

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



Wonders

ט"ז

Weekly Magazine of the Shiurim and Farbrengens
of HaRav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

Issue 188

Shabbat Tzav-HaGadol 5786 🌸 March 27-28, 2026

שַׁבַּת צוֹ-הַגָּדוֹל 🌸 ט-י נִיֶּסֶן תשפ"ו



“ The Tzemach Tzedek took his handkerchief and wound it around his holy hand, layer by layer, until the hand was entirely concealed from view. He then waved the handkerchief from side to side.

“What do you see?” the Tzemach Tzedek asked the child.

“The handkerchief moving from side to side,” the boy replied.



3 Five Dynamics of Leadership: Compassion

7 Story: The Tzemach Tzedek: Believing Without Seeing

9 Preparation for Passover: The Four Existential Questions in the Jewish Heart

The Lubavitcher Rebbe to Rav Ginsburgh, Elul 5741

"...It would be proper
to publish your classes
in book form.
With blessings for success..."

ברכה
לרב
גנז'ך
בפרסום
ספרותך
בברכה
לרב
גנז'ך
בפרסום
ספרותך

בברכה
לרב
גנז'ך
בפרסום
ספרותך
בברכה
לרב
גנז'ך
בפרסום
ספרותך

Wonders

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

Wonders is distributed weekly in Israel and North America.
For feedback and/or to receive copies for distribution in your area,
write to mgenuth@inner.org
Dedication opportunities available.

To see more of Harav Ginsburgh's teachings in English, and to sign up for
our weekly email newsletter with updates on live classes and events, go to:

www.inner.org

Books and music are available for sale at www.inner.org/webstore



Join our daily Whatsapp
group. Send a message
to **+972-50-6528650**



Subscribe to our Youtube channel for
hundreds of hours of in-depth study
www.youtube.com/innerorg



Click here to support Wonders
(3500 copies freely distributed
every week)



Scan this code to access
all Wonders past issues

Wonders Staff

Editor: R' Moshe Genuth • Associate Editor: Shelli Karzen

Contributing Editor: R. Avraham Arie Trugman • Typesetting: Yoel Broderick

FIVE DYNAMICS OF LEADERSHIP: COMPASSION

*We continue our exploration of HaRav Ginsburgh's book, *Awakening the Spark Within: Five Dynamics of Leadership that Can Change the World*. Having treated the broader vision of leadership and the first two of the five dynamics, the art of compromise and the drive for wholeness, we now turn to the third of the five dynamics: the power of compassion. Compassion inspires others to lead with compassion.*

THE POWER OF COMPASSION TO INSPIRE

Continuing our exploration of the five dynamics of leadership that can change the world, we now turn to the third dynamic: the power of compassion to inspire. As emphasized throughout this series, leadership is not limited to public figures or formal positions of authority. Rather, it is an inherent potential embedded within the soul-root of everyone. Each person, in his or her own sphere of influence—family, community, workplace, or society at large—has the potential to lead, to guide, and to uplift.

At its core, leadership is the ability to influence others positively. Yet the capacity to inspire others cannot be manufactured externally. It emerges organically from one's own inner state. Only when inspiration is alive within the soul can it radiate outward and awaken that same potential in others. Compassion plays a central role in this process. It is compassion that enables a person to see beyond superficial appearances, and beyond the limitations of a judgmental attitude towards others.

To see the world through compassionate eyes is to recognize that beneath every

external form lies an inner spark of Divine life. This perspective allows the potential leader to perceive not only what is, but also what can be.

COMPASSION AND THE MESSIANIC IDEAL

The prophet Isaiah describes the future and the ultimate leader, the Mashiach with the following words: “For he who shows them compassion will lead them; by fountains of water, he will guide them.”¹ Isaiah does not describe the Mashiach primarily as a conqueror, philosopher, or miracle-worker, but as one who leads through compassion. Compassion, according to this vision is the very engine that generates inspiration and guidance. Through compassion, leadership becomes life-giving, likened here to flowing waters that sustain and refresh.

Chasidic thought deepens this idea by identifying three distinct levels of compassion. The first level is having compassion on every human being whose lofty soul descends from its spiritual origin into the constraints of a body and a physical and unrectified world. Recognition of this

1. Isaiah 49:10.

fact alone should evoke compassion for oneself and for others, simply because of the challenge presented by existing within limits, struggle, and concealment.

The second level is compassion for the people of Israel. This compassion arises not only from shared identity but from an honest reckoning with a history of centuries of persecution, displacement, and suffering.

Lastly, is the compassion for the Creator Himself and the exile of the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence. Jewish tradition speaks of the “pain” God experiences, as it were, when seeing the world He created for harmony and unity, existing instead in such fragmentation and disarray. To feel compassion at this level is to align one’s heart with Divine will and purpose and to yearn for the healing of all of Creation.

