

"Open my eyes so that I may see the **wonders** of Your Torah"



נט"ז

Wonders

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“ If Judaism has lost the adventurous spirit that used to drive it, science may help rekindle it. ”

3 **Into the Unknown:** The Spirit of Adventure in Science and Judaism

7 **Story:** Rebbe Mordechai Yosef Leiner: Not A Miracle

9 **Partzuf:** Joseph and Judah Meet: A Partzuf of Interpretations

The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

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to publish your classes
in book form.
With blessings for success..."

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Wonders

An anthology from the shiurim and farbrengens
of Harav **Yitzchak Ginsburgh**

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INTO THE UNKNOWN:

The Spirit of Adventure in Science and Judaism

Can we identify a singular quality that most defines the spirit of science? At its core, beneath the impressive scientific methodology and the vast knowledge it yields, the distinctive essence of the scientific endeavor lies in its courage to *journey into the unknown*. This spirit was felt most profoundly during the Scientific Revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, when a small group of brave researchers dared to abandon the security provided by accepted dogma and chart an unpaved path of scientific inquiry. Some, as is well known, paid for this courage with their freedom and some, even with their lives.

On a practical level, this journey into the unknown manifests in the *scientific method*, which is based on trial and error. A scientist proposes theoretical hypotheses, tests them against observations and laboratory experiments, and must always remain open to the possibility that they might be disproven. It is widely recognized that the most fundamental principle in the philosophy of science is that scientific theories cannot be proven, only refuted. An experiment whose results align with a theory does not confirm its truth but merely reinforces its likelihood. The possibility of falsification is the primary criterion for the validity of a scientific theory. Thus, the only certainty science offers is that disproven theories are false; it does not provide assurance that theories which have yet to be disproven are true. A scientific theory is, in a sense, destined to

an eternal journey toward an unreachable horizon: it can be corroborated time and again, but never definitively proven.

To this day, secular culture considers choosing this path its greatest act of heroism. The highest praise for scientists is their ability to admit their errors when faced with evidence that refutes their theories. Even the average secular individual takes pride in declaring, above all else, that they know nothing with absolute certainty and that they might be wrong. Indeed, who could deny that the ability to acknowledge ignorance reflects a humility and modesty worthy of admiration?

JEW'S PLAY IT SAFE

When comparing the approach of trial and error to the Torah world, the two seem entirely opposite in nature. Faith, by definition, is not contingent upon the results of any experiment. It is like a tent stake designed to ensure that no wind can topple the believer's worldview. Obviously, faith too cannot be proven—but neither can it be falsified. Jewish faith in the Torah's truth in particular is founded on trust in the testimony passed down from the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, transmitted from parent to child through the generations. This testimony cannot be directly verified and, therefore, cannot be disproven.

Thus, while science exists in a world of doubt, the Torah exists in a world of certainty. This strikes many as counter-

intuitive, as science is known for its mathematical precision, while the Torah is inherently ambiguous and open to myriad interpretations. But we are not talking here about the *nature* of the statements made by Torah or science, but rather about their solidity in the eyes of those who follow them. The Torah may be imprecise and ambiguous, but its validity is perceived by its believers as absolute, Divine truth. Likewise, science's precision is valid only within the framework of its theories, but these themselves are always subject to doubt and the risk of falsification.

This distinction highlights the central reason why most adherents of Torah tradition hesitate to reconcile it with science: being a scientist requires taking risks, but a person of Torah does not like gambling—they like winning. Therefore, those accustomed to the stable faith of the Torah world usually prefer to tread safely on well-paved roads and avoid venturing into uncharted territory.

However, clearly such an approach results in greater loss than gain. While the Torah and faith may seem to remain sturdy and indestructible, their further growth is impaired. They remain mostly sheltered from the historical developments and changes human (and Jewish) society go through, but they also suffer from stagnation when they are forced to turn their backs on both new interpretations from within and new questions from without. To cultivate the world of faith, one must be willing to venture onto untrodden and uncertain paths and embrace the possibility of making mistakes. A Chassidic saying goes: “It is not always

possible to walk on an iron bridge.” The conservative type's fear of change plays an essential role in building a society, but at times it can devolve into a paralyzing dread that suppresses any aspiration for growth. Those who understand that bringing redemption requires venturing into unredeemed territories must agree to embark on a journey toward the unknown horizon.

