

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



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Wonders

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שַׁבַּת וְאַתְחַנֵּן-נַחֲמוּ י-יָא אָב תשפ"ו 🌸



“ Nikolsburg remained a modern German city.... And so when he came to Nikolsburg, the Choizeh tied a kerchief over his eyes and let one of the chasidim lead him. A woman who saw someone being led with a cloth over his eyes burst into loud laughter at this strange sight. She laughed and laughed... ”

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

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STORY

THE CHOIZEH OF LUBLIN: YOU SHALL BE HOLY

Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak HaLevi Horowitz was also known as "the Choizeh (the Seer) of Lublin" by virtue of his wondrous ability to perceive across great distances of time and place. He was born in the year 5505 (1745) in Poland. He studied under Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg and the Maggid of Mezritch, and after their passing became the foremost disciple of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk. He settled in the great city of Lublin and established his court there, to which multitudes flocked. The Choizeh dispatched his most distinguished disciples to spread the teachings and way of life of Chasidut throughout Poland and Galicia. Among them were the "Holy Yid" of Pshischa, Rebbe Uri "the Seraph" of Strelisk, Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz, and many others. The Choizeh devoted himself to hastening the Redemption and the coming of Mashiach, and on the eve of Simchat Torah 5575 (1814) he fell from the window of his home under wondrous and mysterious circumstances, in the midst of spiritual exertions to hasten the Redemption. As a result of the severe fall, he lay bedridden for nearly a year, until he departed this world on Tisha B'Av 5575 (1815). He was laid to rest in Lublin.

Once, the Choizeh traveled to visit his teacher, Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg, the brother of Rebbe Pinchas, the author of the *Hafla'ah*, and one of the great *tzaddikim* among the Maggid's disciples. The Maggid had sent the two brothers to Germany, which was comparatively less observant than Poland, and no one beside them had succeeded in kindling the light of Chasidut there. Yet for all the good they had accomplished, Nikolsburg remained a modern German city in a style the *Choizeh* simply could not abide. And so when he came to Nikolsburg, he tied a kerchief over his eyes and let one of the *chasidim* lead him.

A woman who saw someone being led with a cloth over his eyes burst into loud laughter at this strange sight. She laughed and laughed until, on account of the *tzaddik's* displeasure, whether consciously or not, something very unfortunate befell her.

When the matter became known to Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg, he said to the his student the *Choizeh*: "Please, return home, and do not come here to visit. You have nothing to do in a place like Nikolsburg."

The Choizeh's quality of *gevurah*, or Divine severity, found its most characteristic expression in his zealousness for guarding of the eyes, ensuring that they do not see what should not be seen. It is told that when his master Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk departed this world, he transmitted his spiritual powers to four of his disciples: to the *Choizeh* he gave the power of his eyes, to the Maggid of Kozhnitz he gave the power of his heart, to Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Rimanov the power of his mind, and to the Ohev Yisrael of Apt the power of his words.

From the story we see that even before coming to Rebbe Elimelech, the *Choizeh* was exceedingly vigilant in all matters pertaining to his eyes and their sanctity and it was precisely for this reason that he merited this gift from Rebbe Elimelech, in keeping with the principle of "He grants wisdom to the wise" (Daniel 2:21). So it was with the other disciples who merited their respective gifts from Rebbe Elimelech.

When a *tzaddik* fears for the sanctity of his particular calling, he draws a quality of Divine judgment around himself. He perceives with sharp clarity the importance of his unique service, and one who is insensitive to this may come to harm. Through this power the *Choizeh* would inadvertently spiritually strike those who treated his honor lightly, even when no such intention was in his heart.

Yet many *tzaddikim* conducted themselves in a different manner. It is told of Rebbe Baruch of Mezhibuzh (the Ba'al Shem Tov's grandson) that when the *Choizeh* came to visit him, the women of the household entered the room where the

tzaddik and the *chasidim* were gathered, to hear the words of Torah at the third Shabbat meal. The *Choizeh* turned to Rebbe Baruch in great astonishment: "Is it not written, 'Turn away my eyes from beholding impropriety?'" Rebbe Baruch replied: "It is not written 'turn impropriety away from my eyes.' Rather it states the opposite: if there is impropriety present, I simply do not see it."

