



Kovetz

# Chidushei Torah

A collection of Chidushei Torah through the  
many dimensions of The Torah:  
Peshat, Remez, Halacha and Chassidus

.

*Composed by:  
Rabbi's, Yeshiva students and members of  
The Buffalo Jewish Community.*

Yud Alef Nissan, 5786



## Foreword

**“For the rod of wickedness shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, so that the righteous will not stretch forth their hands to iniquity.”** (Tehillim 125:3)

Fortunate are we—how good is our portion, how pleasant is our lot, and how beautiful is our inheritance.

Through Torah study and the observance of mitzvot, every Jewish soul is connected to the Divine. In this sense, Torah is equal for all of Israel, for we share one Torah and one law. Yet on a deeper level, souls are not identical in their spiritual mission. Each soul enters this world at a particular time and carries a unique role.

Our sages teach that every individual has a mitzvah in which he is especially careful. Just as the limbs of the body each serve a distinct function—the eye to see and the ear to hear—so too every mitzvah reveals a unique Divine light. Although every soul must ultimately fulfill all 613 mitzvot, certain mitzvot shine with particular significance for each individual soul.

This distinction is related to the concept of goral, a “lot,” which represents something beyond human understanding. Certain spiritual advantages granted to a soul are not determined by intellect or reasoning but stem from the Divine will alone.

Similarly, there is an aspect of Torah that is received as a gift from above. Some dimensions of Torah are attained through effort and understanding, while others are bestowed by Hashem beyond the limits of human ability. Our sages illustrate this with Moshe Rabbeinu, who initially studied Torah but would forget it until it was ultimately given to him as a gift, allowing it to remain with him eternally.

Although a gift ultimately depends on the will of the giver, our sages teach that it is given to one who is worthy. Human effort does not compel the gift, but it prepares the person to receive it.

So too in Torah: after a person exerts himself to the fullest of his ability, Hashem may grant him deeper understanding as a gift from above.

This idea also helps explain why we pray for the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, for the fullest revelation of Torah—the ultimate “gift” within Torah—will be revealed in the era of Mashiach.

It is well known that every Jew has the ability—and indeed the responsibility—to bring forth new insights in Torah. As explained in Tanya, each person must reveal the wisdom connected to the root of his soul and thereby complete his spiritual mission.

Based on this principle, the Lubavitcher Rebbe encouraged individuals to write and publish their Torah insights. This brings a twofold benefit: it strengthens Torah learning for the community, fulfilling the ideal of “Yagdil Torah V’Ya’adir,” and it deepens the understanding of the author himself, since explaining an idea clearly to others enhances one’s own comprehension.

Thank G-d, the city of Buffalo is blessed with many scholars and students of Torah. With Hashem’s help we have gathered Torah insights from rabbis, scholars, and yeshivah students of the community, spanning many areas of Torah—including Scripture, halachah, and Chassidut. These insights are presented in both Hebrew and English for the benefit of the wider public.

A special feature of this year’s volume is the inclusion of Torah insights from previous generations of Buffalo rabbis, some of which are being published for the first time from handwritten manuscripts.

We extend our sincere thanks to the rabbis and students who contributed their Torah insights to increase and glorify Torah.

Special thanks to the temimim Shalom Dov Ber Gurary, Schneur Zalman Gurary, and Levi Sternberg for their assistance in editing this publication.

It is our hope that through studying the Torah insights contained in this booklet, even more Torah ideas will be generated, enabling future publications of additional collections.

May it be Hashem's will that we soon merit the ultimate renewal of Torah that will be revealed in the Torah of Mashiach:

“A new Torah will emerge from Me.” (Yeshaya 51:4)

As the Rambam writes, in the days of Mashiach the world will be filled with knowledge of Hashem, and humanity will be devoted to understanding the Divine:

“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea.”

For comments or feedback on this collection, please email:

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# **Chidushei Torah**



## Foiled Plans

RABBI YOSEF ALT

“Yisro rejoiced over all the good that Hashem had done for Yisroel, that He has rescued it from Egypt. Yisro said, ‘Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt. **Now** I know that Hashem is the greatest of all gods, from in the very matter (the Egyptians) had **conspired** against them...!’” (Shemos, 18:9-11)

Why did Yisro emphasize “now” what exactly happened now? Why did Yisro mention that the Egyptians “conspired”, they didn’t only conspire, they enslaved and tortured the Jewish people as well?

I once heard an amazing p’shat from one of my Rebbeim, Rabbi Tzvi Einstater. He referenced the Talmud (Kiddushin 39B)

מְחַשְׁבֵּה רָעָה אֵין הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצַרְפָּה לְמַעֲשֵׂה

Hashem does not link a bad thought to an action (Hashem only punishes for a sin that was committed, not for a thought or plan to commit a sin).

Tosfos explains that this principle only applies to Jewish people; regarding non-Jews, Hashem executes punishment for thoughts and plans to sin, as well as action. Tosfos uses Eisav as an example; he never successfully harmed Yaakov, yet he is punished for his attempts and desire to do so.

There is a well-known Midrash that Pharaoh had three advisors, Bilaam, Iyov, and Yisro. Bilaam encouraged Pharaoh to follow through

with his plan to enslave and torture the Jews, Iyov was silent, and Yisro opposed the idea and therefore fled to Midian to escape punishment.

