Harshaah* 3:14).

During our weekday pursuits, we are subject to this-worldly fears. But with the entry of the Sabbath, we no longer think of this world. The Sabbath is a time of joy—and the fear of God is joyful.

When we know that God has created everything and that everything is under His control, why should we fear anyone and anything else? We realize that nothing can harm us without His permission. Therefore, we should only fear the Master of the universe.

At the beginning of the Sabbath, we take the fallen fears of the previous weekdays and lift them to God.

We do this in the Kiddush, the sanctification over the wine conducted directly before the evening meal.

The wine represents fear. Strong wine correlates to gevurah, which is awesome. The cup that holds the wine is a receptacle, like malchut. The word kiddush means “holy,” which correlates to daat, consciousness of God.

When on Friday night we lift up the cup of wine in honor of the Sabbath, we lift all fears to their source, the consciousness of God. Then we read the text testifying that God created the heavens and earth and rested on the seventh day. We proclaim God’s rulership over all the world. We proclaim that there is no reason to fear anything in the world; that only God is king (cf. *HM Harshaah* 3:12).

The sword of the fear of God can only be received from a holy, wise teacher. This is because the fear of God is only attained when we gain access to the revelation of God’s will. And God’s will is revealed only when a holy teacher ties our will—and the desires of the entire world—to God’s supernal will.

The knife used to slaughter an animal according to the kosher laws corresponds to this “sword of God.” When we slaughter an animal, we subjugate the animal spirit, purely natural, non-transcendent physicality. We make the animal ready for a

human being who can raise the sparks of holiness (cf. *YD Dagim* 3:2).

Eating

When we eat, we have the opportunity to raise the holy sparks that were embedded in the food. Precisely at the time that we are engaged in an act that instinctively draws us to physicality, we can be focused on the spiritual.

Only a strong person who has accomplished much in mastering malchut can in this way attain the illumination of God's will.

But in future days, everyone will be able to attain this illumination (cf. *YD Pidyon Bechor* 5:12).

When he eats, the spiritual master can taste the holy letters from which the food was created and which constitute its life force (cf. *YD Notein Taam Lifgam* 1).

On a simpler level, every Jew can link his eating to the perfection of malchut by reciting a blessing before eating. By blessing "the Lord, our God, King of the universe," we reveal God's malchut (cf. *YD Beitzim*).

We also do this by eating in a holy fashion and by reciting the birkat hamazon, the grace after meals.

When the Jews perform God's will in this way, then God praises the Jews.

And when God praises the Jews, His malchut is revealed. Our sages have taught that "there is no king without a nation." When we praise God and God praises us, He is truly our God.

Then we are close to each other; our relationship is vibrant and inter-relating. God's quality of malchut can be expressed only when He has a nation that accepts Him, over whom He can be king. Then, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (cf. *OH Birkat Hamazon* 4:4).

Even the table upon which we eat is related to malchut, as in the phrase, "A table of kings" (cf. *OH Netilat Yadayim* 1:2).

Following a meal with a company of at least three men or women, some have the custom to recite the grace after meals while holding a cup of wine, which is drunk after the grace is finished.

This cup is related to malchut. Malchut can be reached after we have rectified our eating.

We begin the grace after formally inviting the others to join us. In order to drive out physicality, we must make a specific statement of intent for the sake of holiness. Only then can we carry the cup of malchut (cf. *EH Kiddushin* 1).

Blessings

A Jew makes many blessings: blessings for types of enjoyment such as eating, smelling and seeing beautiful things; blessings over fulfilling a mitzvah; and so on.

Every blessing begins with the formula, "Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe." We recall that God is king of the entire universe. No one can ever be lost, for He rules everywhere. Thus we are taught, "If you are cast to the ends of the heavens, from there will I gather you" (Deuteronomy 30:4).

Everywhere in the universe, holiness lies scattered,

unnoticed, trampled upon. By mentioning God's kingship, we retrieve these objects (cf. *OH Birkat Hapeirot*).

The Land of Israel

In the grace, we thank God for having given the children of Israel the land of Israel.