Similarly, when Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg heard what had occurred, he sent the *Choizeh* home. Rabbi Shmelke's work was to draw the people of his city closer to God. To enter the world of Jews for whom life is still distant from revealed holiness, one must be sensitive to their latent sanctity. Even if this demands setting aside one's personal service of God, one must be willing to descend into places of less repute to bring out the diamonds hidden within.

In contrast to the difficulties that arise from such a mismatch, when the *Choizeh* encountered Jews who were vessels fit to receive, his extraordinary holiness worked within them in deeply blessed ways:

One of the *tzaddikim* who was a disciple of the *Choizeh* was Rebbe Shalom of Kaminke. As a young scholar he was known as a prodigious genius, but was not a *chasid*. As was the way in those times, a wealthy man took him as a son-in-law with a promise to support the family for many years and to provide a generous dowry. The prospective father-in-law, however, made the agreement conditional upon their traveling together to the *Choizeh* of Lublin who would bless the young man and test his Torah knowledge. The prospective

groom and his father agreed, and the two set out to the *Choizeh*.

When they arrived, the *Choizeh* called for his attendant to bring the Book of Leviticus and read from it. When Rebbe Shalom later recounted this to his friend, the *Imrei Noam*, he said: "Believe me, when he asked them to bring the Book of Leviticus, I nearly burst out laughing. This is how they test me? I need to be tested on complex Talmudic intricacies, not on Leviticus!" The Rebbe opened the book to the beginning of the Torah portion of *Kedoshim* and asked: "Do you know what *Rashi* writes on this?" Again Rebbe Shalom suppressed his laughter at such a question and said: "Be separated from sexual immorality and from transgression." The Rebbe said: "Let us recite this *Rashi* together," and they began to say it together. At that very moment, the *tzaddik* related, a trembling and shuddering seized my entire body. I trembled so violently that I had to lie down. For many hours I shook, and I was truly dangerously ill. Even today, when I recount this story, I begin to tremble throughout my entire body.

Another great *tzaddik* of Poland, the author of the *Tiferet Shlomo*, related that his father had brought him to the *Choizeh* when he was a child. The Rebbe took him aside and said to him the very same thing: "Do you remember what *Rashi* writes on '*Kedoshim tihyu*' (You shall be holy)? Let us say it together: 'Be separated from sexual immorality and from transgression.'" The author of the *Tiferet Shlomo* later testified that, thank God, he had never in his life stumbled in the blemish of the covenant, by virtue of

those words he had heard as a child.

In two stories that are actually one, the *Choizeh's* power is revealed: the power to take a simple sentence from the Torah and through it transform the entire lives of two people. The young child became a guardian of the covenant in the most natural way, while the brilliant opponent of Chasidut who had presumably understood far more than the child what "immorality and transgression" entailed trembled through his entire body. Ultimately, both became great *tzaddikim* who guided multitudes in the path of God.

As befits a story concerned with the sanctity of procreation, what is revealed here is not only temperance and fear of sin. Rather, in these stories, the *tzaddik* makes his *chasidim* fruitful and triggers a profound transformation within them, one that bears fruit for entire lifetimes and for generations upon generations, just like an act of procreation.

The anniversary of passing of the *Choizeh* falls on the 9th of Av, the day on which Mashiach is born. The Mashiach embodies the perfection of the rectification of the covenant and the fulfillment of the commandment, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (with holiness and with purity). This is the Torah's first commandment. Having offspring is referred to as "the great commandment" (where "great" invokes and suggests augmentation), the commandment that inter-cludes the entire Torah. Revealing this essential connection between the *Choizeh* and his day of passing is revealed in the equality between the numerical value of Tisha B'Av (תשעה באב) and "Joseph" the

archetypal soul of the power of procreation and “the guardian of the covenant,” when Joseph is written in a special way (known as *panim ve’achor*) by the Arizal, as follows: Tisha B’av is 780 and “Joseph” front and back (ייו יוס יוסף יוסף וסף סף).