Rabbi Einstater explained that in this week's parsha Yisro joins the Jewish people. His son-in-law, Moshe Rabbeinu, tells him all the intricate details of the many miracles they witnessed in Egypt. Yisro responds, "now", now that I know all the details of how the Egyptians were punished "I know that Hashem is the greatest of all gods." Yisro was one of Pharaoh's advisors, so he had insider information; he had knowledge of the many unexecuted plans of the Egyptians. Yisro understood the precision of Hashem's punishment, how every last detail of the plagues was calculated. No one else could appreciate this as much as Yisro could, because only he understood all the thoughts and plans for which they were also being punished!

A story is told of a non-Jewish fellow who approached the great Mussar master Rav Itzele Peterburger, close disciple of Rav Yisroel Salanter. He was bothered by a pasuk in Tehilim (which is part of Hallel), "Praise Hashem, all nations; praise Him, all the states! For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of Hashem is eternal, Halleluyah." (Tehilim 117:1-2) The fellow asked Rav Itzele, why should "all the nations" be the ones to praise Hashem for His kindness, wouldn't it be more befitting for the Jewish people to praise Hashem themselves? Rav Itzele responded that only the nations of the world know the full extent of Hashem's kindness. We only know of our salvation from dangers that became a reality, but Hashem has saved us from endless plans and attempts to destroy the Jewish people which we never knew existed. In the end of days when Hashem is revealed to the entire world, only the nations will fully understand Hashem's kindness in protecting the Jewish people from both actual threats and potential threats that never became a reality at all.

May we merit to arrive at that great day b'mheira v'yameinu, amen!



## Haneiros Hallalu: Five Dimensions of Light

REB YAAKOV CHANIN

In his treatise “Kuntres Inyana shel Toras haChassidus” (“The core of the subject of the teachings of chassidism”) the Rebbe explains several foundational ideas pertaining to chassidic teachings. He shows that, on the one hand, the Torah, in its essence, is “completely united with the infinite light of Hashem, the light that is encloded within the Torah and perfectly and totally united with Torah”<sup>1</sup>.

This unification makes the essence of the Torah to be completely infinite, and, simultaneously, an indivisible, essentially simple entity. On the other hand, all four basic modes through which one can interpret the Torah, namely Pshat (plain meaning), Remez (hinted meaning), Drush (homiletic meaning) and Sod (esoteric meaning), are definable. Definition by its nature is a form of limitation.

Therefore, the study of the Torah via any one of these modes of interpretation is, therefore, limited, and does not express its indivisible and simple essence. These four modes correspond to the four levels of the soul: Pshat to Nefesh, Remez to Ruach, Drush to Neshamah and Sod to Chayah. Chassidus, yet a fifth and additional mode of interpretation, is unique because it corresponds to the soul level of Yechida, whose mode of existence is a total unity with the Creator, and thus is able to directly represent the quintessential point of Torah. As such,

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1) Tanya, Kuntres Acharon 6.

Chassidus includes all other levels of Pshat, Remez, Drush and Sod and gives life to them all. Also, Chassidus, representing the quintessential point of Torah, is directly connected with the coming of Moshiach and the World to Come, where the essence of Hashem is revealed in the lowest level of Creation.

The Rebbe shows in that treatise this quality of Chassidus in the example of the prayer "Modeh Ani." Also, the Rebbe says there, that the Chassidic way of analyzing the relationship between all the methods of understanding Torah is applicable to any Torah topic.

We can apply this perspective to Chanukah and study the thanksgiving hymn that is customarily sung at the lighting of the Chanukah menorah: "We light these candles for the salvations, wonders and miracles that You did to our fathers in those days at this time". This prayer is included in the Siddur and it is an established custom to recite it immediately after lighting the Menorah. First, we will look into the Pshat, Remez, Drush and Sod in this hymn, then we will look into its Chassidic explanation.

Afterwards, we will examine how the Chassidic explanation gives life to all other four modes of interpretation and unites them into one whole.

### Pshat

The plain meaning of the words "We light these candles..." is that by lighting the candles, we commemorate the miracles of the victory of the Jews in the war against the Greek-Syrian attempts to stop Torah learning and observance of the commandments, and the subsequent miracle of the one flask of oil that lasted for eight days. Even if a person is alone in their house, when they light the Menorah, they would say "we light these candles," rather than "I light these candles." This language of community and collectivity underscores the principle that

“all Jews are responsible one for another”<sup>2</sup> and furthermore, each Jew is a guarantor for all other Jews to be part of the covenant between each of them and Hashem<sup>3</sup>.

### Remez

The hint in these words is indicated by an unusual form of the word “these” - “halalu”, instead of “haeilu”. “Halalu” translates more literally to “those,” instead of “these”. This terminology hints at the lights of Chanukah in times of Moshiach. In Moshiach times all holidays will be abolished except Purim<sup>4</sup>. Since Purim and Chanukah are of the same category, Chanukah also will remain prominent in Moshiach’s era<sup>5</sup>.

### Drush

This terminological difference also could have a homiletic, implied meaning. The explanation could be based on the fact that the word “halalu” can be understood also as “say Hallel”. To trace this connection, we can compare the mitzvot of lighting the menorah and saying Hallel on Chanukah with the two readings of Megilat Esther on Purim. Regarding Chanukah, Rambam says<sup>6</sup>, that we should light the candles in order to “show and reveal the miracle”. Regarding Purim, the Tosefot<sup>7</sup> mention, that one of the reasons to read the Megilah during the day time is because the mitzvah of publicizing the miracle is mainly during the day; this implies that this mitzvah is still operative during

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2) Shevuot 39a.