Each of these levels of compassion draws forth a corresponding Divine response. As a person refines and elevates his or her capacity for compassion, God responds by granting deeper inspiration and a greater ability to act meaningfully to rectify the world.

MOSES: COMPASSION AND SELFLESSNESS UNITED

Jewish tradition teaches that the soul of Moses reappears in the soul of Mashiach: “He is the first redeemer, and he will be the last redeemer.”² Moses’ life serves as a living model of leadership rooted in compassion.

His compassion is evident from the very beginning. Though raised as a prince of Egypt, Moses sacrifices his privileged position to defend a fellow Jew being brutally beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster.³ This act

of moral courage forces him into exile, yet it reveals the essence of his leadership: an inability to remain indifferent in the face of suffering.

Soon after, Moses intervenes again—this time on behalf of defenseless women being harassed by shepherds at a well.⁴ Once more, his compassion is expressed through decisive action, without concern for personal benefit or recognition.

A beautiful *midrash* describes how Moses runs after a young suckling lamb that had run away. He locates him drinking water from a small crevice in a rock and blames himself for not providing the sheep sufficiently. He puts the exhausted lamb on his shoulder to return him to the flock. God who is watching this scene declares: this is the shepherd I want for my flock, the people of Israel.⁵

Throughout the forty years in the desert, Moses repeatedly stands as the defender of the Jewish people. Time and again, he intercedes with God following episodes of complaint, rebellion, and spiritual failure. His leadership is characterized not by a dominating temperament, but by acting with compassion and taking responsibility for the weak.

Yet, greater even than his compassion is Moses’ sense of selflessness. The Torah itself testifies: “And the man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any man on the face of the earth.”⁶ Humility and compassion together form the foundation of authentic leadership. While the Mashiach will embody humility, Isaiah emphasizes that compassion will be his most defining trait—extending not only to Israel but ultimately to all humanity.

2. *Shemot Rabbah* 4:2

3. Exodus 2:11–12.

4. *Ibid.* 2:16–17.

5. *Shemot Rabbah* 2:2.

6. Numbers 12:3.

COMPASSION AS ACTION

In Jewish thought, compassion is never confined to feeling alone. True compassion demands action. Rabbi Eliezer, a second-century sage, taught that one should perform an act of compassion before turning to God in prayer.⁷ He himself would give charity to a needy person prior to praying each morning, embodying the principle that spiritual elevation must be grounded in care for others.

This approach was emphasized and expanded by the Ba'al Shem Tov and his followers. He taught that serving God is inseparable from caring for people. Acts of kindness, involvement in communal welfares, and sensitivity to the needs of others are not distractions from spiritual life—they are its very expression. This was nothing less than a revolution for those spiritual adepts who until the Ba'al Shem Tov had viewed the solitary, even hermetic pursuit of spirituality far from the crowd, as the pinnacle of religious development. Famously, the Ba'al Shem Tov taught these great giants of the spirit to refocus their energy from developing their own connection with God to caring for the well-being of others—first for their physical needs and only then for the elevation of their religious level.

COMPASSION AND DIVINE INSPIRATION

Isaiah describes the source of true inspiration as the spirit of God: “The spirit of God shall rest upon him—the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of God.”⁸

7. *Bava Batra* 10a.

8. Isaiah 11:2.

This passage refers explicitly to the Mashiach, yet implicitly to the spark of leadership present within every Jew. Notably, the Divine name used in this verse—“the spirit of Havayah”—is Havayah, the four-letter Name, the Tetragrammaton, which Kabbalah identifies as the “Name of compassion,” i.e., the Name of God that represents His trait of compassion. This again reveals a profound connection between Divine inspiration and compassion. Previously, we saw how Isaiah identifies the Mashiach with compassion and here as the recipient of Divine inspiration. Where compassion is cultivated, inspiration naturally follows.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

A powerful illustration of the importance of compassion emerges in the figure of Noah. Though described as a *tzaddik*, a righteous individual,⁹ he is criticized by the sages and later commentaries for failing to plead for God’s compassion on behalf of his generation.