In addition, the value of “Mashiach is

born on Tisha B’av” (בְּתִשְׁעָה בְּאָב נולד המשיח) is equal to the Ezekiel’s exclamation describing God’s holiness, “Holy, holy, holy [is *Havayah*, God of Hosts]” (קדוש קדוש קדוש) where once again, the holiness is an inherent sign of those who protect and safeguard the covenant.

PARASHAT VA'ETCHANAN

INSIGHTS INTO THE SHEMA:

THE FOUNDATIONAL

STATEMENT OF JEWISH FAITH

Hear O Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is One

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֶחָד

The one and only time the *Shema*, the cardinal statement of faith in Judaism, is written in the Torah is in *parashat Va'etchnan*.¹ Moses states it to the Israelites at the very end of their forty year journey through the wilderness. Also in this *parashah*, Moses reviews the Giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments.² In fact, the *Mishnah Brurah* quotes from the Jerusalem Talmud³ that states that allusions to all Ten Commandments can be seen found in the verses of the full text of the *Shema*.⁴ From this we learn that the *Shema* and the Ten Commandments are intrinsically linked in importance as foundational teachings on which the entire Torah and Jewish life rests.

Maimonides in his *Sefer Hamitzvot*—an enumeration and short description of all 613 commandments found in the Torah—lists the first three commandments as: 1) “I am *Havayah*, your God who has taken

you out of the Land of Egypt,”⁵ the first of the Ten Commandments which affirms our belief in God; 2) the commandment to recite the *Shema* twice daily and therefore assert our belief in the oneness of God⁶; 3) to love God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might,”⁷ an intrinsic part of the daily recitation of the *Shema*. This further confirms the essential connection between the *Shema* and the Ten Commandments.

The *Shema* implies that the belief in God's oneness extends to all of reality. From God's ultimate oneness, we come to realize that all He has created is in essence one and connected. Everything is unified and part of God's essential Oneness. Human beings reach their highest state of consciousness when they realize that the seeming plurality in the world is really a manifestation of God's Oneness.⁸ From the time of Abraham till this day, the teaching of One God has been at the center of

1. Deuteronomy 6:4.

2. Ibid 5:6-18.

3. *Berachot* 1:5.

4. *Orach Chaim* 61:1.

5. Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6.

6. Deuteronomy 6:4.

7. Ibid 6:5.

8. *Yaiyn Yitzchak*, *Va'etchanan*, §52.

Judaism's mission in the world. Thus, the *Shema* stands as a constant reminder of the Jewish people's unique charge to help manifest God's Oneness in the world.

GOD NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

Rashi's commentary on the *Shema* is simple but powerful:

"Havayah, who is our God presently, but is not the God of the nations, is destined to be the one God of the whole world." As it says in Zephaniah: "For then I will cause the peoples [to speak] a pure language so that they may all call upon the name of *Havayah*."⁹ Additionally, it is also written in Zechariah: "On that day *Havayah* will be one and His Name one."¹⁰

Along with the *Shema* being a statement of faith, it can leap from the soul as a heart-felt plea: *Hashem!!* Please reveal your Oneness in the world and bring the whole world together in peace and harmony to be one!!¹¹ Even more, it can be taken as a call to action, a commitment to assist God in transforming the world so that unity can be manifest in the here and now.

SHEMA: HEARING, SEEING AND JOY

The sense of hearing in Kabbalah is always associated with the *sefirah* of *binah*, understanding.¹² Thus, the word *shema*, which literally means "Hear," implies not only physical hearing but a deep sense of understanding. *Binah* is referred to as the mother principle in Kabbalah, representing the archetypal, receptive

feminine energy.¹³ Although prayer and the daily discipline of reciting *Shema* take great initiative, on a deeper level, it is an exercise in receptivity. The understanding we attempt to reach through the *Shema* is thus a union between active intellectual focus and a more passive self-nullification and openness that allows Divine revelation to fill our whole being.