The land of Israel is holy because only there can all of God's commandments can be performed. The land of Israel is malchut (cf. *OH Devarim Hanohagim B'seudah* 4:1).

God created the world with ten sayings. The essence of these sayings remains in creation. They are the honor of God, which rests in all reality. When we relate to reality by seeing the divine presence in all things, we access this Godly honor.

This honor is malchut. In relation to this, the verse states, "the earth is full of His honor" (Isaiah 6:3).

Because the land of Israel is particularly apt to reveal the hidden presence of God, it represents the quality of malchut (cf. *YD Tolaim* 105 3:1).

Just as land is the most physical expression of reality, so is God's name the most corporeal expression of Who He is. Thus, both God's name and the land express the concept of malchut.

In order to give compassion to His creatures, God so to speak constricted Himself many times, so that they would be able to uncover His divinity. Each constriction God effected is a name of God. Each of the ten sefirot has a corresponding name of God.

In the same way, the land of Israel is the means for the ultimate revelation of God's presence. This is why the task of the

Torah can only be fulfilled upon the Holy Land.

This is related to the task of Judaism in general: to reveal God through our human acts. Only when we possess a fit vessel can we integrate a lasting, healthy holiness into our lives (cf. *OH Devarim Hanohagim B'seudah* 4:6).

God promised the Jews a messianic gift of an unbounded inheritance.

The essential revelation of malchut is the realization that it is God Who brought the universe from nothingness into being.

When we have this recognition, all desires and appearances are incorporated into the will of the Infinite One. Then the land–malchut–is drawn into that unbounded inheritance.

Thus, only when Jews dwell upon the land of Israel can Judaism, Torah and the universe be perfected.

But wherever we are, we can strive for such a state of union with God.

In particular, our sages said that “Whoever makes the Sabbath pleasurable is given an unbounded inheritance.”

God’s highest will is revealed on the Sabbath. At that time, all the universes rise to their source. The Sabbath is the overcoming of physicality. That is why we are not allowed to engage in any physical work on the Sabbath. By not working, we tune into a reality where all of existence is nullified and returns to a state that transcends being.

At such a point, everything is incorporated into the highest will of the Infinite One.

Gaining such a state is the purpose of all the commandments. It is a state that is unbounded and entirely good,

which the hand of evil cannot grasp (cf. *HM Matzranut* 2:2).

There are many commandments that can only be observed in the land of Israel. Most of these are agricultural, such as tithing, the sabbatical year and so forth.

The Bible tells how, after Adam sinned, God cursed him so that he would have to labor “by the sweat of [his] brow,” and the land would give forth its crop grudgingly.

The field—the land—is malchut. In exile, this field is impoverished.

But when we connect the land to God and to goodness—in particular, by observing the commandments related to the land—we free it of the curse of Adam. Then malchut is released and the land gives forth plenty and great blessing (cf. *HM Chakirut V’kablant* 2:5).

Teachers

Ultimately, it is possible for the entire globe to take on the character of the Holy Land.

This process of the spreading out of malchut is similar to the writing of a Torah scroll. Upon the parchment, we write letters of the holy text. We draw God’s supernal wisdom into those constricting letters.

In the same way, a teacher draws his knowledge into student.

Supernal knowledge is unbridled. Lower wisdom cannot understand it all. It must accept upon the basis of faith. A student must accept the lessons of his teacher on faith (cf. *EH Piryah*

V'riviah V'Hilchot Ishut 1:1).

We must believe that there exist teachers who draw Godliness into the world and reveal the truth of His existence. When we find such a teacher, we must have faith in him. Via such faith, we are able to reveal that which was previously hidden (cf. *YD Shechitah* 5:12).

Ideally, we should have a relationship with a teacher on such a level of intimacy that we feel comfortable confessing our misdeeds and imperfections to him. When we have such a relationship, we can raise our malchut to its source.

On a macroscopic level, this corresponds to the return of kingship to the house of David and the restoration of the messianic kingship (cf. *HM Geviyat Chov Meihayitomim* 4:3).