The *Zohar* relates that when Noah exits the ark and beholds the devastation caused by the Flood, he questions God’s justice. God responds by calling him a “foolish shepherd,” rebuking him for not requesting mercy while there was still time. In fact, God had delayed the flood repeatedly, affording Noah with opportunity after opportunity to plead for compassion.¹⁰

There is a debate among the sages whether Noah, if he had been alive at the time of Abraham, would have been more or less righteous than he was in his own generation. Some are of the opinion that had

9. Genesis 6:9.

10. *Zohar (Hashmatot)* 1:254b.

he lived at the time of Abraham, he would have been influenced by Abraham's example to be greater than he had been in his own generation. Others claim, though, that he was only called righteous in comparison to his evil generation and had he lived at the time of Abraham, he would have been thought of as quite ordinary.¹¹

The comparison with Abraham is purposeful. When God informs Abraham of the impending destruction of Sodom, Abraham immediately pleads on behalf of its inhabitants, negotiating persistently to save them, despite their evil ways.¹² Though only Lot and his daughters are ultimately spared, from that lineage emerges Ruth, King David, and eventually the Mashiach.

The full rectification of Noah's failing comes about through Moses. After the Sin of the Golden Calf, God threatens to destroy the Jewish people and begin building a nation from Moses. Moses responds with unparalleled self-sacrifice: "And now, if You would but forgive their sin—but if not, erase me now from Your book which You have written."¹³

Kabbalistic tradition teaches that the letters of the word "erase me" (מחני), when rearranged spell "the waters of Noah"¹⁴ (מי נח), alluding to the waters of the Flood. Because he did not seek compassion for his generation's people, the Flood is named after Noah. At that moment, Moses repaired the spiritual blemish left by Noah's failure to plead for his generation. Moses is willing to

sacrifice not only his leadership, but his very place in the Torah, for the sake of the people.

CREATING A NEW WORLD

When Noah left the ark at God's instruction,¹⁵ he was in a unique position, as he was one of the few people to ever witness, quite literally, a "new world." The command for Noah to leave the ark also implied that to build a new world, one had to leave behind an old-world consciousness to build a new one.

Inasmuch as the teachings of the Torah are eternal and all its stories and personalities are archetypal in nature, the idea of creating a new world by leaving the old world behind has great relevance for the Jewish people today. World War II and the Holocaust in great measure brought the world as we knew it to an end and demanded new solutions. This is especially true for the Jewish people, as only three years after the Holocaust, Jewish sovereignty was renewed in the Land of Israel after two thousand years. This was like a post-flood reality where Noah had the opportunity to create a new world.

Although Israel from its inception has had to face enemies trying to destroy it, nonetheless, the Jewish people are faced today with the opportunity to create a new world that will lead to the Messianic era. To do so does not mean being naive or passive in the face of our enemy's opposition, but just as God promised Noah after the flood that there would be no future flood, Israel is called upon to trust that another Holocaust will not occur and to go about our affairs fearlessly creating a new world ready for true redemption.

The passage of Isaiah about the spirit of

11. See *Rashi* on Genesis 6:9.

12. Genesis 18:23–33.

13. Exodus 32:32.

14. Isaiah 54:9, "For this to Me [God] is like the waters of Noah: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah nevermore would flood the earth, so I swear that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you."

15. Genesis 8:17.

God and the spirit of counsel and might represents the collective potential of the Jewish people to be a source of great counsel and a light unto the nations. In fact, Isaiah in one verse calls the Mashiach “a wondrous giver of counsel.”

As discussed above, compassion entails more than passive empathy but rather an active involvement in the present. Every

person, in their sphere of influence, by cultivating compassion that moves us to act in an inspired manner, can align themselves with the spirit of God and participate in the ongoing work of healing the world—preparing it for the ultimate redemption led by a compassionate leader who inspires the same in others.

STORY

THE TZEMACH TZEDEK: BELIEVING WITHOUT SEEING

Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born to his father Rabbi Shalom Shachna and his mother Rebbetzin Devorah Leah on the 29th of Elul, 5549 (1789). In 5553, when he was but three years old, his mother passed away. At her final request, he was adopted by his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, who cherished him deeply. On the 5th of Kislev, 5564 (1803), he married his cousin, Rebbetzin Chayah Mushkah, daughter of the Mittlerer Rebbe. After the passing of his father-in-law on the 9th of Kislev, 5588 (1827), the Chasidim resolved to accept his leadership but he refused many times and ultimately consented only on the condition that he not be troubled with material matters. He became renowned as one of the greatest halachic decisors and was indeed named after his monumental responsa collection, Tzemach Tzedek [whose numerical value equals Menachem Mendel]. He delivered and authored Chasidic discourses in great abundance and was known for his tireless advocacy on behalf of Russian Jewry for which he was even imprisoned several times. During his leadership he published his grandfather's works Torah Or and Likkutei Torah, established agricultural settlements for Jewish farmers and supported them generously, and even founded the town of Shchedrin. He passed away on the 13th of Nissan, 5626 (1866), and was buried in Lubavitch.