The three letters of the word *Shema* (שמע) are in order the initials of the phrase from Isaiah, "lift your eyes upwards"¹⁴ (שאו (מרום עיניכם). Here we see the union between the *sefirah* of *binah* which is associated with hearing (Hear O' Israel) and the *sefirah* of *chochmah* which is associated with sight. In fact, the *Zohar* states that the two *sefirot* of *chochmah* and *binah* are "like two beloved companions who never separate."¹⁵ By closing our eyes when reciting the *Shema*, we practice seeing with the inner eye of the soul that which our conscience hears when saying the *Shema*.

The inner experience of *binah* is joy, as taught in Kabbalah and Chasidut.¹⁶ This connection between *binah*—the mother principle—and joy is found in the verse: "the mother of children is joyful."¹⁷ *Binah's* children according to Kabbalah are the seven emotive faculties or *sefirot* of the heart.

The first verse of the *Shema* is, "Hear O Israel, *Havayah* is our God, *Havayah* is One" (שמע ישראל יהוה אחד). It consists of six words and its numerical

9. 3:9.

10. 14:9.

11. *Yaiyn Yitzchak*, *Va'etchanan*, §61.

12. *Ibid*, section 60.

13. *Anatomy of the Soul*, pp. 93-94.

14. 40:26; *Tikkunei Zohar* 85a.

15. *Anatomy of the Soul*, pp. 93-94.

16. *Ibid*.

17. *Psalms* 113:9.

value is 1118. This is also the value of the phrase, “I am very happy to give witness to the unity of God” (אני שמח מאד להעיד על אחדות י-הוה). We should be full of joy that not only are we aware of the One God and the unity of all things, but that I can also proclaim and give witness to this reality.¹⁸

Additionally, 1118 is the smallest number that is a multiple of both 26 and 86, where 26 is the value of God’s essential four-letter Name, *Havayah* and 86 is the value of His Name, *Elokim*. This is indeed the very sign of the Shema, that *Havayah* and *Elokim* are one!¹⁹

ISRAEL’S MISSION

Not only is the *Shema* the cardinal statement of faith of the Jewish people but as mentioned above, it encapsulates the very mission of the Jewish people. Israel does not only declare that God is One but we, the people of Israel, “one nation in the earth,”²⁰ are his loyal representatives.

Thus, Israel in the *Shema* is not only being called to hear/understand the oneness of God but more so to integrate in the deepest recesses of the soul that Israel contains “an actual part of God above.”²¹ In doing so we unite our most inner spark of Divinity with its ultimate source in One God.

Permuting the letters of Israel (ישראל) reveals the words, “I have a head” (לי ראש). This alludes to the primary emphasis in Judaism of using one’s intellect, the head,

to lead the way. The Alter Rebbe taught in *Tanya* that the mind must rule over the heart, the intellect must make order and sense of the emotions.²² Yet he then reveals that despite this very important rule, there is an inner point of the heart that ultimately rises above the intellect and in certain crucial decision must be taken into consideration.

The *Shema* which declares the unity of God must be based on one’s own sense of inner unity of mind and heart, intellect and emotion.

HAVAYAH IS OUR GOD

God’s four-letter Name, *Havayah*, characterizes in general God’s more transcendent posture vis-à-vis the world, whereas the name *Elokim* which equals numerically the all-encompassing word for nature, pronounced *hateva* (הטבע), symbolizes God’s imminent Presence in the world. In Kabbalah, God’s being transcendent is termed “He who surrounds all worlds”; God’s imminence is called *memale kol almin*, meaning, “He fills all worlds.” Yet these two manifestations of God are ultimately one.²³

The four-letter Name of God is not pronounced as written, rather pronounce it using the Name of God, *Adni*.²⁴ When permuting the letters of *Adni* (אדני) we find the word *din* (דין), judgment. Yet the four-letter Name as it is written is always associated with mercy, love and compassion. The unity of these two seemingly opposite attributes also lies at

18. *Yaiyn Yitzchak*, *Va’etchanan*, §58.

19. 137: *The Riddle of Creation*, p. 68.

20. 2 Samuel 7:23.

21. *Tanya*, chapter 2.