A wise teacher knows how to raise our malchut so that it is directly aligned with Godly wisdom: he can reconcile the light of the moon with the light of the sun. Therefore, when the Beit Hamikdash stood, it was the teachers of Israel who intercalated the calendar, reconciling the solar and the lunar cycles (cf. *YD Giluach* 3:4).

Our teacher must be able to give wise, helpful advice. Malchut rises only with the help of advice (cf. *OH Taanit* 4:14). The totality of divine advice is contained in the Torah, whose 613 commandments are termed by the Zohar “advice” (cf. *OH Hoshanah Rabbah* 2:4).

Corresponding to these 613 commandments, every human being has 613 limbs and sinews. The 613 commandments cannot be understood and clarified without the wisdom of the sages. Similarly, our spiritual structure can only be perfected with the help

of a wise teacher. Just as we must have faith in the sages who have transmitted the oral Torah, so must we have a relationship of faith in our teachers (cf. *EH Yibbum* 3:2).

A teacher represents malchut. Therefore, the sages said, “Who are the kings? The sages.”

Each one of us has a sage within, a point within that can teach and illumine. Therefore, each of us has within us the core of malchut, the ability to shine the consciousness of Torah in the world.

To the extent that we are able to inspire others with the teacher within us, so are we obligated to speak those illuminating words of God.

When we teach, we actualize our connection to malchut. Then we are able to draw down true wealth to ourselves, and be illumined by the will of God.

When we teach others, we draw sustenance to God’s presence, malchut, which is in exile. God’s malchut can be found everywhere, even in the lowest depths. When we raise malchut, the lowest and most degraded places can be redeemed. The most hopeless and most abandoned people can receive their own true, inner wealth (cf. *YD Pidyon Bechor* 5:19).

Judges

Judges too correspond to malchut. Like a king, they determine the outcome of people’s lives.

Ideally, people should act fairly with one another and live in peace just as a kingdom should be ruled by peace.

When two people become litigants, their malchut has fallen.

They go before the judges, whose wise judgment raises the malchut to Divine wisdom and restores harmony.

Then that wisdom is drawn down here below.

Reality is a blend of pre-creation constantly invigorating post-creation.

Before creation, actual and potential were one, with no difference between them.

After creation, they split into two. They did so via the command of God.

The process of creation, from potential to actual, is brought about via truth. “The seal of God is truth, and with it He created the world.” This process is continuous and on-going.

When litigants make statements that are false, they upset God’s malchut and disfigure creation. The divine, pre-creation energy lifts up. Then nothing is left to vivify our universe, and malchut falls.

Then, when witnesses reveal the truth, they lift malchut and restore the world.

The two witnesses mirror the constant act of creation. The truth that they reveal effects an emergence from the potential to the actual.

Therefore, according to Torah law, there must be two witnesses. They correspond to and restore the joining of the two stages of reality.

Then creation, which had been marred by falsehood and controversy, is restored.

With truth, we shift from potential to actual. In doing so,

we reveal God's divinity throughout the world (cf. *HM Eidut* 1).

Speech

We must dedicate our voice and words to holiness. Our mouth is an organ of malchut. Our speech can be the revelation of malchut (cf. *HM Apotrofus* 3:13).

Speech in general is connected to malchut. We only fulfill the commandment of learning Torah when we learn aloud, drawing the transcendent ideas of Torah into the vessels of speech. Similarly, we only fulfill the act of prayer when we pronounce the words, providing a receptacle for our yearning and for receiving God's reply.

Because speech is malchut, the final sefirah, it is surrounded by unholy forces. That is why it is so important to guard our speech from bad language, gossip and falsehood (cf. *HM Halvaah* 1:4). We must counter those voices of ugliness with strong, brazen expression of holiness, with a strong, striking speech (cf. *HM Maakah Ush'mirat Nefesh* 4:11). Such speech shines on us and brings to fruition the verse, "The world is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3) (cf. *YD Ever Min Hachai* 2:1).