3) Sotah 37b.

4) Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei 944.

5) R. Moshe Feinstein, Mesoras Moshe, see also Magid Meisharim on Vayakhel.

6) Mishneh Tora, Scroll of Esther and Chanukah 3:3.

7) Megilah 4a, “Chayav Adam...”.

the night, although its effect does not achieve the same degree of publicization as during the day. Another matter pertaining to both Chanukah and Purim is that both festivals commemorate the miracles, necessitating the need to say the thanksgiving praises of Hallel. The Talmud mentions<sup>8</sup> that one of the reasons why Hallel is not recited on Purim is that the day reading of Megilah fulfills the same role. It is specifically day reading that substitutes for Hallel because Hallel can only be recited during the day<sup>9</sup>. (This remains true with the exception of the first night (two nights outside of the Land of Israel) of Pesach, when, according to one of the explanations<sup>10</sup>, we want to emphasize that we were redeemed during the night).

Thus, we see that the reading of Megilah has two aspects: publicizing the miracle and proclaiming the praises of Hashem in the way Hallel does. We also may notice the connection between reading the Megilah and lighting the Chanukah candles from the fact that we say one specific blessing to Hashem in both of them: we praise Hashem “who did miracles to our fathers in those days at this time”. Thus, we may postulate that since the reading of the Megilah fulfills the recitation of Hallel, and the lighting of the Chanukah candles is similar to reading the Megilah, therefore, the lighting of the Chanukah candles also has an aspect of reciting Hallel. This is emphasized by the word “halalu”.

### Sod

The esoteric insight is in the following<sup>11</sup>. The word “נר” (“candle”) has the same numerical value as the three unifications of Hashem’s names combined together: one is the unification of יה-וה-וה and א-ה-ה-יה, another one of יה-וה-וה and א-ל-ה-יה-ים and the third of יה-וה-וה and

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8) Megilah 14a.

9) Megilah 20b.

10) Ramban to Pesachim.

11) Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Chanukah, ch. 4.

א-ד-ג-ו-י. More than that, the number of letters in these three unifications is twenty-five, hinting at the date when Chanukah begins: the twenty-fifth of Kislev. The first unification indicates the union of Chochmah and Binah and relates to Hashem's Name ע"ב. The second indicates the union of ז"א and Malchus and relates to Hashem's Name ס"ג. The third unification indicates the fulfillment of actual commandments and relates to the Name מ"ה. These three names are themselves numerical representations of Hashem's Name י-ה-ו-ה, with the last three letters spelled in different ways. Each of these Names indicate a certain stage in condensing primordial G-dly light into definite forms of Creation. In addition, the summary numerical value of the word "lehadlik" ("to light") with an additional 1 standing for this word as a whole is the same as the sum of these three Names - 72, 63 and 45.

### Chassidic interpretation

The Chassidic approach is to make emphasis on certain teaching and show how it permeates all other four methods of Torah learning, making them relevant to a person in all aspects of life. In the case of "we are lighting these candles", the Chassidic interpretation may bring up a correlating verse to explain what candles we are lighting:<sup>12</sup> "The soul of man is the candle of Hashem".

This statement carries in itself several ideas emphasized in Chassidus. First, the Jewish soul is part of Hashem Himself<sup>13</sup>. That makes all Jews one complete indivisible entity in their source because Hashem Himself is one and indivisible. Also, it illustrates the ultimate purpose of Creation: Hashem wanted to have a dwelling place for Himself in the lower realm<sup>14</sup>.

A Jew, by conducting his life in the material world as a Jew, through

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12) Mishlei 20:27.

13) Tanya p.1, ch.2.

14) Tanchuma, Nasso 16.

learning Torah and doing mitzvos, makes his G-dly soul shine in a realm of concealment and darkness; the Jew's actions reveal G-d in that darkness and, thereby, builds the dwelling for Hashem in this lowly realm. The principle that the Holy One blessed be He, Torah and the people of Israel are one,<sup>15</sup> is reflected and actualized in this dynamic. This oneness may be seen in the words "we light these candles", which can be simultaneously understood as "these candles light «we»". In other words, we reveal G-dliness in the world through the Torah and its commandments, yet, simultaneously, the Torah and its commandments reveal G-dliness through us. By lighting the Chanukah candles, we activate our unity with the Torah and Hashem Himself in the physical realm.

This understanding makes all four other levels of approach to the Torah much more personal and relatable.

### Chassidic interpretation in Pshat

On the level of Pshat a person may feel detached from the events of Chanukah that happened long ago; the obstacles to observing Torah in our times may be completely different from the times of the second Temple. We may find many similarities between the fight of the Maccabees and our own struggles to maintain Judaism, but these similarities are still between two separate sets of events and participants. Saying "we are lighting" and not "I am lighting", a person may wonder, why they include themselves together with the Jews they don't know or even don't want to know, possibly having the deepest intellectual or emotional or ethical differences with them. But the knowledge and appreciation that all Jews are one entity directly included in Hashem Himself, makes a person to clearly see oneself in an absolute unity with all other Jews, throughout all generations, including the Hashmoneans. When a Jew lights the candles, which is a physical actualiza-

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15) Zohar 3 73a.

tion of igniting their G-dly soul, that naturally makes the unity of the Jews of all generations and Hashem to materialize through fulfillment of the Torah commandment. Materialization of this unity is so great that we are saying “we light these candles for the salvations”.