22. Chapters 12 and 17.

23. *Yaiyn Yitzchak*, *Va’etchanan*, §65.

24. See *Rashi* on Exodus 3:15.

the heart of the unity proclaimed in the *Shema*.

The word “our God” (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) equals 102, the same as the “faith” (אֱמוּנָה). The faith that *Havayah* is “our God” now but in the future the awareness of the One God will be universally accepted is, at the heart of *Shema* being the cardinal statement of faith in Judaism. The middle letter of the *Shema*—the 13th of its 25 letters—is the *alef* of the word *Elokenu* (אֱלֹהֵינוּ). *Alef* is the first letter of the word for faith, and thus the pivotal, middle point of the *Shema*.²⁵

This faith should be understood intellectually, felt emotionally and acted upon in our interactions with the world.

GOD IS ONE

The *Zohar* states that God is, “One, but not in number.”²⁶ The *Zohar*’s intent is to state that God is not one as opposed to two. Instead, the word “one” in the *Shema* should be understood as the oneness of God that is unique and transcends any human concept of oneness and unity. Therefore, we should not think in terms of the number one, rather a state of oneness that includes and encompasses all reality yet transcends any and all attempts of defining that unity.

God’s Oneness is only truly revealed in a place of revealed unity. Therefore, the awesome revelation of God at Mount Sinai could only occur because the people arrived at Mount Sinai “like one person with one heart.”²⁷ As stated above, “one” (אֶחָד) numerically equals 13, as does the

word “love” (אֲהַבָה). Together they equal 26, the same as the four-letter Name of God.²⁸ In both the morning and evening, the reading of the *Shema* is preceded by a blessing. In the morning it is: “Blessed are you, *Havayah*, who chooses His people Israel with love” while in the evening it is: “Blessed are you, *Havayah*, Who loves his nation Israel.” In both cases the blessing expresses the great love God has for Israel.

Immediately following the recitation of the *Shema*, we begin the first of three passages the Sages instituted to be said with the *Shema* morning and evening with the words: “and you shall love *Havayah*, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.”²⁹ This statement expresses the great love of God the Jewish people are to strive for.

Thus, we see that *Kriyat Shema* is surrounded by love: the love of God for Israel and the love of Israel for God. “*Havayah* is one,” the unity of God, is meant to be experienced as pure love.

The numerical equivalents of the three letters that make up the word “one” (אֶחָד) are 1, 8, and 4, respectively. They provide the background for a basic intent one should have when reciting the *Shema*: God who is One (*alef*), is drawn down through the seven heavens and earth where God’s Oneness will spread out and be manifest to the four directions (*dalet*).³⁰

In fact, saying the *Shema* accomplishes not only drawing down God’s Oneness into this material world but also is a powerful paradigm for drawing down the soul’s root

25. *The Hebrew Letters*, p. 36.

26. Opening of Patach Eliyahu.

27. See *Rashi* on Exodus 19:2.

28. *Yaiyn Yitzchak*, *Va’etchanan*, §48.

29. Deuteronomy 6:5.

30. *Orach Chaim* 61:5.

into active consciousness.

The *Shema* is written in *parashat Va'etchanan* immediately after the description of the Land of Israel, "a land flowing in milk and honey."³¹ The three letters of the word *echad* (אחד) are the same three letters that begin the three words "a

land flowing with milk and honey" (אֶרֶץ חָלָב וּדְבַשׁ).³² From this we see that the revelation of the unity of God is most easily done in the Holy Land, flowing like milk and honey.

31. Deuteronomy 6:3.

32. (10) מאמרי תש"ה - ד"ה שובה ישראל.

FROM THE CHASIDIC MASTERS: ME'OR EINAYIM REVEALING THE TORAH'S INNER DIMENSION

Learning Torah is not just about understanding, it is about inner transformation. When we stop at a shallow understanding of what we have learnt, this usually leads to misconceptions that make it hard to find the validity in other people's understanding of the same topic or issue. What can be done?