Incorporating science into the world of Torah means adopting an experimental approach to life, a willingness to err and be proven wrong. Such a move refines the religious individual. It refreshes and invigorates the soul, stripping away excess pride and overconfidence, and restores a youthful spirit that rote study and repetition of the familiar often weaken. Above all, it can reintroduce people of Torah to someone who should always be present in the study hall but is often left outside: the Holy Blessed One Himself, with His infinite nature and boundless surprises. There is nothing better for strengthening faith in God than leaving yourself vulnerable to err. By doing so, we create a space where God can teach us, play with us, and surprise us with endless novelties.

HOLY ADVENTURISM

In truth, the two core elements of the scientific method—experimentation and error—have preexisting foundations in the Torah. These foundations are not as developed or central in the Torah as they are in science, but their very presence indicates that they are not foreign to it. They can be seen as seeds planted in the Torah's soil, yearning for someone to water and nurture them.

The ideal of experimentation is most evident in the Torah through the figure of *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes). *Kohelet*, traditionally identified as King Solomon, serves as the ultimate example of a person who refused to accept truths based on hearsay or blind faith. Instead, he sought to learn everything through personal experience: “I set my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven.”¹

Solomon-Kohelet stands as a kind of ancient prototype of the scientist, venturing into the world to gather observations and draw conclusions from them. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Solomon’s inquiries led him to form a worldview remarkably similar to that which modern science has instilled in contemporary individuals (at least up until the final verses of *Kohelet*): “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” together with, “That which has been is that which shall be, and that which has been done is that which shall be done, and there is nothing new under the sun,” and “The same fate comes to all,” and so forth. A cold, unprejudiced observation of nature, stripped of inherited beliefs and preconceived notions, has led experimentalists throughout history to reach similar conclusions.

What about the willingness to err? This too is found in the Torah. An important statement in the Talmud asserts: “A person cannot truly understand words of Torah unless they have stumbled over them.” This refers to a situation in which a person has studied all the debates and reasoning, knows the legal ruling, but

errs in its practical application. Why isn’t theoretical study alone always sufficient to grasp the depths of a matter, and how does failure achieve this? It seems that when we discover we have erred, the learned content is augmented by the lesson derived from the error itself: the realization that we are *capable of making mistakes*, that we are not all-knowing or immune to error. This lesson, which cuts across the intellect and touches the very core of the soul, imprints the learned content upon us with greater intensity than any intellectual lecture.

The book of Proverbs compares the Torah to a beautiful woman and urges us to “Always be infatuated with loving her.”² The Hebrew word for “infatuated” (תַּשְׁהוּ), also means “you shall err.” The verse can therefore be interpreted as saying that if we truly love the Torah, we must always be willing to make mistakes while studying it.

Above all, the Torah expresses the spirit of venturing into the unknown in the story of the Exodus, the central narrative of the entire Torah. The Exodus was a bold step of leaving the familiar for the unknown. Even though many Israelites later felt regret and nostalgia for the “fleshpots” of Egypt, this does not diminish from the spirit of freedom that coursed through them on the night of their departure. On the contrary, their regret highlights the profound allure of the familiar, against which the greatness of the willingness to part from it becomes apparent.

Tapping into this spirit of adventure and freedom, the prophet Jeremiah declared: “Thus says God: I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the

1. Ecclesiastes 1:13.

2. Proverbs 5:19.

love of your betrothal, when you followed Me into the wilderness, into an unsown land.” Just as the early scientists dared to reject the medieval worldview and seek a new one, so too the Israelites departing Egypt were marked by courage and an adventurous spirit, open to renewal as was the first Patriarch, Abraham, upon whom God called to “leave your country, your birthplace, and the house of your father.”

The Torah calls upon us to emulate these qualities, first and foremost during Passover, but really every day: “A person is obligated to see themselves as if they, personally, had come out of Egypt.” The values of experimentation, error, and venturing into the unknown are neither foreign to nor external from Jewish life;

they are integral to the entirety of what it offers. As the sages said, “Teach your tongue to say, ‘I do not know.’”

For various reasons, Judaism has usually preferred to follow a path that emphasizes and develops other aspects of the Torah, leaving these facets neglected. When a reunion with science restores the Torah to a path that can integrate trial and error, experimentation and failure, it will not be adding anything new. Rather, it will be calling upon us to reclaim precious parts of the Torah way of life that have always been there, but were buried under the dust of our long wanderings in the wilderness of the nations, where survival is essential, and experimentation was a luxury we could not always afford to engage in.

continued from page 16

God. Thus, when he says to Joseph, “*For you are like Pharaoh*” he is saying to God: “You are perceived only according to what is revealed [Pharaoh, which means revealed in Hebrew].” No one sees You.