The *chasid* Rabbi Avraham Ber, son of Yirmiyah of Homel, was by nature a seeker and investigator. By the age of ten, he was already well-versed in the philosophical works of inquiry. His father, the *chasid* Rabbi Yirmiyah, feared that his son's probing, analytical nature might lead him, God forbid, to doubts in matters of faith. And so he

brought the boy before the holy Tzemach Tzedek to receive his blessing for all good things and that his investigations would not lead him astray, God forbid.

The Tzemach Tzedek took his handkerchief and wound it around his holy hand, layer by layer, until the hand was entirely concealed from view. He then waved the handkerchief from side to side.

“What do you see?” the Tzemach Tzedek asked the child.

“The handkerchief moving from side to side,” the boy replied.

“And what is moving the handkerchief?” asked the Rebbe.

“The Rebbe’s hand,” answered the child.

The Tzemach Tzedek pressed further: “But you cannot see the hand!” and immediately continued: “Yet it is perfectly simple and clear to you that even what cannot be seen with eyes of flesh is nonetheless true and real.”

The young boy absorbed the message, and from that moment, his doubts fell away. He learned and ascended in Torah, in the learning and practice of Chasidut, and in the fear of Heaven, until he became one of the great *chasidim*.

THE RIGHT HAND OF FAITH

The Tzemach Tzedek possessed the rare capacity to render tangible that which lies beyond the grasp of human intellect, to make faith palpable, visible, almost touchable. This is the hallmark of a true rebbe: a *tzaddik* who reveals Godliness to all those connected to him. The Tzemach Tzedek accomplishes this in the distinctly Chabad manner, through what we might call “rectified philosophy.” On the one hand, there is rigorous logical inference. On the other its very purpose is to illuminate a principle of faith that transcends reason and knowledge altogether. The intellect does not replace faith here—it serves as its vessel, its garment.

TWO MENACHEM MENDELS

The Tzemach Tzedek bore the name of another luminous figure: Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, eponymously

known as *Pri HaAretz*. The Vitebsker too was gifted with an extraordinary sensitivity for making Godliness felt and present. Yet his way of doing so was more encompassing, more transcendent, less mediated through the structured pathways of the intellect. The Tzemach Tzedek always took care to clothe Godliness in intellect. He does so in this story and also by means of the teachings of his illustrious grandfather, the Alter Rebbe.

The fact that the Tzemach Tzedek chose his right hand, the hand that represents the *sefirah* of loving-kindness and the experience of love, is not incidental. It reveals the hidden motivating force behind the entire gesture, behind the entire Chabad project of clothing faith in intellect. It is not a cold philosophical exercise. It is an act of profound love for every Jew, and the will to bring faith to every person, even if that faith is currently concealed from the eyes of his intellect.

PREPARATION FOR PASSOVER

THE FOUR EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS IN THE JEWISH HEART

In preparation for Passover next week, we are presenting the first part of a farbrengen held by Rav Ginsburgh a few years ago. This was one of the most powerful examples of the Rav's method of drawing correspondence between seemingly unrelated sets of items that the sages grouped together. In this farbrengen he focused on sets of 4 elements, including the 4 Sons in the Haggadah, the 4 Cups of Wine. Many of the insights from this seminal farbrengen were included in the Rav's Hebrew Haggadah, Sodat Min Haseder.

Rav Ginsburgh began by defining the essence of the Exodus to be the liberation of our aspiration to know and then reviewing the 4 Existential Questions that dwell deep in the heart of every Jew. The second half of this farbrengen will be published in next week's issue of Wonders.

FREEDOM TO ASPIRE

Breathing is one of the most important health hacks we possess. Around the world, many diverse cultures have focused on the healing properties of breathing. When you think of the Exodus from Egypt, when you think about Passover, breathing might not be the first thing that comes to mind. But if we ask ourselves, what is Passover's core message, we might answer that the Exodus from Egypt allowed us to aspire again as a people. Breaking the chains of bondage and exile allowed us to become the nation we were destined to be. Breathing is also called respiration. Every time we breathe, we are in a sense re-aspiring. In fact, the Hebrew word for "inhale" (שְׁאִיפָה) literally means "to aspire!" Aspiring is the essence of the Exodus

from Egypt; it is the aspiration, the yearning. Because the Exodus of Egypt is the bedrock of our people, it would not be amiss to say that Jews are defined by the fact that they aspire. The Jewish soul aspires.

There are many things to aspire to in life. Some yearn for material things, an aspiration that can never be satisfied, as King Solomon famously said, "One who loves money is never satiated with money."¹ When it comes to physical wealth, the rule to follow is, "Who is wealthy? One who is satisfied with his portion."² But when it comes to the spiritual realm, being satisfied is considered a shortcoming. Hence, the Jewish soul though is never satisfied with its current spiritual state, it always yearns for more. This is the power of the infinite that resides within the

1. Ecclesiastes 5:9.

2. Avot 4:1.

Jewish people. It is the manifestation of the blessing to “be fruitful and multiply.”³ And this blessing is manifest most powerfully on Passover, as alluded to by the shared value of “be fruitful and multiply” (פרו ורבו) and “the Paschal sacrifice” (קרבת פסח).