The Me'or Einayim focuses on why Moses began to explain the Torah only when the Israelites had arrived at the border of the Land of Israel, after the completion of 42 journeys in the wilderness. He explains that these journeys were necessary to eradicate the husks that mask the Torah's inner facets. His teaching shows a path to follow for the generations that followed: one must contemplate the Torah until eradicating all the judgments-kelipot that cover the truth. When the Torah's deeper meaning is uncovered it leads to a stronger connection and to mutual responsibility between Jews, despite perceived differences of opinion.

This is a simplified version of Rav Ginsburgh's teaching of the Me'or Einayim, Rebbe Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, on parashat Devarim. It was first published in Hebrew in the Devarim 5786 issue of Nifla'ot. A direct translation of the original Hebrew article can be accessed on our website: www.patreon.com/galeinai.

The Book of Deuteronomy opens with a quiet but strange detail. Before Moses delivers a single word of his farewell

speech, the text pauses to tell us exactly where he is standing: "Across the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to

explain this Torah, saying." Why does it matter so much *where* Moses was when he began to explain the Torah? And why did he wait until this very last stop, on the far edge of the wilderness, right up against the border of the Land of Israel?

The Me'or Einayim — authored by Rebbe Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov and of the Maggid of Mezritch — reads this verse not as a piece of geography but as a map of the spiritual life. His answer turns a one-time historical moment into a principle that applies to every person, in every generation, whenever they sit down to learn. This article walks through his teaching in simple terms.

TWO TORAHS IN ONE

To understand the teaching, we first need to know that Jewish tradition speaks of two Torahs—two ways in which God's revelation reaches our lives. There is the Written Torah — the text of the Five Books of Moses, the words delivered directly from God and written on parchment. And there is the Oral Torah — the explanation, the reasoning, the give-and-take that unpacks what those written words actually mean. The written words of the Torah are like a locked door; the Oral Torah is the key to entering their meaning and translating them into our lives.

The Me'or Einayim points out that the Book of Deuteronomy is special: it is the place where the Oral Torah first emerges to uncover a path leading out of the Written Torah. Moses is no longer just transmitting God's words; he is *explaining* them. And that explaining, the teaching says, could only begin at this exact point — after

the entire journey through the desert was complete and the people were on the threshold of the Land.

THE HUSKS THAT HIDE THE TRUTH

The central image in this teaching is the *kelipah* (plural *kelipot*), a Hebrew word that literally means "husk" or "shell" — the peel you throw away to get to the fruit. In Chassidic thought, *kelipot* are the spiritual coverings that hide what is holy and true. They are the static on the line, the fog over the view. Unlike a fruit (this is where the analogy breaks down), the peel is not part of the Torah; it does not originate in the Torah. The husk or peel that surrounds the Torah is rooted in the self-consciousness of those engaging with it.

The Me'or Einayim describes these husks as a kind of screen stretched over the Torah, separating the learner from the Torah's true "face," from its inner message. Even when the words are right in front of you, the husks keep you from seeing what they really mean. So the whole drama of receiving the Torah in every generation is predicated on a type of *removal*: before the light can shine through, the covering has to come off. Every generation must peel the husk to uncover the Torah's inner message.

This was true for the first generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt and received the Torah at Mt. Sinai. They too had to remove their self-generated husk before the Torah could be given to them. That is why, says the Me'or Einayim, that Torah was not given at Mount Sinai the instant the people left Egypt. First there were seven weeks — forty-nine

days — and a series of journeys through the wilderness, including the miracle of the Splitting of the Red Sea. The people had spent generations "immersed in impurities," soaked in the spiritual atmosphere of Egypt. The wilderness itself was understood as a desolate place, the natural home of the husks. By traveling through it and witnessing open miracles, the people had faith in God's Providence planted firmly in their hearts, and that faith gave them the strength to break down the husks — to clear the screen that stood between them and the Written Torah.

WHY THE NUMBER FORTY-NINE

Here the teaching leans on a beautiful piece of number-play. A tradition in the Midrash says the Torah can be interpreted through "forty-nine faces of purity and forty-nine faces of impurity" — meaning it has vast interpretive depth in either direction. The Me'or Einayim connects this to the word Moab itself, whose value using *gematria* is exactly forty-nine.