We can make our speech a Holy Tongue. Like the holy speech with which God created the world, we can invest the world with holiness (cf. *OH Yom Hakkipurim* 1:5). With our speech, we can fill the world with peace (cf. *YD Reishit Hagaz* 1).

When we draw down this spirit, we draw from the future, ideal messianic age. In this world of action, we draw to ourselves the song of holiness that we will sing then (cf. *OH Hashkamat*

Haboker 5:11).

We draw this down morning and evening with the recitation of the Sh'ma. The first line of Sh'ma is "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." This corresponds to binah.

Then we recite the second line in a low voice: "Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever."

This second line corresponds to malchut.

When we recite the first line of Sh'ma, we draw from the great, ideal light of God's unity that will shine in the future. With the second line, we condense that great light so that we will be able to bear it now (cf. *HM Eidut* 4:15).

We must merge the supernal place of God's glory, where He is completely hidden, with malchut, the level where "the earth is filled with His glory."

Merging these two aspects constitutes the essence of knowing God. And we bring about this essential union when we carry out God's commandments.

Then God's spirit is revealed throughout the world (cf. *HM Chezkat M'talti'lim* 3:11).

The Jewish people is the first-born of humans, a "chosen people" who have the privilege and obligation to lead sanctified lives and bring this sanctity to all human beings. Thus, the language of Israel is the Holy Tongue, from which, the Torah teaches, all languages devolved. The Holy Tongue is the language of God, the language with which He made the world: malchut (cf. *YD Bechor Beheimah Tohorah* 1).

This holy speech is embodied by the female principle: Eve, the mother of all life, the woman whose name means speech: a

sensitivity to the language of God as expressed in the hidden, aura of divinity within nature: “Day to day expresses speech, night to night speaks (yechaveh, connected to *Chava*, Eve) knowledge” (Psalms 19:3).

When speech is degraded, it becomes a vehicle for the seventy passions of physicality: the languages of the seventy nations. When the letters of God’s speech, with which He made and imbues the world, sink into such debasement, they can no longer be raised. As a result, the Torah expresses itself with negative, prohibitory commandments: “Thou shalt not steal”; “thou shalt not murder.” Those holy letters have been turned to evil—we may never make use of them (cf. *YD Taarovet* 1:1).

Festivals

On the three pilgrim festivals (Succot, Pesach and Shavuot), the fact that the Lord is God is revealed. Malchut rises from the husks of evil (cf. *OH Yom Tov* 1:2). Then the husks of the four kingdoms of exile are suppressed.

When the light of the holiday shines, when we hear a mighty proclamation from heaven and we experience regret for our bad acts. That causes malchut to rise from the husks.

All this stems from rosh chodesh, the first day of the month. The day on which the festival falls is determined by which day constitutes the new month. At the beginning of the month, the light of the moon, malchut, was completely hidden. Out of the hiddenness was revealed the growth of a new light (cf. *OH Rosh Chodesh* 3:3).

That is why four people are called up to the Torah reading on rosh chodesh. When these four people are called up to the Torah, which is the receptacle of malchut and the name of God, the four kingdoms of exile are vanquished (cf. *OH Rosh Chodesh* 3:8).

The date for the Sabbath was set by God. But the Jewish calendar is determined on earth according to the deposition of witnesses regarding the new moon (this ceased soon after the destruction of the second *Beit Hamikdash*). The Sabbath is a present from God to man. But the quality of the festival depends on the input of human beings.

Our input raises malchut. When malchut is raised from the four kingdoms, the archenemy of mankind, Amalek, is subjugated (*YD Reishit Hagaz* 1).

Barley Offering

Because malchut is a quality of constriction, at times the wisdom in it may become so constricted that it expresses itself as foolishness and animal nature.

There is a holy quality to being like an animal before God, serving Him with humility and no self-aggrandizement.

But on the other hand, we must not engage in animalistic actions. We then raise our animal nature to the highest service of God.

This process was enacted in the days of the Beit Hamikdash on the second day of Pesach, when flour of the new barley season was offered to God. Barley, animal fodder, our animal nature, was offered up to God (cf. *HM Pikadon* 4:4).