AN OBLIGATION TO QUESTION

Aspiration begins with knowing. A Jew aspires to know, which is why Jews have

questions. Nowhere is this more pronounced than at the Seder. We just begin the *Haggadah* and we come across the directive, “And here the son asks: What...” It is well known that even if there are no children to voice these questions, any adult at the table will do just as well. Even if one is celebrating the Seder alone, one is obliged to ask the questions.

This simple directive, “And here the son asks: What...” (הבן שואל: מה) hides a deep Kabbalistic concept. The words for “son” (בן) and “what” (מה) are the names of two fillings of God’s essential Name *Havayah*.⁴ The “son” (מה) represents the backside, it is from there, where the light has not yet reached, that questions are asked. It is from the backside that one seeks and aspires to find answers. That he begins his questions with “what” (מה) alludes to how the backside constantly seeks the frontside, constantly yearns for the light and the revelation of Godly essence that will bring clarity and resolution. Accordingly, in Kabbalah, the filling that equals “son” (בן) constantly seeks to attach to the filling that equals “what” (מה)—questions demand answers and shadows must be illuminated.

The combination of “son” and “what” is equal to “time” (זמן). Every moment of time is described as a product of the Divine dynamic known as “touching and not touching.” Every moment of time is a product of our aspiration to find out more and touch even that which cannot be touched.

SETS OF FOUR

The Haggadah presents Four Questions. They are the first set of four we encounter on the Seder night. Then there are Four Sons. There are also Four Cups of wine. Rabbinic sources contain references to other sets of four, one of the best known being the four sages who entered the Pardes (i.e., Paradise). We will attempt to show how they all connect.

One simple connection is that the four cups of wine are meant to allow us to reach deep within ourselves to ask our most

existential questions. The sages say that “Wine enters, secret exits.”⁵ Wine has the capacity to reveal secrets. Our deepest secrets are those existential questions we carry in our heart, which we have never dared to ask. When I drink four cups of wine during the Seder, I suddenly feel I have four questions. I feel the freedom to ask. Passover is the “time of our freedom” (זמן חרותנו). Freedom in Hebrew (חרות) is an acronym for the four sons in the Haggadah: “the Wise one, the Wicked one, the Earnest one, and the One who does not know how to ask” (הכם רשע תם)

3. Genesis 1:28

4. “Son” (בן) equals 52, the value of **יוד הה וו הה** and

“what” (מה) equals 45, the value of **יוד הא ואו הא**.

5. *Eiruvin* 65a.

(וְשִׂאֵינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשֵׂאל). The essence of freedom is freedom of speech and the essence of free speech is the freedom to ask; to ask our Father in Heaven: “Tatee, I want to ask You four questions.” Modern psychology is well aware of repression and that sometimes, what is repressed needs to be released. On Seder night, all my repressed existential questions must come out. This is the aspiration we have when coming out of Egypt. To know.

REPPRESSED QUESTIONS AND THE EVIL INSIDE

The Rebbe Rashab taught that all year long, we are required to be in a state of knowing: “You shall know today... that *Havayah* is your God.” Whomever is obligated to know, must pose questions. It is in its ability to question that the Babylonian Talmud is superior to the Jerusalem Talmud. The Jerusalem Talmud has fewer questions, and consequently, it does less to rectify the evil within, because questions originate from the side of negativity. Because the Babylonian Talmud is described by the verse, “*Havayah*

has made me dwell in darkness,” it poses more questions, it can rectify more of the concealed evil. When the questions are posed before God, “Tatee, I want to ask You questions,” they have the power to clarify and rectify the deepest evil. That too is the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt.

THE FOUR EXISTENTIAL QUESTIONS

We begin by identifying the four existential questions in life. At first glance, they are not related to the four questions asked in the Haggadah, but later, we will see the deep connection between the two sets of questions.

The first existential question is: Why was I created? This is a personal version of the general question: Why did God create the world at all?

One might ask, is it even a good thing to be created? At the personal level the sages rule that, “it is better for a person not to have been created than to have been created.”⁶ Since this applies to every individual Jew, all the more so that it applies to the entire world. Thus, there is an enormous question here.