Gematria does not stand on its own. The fact that two words, phrases, or concepts have the same numerical value does not in and of itself suffice to connect them. A numerical match is never the whole story. It is an invitation to look for the *inner* connection between them, not a proof on its own. The number is a doorway, not the room.

So what is the inner link between "Moab" and these forty-nine facets? The teaching ties the number to the forty-nine days — the number of days from the Exodus to the Giving of the Torah

at Sinai. These were precious days of preparation. These forty-nine days of preparation became the Forty-Nine Days of Counting the Omer every year, between the second day of Passover and Shavu'ot, the festival commemorating the Giving of the Torah. The link between these days and the necessary soul-searching required to penetrate the Torah's inner face is alluded to in a verse from Proverbs: "If you seek it as silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures." The verse is speaking of the search to understand Torah and hints at the number 49, since the Hebrew for "hidden treasures" can be read as "and as forty-nine are counted." The message: the treasure of the Torah is reached only through a long, deliberate count of preparation, one day, one step at a time.

GIVEN TO MOSES, NOT YET TO EVERYONE

Now comes the pivot of the whole teaching. Tradition holds that the entire Torah — Written *and* Oral, down to the last detail a future student would ever discover — was given to Moses at Sinai. But there is a difference between something being *given to Moses* and something being *available to everyone*.

The Written Torah could be handed to the whole nation after those first forty-nine days. But the Oral Torah — the secrets, the explanations, the living meaning — stayed covered by husks for everyone except Moses himself. It had been revealed to him alone, "because of the greatness of his level," but the rest of the people simply could not reach it yet. That is what the extra forty years of wandering were for. Every stop, every encampment,

was another husk removed, until at last the people arrived in the plains of Moab.

And in passing *through* Moab, they cleared away the husk of Moab too — the final barrier. Only then, with every covering stripped away, could Moses turn to the entire people and finally "explain this Torah." What had been his alone was now theirs. The revelation was complete not because Moses had learned something new, but because the audience had finally become able to receive it.

THE SAME BATTLE, AT YOUR OWN DESK

The reason this matters — and the reason the Me'or Einayim insists it is not just ancient history — is that the very same process repeats every time any of us learns. This is where the teaching becomes deeply practical.

When you sit with a text and hit a difficulty, a question you can't resolve, that difficulty is not random. There is a *kelipah* covering that spot; the fog has rolled in, and understanding is blocked. And here is the striking claim: that fog is made of *your own judgments*. In Chassidic language, the obstacle is *din* — the harsh, self-focused, ego-driven part of us. The covering over the truth is, at root, our own sense of self getting in the way.

The way through is *binah* — the faculty of patient, deep understanding. When you refuse to give up on the question, when you dig in and truly try to understand, you are not just solving a puzzle; you are dissolving the husk. The truth was there all along, waiting behind a screen you yourself put up. Real effort in learning is spiritual demolition work.

TWO WAYS OF DISAGREEING

The teaching then draws out a broader principle about the human heart, contrasting two forces: loving-kindness (*chesed*, the warm, inward, "right-sided" energy) and judgment (*din*, the cold, oppositional, "left-sided" energy).

The key insight is about how each one handles disagreement. A person coming from *chesed* can disagree with another approach while still seeing the truth inside it and respecting its proper place. A person coming from *din* does not just disagree — they *oppose*, forcefully, often without regard for whether the other side has a point. One says "I see it differently, and here is where you're also right." The other says "you are simply wrong, and I will not hear you."

We can offer a pointed illustration from the world of Torah study itself: those devoted to the *inner* dimension of Torah generally value the "revealed" legal study and understand why it matters — but people focused only on the revealed, legal layer will often bristle at the inner teaching, so that a single Chasidic insight can trigger fierce resistance. The same contrast can be found in large measure in the political arena of our: the "Right" tends to disagree over substance while the "Left" opposes without regard for facts. The underlying spiritual point stands on its own: closed-off opposition is a symptom of *din*; openness that can hold disagreement without hostility is a sign of *chesed*.