This is why Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth returned to the land of Israel during the time of the cutting of the omer, the measure of barley. Ruth, a Moabite convert, would become the ancestor of King David, from whose children will emerge the messiah.

It is precisely through raising the animal nature, through rising from idolatry to recognition of God, that we bring the messiah. The story of Ruth's relationship with her future husband, Boaz, is one of modesty and sexual propriety: and this too is the integral, remedial nature of malchut (cf. *YD Chadash 2:7*).

On the Mount of Zion

The Talmud teaches that the center of the world is the site of the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem. From that site pours forth recognition of God. It is from such a nexus that the world is poured out.

Thus, the messianic awakening will come from the land of Israel and Jerusalem. From the site of creation and the revelation of God's divinity, His malchut and rulership will come forth (cf. *HM Chezkat Metaltilin 5:11*).

Within every day and every event, we must seek that crowning moment, the recognition of God. In this way we attach ourselves to the spark of holiness and the seed of redemption in every particle and wave of reality. Within our lives and in a nimbus that surrounds our lives, we draw down and create the palace of the messiah. Then the scent of holiness can spread throughout the world. With all our heart, we must search for our

true teachers. And we must be a true teacher to ourself and others.

Nullified in the cognition of God, we must be independent, capable of moral and spiritual choice. Although mature, we must nullify ourselves before a greater power.

Immersed within this world, we must be merely a vehicle for God's rule. Merely a servant of God, humble and transparent before Him, we must be able to rule with might.

We must wait through the drawn-out exile to receive the crown of the messiah. We must in every instant seek that crown.

And in all that we do we must hear the faint echo of the herald of the messiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger announcing peace, announcing goodness, announcing redemption, saying to Zion: God is king."

Appendix

The Thirteen Qualities of Compassion

(1) “Who is a god like You?”

No other being can equal God in His might. Yet even as a person sins against Him, God is actively giving him the being and strength to do so. Therefore, no other force or being can equal God’s patience and humility.

We emulate God by acting toward others with principled goodness, even when they are unappreciative and insulting.

(2) “You forgive sin.”

When a person sins against God, he creates a destructive spiritual force that has the power to drain his energies. Yet God protects him from this destructive force and waits for him to repent.

We emulate God by treating others with love even while they have not yet rectified their behavior against us.

(3) “And You pass over the iniquity.”

God Himself forgives a person's sin and rectifies what he ruined. "God has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion" (Isaiah 4:4).

We emulate God when we lower ourselves to help someone cleanse himself of his moral turpitude. It may be that this person created his own filth. Yet a principled sense of love impels us to lift him from his situation.

(4) "To the remnant of His inheritance."

Just as God loves the Jewish people, so must we desire the best for other Jews. We must realize that all Jews are in essence one organism, and that the disgrace of another Jew is harmful to our own being.

Although this relationship extends to the greater realm of mankind, it is particularly so as regards the nation that is called "a special people."¹¹

(5) "He does not hold on forever to His anger."

God releases His anger even if someone does not repent. Such was the case when Jereboam constructed golden calves as idols, yet God restored the borders of Israel (Kings II 14:26).

We emulate God when we do not self-indulge in angry rebuke of another person, even when that anger and rebuke would

¹¹Rabbi Akiva taught, "Beloved is man, who was created in the image of God. Beloved are the Jews, who are called the children of God" (Pirkei Avot).

All human beings are creatures of God and have an interwoven fate and a responsibility to each other.

The Jewish people in particular are called God's children.

be justified. And we emulate God when we attempt to improve another person by attracting him with love.

(6) “For He desires lovingkindness.”

God desires human beings to act lovingly to each other. When they do so, even though they may be flawed and sinful, God forgives their faults.

We emulate God when, seeing that a person who has treated us wrongly acts kindly to others, we release our anger against him. For instance, when a man sees that his wife gives generously of herself to take care of their children, his regard for her can nullify his anger.

(7) “He will again have compassion on us.”

If one person acts badly against another and then makes it up to him, the second person forgives him but his love has diminished.