The word “for” (“al”) could be translated as “above”, which means us lighting the Chanukah candles and, thus, materializing the unity of Hashem and the Jews through Torah, is greater than the salvations and miracles that Hashem did for the Jews in the times of Hashmoneans.

### Chassidic interpretation in Remez

On the level of Remez we may wonder, what relevance has the lighting of the Chanukah candles in the times of Moshiach to us?

Granted, it underscores a great spiritual power of the Hashmoneans' self-sacrifice that resulted in the miracle, and consequential rabbinical enactment that will be appreciated with the coming of Moshiach, but until that time, G-liness is totally concealed in the world.

Even if we consider the teaching,<sup>16</sup> that the primordial light that shone in the first 36 hours after Creation and then was hidden until the World to Come, is revealed in the 36 Chanukah lights, we don't appreciate this light via our physical senses; instead, we only see the physical light waves. But the knowledge and appreciation of the fact that the Jew is one with Hashem and His Torah, helps a person to realize and see that these very Chanukah candles they light is their own soul that is ignited with the actual light from the future, namely the light of Moshiach's era, when the essence of Hashem will be revealed in the material world. That is, His essence is revealed before our own eyes during the performance of this mitzvah in the lights of the menorah.

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16) Bnei Yissaschar on Chanukah.

### Chassidic interpretation in Drush

On the level of Drush we may not necessarily see immediately, what is the practical difference for us personally that lighting the candles has an aspect of publicizing the miracle and reciting thanksgiving prayers of Hallel. We surely would fulfill the commandment anyway, but without the chassidic approach we may feel that the commandment is one thing while our persona is another thing. But the idea of oneness of the Torah and her commandments and us with Hashem, whose oneness is absolute and complete, makes us realize that publicizing the miracle - a miracle which by itself constitutes revealing G-dliness in the world - is actually an act of physically praising Hashem; this realization naturally leads a person to recite praises of Hashem.

Lighting the candles publicizes the miracle, which is a direct way of making the Name of Hashem habitual and recognized in the world. Through His Name Hashem Himself thereby becomes recognized in the world. This is the way to make this world an abode for Him, which is the purpose of Creation, as mentioned before. And thus, the soul of the Jew, which is united with Hashem in a wonderful unity, is naturally lit through this action of publicizing the miracle. This itself would prompt a Jew to praise Hashem spontaneously for the opportunity to self-actualize via lighting the candles.

### Chassidic interpretation in Sod

On the level of Sod, we may be excited to know what holy spiritual strata of Creation we touch and affect via lighting the Chanukah menorah, and what exalted unifications of Hashem's names we achieve thereby, but not necessarily would we grasp their connection to our mundane life and materialistic physical perception of reality during fulfillment of the commandment, and more so, in our day-to-day activities. However the knowledge and appreciation of the fact that the lit candles of the mitzvah are our own souls, which are united with

Hashem, makes us perceive our palpable intellect, emotions and preparedness for self-sacrifice as the integral completion of the chain of convergence of G-dly attributes, which are marked for reference by His Names and their combinations through all the stages of Creation, starting from its essentially transcendent source. Thus, by lighting the candles we ourselves live through י-ה-ו-ה uniting with א-ה-י-ה, and through י-ה-ו-ה uniting with א-ל-ה-י-ם and י-ה-ו-ה uniting with א-ד-נ-י; the revelation of all these three unifications being one through all worlds and levels, including this physical world and us ourselves.

### All interpretations as one

In all of the above we see how all four methods of interpretation are pointing through the chassidic approach to the same ultimate oneness of Creation with the Creator in the realization of its ultimate goal. Through the lighting of the Chanukah candles, we reveal the oneness of all the Jews of all generations, including the World to Come, between themselves and with Hashem Himself, through all the spiritual levels of Creation, into physical palpable reality. The special quality of this particular mitzvah is that the physical light of the menorah is identical with the Jewish soul and the G-dly light of the World to Come. Therefore, this mitzvah is emphasizing the idea that the World to Come - the dwelling place for Hashem - is already here, and we are required only to reveal it with the illumination of a candle, and not through the cumbersome labor of building.

### Conclusion

Thus it could be seen that the chassidic explanation is giving life to all other ways of interpreting the Torah subject, and that itself is the actual particular mode of resurrection<sup>17</sup> which actively contributes to

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17) Hayom yom Sivan 11.

the ultimate resurrection of the dead with the imminent revelation of Moshiach.



## When Women's Actions Shape Halacha

RABBI MOSHE HEIMOWITZ

The Gemara in Megillah page 4A says the following: Women are obligated in the reading of Megillah. We know that woman are obligated in lighting Chanukah candles and drinking the four cups of wine at the Seder. The question is why? All three are time bound Mitzvos which women are absolved from. That is why Women are not obligated in Sukkah, Lulav, or Shofar. Although woman try hard to fulfill these mitzvos, ultimately they are **not** obligated. If so, why is Megillah (which includes all the Mitzvos of Purim), Chanukah, and the four cups different?

Rashi and Tosafos learn that women were in equal danger as men in the Purim story, Chanukah story and Pesach. Therefore, since women were **equally** saved, in these Three scenarios, They are equally obligate in the mitzvos, as Purim, Chanukah, and Pesach celebrate our being saved from Haman, Antiochus, and Pharoh.