SWEETENING AT THE ROOT

If judgment is the problem, how do you fix it? The *Me'or Einayim* gives a precise answer: "Judgments can be sweetened only at their root." You don't beat down a harsh reaction by force; you trace it back to its source and transform it there.

Practically, that source is the external dimension of *understanding* itself. External understanding means shallow understanding, the type that inexorably leads to opposition to other points of view and makes it impossible to see what validity they may have. The real labor, the teaching says, is sustained toil in study and inner reflection on your own viewpoint until you reach a genuine, inner grasp of the truth, not just an intellectual one. This process of unlocking the interior dimension of understanding is the heart of the Chabad Chasidic approach and is known as *derher*, or inner hearing, which when experienced properly is accompanied with a deepfelt supernal pleasure.

When that happens the shallow opposition remains and generally, one feels their opinion is validated just by the misconception that others are wrong. One might say that the external dimension of understanding leads to a feeling that "I am right merely because you are wrong." But when the judgments emerging from shallow understanding are softened, then even the critical, oppositional part of a person can honestly *see* the validity of the other side and can stop fighting it. When that happens, Chasidic teachings reveal that harshness turns into supernal pleasure, and a person is able to embrace

even someone he has treated as an opponent.

THE FIFTIETH GATE AND THE SWEETNESS OF MOAB

There is warmth hidden in the very name of the final encampment in the wilderness, just before entering the Land of Canaan—"the plains of Moab." This was the location where Moses began to reveal the Oral Torah. The "plains of Moab" in Hebrew is *arvot Moav*, and *aravot* echoes the word *arevut*, which means both *sweetness* and *mutual responsibility*. The sweetness is the harshness turning into pleasure, as discussed.

But the mutual responsibility is another thing altogether. I they stand on the edge of the Land, the people are being prepared for a new kind of togetherness, of mutual responsibility. The Torah is traditionally described as containing six hundred thousand letters, matching the soul roots of Israel, so that each soul corresponds to a letter in the Torah. And just as a Torah scroll is rendered invalid if even one letter is missing, so every soul needs every other. This is the deeper meaning of the famous phrase, "all of Israel are responsible for one another." Once the husks are gone and people can finally connect to the Torah without a screen, they discover that they are connected to each other, too.

THE GREAT DANGER: FOOLING YOURSELF

The Ma'or Einayim ends his teaching with a warning. The same Hebrew word that means "to count" is also cognate with the word meaning "to deceive." That word-play carries a serious message: it



is frighteningly easy, in study, to *deceive yourself* — to imagine you have fully understood, when in truth you have not even begun to see the real face of the Torah. And what causes the illusion? The same culprit as before: your own judgments and ego, quietly convincing you that you have already arrived, that you have already unlocked the Torah's true meaning, that you have been privileged to understand the Divine mind..

This danger, the teaching notes, is most acute among accomplished scholars who think highly of themselves. It is possible to build a dazzling, intricate argument — clever, impressive, airtight-sounding — with no real inner understanding behind it at all. The great sages criticized this kind of empty cleverness, not because rigorous analysis is bad, but because brilliance can become a performance that hides the absence of true insight. Indeed, in our own times, a perfect example of purely external cleverness is artificial intelligence, which can produce polished results that are, in the end, external and artificial.

The Chassidic antidote is captured in a

phrase said to be the essence of the entire *Tanya*: "Do not be a deceiver." Do not con yourself into thinking you are already a saint. Stay honest about where you actually are.

THE REAL WORK

“**S**earch for it as for hidden treasures,” says the Book of Proverbs — and the real searching, the *Me'or Einayim* explains, is not only searching the text. It is searching *yourself*: examining your own conduct, refining your character, and bringing that refined self back to your study. Only by softening the judgments and clearing away the ego that fogs the page can a person finally see the Torah's true face — and, as the verse promises, "then you will understand the fear of God."

Moses could only teach in the plains of Moab because the long work of removal was finally done. The teaching's quiet claim is that the plains of Moab are not only a place on the map. They are a place each of us has to reach — the point where the last husk falls away, and the truth we were seeking turns out to have been waiting for us the whole time.



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