God is different. When someone repents of his wrongdoing, God loves him even more than He did before.

Thus, “He will again”—after we repent—“have compassion on us.” He will relate to us with great compassion, even more than we received before.

We emulate God by acting the same way. When a person who acted wrongly now demonstrates remorse, we should not harbor any anger but rather love him even more.

(8) “He will subjugate our sins.”

Whenever a person does a good deed, it comes before God’s presence. But if a person sins, God in His love subjugates that sin so as not to allow it to rise before Him.

The Torah teaches that God does not take good deeds as bribes (Deuteronomy 10:17 and Ramban ad loc). God does not

necessarily punish each sin. And when He forgives sin, He does so with no strings attached: He does not demand good deeds as bribes, as payment. In addition to having our sins forgiven, we will be rewarded for each of our good deeds.

We emulate God by not keeping exact accounts of how someone else has acted wrongly. Rather, we should magnify the other person's good and minimize the wrong.

(9) “And cast into the depths of the sea all of their sins.”

Evil-doers are called “the depths of the sea,” as in the verse, “The wicked are like a stormy sea that cannot be quieted, and whose waters cast up trash and mud” (Isaiah 57:20). This phrase can be homiletically interpreted to read that God will ultimately cast down the wicked who had oppressed the Jewish people.

Sometimes, when the Jews sinned, they needed difficult experiences to purify them. These experiences were provided by evil-doers such as Pharaoh. In the end, such evil-doers do of their own free will more than was required. “I was a little angry, and they helped for the sake of evil” (Zechariah 1:15). Eventually, God regrets His original decree and takes the side of the Jews.

Similarly, since everything is from God, an abusive person may claim that he is an agent of God. But ultimately, God does not desire such an agent. That abuser will eventually have to take responsibility for his action. And the victim can justifiably feel that he is accepted and loved by God—even if he had acted incorrectly.

We emulate God when we act with love even to a person who was obviously acting wrongly, after that person has been crushed by suffering and has demonstrated regret for his former deeds.

(10) “You give truth to Jacob.”

Jacob has two names: Jacob and Israel. Jacob refers to a state of being in which one acts according to strict principles of correctness and justice. Israel refers to a more expansive condition, going beyond the letter of the law.

When a person is on the level of “Jacob,” God responds in kind and treats him with a strict adherence to justness and truth that is tinged with compassion.

We emulate God by treating others fairly, in a spirit of love.

(11) “Lovingkindness to Abraham.”

Abraham is the paradigm of selfless, unconditional love. When a person acts in such a manner, God reciprocates in kind.

We emulate God by acting toward those people who are particularly good and pious in a manner that extends beyond the letter of the law, with especial patience and compassion.

(12) “As You have vowed to our forefathers.”

Even if the Jewish people act in a manner that is not worthy of God’s love, God has a storehouse of grace from which He gives to them, because of the merit of their forebears (in particular, the Patriarchs).

We emulate God by adopting a similar attitude toward misbehaving Jews, cognizant that even they contain within themselves the spark of blessing that was given to their forefathers.¹²

¹²All of humanity must be appreciated. But a Jew has a special feel for his fellow Jews. In this vein, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook wrote,

“I love everything. I cannot help but love all beings, all nations.

(13) “From the days of old.”

When the merit of the forefathers runs out, God continues to love the Jews, even if they are unworthy, by recalling their faithfulness and goodness in “days of old”: “I recall the lovingkindness of your youth, the love of Your marriage day” (Jeremiah 2:2).

We emulate God in a similar way. When we see a person who seems unlovable, we can think of him as a child before he ever sinned. We can think of the good things he did in the past. This can arouse love in our heart and actions (cf. *Tomer Devorah*, chapter 1).

“I desire with my entire depth the beauty of everything, the rectification of everything.

“My love for the Jewish people is more fiery, more deep, but the inner desire spreads out with a powerful love to all.

“I literally have no need to force this feeling of love. It flows directly from the depth of holiness of wisdom, from the Divine soul” (Arpelei Tohar 22, quoted in *Mishnato Shel Harav Kook*, p. 307).