However, the Rashbam, Rashi's grandson, learns quite differently. It is possible that being equally saved does not **trump** the laws of time bound Mitzvos. For that reason alone, women would not be obligated in Purim, Chanukah, and the four cups at the Seder.

The Rashbam learns that the reason for Women's obligation in these three mitzvos is because women were at the **forefront** of the saving of the Jews in all three cases. Purim-Esther, Chanukah-Yehudis, Pesach- because of the merit of the righteous woman in Mitzrayim.

When women are at the forefront of the saving of the Jews, then those holidays commemorating that become obligatory for women as well.

Usually, we think of the concept “in the merit of the righteous women the Jews were saved from Mitzrayim” as a nice concept. According to Rashbam, this is totally incorrect. It is more than a concept, a nice accolade. It is serious and determines the halacha that woman are obligated in the four cups at the Seder.

(Please note: Women are obligated in eating Matzah for a different reason.)

Women's role throughout history; Purim, Chanukah and Pesach was not backseat, but primary, at the forefront, and that dictates halacha! May women be at the forefront to bring Moshiach!



## Ki Tisa – Hashem's Personal Charge

RABBI AVI OKIN

After completing the commands regarding the construction of the Mishkan, Hashem informs Moshe of the person chosen to lead this project. Hashem says “See that I have called the name of Betzlalel, son of Uri, son of Chur, from the tribe of Yehuda” (Shemos 31:2). It appears from this Passuk that God was not simply informing Moshe of Betzalel’s designation for this role, but rather drawing his attention to the fact that he was already designated. He was telling Moshe that he should already be able to see that Betzalel was assigned the mission of leading the construction of the Mishkan.

The obvious question arises, how could Moshe see this? How could Moshe be able to determine that Betzalel was appointed even before he was told this? What does Hashem mean when He says, ראה קראתי בשם – that Moshe should “see” that He selected Betzalel to lead this project?

Rav Moshe Feinstein explained that the answer is found in the very next passuk: ואמלא אותו רוח אלוקים, בחכמה ובתבונה ובדעת ובכל מלאכה. Hashem tells Moshe that He had endowed Betzalel with special wisdom and knowledge, with the unique talents and capabilities needed to assume this ambitious and sacred mission. Rav Moshe explained that this itself was Betzalel’s designation. The very fact that Hashem blessed Betzalel with these special gifts, with these extraordinary abilities, was Betzalel’s calling, his assignment to the role of leading

the Mishkan's construction. Hashem was telling Moshe that Betzalel's special talents show that he has been chosen for this mission.

This is true not only of Betzalel, but of every one of us. Hashem does not tap us on our shoulder and tell us what we're supposed to do. He does not send a message to our phones to inform us of our unique role. What He does do, however, is give us talents, strength, abilities, resources and opportunities. He gives us the ability to self-actualize and to achieve our mission in this world.

When I was serving as Assistant Rabbi at Nusach Ari in Saint Louis, I remember taking Binyomin to the Zoo as a young boy. I remember him asking me about the respective features of the animals that we were seeing. For example, "Abba, why does the anteater have such a long tongue?" "So that they can eat the ants from their colonies, Binyomin" I responded. "Every animal is created the exact way Hashem wanted, so that it could lead the life Hashem wants it to live."

Rabbi Yehudah Ibn Tibbon expands on this idea in Chovos Halevavos in a more sophisticated manner: Hashem creates each creature with the exact physical tools to interact with its environment in the best way for that animal. For example, Polar Bears have very thick fur so they can survive the cold winter, and birds have wings and feathers so they can fly. Hashem looks after each animal, and we need to believe that Hashem is taking care of us in the same way.

If we look honestly at ourselves and our lives, we will find our calling. We will find unique gifts, abilities that we can harness and use. These gifts are our calling, and it is up to us to hear the call and to respond accordingly. Our toolbox may not be the same as it was when we were younger, but it suits the mission that we have now that we did not have earlier. Hashem gives us exactly what we need to accomplish our purpose on earth.

Coupling the idea from Chovos Halevavos with Rav Moshe's idea, we need to believe that Hashem has a mission for each one of us, and that Hashem will help us to actualize our potential and accomplish our life mission. If Hashem has woken us up in the morning, it is because

He believes in us, we have what to accomplish, and the tools we need to do so.

We are all in different stages of life. Some of us are just starting careers, others are at the height of our careers, and some of us may not be formally employed anymore. We should all reflect on what steps we can take to self-actualize, what can we contribute to our respective shuls and community at large. If Hashem woke us up today, then we have a job to do. He believes in us and wants us to succeed.

May Hashem help us to see our tools and skills, and May we achieve the Simcha that comes from being on the road to Self-Actualization, loving our work and life, each and every day.



# The Gift of Struggle

HATOMIM CHAIM MORDECHAI SHACHNA OKONOV

## Introduction: The Mishnah and Its Question

The Mishnah in Eilu Metziot (Bava Metzia 33a) teaches a hierarchy of responsibility:

If one must choose between his own lost item, his father's, or his teacher's, his own takes precedence.

Between his father and his teacher, his teacher comes first—because his father brought him into this world, while his teacher brings him to the World to Come.

However, if his father is a Torah scholar, the father takes precedence.

The Mishnah continues:

If both his father and teacher are carrying a burden, he helps his teacher first.

If both are in captivity, he redeems his teacher first.

