With God’s help

Yeshivah Al Beit Midrash

Tanya — Iggeret HaKodesh 20

Unity, Creation, and Action

A commentary in twenty chapters
Based on research in Kabbalah and Chassidut

A consolidated edition for the beginning reader

An extensive commentary, from the Epistle’s wording to the depth of its argument

20 Tishrei 5787

Iggeret HaKodesh 20: Commentary and Study

A Book for Continuous Study

20 Tishrei 5787

Twenty chapters, four parts, and a guide to further study

The twenty chapters, introduction, approaches to study, case studies, glossary, and source index. The wording of the Epistle is preserved in full and in order, with an identifying label beside each passage; unresolved questions are marked where they arise.

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Preface

Iggeret HaKodesh 20 is short: the text on which this book is based contains 1,640 Hebrew words. Yet it touches on one of the most fundamental questions a person can ask: how does a world full of limits, differences, and multiplicity emerge from the one Creator, Who has no limit, and what is the human being's place in such a world? It opens with the Zohar's words, "He and His life-giving emanations are one; He and His organs are one," meaning that He and His lights are one, and He and His vessels are one. It proceeds to the vessels, which have limits, and to created beings coming into existence "something from

nothing”: a new reality that is not a continuation of something preceding it. From there it descends to the vitality within the worlds, to the power of growth in the earth, and finally to a mitzvah performed with one’s hands upon a physical object. Along the way, the reader encounters many names and concepts. To keep the thread from being lost, at every stage the book shows what question is being asked, how the Epistle’s wording answers it, and what question continues to accompany us.

How This Library Came into Being

The path to this book began with the publication of research into a variety of Jewish questions. For a year or more, we published investigations of different subjects. Each investigation advanced in rounds: we asked questions, gathered sources, compared answers, and returned to points that were still unclear. In time, readers responded: the research material was interesting, but difficult to read in its existing form. It was not easy to follow a question from one round to the next, remember which answer had been corrected, and know what remained of the discussion at its conclusion.

The booklets grew out of that request. Each booklet was devoted to a single study, presenting its development in a form that could be read continuously.

Usually, three, four, or five rounds of investigation preceded it. Some booklets were short and others more extensive, depending on the question and what was needed to explain it. By the time this book was prepared, we had published twelve booklets.

The work on Iggeret HaKodesh 20 likewise did not begin with a plan to write a large book. We had seven principal investigations before us, each arising from a question about the Epistle's wording. When we brought them together, it became clear how far the study had expanded. We had a great deal of material, but the reader still needed a path: where to begin, how one question related to another, and what needed to be understood before moving to the next sentence.

This led to the decision to prepare a book of commentary and study alongside three research volumes. The research volumes preserve the depth of the investigation and the approaches examined; the reader's book arranges the material according to the Epistle's progression and leads through it step by step. The seven investigations are the foundation of the research, and the twenty chapters are the form of study built from it. Thus, the four books serve complementary purposes: one can study the commentary continuously and turn to the research volumes when seeking a deeper understanding of the path that led to it.

The readers' original request continues to guide us here as well. A clear explanation requires additional work from the writer: choosing the order of presentation, introducing a concept at the right moment, explaining why a distinction is needed, and allowing the reader time to understand. The hope is that someone encountering the Epistle for the first time will find a way through it, and that someone who has already studied it will find room for a new question.

From Research to Book

Here I also want to share the cost of the work. The seven principal investigations required, by my estimate, about six hours of my time; preparing the book from the material already gathered required about sixty hours, roughly ten times as much. During the research rounds, I could pose a question, pass answers between the systems, and request further investigation, then turn to something else while they worked. Making a continuous book required me to return, check, and correct time and again.[1]

[1] The time estimates and description of the working environment are the research initiator's personal testimony, supplied for this book: approximately six hours for the seven principal investigations and approximately sixty hours to prepare the book from the collected material. In the early stages he reported using Grok 4.6, Claude Opus 5 and a little Opus 5.5 and Fable, and Astra in the ChatGPT environment. For the concluding stages he added: Astra at Medium, High, Extra High and the maximum level; Sol 6.1; Grok Heavy, Grok 4.7 and Grok Bot; and, in Claude, Sonata, with which, he reports, the last final check was conducted. The tool names are given as reported. Version details and response times were only partially preserved in the research volumes (Research Book, vol. I, pp. 97–99, 105–107; vol. III, pp. 2866–2867).

A particularly difficult surprise awaited me in tasks that appeared simple. Transferring files from Google Drive to GitHub, a system for storing files and their versions, became complicated: a file that seemed to have been transferred turned out to be incomplete, and sometimes only a reference to it had been saved. I had to check what had actually arrived and repeat the transfer. Thus, alongside the ability to assist with complex inquiry, I encountered difficulty completing an operation that seemingly required little thought. That was the experience of working with the tools available to me at the time.