We place this in victory and acknowledgment, because they correspond to the two principles of faith of the Torah’s inner dimension that “*The tzaddik decrees, and God fulfills*” (victory) and

“*God decrees, and the tzaddik annuls*” (*acknowledgment*).¹² Rebbe Nachman explains that Judah is here asking for the power to overturn and annul Divine decrees, because if granted this ability, it would reveal to everyone that the world is governed by God and not by nature alone.

(the remaining discussion of this beautiful *partzuf* can be accessed on our website, inner.org or on our Patreon page: www.patreon.com/galeinai).

(based on a class given on the 7th of Tevet, 5773 in Kfar Chabad)

1. Ezekiel 37:16-17.

2. Rabbi Dov Ber Schneersohn, *Derech Chaim*.

3. Song of Songs 7:7.

4. Ibid. 5:8.

5. Psalms 63:3.

6. Psalms 104:24.

7. Genesis 1:2.

8. *Likkutei Moharan*, 62.

9. *Psalms* 51:19.

10. *Amos* 9:13.

11. *Isaiah* 49:3.

12. See in length in our Hebrew volume, *Emunah VeMuda'ut*.

STORY

REBBE MORDECHAI YOSEF LEINER:

Not A Miracle

Rebbe Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica, known eponymously by the title of his book "Mei HaShiloach", was born in 5560 (1800) to his father Rabbi Yaakov, a disciple of the Seer of Lublin. He was a distinguished student of Rebbe Simchah Bunim of Peshischa and later accepted the leadership of Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. Following an ideological dispute, he left Kotzk with a group of followers and founded the Izbica Chasidic dynasty, which continued in Radzyn. Rebbe Mordechai Yosef was known for the profundity of his Chasidic teachings, and for his perspective that, in their inner essence, all the actions of the Jewish people, even sins, express the will of the Holy Blessed One. His Torah teachings were collected by his grandson, Rebbe Gershon Chanoch Henoah, into the book "Mei HaShiloach". His path was continued by his disciples, Rebbe Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, Rebbe Leibele Eiger, and his own son Rebbe Yaakov Leiner. Rebbe Mordechai Yosef passed away on the 7th of Tevet 5614 (1854).

There was an incident with the holy Rebbe of Izbica involving mead, a popular drink in his time. Mead is made from fermented honey water and is similar to wine in appearance. It is sometimes even called honey wine. Once, by mistake, mead was poured into his Kiddush goblet instead of wine, and he began to recite the Kiddush for the Shabbat meal. When he reached the blessing made on wine in the Kiddush, he stopped and would not continue the blessing. When those present realized this, they began to search for a reason for his behavior. It was then discovered that it was mead in his goblet, not wine. If he would have continued and made the blessing over wine, it would have been taking God's Name in vain.

Afterwards, Rebbe Mordechai Yosef explained that no one should think that stopping the blessing was a miracle or the result of Divine inspiration. Rather, since he always searches for the kosher status of something before reciting its blessing, now too, during Kiddush, he searched for the kosher status of the wine and could not find it.

Even though mead is inherently kosher and is fit even for Kiddush, nevertheless wine requires inspection to ensure that it is kosher, etc. For mead, all the special prohibitions that apply to wine are not relevant. And when these prohibitions are not applicable, it is impossible to ascertain whether the drink in his cup is kosher

or not. For as long as there is no opposing force to *kashrut*, the *kashrut* itself is of a lesser degree. Therefore, he couldn't find the *kashrut* in the mead and could not continue with its blessing.

Rebbe Mordechai Yosef's extraordinary eyesight, which to himself was no miracle at all, saved him from making the blessing for wine over a drink that is not wine. Indeed, *tzaddikim* have said that specifically the word *gefen* (vine, גֶּפֶן), which appears in the blessing over wine, hints to the many influences of Kiddush over health (*gezunt*, געזונט), livelihood (*parnassah*, פֶּרְנִיסָה), and satisfaction from one's life and offspring (*nachat*, נַחַת).

The *tzaddik* knew this secret well: Once, on the Shabbat of Parashat Tetzaveh, a Jew asked him for a blessing for livelihood. The *tzaddik* handed him a cup of wine and said, quoting the verse from that week's Torah portion: "And you shall make settings of gold"³ (וַעֲשִׂיתָ מְשָׁבֶצֶת זָהָב). May you have purses full of gold! Not many days passed before the man became very wealthy.

In Kabbalah and Chasidut, wine is associated with the *sefirah* of *binah* (understanding) while mead falls under the halachic category of *chamar medinah* (the drink of the land) and is thus associated with the *sefirah* of *malchut* (kingdom). The association between wine and *binah* is expressed both in the many restrictions that apply to wine, since *binah* is the source of judgments—strict adherence to *kashrut* being among them and the fact that "song is only said over wine"⁴—an expression of the idea that the inner essence of *binah* is specifically joy.