Generally, it is young children who ask the deepest questions. This is why the Exodus from Egypt is described by the prophet with the words, “I recall your favor, the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown”⁷ as well as, “I fell in love with Israel, when he was still a youth, and I have called him My son, ever since Egypt.”⁸

This is the aspect of youth, or small-mindedness (מוֹחִין דְּקִטְנוּת) that is the hallmark of Passover, as taught in Chasidic writings. Matzah too is an exemplar of small-mindedness. The Creator loves young children because they are clearly capable of asking deep, penetrating, and existentially challenging questions. Questions like: Why did God create the world? Why did God create me? Or in another version: Why am I here in the first place? What is the purpose of life? Nothing arouses God’s essential love more than the sincere stance of the young or the young at heart, who turn to God in states of small-mindedness.

6. *Eiruvin* 13b.

7. *Jeremiah* 2:2

8. *Hosea* 11:1.

The second existential question is: Why did God choose the Jewish people above all nations?

Now that God has created me, the second question focuses and reveals an entirely different dimension. If God is already creating, if there is to be Creation at all, the ideal would be complete equality. After all, we all descend from Adam, and since Adam sinned, we all need to rectify that. So why would one people be considered superior to another?

Now, Chasidic teachings explain that only a Jew would ask this question. There are those who say this is the question of the wise son. The wisdom in this question is that no matter what special character trait you would present to justify Israel's choice, this character trait is always the product of Divine awakening, of a Divine gift granting Israel this special trait. If you argue that a Jew is fine, that a Jew has a Divine soul, in the end, where does that come from? It comes from the Holy Blessed One. The Divine soul is not the "I." We say every morning, "the soul You gave me is pure." It is not mine, it is not me. You God give me my soul; You gave it, and You give it each and every day. You give me my soul, and You make me a Jew. This is why every Jew must recite the blessing, "Blessed are You *Havayah*... Who has not made me a non-Jew," because it could have been, God forbid, the opposite.

We can deepen our understanding of the origin of our special status by contemplating the nature of humility. On the verse, "the humble shall increase their joy in *Havayah*,"⁹ the tradition in Chabad, from the Alter Rebbe and on, is that a Jew's true humility must extend even to a non-Jew. The foundation of humility in Chasidic thought is that had God

given someone else the good qualities he gave me, presumably the other person would have been even better than me. This explicitly includes every non-Jew also. Everything that we identify as distinctive signs of being a Jew, things that are not conscious at all, not dependent on free choice—compassion, modesty, and kindness¹⁰—are gifts from God because they are the traits of the soul that is a gift from Him. But, if everything is by Divine decree, then there is no a priori explanation to why God chose me and us, singling us out as better than others. This thought creates a contradiction within the Jew himself. Our inner sensibility demands and declares equality. Thus, this is the second existential question: How is it that God favors one over another?

The third and fourth existential questions go together. The third is why is there suffering in the world? Why does God do such things? Why is there evil in the world? Our world is full of evil and injustice. And this is not merely evil in appearance. And it is not because those who suffer from it are always somehow at fault.¹¹ This is the well-known question of *tzaddik vera lo*, "a righteous person who suffers." There is no more profound existential question than this. Moses himself asked this question regarding Rabbi Akiva, and God answered him: "Silence! This is what has arisen in My thought,"¹² I have nothing to say to you.

Indeed, we must mention that for now, none of these existential questions have a full answer. They represent the longing in the Jewish soul.

The fourth question, which is connected to the third is, why has Mashiach not yet come? This is the question the Lubavitcher Rebbe asked publicly many times. All the

companions try to convince him of his guilt, but which God ultimately rejects.]

12. *Menachot* 29b.

9. Isaiah 29:19.

10. *Yevamot* 79a.

11. [ed's. note: Case in point is Job, whose

designated times for Mashiach's arrival have passed,¹³ everything has been accomplished, all necessary teshuvah has been done, and still Mashiach is not here. "Until when?" (עד מתי). This question is linked to the third first through Moses. The question of evil and suffering is attributed to Moses and he is also linked to the Mashiach, since about

Moses it says, "he is the first redeemer, and he is the final redeemer,"¹⁴ meaning that Moses is (soul of) the Mashiach. They are also connected because when the Mashiach does arrive, one of the things we will see is an end to the problem of a tzaddik who suffers. Evil will be rectified once the Mashiach arrives.

A beautiful, original, Chasidic teaching is that there are 3 foundational principles we must integrate into rectify our mentality. We call them the *alef*, *beit*, and *gimmel* of Chasidut. The *alef* is the expression, "There is nothing besides Him" (אין עוד מלבדו), which begins with the letter *alef*. The *beit* of Chasidut is, "For me the world was created" (בשבילי נברא העולם), whose initial letter is *beit*. Finally, the *gimmel* of Chasidut is, "This too is the good" (גם זו לטובה), which begins with the letter *gimmel*.