There were also long waits, systems that stopped, and the need to resume work that had already seemed complete. This involved exertion of mind and body, and at times was genuinely exhausting. I relate this to give the reader a faithful picture of the process: the tools made it possible to produce a great deal of material quickly, while turning it into a book whose continuity could be trusted and from which one could learn demanded a different kind of labor. This experience, too, is part of what the book seeks to teach.

What the Book Seeks to Give the Reader

The book seeks to give the reader four things.

A complete path through the Epistle. Its wording is presented in full and in order, in 179 short passages,

each explained: first what the words say, then what question they resolve, and finally what they contribute to the argument. No prior knowledge of Kabbalah is required. A new concept is explained where it is needed, and the glossary at the end of the book helps the reader return to it.

Understanding that can be shared. The aim is that, at the end of the study, the reader will be able to explain to a study partner, family members, or students what the Epistle asks, how it answers, and why these matters bear on the mitzvot one performs every day.

A way of working. The book openly shares the investigative process behind it and teaches how any learner can use artificial-intelligence tools, programs to which one can write in ordinary language and receive written replies, to ask questions, open a source, compare, and verify. It also teaches how to ensure that the tool remains a tool: the source is examined directly, and decisions on Torah questions remain in the hands of learners and rabbis.

Honesty about the limits of knowledge. Where the inquiry has reached a conclusion, it is stated clearly. Where a question remains, it is presented as a question, worded as precisely as possible. One can understand two possibilities and remain unable to decide between them; one can identify the source of a power without knowing how to describe every stage of

its operation. In such a case, the commentary's role is to clarify the limit of knowledge so that the remaining question becomes more precise.

The commentary is divided into twenty chapters that follow the order of the Epistle. This division is a teaching device of the book and is not attributed to the Epistle's author. The four parts grouping the chapters help the reader see the whole argument, while the exact sequence of the words is preserved within them. A single sentence may require an entire chapter, while several sentences may together form a single argument; a chapter's length is determined by the investigation it requires, rather than by the number of words it explains.

The two aims, studying the Epistle in depth and learning how to continue asking, checking, and exploring with the tools available to us, are connected. For this reason, substantial space is also given here to working with artificial intelligence. The introduction offers a first acquaintance with both. There we also ask what can be learned from the words of the Rebbe, His Holiness the Lubavitcher Rebbe, about the emergence of communication technologies in their time, and how that perspective may inform our approach to the new conversational tools, so that wonder at the possibility becomes a question about its use. A detailed discussion of methods, examples, and exercises

follows the twenty chapters, in “Studying Further” and the case studies; readers may turn to it before, during, or after their reading.

Bringing to Light, for the Learner Too

In his talk on Shabbat of the Torah portions Nitzavim–Vayelech, 23 Elul 5742, the Rebbe urged the publication of collections of Torah insights and examined the usual Hebrew expression for publishing a book: “bringing to light.” The insights exist before they are printed, and printing brings them forth and reveals them; publication also adds a further quality to their light. This does not mean that they had no light at all before printing. The Rebbe explains that light has many levels, and publication adds another level.[2]

This thought accompanies the preparation of the present book. An investigation preserved in working papers can already benefit the person who undertook it. To benefit another learner as well, it must take a form that the learner can enter: a clearly formulated question, explained concepts, an argument that can be followed, and a clear distinction between what has been established and what remains open. Writing for another person obliges us to ask again whether we

[2] Talk of Shabbat Parashat Nitzavim–Vayelech, 23 Elul 5742, section 18; Torat Menachem—Hitvaaduyot 5742, vol. IV, p. 2237 and following. See the talk on the Rebbe’s books website and the volume’s contents. The account here is based on the passage as reprinted in the booklet “כינוס הכנה לי״א ניסן ק״כ שנה,” the Montreal shluchim, pp. י–יא [10–11]. The connection to the work of commentary undertaken in this book is our proposal.

understand what we are trying to explain. Sometimes the very attempt to clarify a sentence reveals a missing link.

This also has a connection with the subject of the Epistle, which deals extensively with light and revelation and with the relationship between the source of an influence and its recipients. The connection we propose is a way of thinking about the work of study and writing. The Rebbe's words about publishing Torah insights are not presented here as his commentary on Iggeret HaKodesh 20, and publishing a book is not an analogy explaining the world's creation from nothing. In editing, we work with things already studied and written, seeking to bring them from the relative concealment of research files to revelation and understanding in the reader.

Publication is therefore also tested in the encounter with the person who opens the book: will that person be able to understand the question, weigh the explanation, question it, and continue learning? The transition from research to booklet, and from booklets to a book of commentary, answers the same request we heard at the beginning. The learning gathered here seeks to become learning that can be shared. The reading map on the following pages offers each reader a suitable path.