Both the joyous song and the penetrating gaze into the essence of wine are hinted at in the word "kosher" (כָּשֵׁר). The first letter, כ, is the initial of the word "strength" (כֹּחַ). The remaining two letters, שר, have two meanings: either song or gaze, the latter meaning appears in the verse "And from the hills I see him"⁵ (וּמִגְבוּעוֹת אֲשׁוּרָיו). The power to gaze and sense the essence of wine belongs specifically to the *gevurah* (might) aspect of *binah*: the fear of God in the *tzaddik's* heart is what allows him to understand (the meaning of *binah*) what stands before him.

In light of our words, it is interesting to see that in several places, wine is connected with fear. For instance, the Talmud states that "severe fear, wine dispels it."⁶ The joy and lightheadedness in wine contend with fear and overcome it. The Ba'al Shem Tov, however, expounded on this Talmudic statement as if it read: "severe wine, fear dispels it." The Ba'al Shem Tov and his disciples mentioned this interpretation when they instantly needed to dispel the effect of wine they had drunk. They did this by remembering God and experiencing the fear of God. Similarly, Rebbe Mordechai Yosef, when he was about to drink wine, filled himself with fear of Heaven as he verified the *kashrut* of the drink, and the fear of God helped him avoid a stumbling block he had not even thought of.

3. Exodus 28:13.

4. *Berachot* 35a.

5. Numbers 23:9.

6. *Bava Batra* 10a.

PARTZUF

JOSEPH AND JUDAH MEET: A PARTZUF OF INTERPRETATIONS

קֶטֶר crown-keter

Joseph as Pleasure, Judah as Will (Yoke)

Joseph as Redemption, Judah as Exile

Joseph as Unity (Wakefulness), Judah as Multiplicity (Sleep)

חִכְמָה wisdom-chochmah

Joseph as Second Refinement, Judah as First

בִּינָה understanding-binah

Joseph as light, Judah as vessel

Joseph as mind, Judah as heart

דַּעַת knowledge-da'at

Joseph as Knowledge of God, Judah as Faith in God

חֶסֶד loving-kindness-chesed

Joseph as Shabbat, Judah as Weekdays

גְבוּרָה might-gevurah

Joseph as the Harvester, Judah as the Plowman

Joseph as Abstract Mind, Judah as Broken Heart

תְּפִאֲרֵת beauty-tiferet

Joseph as Concealed Service, Judah as Revealed Service

הוֹד and נִצָּח victory-netzach and splendor-hod

Joseph as Concealed Godliness, Judah as Yearning to Reveal God

יְסוֹד foundation-yesod

Joseph as a Tzaddik, Judah as a Ba'al Teshuvah

מַלְכוּת kingdom-malchut

Joseph as a King in Practice, Judah as a King in Potential

Parashat Vayigash begins with the long-awaited face-to-face encounter between Joseph and Judah. After 22 years of regret over that fateful day when Joseph was sold, Joseph is facing his persecutors and is about to go head-to-head with Judah, whom they all recognize as their

leader. Seemingly it is only Joseph that is fully aware of the stakes. Still, Judah is also painfully aware that Benjamin's life hangs in the balance, as does the wholeness of Jacob's family and the future of the Jewish people. It is not surprising then that so much meaning has been ascribed to this

encounter and that its symbolism has been developed in many different directions. At the literal level, Judah's encounter with Joseph symbolizes the coming together of the two most important forces in the Jewish people—forces that a few centuries later would split the nation in two: the Northern and Southern kingdoms. The Haftarah—the selection from the Prophets—was chosen to reflect the reunification of Joseph and Judah, as Ezekiel is instructed by God:

And you, O' son of man, take a stick and write on it "Of Judah and the Israelites associated with him." Take another stick and write on it, "Of Joseph, the tree of Ephraim, and all the house of Israel associated with him." Bring them close to each other so they become one stick, joined together in your hand.¹

Beyond its national symbolism, Judah approaching Joseph carries profound meaning in Divine service (*avodat HaShem*). It symbolizes the need for unification distinct approaches to serving the Creator.

In this week's *partzuf*, we will look at some of the main interpretations given to the role of Joseph and Judah and the meaning of their encounter and place them in a unifying model.