Again, if the father is a scholar, the father takes precedence.

## The Central Question

A careful reading reveals an inconsistency:

In the case of lost objects and captivity, the Mishnah adds a qualification:

If the father is a scholar, he comes first.

However, in the case of unloading a burden, this qualification is omitted.

Why does the Mishnah leave out this distinction in the middle case?

### **The Approach of the Shitah Mekubetzes**

The Shitah Mekubetzes explains that the omission is deliberate.

The three cases represent different categories:

Lost object – financial loss

Captivity – physical suffering and humiliation

Burden – an intermediate case

Because unloading a burden contains elements of both monetary concern and physical discomfort, it is unclear whether it should follow the first or third case. Therefore, the Mishnah leaves it unspecified.

Practical Conclusion

If the father is equal to the teacher father takes precedence

If the father is merely a scholar one may choose

The ambiguity reflects a genuine halachic uncertainty.

### **The Approach of the Tosafot Yom Tov**

The Tosafot Yom Tov presents a different perspective.

He suggests that unloading a burden may be categorized as honor alone, without financial loss or real physical danger. If so, the obligation to honor one's teacher may outweigh that of honoring one's father—even if the father is equal.

However, he concludes without a definitive ruling, leaving the matter unresolved.

### **The Deeper Dimension: The Baal Shem Tov**

To understand the inner meaning of this Mishnah, we turn to a teaching of the Baal Shem Tov on the verse:

“If you see the donkey of your enemy crouching under its burden... you must surely help him.”

The Baal Shem Tov explains:

Donkey (חומר / chomer) represents the material body

Enemy refers to the body's resistance to spirituality

Burden is the mission of refining the body through Torah and mitzvot

One might think to “break” the body through asceticism. However, the Baal Shem Tov teaches:

One must help the body, refine it—not destroy it.

### **The Gemara: Burden as a Human Condition**

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 30b) tells of Rabbi Yishmael, who encountered a man struggling with a heavy load. Rather than carry it himself—since it was beneath his dignity—he paid the man and declared the load ownerless.

This story highlights that the concept of “burden” applies not only to animals but to human beings as well. It represents a broader existential struggle.

### **Rabbi Meir: A Spiritual Precedence**

A story is told of Rabbi Meir being asked:

Whom would you bring to Gan Eden first—your father or your teacher?

He answered: his teacher, echoing the Mishnah's reasoning.

This demonstrates that the Mishnah is not merely practical law—it reflects a spiritual hierarchy.

### **The Alter Rebbe: Defining the “Burden”**

The Alter Rebbe explains that the burden refers to the inner struggle of the person.

#### **1. The Burden of the Body**

The body is like a donkey carrying a heavy load.

One must help it and refine it—not break it.

## 2. The Burden of Inner Conflict

A person struggles between his spiritual aspirations and his current state. This can lead to sadness—but the Alter Rebbe teaches:

Sadness comes from pride

One must instead feel joy in the effort of serving Hashem

Thus, the burden is the ongoing struggle with the yetzer hara and the effort to refine oneself.

### **The Rebbe: Ratzo and Shov**

In a sicha (Likkutei Sichos Vol. 32), the Rebbe discusses Nadav and Avihu:

They experienced ratzo—a powerful yearning to connect with Hashem

But they lacked shov—the return to the physical world

Their mistake was not desire for spirituality, but failing to channel it into action within the physical world.

This teaches:

The goal is not to escape the world, but to transform it.

### **Two Souls: A New Understanding**

Chassidus teaches that every person has two souls:

Nefesh Elohis (Divine Soul)

Seeks spirituality

Desires closeness to Hashem

Nefesh HaBahamis (Animal Soul)

Seeks physicality

Focuses on self-preservation

Neither is inherently bad. Both are necessary.

### **Reinterpreting the Mishnah**

We can now understand the Mishnah on a deeper level:

Father - Nefesh HaBahamis (physical life)

Teacher - Nefesh Elohis (spiritual life)

Just as:

The father gives physical existence

The teacher gives spiritual life

So too:

The animal soul sustains the body

The divine soul gives purpose

### **The “Burden”**

Each soul carries its own burden:

The animal soul struggles with material refinement

The divine soul strives for transcendence

### **The Priority**

The Mishnah teaches:

Normally, follow the teacher the Divine soul

However, if the father is a “chacham” - if the animal soul has been refined and aligned with holiness, it takes precedence

Why?

Because transforming the physical is the ultimate purpose.

### **The Case of Uncertainty**

When the animal soul is not yet fully refined, there is ambiguity:

Should one follow the pull of spirituality?

Or attend to the needs of the physical?

This is the unresolved case of the Mishnah.

The Shitah Mekubetzes allows for choice.

The Baal Shem Tov’s Resolution

The Baal Shem Tov provides guidance:

Even when the body resists holiness, one must help it, not break it.

Therefore:

Even an unrefined animal soul must be worked with

It must be elevated, not rejected

This suggests a stronger position:

One must engage and refine the physical, not abandon it.

### Conclusion: The Burden of Refinement

The “burden” of the Mishnah is not only physical—it is the burden of human existence:

The tension between body and soul

The struggle between material and spiritual

The mission to transform darkness into light

The ultimate goal is not to suppress the physical, but to elevate it—to bring the nefesh habahamis to the level of the nefesh elokis.