These three foundational expressions correspond to wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. To perceive the one true reality, that "there is nothing besides God," is not easy and depends specifically on the *sefirah* of wisdom, on one's sense of selflessness.¹⁵ Integrating this consciousness allows me to sense the true being within me, my Divine soul, for whose service and dedication to God, "the world was created." This corresponds to the *sefirah* of understanding, the beginning of "being." Thus, the relationship between the first two principles is one of nothingness and being.

Finally, the third principle relies on our *sefirah* of knowledge (*da'at*), the ability to break reality and reveal its true inner purpose, which is to aid me in my service of the Almighty. Knowledge is where the right and left axes or must be joined, or included within one another. The pinnacle of this inclusion is to tangibly see, in actual experience, that even "this," is for the good.

Despite how important and essential these four questions are, it is important to realize that even after they are asked, no direct response is offered during the Seder. Nonetheless, the time to ask these questions is Passover. There is something in Passover that surpasses even the Giving of the Torah. The Giving of the Torah is also, for now, about providing answers. However, there is something about Passover that allows for questions that even the Giving of the Torah cannot yet answer yet, until "a new Torah

shall issue forth from Me."¹⁶ These are the four questions whose origin is in the young children who have just started learning Torah.

These existential questions that the young children perceive remind us of one of the principles that appears in the Responsa of the Rashba: when praying, we picture before us the same God that the child would have in mind. The child is not sophisticated enough to pray to any of God's manifestations, to any of the sefirot, or any other quality of God.

13. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

14. *Shemot Rabbah* 2:4.

15. See *Tanya*, ch. 33.

16. Isaiah 51:4.

He or she prays to God's very essence, to His being. Just as the child recognizes God's very essence in the purest more underestimated manner, so the child can ask any question without imposing any limitation on it. And thus, to whomever the child is praying, I too must I pray.

Furthermore, the four existential questions about life are seen to correspond to the first three *sefirot*: wisdom (*chochmah*), understanding (*binah*), and the *sefirah* of "knowledge" (*da'at*), which divides into two lateral sides known as "the depth of good" and "the depth of evil." They are also the five aspects of loving-kindness in the right side of knowledge (*chassadim*) and the five aspects of severity (*gevurot*) that are the left side of knowledge. These three *sefirot* that are divided into four also correspond to the four compartments in the head *tefillin*.

The first question—Why was the world created?—corresponds to wisdom, following the verse, "You made them all [i.e., all the components of Creation] with wisdom."¹⁷

The second question—Why the Jewish people?— is the question of understanding, following the principle that, "Israel preceded everything in thought [i.e., within the intellectual faculty of understanding]."¹⁸

The third question—Why is there evil in the world?—corresponds to the left side of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." This is the question that parallels the aspects of might or severity in the *sefirah* of knowledge.

Finally, the fourth question—Why has the Mashiach not come?—also corresponds to the Tree of Knowledge of Good, but this time to its right side, the five aspects of loving-kindness within the *sefirah* of knowledge.

From among these four questions, which

is primary? We said that the Lubavitcher Rebbe's most important and therefore the primary question is the fourth: Why has the Mashiach not come? He does not understand it, and he protests and cries out about it each day. In fact, even though we have seen the connection between Moses and the third question, the problem of suffering in the world, Moses is also explicitly connected with the question about Mashiach. How so?

When God tried to convince Moses to accept the mission of saving the people from Egypt and bringing them out to receive the Torah and to inherit the Land of Israel, Moses refused. His argument was that if God cannot make him the Mashiach, if God cannot promise that there will be no more exile after the Exodus from Egypt, then he, Moses, is not interested in fulfilling this mission. Like all great leaders of each generation, the Lubavitcher Rebbe is an embodiment of "the extension of Moses into every generation," and therefore, for him too, the question of why the Mashiach has not come yet would be tremendously important. As Moses said, "Please send [the redemption] through whomever else You will send."¹⁹ I do not want to redeem this nation as the first redeemer, if I cannot be the final redeemer here and now!

Moses too wants the Mashiach to come. This corresponds to the five aspects of loving-kindness in knowledge. It also includes the five aspects of severity, since Moses ties the coming of Mashiach with the problem of suffering, "Why have You caused suffering to this nation? Why have You sent me?"

Encapsulating the two questions of knowledge, Moses asked to know God's face²⁰—for there is no one like Moses who yearns to know. We said that the beginning

17. Psalms 104:24.

18. *Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4.

19. Exodus 4:13.

20. Exodus 33:20.

of aspiration is the aspiration to know, as in, “Know the God of your father and serve Him.”²¹ All our service is according to the *sefirah* of knowledge. Every day we seek new knowledge of God. This aspiration to know more serves as the underlying principle for so much of the Chasidic path revealed by the Ba’al Shem Tov. How so?