RELATING TO A TZADDIK, RELATING TO GOD

Before we begin, let us consider what is probably the most obvious symbolism in Joseph and Judah's meeting. Joseph is known as Joseph the Tzaddik. Thus, the words, "*Judah approached Joseph*" can refer to every Jew approaching a *tzaddik* without any intermediaries or barriers. Just

as a true *tzaddik* is not seen as a barrier between the individual and God, so too, there should be no barrier between the individual and the *tzaddik*.

In light of this principle of that we first learn from Moses, whose self-nullification ensures that he does not get in the way of an individual's connection with God, we find Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaching that, the words Judah spoke to Joseph, he simultaneously addressed heavenward, "*Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not let your anger burn against your servant...*"

The *Chatam Sofer* expands on this idea, as does the *Izbicer Rebbe*. They suggest that when a Jew speaks, regardless of who they are addressing, they should have the intention that, in essence, they are speaking with God. This was the approach taken by all the *tzaddikim*, the disciples of the Ba'al Shem Tov.

CROWN: PLEASURE IN THE DIVINE AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE YOKE

There are a number of different interpretations that correspond to the crown in its complexity. In general, Joseph and Judah represent pleasure and will, the interior and exterior parts of the crown known as *Atik Yomin* and *Arich Anpin*.

Joseph represents the interior aspect of the crown, the Divine delight or pleasure in serving God referred to as "the Head of Nothingness" (*Reisha deAyin*). A person who attains this state experiences a (paradoxical) revelation of the true being, and this can even be sensed by the physical body. For example, it is told of the great *tzaddik*, Rebbe Nachum of Chernobyl, although he lived in extreme poverty and had almost nothing to

eat, his body became physically robust and fat from the Divine pleasure he experienced in responding with fervor, “*Amen, yehei shemei rabbah mevorach.*”

Judah represents the exterior aspect of the crown, Divine will, which manifests as the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, serving God beyond reason and intellect. So, while Joseph reflects the Divine pleasure that transcends understanding, Judah reflects the unwavering commitment and submission to God’s will, also beyond intellect and comprehension. This means that Judah represents a submission to the Divine will that is not an intense emotional longing but rather the simple will of a faithful servant who exists solely to fulfill the will of their master, without any other considerations. It is not driven by a passionate emotional desire to nullify oneself and be included in God but instead by the straightforward will of a true servant. This servant has nothing in life other than their master, and their entire being is directed toward fulfilling the master’s will. This is undoubtedly a service that transcends reason and understanding—it is inherently Jewish.

Which is higher: acceptance of the yoke or Divine pleasure? This is a deep question explored extensively in Chassidic teachings, particularly in Chabad. Each has a unique advantage over the other. But in truth, they need to work together. Divine pleasure is akin to light, while submission to Divine will serves as its vessel. “Judah approached him” reflects the dynamic in which *kabbalat ol* pleads and entreats Divine pleasure, the force that actualizes goodness in the world; Divine pleasure is the “king” in this dynamic, and everything

flows according to its decree. However, Judah’s submission and acceptance of Joseph’s sovereignty act as the foundation and vessel that makes it possible to capture the pleasure of the Divine allowing it to be revealed and ensuring that God’s beneficence is expressed in all creation.

CROWN: EXILE AND REDEMPTION

Expanding on this idea, it is written² that Joseph’s pleasure is akin to the verse in the Song of Songs, “How beautiful and how pleasant is pleasurable love”³ (אֶהְבֶּהּ בְּתַעֲנוּגִים). Joseph, even when he is in prison, enduring suffering in Egypt, remains in a state of inner joy and Divine pleasure. No matter where he finds himself—even in the pit with snakes and scorpions or confined in the prison—he experiences Divine success and pleasure in his path.

In contrast, Judah often willingly places himself in peril. Like Joseph, his life is filled with trials, challenges, and hardships. But unlike Joseph, Judah does not experience Divine pleasure, even though he yearns for it with all his being. In the Song of Songs, Judah’s state is described as, “I am love-sick”⁴ (חֹלֵת אֶהְבֶּה אֲנִי). As such, Joseph represents the Jew in times of redemption, such as during the existence of the Temple, when we can experience Divine pleasure. Judah, on the other hand, represents the Jewish people in exile, longing and yearning for divine closeness.

Chasidut teaches that there is more of the essence revealed during exile. This is one of the great innovations of the Ba’al Shem Tov: the longing and thirst for God in exile surpass the satisfaction of redemption. The Ba’al Shem Tov explains this with regard to the verse “So, too, I have seen You in the

sanctuary”⁵: If only, when I return to the *Beit HaMikdash*, I could retain the same yearning I felt in the wilderness, in a dry and parched land without water.