This is a necessary process of yeridah l'tzorech aliyah—descending in order to ascend. By engaging with the physical and elevating it to the spiritual, a person rises to a level higher than could have been reached without the descent. This concept is foundational; it lies at the very core of Chassidus, and particularly Chabad. It is through this process that we bring Moshiach. Through it, we reveal both our own true potential and the inner potential of the nefesh habahamis. When we emerge from this process, the “father” and the “teacher” become united as one—and this is the revelation of Moshiach.



## From Seven to Eight: From Nature to Transcendence

RABBI SHLOMO SCHACHTER

Most of us are familiar with the basic story of Chanukah. The Greeks forbade us from practicing our faith and defiled God's Holy Temple. When the victorious Maccabees threw off the yoke of Greek imperial rule and rededicated The Temple, they found only a small jar of oil, enough to light the Menorah for a single day. The great Chanukah miracle was that the oil lasted the entire eight days necessary to produce new pure oil. We commemorate this miracle by lighting candles for eight nights to re-enact the story.

One frequently asked question which appears in the halachic literature is, "the first night wasn't a miracle, so why do we light candles for eight nights, not seven?"

Some rabbis have suggested that the miracle of the first night was the military victory of the "few over the many".

The Zohar suggests that the miracle was that we found this very special cruse of oil. The understanding of the Zohar is that this was oil made by Noah from the olives on the branch the dove brought back to the arc. The invocation of the dove with the olive branch makes the Chanukah candles a universal symbol of peace. Another explanation of the miracle is that despite knowing that there was only enough oil for one night, the Maccabees nevertheless chose to light the oil. That in itself is perhaps a miracle.

Perhaps it can be explained, however, in the following way, if we

look closely, the question itself (like so many Jewish questions) is better than any of the answers. What we are really asking is, “How do human actions become God’s miracle?” “How does 7 become 8?” This is mirrored in the addition of an eight candle to the chanukiah whereas the original menorah had only seven branches.

In the Torah, seven always signifies wholeness, the completion of a full cycle. There are seven days in the week of creation, and Shabbat makes the week whole. Seven weeks from Pesach to Shavuot. Seven ‘clean days’ counted in family purity. Seven years of service and a slave goes free. Seven years in the agricultural cycle, and the economy is reset every seven sevens. When we get to seven, we’ve done our job as humans and the cycle is complete.

Eight however signifies something more, the inclusion of the infinite. The most famous eight in the Torah is the eighth day of circumcision. Circumcision isn’t about a function like hygiene, increased sensitivity or even “perfecting the Human form”. If it were, it would belong on the sixth or seventh day. Circumcision is instead a “sign” that we are “with God”. It’s not something which changes us functionally, it only adds a dimension of presence of the infinite embedded in our very flesh. This is what the number eight signifies. The Mishkan was filled with the presence of Hashem on the eighth day. The final day of the High Holiday cycle, Shmini Atzeret (lit. ‘The Eighth Festival’), is a celebration of the unique relationship Israel has with Hashem, not because of what we have done or will do, nor looking back to what Hashem has done for us. Rather the eighth day we celebrate because of the presence of the Infinite which is with us regardless of what we do.

It should come then as no surprise that the Greeks forbade circumcision. To the Greek mind, everything must have a function, even if that function is beauty. They celebrated aesthetics, enjoying art, sculpture, and the beauty of the Human form. The most celebrated people were athletes, artists, philosophers, mathematicians. People who excelled at some function. But celebrating just being with God? No way.

So circumcision was banned. Public teaching of Torah, keeping the Jewish calendar, months, festivals and Shabbat were also banned. Tefillin became contraband (Shabbat 130a). What do all these things have in common?

They are all called “signs”.

In the Shabbat morning Kiddush we read (Ex. 31:17) בְּיָמֵינוּ וּבְיַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “Between Me and The Children of Israel it (Shabbat) is a sign forever...” While certainly there is a functional rejuvenation that comes with the Day of Rest, the essence of Shabbat is not encapsulated in calling it a “day off of work”. We don’t earn Shabbat by working six days. Rather, Shabbat is about spending the day with God because our very essence is “with God”.

Like Shabbat, all these mitzvot which the Greeks banned are signs between us and God that we are together. That our relationship with God is not a function of our behavior. Rather, our behavior expresses our unbreakable bond with God – but it is a sign of that bond, not the cause.

The Menorah itself also has this essential element. In Parshat Beha’alotcha where Aaron is instructed how to light the Menorah it says, (Num. ch 8)” When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light towards the body of the Menorah”. The seven are meant to illuminate the eighth, the Menorah itself which is the essential symbol of the Jewish People. Why lean the wicks toward the menorah itself? Rashi tells us, “so that we shouldn’t think that God needs the light”. The light is not functional. Rather, “it is a testimony that The Shechina (God’s Presence) dwells with the Jewish people.” The Menorah itself is a symbol of this non-functional light which is the indicator of God’s presence in our life.

This dynamic is embedded in the halacha of the Chanukah candles and we say it as part of the “Hanerot Halalu” declaration when we’ve lit them. אין לנו רשות להשתמש בהם We are not permitted to make functional use of this light. That’s why we need a shamash, so that if we were to check our watch for example, we wouldn’t be “using” the cha-

nukah candles for their light. Rather the Chanukah lights tell us That God is miraculously present in our lives just as He was for our ancestors.