The sages reveal that, “the Mashiach comes to bring the righteous to perform teshuvah.”²² There is a well known parable attributed to Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon. The Ba’al Shem Tov identified with him so much that he said he was his reincarnation. The

parable is meant to illustrate what it means that one should repent every day, even if one has not sinned. Daily repentance can come as the result of knowing God more from day to day. When I recognize, when I know God better today than I did yesterday, I feel that relatively speaking, all my service from yesterday was like “nothing” and that today I must begin to serve Him anew, repenting for my lack of knowledge yesterday. In a sense then, the coming of Mashiach is the ability to continually aspire to attain further knowledge of God.

When Moses asked the Almighty, “Please show me Your glory,”²³ God answered him: “You shall see My backside,” for now you will only see the back.

According to the Torah’s inner dimension, it is the essence of Joseph that has the power to transform the back into the frontside. This was the reason that Moses fulfilled Joseph’s request that, “You shall bring my bones up from here.”²⁴ Joseph’s bones are understood to represent the power to leave Egypt. Moses takes Joseph’s bones to transform back into front. In the end, when Moses asks to see God’s face as it were, God replies: “You shall see My back, and My face shall not be seen.”²⁵ For now.

When will Moses see God’s “frontside,” as it were? Only at the very end of his life, when he reaches the fiftieth gate. It is then that he merits to die by a Divine kiss (מיתת נְשִׁיקָה) and through that kiss, merits to, as it were, see God’s face.

In proximity to Passover, we read *parashat Acharei* (Leviticus 16), which relates the death of Nadab and Avihu, two of Aharon the High Priest’s sons, when they sought to serve God in a way not commanded. Upon their death, Moses said to Aaron, Nadab and Abihu were greater than the two of us. How so, asked Aaron. The answer said Moses is that we patiently wait for the kiss to come to us (this is how Moses and Aaron felt). But Nadab and Abihu, they could not wait. They yearned and desired with an aspiration and will more genuine than ours, to the point that they themselves drew close to the kiss.

21. 1 Chronicles 28:9.

22. *Sanhedrin* 99b.

23. Exodus 33:18.

24. Genesis 50:25.

25. Exodus 33:23.



THE FOUR WHO ENTERED THE PARDES

We now come to another famous and well-known set of 4 mentioned by the rabbinic sages. They tell us of a mystical experience that included four of the greatest rabbinic leaders of their age: Rabbi Akiva, Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, and Rabbi Elisha ben Avuyah (later referred to as Acher, i.e. “the other”). They entered the mystical realm of the Pardes—a figurative orchard of esoteric knowledge—each posing a different question. The Arizal explains that these sages’ purpose in entering the Pardes was to rectify the sin of Adam, all four of them wanted to hasten the coming of Mashiach by rectifying Adam’s sin. But each went in a different direction, investigated a different inquiry, asked a different question.

Ben Azzai asked the question of wisdom, and then “looked and died.”²⁶ Ben Zoma asked the question that corresponds to understanding, and then “looked and was afflicted.” Elisha ben Avuyah asked the question corresponding to the five severities of the *sefirah* of knowledge and ended up, “cutting down the plantings.” Only Rabbi Akiva—who “entered in peace and departed in peace”—asked the right question, the question closest to receiving an answer, though he did not merit to receive it. This was the question of why the Messiah has not come yet, the question that corresponds to the five aspects of loving-kindness of *chassadim* of *da'at*.

We know this because it was Rabbi Akiva who from among all the sages, actually was seeking the coming of Mashiach, in the most literal and practical sense, to bring

the Mashiach immediately. The Arizal says that Rabbi Akiva was the only one to enter peacefully and depart in peace, because he began from the correct starting point: the five aspects of loving-kindness of knowledge—not from wisdom, not from understanding, and not from the severities of knowledge. Still, despite asking the correct question, Rabbi Akiva did not get an answer, but he merited to enter in peace and departed in peace.

Why did Rabbi Akiva fail? The Arizal explains that this was because the Mashiach must know where to enter and must venture to include all the questions together. This he did not do. He knew the right place to approach, to begin, to open the opening—how to include all the questions together, all our freedoms together in a single question, this he does not know. When a person truly asks, he goes all the way with it. A person who asks sincerely is not satisfied merely with having a question. The nature of a true question is to pursue it, to solve it. Just as a scientist has a question—is it enough to have a question marked “requires further investigation” (צריך עיון)? That is not science. A scientist with a ‘requires further investigation’ sticker on his research, is not satisfied, does not smile because he has a ‘requires further investigation.’ He dedicates his entire life to solving it. So too we take this model into our service of God: there is the question of why the Messiah has not come. If this is truly a question that distresses you, that weighs upon you, you must solve the problem. (to be continued...)

26. *Chagigah* 14b.