In this light, Judah approaching Joseph reflects exile approaching redemption. Both are rooted in the crown. The root of redemption is in Divine pleasure (אֶהְרֵה בְּתַעֲנוּגִים), while the root of exile is in the will of the crown (חולת אֶהְרֵה אָנִי) whose root is in the highest part of the crown, faith. According to this interpretation, the encounter of Judah and Joseph speaks directly to us in our time known as *ikveta deMashicha*—the footsteps of the Messiah. It describes the moment when exile reaches out to unite with redemption—Judah approached him.” This is happening in our time, right now.

UNITY AND MULTIPLICITY

If Judah symbolizes the Jew in exile—a Jew characterized by self-sacrifice, acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, and adherence to *mitzvot* not for personal gratification but purely out of submission to God’s will—then Judah also reflects the state of “I am asleep,” which relates to exile. Nonetheless, even in this state of sleep in exile, “my heart is awake” which suggests some level of awareness, it is like someone asleep but experiencing a vivid dream—ultimately, they are still asleep.

In contrast, Joseph represents the Jew who is fully awake. Joseph symbolizes the Jew in redemption, one who is spiritually awake and alive, experiencing true delight and joy in Divine service.

Now the difference between them is that a person who is awake perceives all the details of reality, everything they

experience around them, as a unified whole. Just as when the body functions, one experiences it as a single cohesive entity without focusing on individual organs. Interestingly, the hallmark of being awake is perceiving the world as unified. What is sleep? A sleeping person experiences every phenomenon in the world as separate and disconnected. They live in a reality of multiplicity. In contrast, the hallmark of being awake is living in a reality of unity and harmony. Thus, if a person truly feels separation in the world they live in, it is a sign they are spiritually asleep.

A person doesn’t always know whether they are awake or asleep. However, according to these teachings, there is a clear sign: if the world appears as one unified whole, you are awake. If you see the world as filled with contradictions, with phenomena that are different and conflicting, it is a sign you are asleep.

Indeed, it is written that the essence of a dream is the coexistence of opposites, constant contradictions. And yet, in this state, Judah demonstrates simple acceptance of the yoke of Heaven and performs *mitzvot* with the mindset of “they were not given for personal enjoyment.” Joseph, however, operates on an entirely different level. He sees the same reality but perceives it as a unified whole. For Joseph, everything he sees, everything that happens, is one picture reflecting God, the Master of the Universe, in simple clarity.

Judah and Joseph’s perspectives are described in Chasidic thought as representing two states of mind. Joseph’s is termed, “Divinity is a given and the world is a novelty” (אֶלְקוֹת בְּפִשְׁטוֹת וְעוֹלָמוֹת בְּהִתְחַדְּשׁוֹת). Judah’s experience is the opposite. He

lives in a dream state where “the world is a given and Divinity is a novelty” (עולמות וְאֵלֹהִים בְּהַתְחַדְּשׁוֹת). In his perception, the world is made up of different things—different people, different opinions, and each distinct from the other. This multiplicity is Judah’s default state. If he occasionally has a spark or flash of divine revelation, it is referred to as “Divinity is a surprise”—a novelty.

WISDOM: FIRST REFINEMENT AND SECOND REFINEMENT

The *sefirah* of wisdom is associated with both Creation and with its refinement. These are captured in the verse, “You made them all with wisdom”⁶ and in the Zohar’s statement, “All are refined through wisdom.” Refinement though is a complex process and Joseph and Judah have different roles in it. Joseph’s role is described in his first dream, “Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field”—meaning, we were engaged in the work of refinement—“and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright,” indicating that Joseph’s refinement surpasses that of his brothers. Then, his brother’s sheaves bowed down to Joseph’s. Chasidic teachings explain that Judah’s refinement corresponds to the *first refinement* that occurs in the lower worlds (*Beriah, Yetzirah, and Assiyah*), while Joseph’s refinement corresponds to the *second refinement* that takes place in the higher world of Emanation (*Atzilut*).

The first refinement, performed by the tribes in general and by Judah in particular focuses on the nullification of the ego (בטול הַיִּשׁ). This entails taking one’s ego, one’s sense of self, or the ego of any entity, and causing it to feel nullified, making it submit before the

Divine nothingness (*ayin*) that continuously brings it into existence. Submission of one’s own ego—recognizing the falsehood of one’s self-centered desires and relinquishing them—is not an easy task.

The second refinement, associated with Joseph, is nullification of being (בטול בְּמַצִּיאוֹת) itself. In this state, the Divine nothingness is no longer something external that flows into oneself—it becomes one’s very essence. The individual no longer feels separate from the Divine; rather, he truly becomes one with the *Ayin*. For Judah to approach Joseph reflects Judah’s agreement and submission to Joseph’s vision as expressed in his dream. He accepts Joseph’s role in bringing all their sheaves to a state of nullification of being, within the World of Emanation.