The message of Chanukah is that as we go about our lives, doing all of our functional activities, they can be merely part of the human experience of working towards seven. Or, if we do them “with God” they can be an infinite miracle. Our souls are called “God’s Candle” (Proverbs, 20:27) When we know that, we can shine God’s light in everything we do.



## The Circumstances for Discipline

RABBI SHMUEL SHANOWITZ

At the end of Parshas Beha'aloscha (Bamidbar 12:1), the Torah relates the well-known episode in which Miriam speaks about her brother Moshe and is subsequently punished with tzaraas and sent out of the camp for seven days.

This episode raises several questions. On the surface, Miriam's punishment appears disproportionate to her "crime." She is afflicted with tzaraas and removed from the camp simply for expressing concern about Moshe's separation from his wife. Furthermore, among the six events that we are commanded to remember every day is the incident of Miriam, as codified by the Rambam (Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 16:10), so that we learn to refrain from speaking lashon hara. Yet Miriam's intentions were not malicious. Rashi and other commentators emphasize that she meant well.

This leads to a deeper question. Why does the Torah choose Miriam as the primary example from which we learn the prohibition of speaking negatively about others? Moreover, the Torah itself recounts something unflattering about Miriam while instructing us not to speak negatively. At first glance, this may appear self-contradictory.

One possible understanding is that the Torah is not asking us to remember what Miriam did, but rather what Hashem did to Miriam. The commandment focuses on the Divine response, not on criticizing

Miriam herself. In fact, this incident was an extreme case — almost the polar opposite of typical gossip.

The Rambam himself highlights Miriam's greatness. She was older than Moshe, helped raise him, and even risked herself to save him as a child. She did not speak out of malice, nor did she attempt to embarrass him. Rather, she mistakenly compared Moshe to other prophets. Moshe himself was not bothered by her words at all, as the Torah testifies to his extraordinary humility.

When we hear Miriam's name, we are reminded of her towering stature and the immense contributions she made to the Jewish people. She persuaded her parents, Amram and Yocheved, to remarry at a time of despair, which ultimately led to the birth of Moshe. She helped ensure the survival of Jewish children despite Pharaoh's decrees. Building the Jewish family and the Jewish future was her life's mission.

It is precisely in this context that Miriam becomes the perfect example. She was so far removed from malicious gossip that her case represents the most innocent scenario imaginable. Her concern about Moshe's marriage was rooted in her lifelong devotion to the building of the Jewish people.

Now the Torah's choice becomes clear. By telling us to remember what happened to Miriam, the Torah creates a powerful sense of shock. If even a person as righteous and well-intentioned as Miriam, speaking with the purest motives, could experience such a severe consequence, how much more careful must ordinary people be regarding their speech.

The Torah therefore presents an extreme case. Miriam herself has nothing to be ashamed of — on the contrary, she remains a towering figure in Jewish history. Yet the Divine reaction demonstrates Hashem's extraordinary sensitivity to the dangers of harmful speech. The lesson becomes unforgettable precisely because it emerges from a case that is almost entirely free of wrongdoing.

A similar educational dynamic may be found in a puzzling story recorded in Likkutei Sichos (Vol. 2, p. 504). When the Frierdiker Rebbe

was about six years old, his father, the Rebbe Rashab, asked him to recite a blessing on his tzitzis. The young boy responded that he had already made the blessing. Nevertheless, the Rebbe Rashab instructed him to say the blessing again. The child respectfully insisted that he had already fulfilled the obligation.

In response, the Rebbe Rashab gave him a light slap and told him that when a father instructs his child, the instruction must be followed. This was the only time in his life that the Frierdiker Rebbe ever received such discipline from his father. Tearful, he protested, "If I need to make a blessing for Hashem, I have already made it. If I am making one for you..." Before he could finish, the Rebbe Rashab interrupted and clarified: "One makes a blessing because Hashem commands it. But fathers are responsible for enforcing Hashem's will, and they must be listened to."

This story too raises questions. Does an innocent child who sincerely believes he has already fulfilled a mitzvah warrant even a light slap? Shouldn't children be trusted, especially when they have a record of good behavior? The Rebbe Rashab, a master educator and the founder of the Tomchei Temimim yeshiva system, was certainly aware of these concerns. Why then was this story preserved and shared?

Perhaps the explanation parallels the lesson from Miriam. Precisely because the Frierdiker Rebbe was such an exceptional child, and precisely because the situation involved no real wrongdoing, the story becomes so powerful.

If the child had actually behaved poorly, the incident might not have been recorded or shared. In that case, the discipline could appear deserved and therefore less instructive. Instead, we encounter a situation where the child's reasoning is understandable and sincere. Yet the Rebbe Rashab chose that moment to convey a critical principle: children must be trained from a young age to follow the guidance and authority of their parents, even when other sincere considerations are present.

Because the Frierdiker Rebbe was such a remarkable child and the

Rebbe Rashab such a profound educator, the lesson carries far greater weight. The very greatness of the individuals involved magnifies the educational message.

In both cases, the Torah and our Rebbeim teach through examples that are almost entirely free of wrongdoing. Miriam remains one of the greatest heroines of Jewish history, and the Frierdiker Rebbe was an extraordinary child raised by a master educator. Yet precisely in these exceptional cases we see how seriously the Torah regards the power of speech and the importance of discipline and obedience in education.

Disclaimer: The purpose of these reflections is to draw lessons from the narratives presented. The writer does not claim to fully understand the depth of either the Torah's account of Miriam or the conduct of our Rebbeim.