BINAH: JOSEPH – LIGHT; JUDAH – VESSEL

One of the most basic concepts in Kabbalah and Chasidut is that there are lights and vessels that contain them. Without a vessel, a light cannot express itself properly. The state in which a light is contained in a vessel is known as *tikkun*. While in wisdom we spoke of refinement (בְּרוּרִים), in *binah* we speak of *tikkun* (תְּקוּן), or enclothing of lights in vessels. It is in the World of Creation (בְּרִיאָה) that we find the initial revelation of vessels into which the light needs enclothe and the World of Creation corresponds to the *sefirah* of understanding (*Binah*). Thus, interpretations of Joseph as light and Judah as vessel correspond to the *sefirah* of understanding in our *partzuf*.

While the root, or Divine source of the vessels is considered higher than that of the lights, the vessel must still receive from

the light, and the light must be willing to dwell within the vessel. “Judah approached him” thus symbolizes the state in which the vessel ascends to meet the light. A proper enclotement or *tikkun* of light in a vessel requires that the light and the vessel be balanced. One way of thinking of this is that since the vessel is ascending, the light needs to be willing to descend. If the amount of ascent exhibited by the vessel is not balanced with the amount of descent exhibited by the light, *tikkun* will not be achieved. The sense of balance in Hebrew (מִתְנָח) is derived from the word for “ear” (אָזְנוֹ)—in humans, this is also true anatomically—and the ear and hearing are also associated with the *sefirah* of understanding.

One of the best parables used to illustrate the relationship between the light and the vessel is between spouses, a topic we have addressed in length in our works on marriage. Another image that can be used is that of the relationship between the spiritual and the material. If they cannot be balanced then the material realm is left soulless, like the Torah’s description of the earth as “chaotic and void,”⁷ the Biblical source for the notion of the World of Chaos that shattered and fell. There are a number of possible distinct scenarios of chaos that are beyond our scope here. Another important relationship that captures the need for *tikkun* between the light and the vessel is the way in which prayer and Torah need to be integrated. Prayer, the toil of the heart is the vessel represented by Judah while the Torah in it, the intent one has—the toil of the mind—is the light that needs to be integrated and is represented by Joseph.

KNOWLEDGE: JOSEPH AS KNOWLEDGE AND JUDAH AS FAITH

Rebbe Nachman⁸ interprets Judah as faith and Joseph as knowledge. We place this interpretation in the *sefirah* of knowledge (לִשְׁמֵרָה). In short, the idea is that there are two types of questions about Divinity in this world: Questions that have answers and questions without answers. To find answers to the first type, one must exert great effort to study, investigate, and understand—this is the toil of the mind, or Joseph. Not doing so can lead to inner heresy, creating internal conflict between the heart and the mind. But one must acknowledge that there are questions for which, in this world, no answer exists. In such cases, one must strengthen themselves with simple faith—this is the toil of the heart, or Judah. As simple faith becomes more tangible, it transforms into a known reality, it becomes revealed and evident to me. Again, the proper relationship between knowing and faith needs to be struck in life.

In the future, all faith will become included within knowledge, within Joseph, which is why “Judah approached him”—faith aspires and yearns to be integrated into knowledge.

LOVING-KINDNESS: JOSEPH AS SHABBAT SERVICE AND JUDAH AS WEEKDAY SERVICE

Here we turn to the *Noam Elimelech* and the *Sefat Emet*. The *Sefat Emet* teaches that Judah represents weekday service, while Joseph represents Shabbat service. Joseph embodies the pleasure of Shabbat (*Oneg Shabbat*), whereas Judah

represents service through toil and effort, the labor of the weekdays. Loving-kindness is just below wisdom, and the work of the weekdays represents the first or initial refinement (Judah) we reviewed in connection with wisdom, while the spiritual work we do on Shabbat represents a second, higher refinement (Joseph). The first day of the week—Judah’s toil and effort—is associated with the *sefirah* of loving-kindness.

To complete our placement of this interpretation in the *sefirah* of loving-kindness, we add the insight of the *Noam Elimelech* that the difference between the weekdays and Shabbat is that Shabbat is Divine service entirely driven by love. He further explains that the essence of weekday awe (if Shabbat is love then the weekdays are awe) should emerge from love. This is the deeper meaning of “Judah approached him.” Judah’s toil during the weekdays, rooted in awe, is elevated and transformed when infused with love, creating a unified Divine service.

MIGHT: JUDAH AS THE PLOWER AND JOSEPH AS THE HARVESTER

Here we place the interpretation offered by the Sochatchov rebbes, the *Shem MiShmuel* and his father, the *Avnei Nezer*. In understanding, we identified Judah and Joseph as the heart and the mind. By approaching Joseph, Judah—the heart—expresses a yearning to ascend. Now, in the *sefirah* of might, which is directly under understanding, the *Shem Mishmuel* writes that Judah represents a broken heart. This broken heart is the ultimate vessel (Judah, again) as declared by the verse, “A broken and contrite heart,

O’ God, You will not despise.”⁹

Now, the Midrash connects our verse “Judah approached him” with a prophecy from Amos: “The plowman shall meet the harvester, and the treader of grapes he who sows seed.”¹⁰ The *plowman* (חורש) represents Judah. The *harvester* (קוצר) represents Joseph. This is a Messianic prophecy, akin to “She conceived and gives birth together,” – the future state where investment and profit will occur simultaneously. However, the *Shem Mishmuel* recounts that his father explained the term *plowman* as referring to Judah, symbolizing one who breaks their heart by plowing their inner self. This is the work of cultivating a broken heart. Just as plowing “softens the earth,” so plowing one’s inner self turns a heart of stone into a heart of flesh—i.e., a broken heart.

Elsewhere, the *Avnei Nezer*, in his commentary on the laws of reaping, explains that the essence of reaping or harvesting is separating the crop from the earth. The *Shem Mishmuel* expands on this by drawing from the *Maharal* of Prague: harvesting represents the ability to sever the intellect from its attachment to corporeality. As long as the mind cannot conceive of abstract ideas in their pure form, it remains bound to materiality and lacks the quality of a truly “detached intellect” (שכל נבדל), as it was referred to by philosophers. A detached intellect can fully grasp spiritual concepts, free of the distortions of material imagination based on the illusory world.

BEAUTY: THE CONCEALED TZADDIK AND THE REVEALED TZADDIK

In beauty (*tiferet*) we place an interpretation from Rebbe Naftali



of Ropshitz. One of the defining characteristics of the sefirah of beauty is that it has one concealed third (its Chabad) and two revealed thirds (its Chagat and Nehi). The idea here is that there are two types of tzadikim: a concealed tzaddik who has a desire to be revealed (this is the “eighth of an eighth of pride” within him) and revealed *tzaddikim*. While living in Egypt, Joseph, sitting on the royal throne shows no outward sign whatsoever of being a Jew. He appears to be an Egyptian, yet his attachment to God surpasses, by an immeasurable degree, that of his brothers. Joseph represents the tzaddik whose Divine service of God is entirely concealed, whereas Judah represents the tzaddik whose service is entirely revealed to all.

Joseph serves God exclusively in concealment, through the cleaving of his thoughts, while his adherence to *mitzvot* is completely imperceptible to someone who is not aware of who he is. He might appear to be a simple water-drawer.

With respect to the *sefirah* of beauty, Torah corresponds to its middle third (Chagat) and the *mitzvot* and prayers correspond to its lower third (Nehi). The imperceptible Divine service of the concealed tzaddik corresponds to its upper third (Chabad).

At the beginning of *Keter Shem Tov*, it is written that the Divine service of beauty is to bring God a sense of satisfaction, as it were, nachas that His will was done, “Israel with whom I beautify Myself”¹¹

(ישראל אשר בך אתפאר); if your intention is for God to take pride in you, that is the service of Tiferet. There are those for whom this manifests without any outward sign, to the extent that others might think, like in Joseph’s case, that he was an Egyptian. This is why there are many stories of *Eliyahu HaNavi* appearing as a non-Jew.

Judah thus recognizes the existence of the extraordinary concealed tzaddik and draws near to him. This concept applies to our own Divine service as well. Torah and *mitzvot* are essential, but there is also a hidden dimension of service, a major principle embodied by the true concealed tzaddik, who should also exist within each of us. If we do not yearn for it, we become self-important, coarse, and disconnected.

VICTORY AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT: PLEADING FOR THE POWER TO REVEAL GODLINESS IN NATURE

Here we place another explanation from Rebbe Nachman who speaks about humanity’s fundamental error: perceiving only reality’s revealed aspect (laws of nature) and missing its concealed Godliness. Because we see the world as governed solely by nature, we focus on intermediaries, such as medicine and doctors (for health) or business and a career (for livelihood), and elevate them to primary importance, forgetting the Creator. Judah approaching Joseph here takes us back to the idea that Judah is actually speaking to

continued on page 6



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