Reading Map

This map is intended to help every reader find a way through the book. It first introduces several basic concepts, then the progression of the four parts, and finally several ways in: for beginners, for those who have already studied Tanya and Chassidut, and for those chiefly interested in learning how to study with artificial intelligence.

Basic Concepts before Beginning

All these concepts are explained at length in the chapters themselves, and most also appear in the glossary at the end of the book. Here, a first acquaintance is enough, so that the names will not come as a surprise when they first appear.

Ein Sof, the Infinite. A designation for Divinity insofar as it has no limit or definition whatsoever. In the Zohar's language at the opening of the Epistle, it is called "Ihu," "He." Later in the book, the distinction between "Or Ein Sof," the Ein Sof light, which is revelation, and the Creator's Essence will become clear.

Light and vessel. "Light," or, is language for revelation and vitality; physical light is not meant. A "vessel," keli, is that which determines the form and measure of revelation. In every sentence, one must establish which light and which vessel are meant, because not

all the vessels mentioned in the Epistle are the same recipient.

Sefirot. The ten aspects through which Divine light is revealed and differentiated into defined attributes: Chochmah, Binah, Daat, Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut. (In one enumeration, Keter takes the place of Daat.) The sefirot have lights and vessels, giving rise to the Epistle's first question: how are vessels that have limits united with Ein Sof?

Malchut. The last of the ten sefirot, the aspect through which Divine power is directed toward created beings. In the Epistle, it is also described as "Keter from below upward": the conclusion that has a special relationship to the beginning. Thus "last" does not mean only lower than those preceding it; its relationship to the source and its role toward created beings must also be examined. This is discussed in chapter 8.

Atzilut and BYA. "Atzilut" is the level at which the lights of the sefirot and their vessels are united with Divinity. It is followed by three worlds, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, abbreviated BYA. In them, a created reality already exists, although a Divine radiance that gives it life shines within them too.

Cause and effect, and something from nothing. "Cause and effect," ilah and alul, is a relationship in which the effect derives from its cause and the two

share a measure of commensurability. This does not mean that they are equal in level: the effect may be lower than its source and still derive from it in a way that retains a relation between the two. "Something from nothing," yesh me-ayin, is the coming into being of a new reality that is not a continuation of a nature preceding it. The "nothing," ayin, does not mean the absence of a Creator or a power bringing into being. The question is not merely whether the thing existed previously, but whether its coming into being can be explained as a continuation of its source through cause and effect. The distinction between these two modes underlies chapters 1–3.

Vitality. The Divine power that gives life to and sustains every created being at every moment. Much of the Epistle examines where each world's vitality comes from and how it reaches all the way to the earth. Along the way, we will distinguish three questions: on what does the created being's existence depend, how does it come into being from nothing, and what constitutes an added revelation within it? These are three questions about the same created being, not three stages in time.

Kav, sovev, and returning light. Terms concerning the manner in which light is revealed and its relation to recipients. "Drawing down" is not a transfer from one physical location to another; it describes how a revelation reaches a recipient. "Kav," the line, is the

drawing down of light in an ordered and measured manner. “Sovev,” encompassing light, is light that is not received according to the recipients’ measure; it does not mean light located spatially outside the world. “Returning light,” or chozer, is a radiance described as “from below upward”; chapter 15 will explain its connection to the conclusion of the kav. One should not picture the reflection of a physical ray here. These concepts are explained chiefly in chapters 7, 11–15, and 18.

Artificial intelligence and prompt. In this book, “artificial intelligence” means programs to which one can write in ordinary language and which reply in writing: explaining, suggesting sources, comparing, and critiquing. A “prompt” is the question or request written to the tool. The tool’s answer is a proposal to be checked; it is not yet a source.

Four Parts, One Argument

Part One, chapters 1–6, builds the language in which one can speak about unity, finitude, and created reality. The distinction between cause and effect and something from nothing accompanies the discussion of vessels, souls, and palaces. Chapter 2 also discusses the apprehension of Moses our teacher.

In Part Two, chapters 7–10, the question becomes sharper: to whom is the power to bring into being

attributed, and how is its operation described in the light and vessels? The discussion passes through Malchut and the letters, and through the analogy of gestation and birth, arriving at the root of Torah and mitzvot. At each stage, it is worth distinguishing three things: the source of the power, the way it is drawn down, and the place of its revelation.

Part Three, chapters 11–16, first discusses vitality and coming into being in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, then the distinctive quality revealed in the earth and the power of growth. On the basis of this investigation, chapter 16 opens the question of sowing, planting, and human service.

Part Four, chapters 17–20, examines the relationship between the lower realm and its root through food, Chochmah and Daat, the sacrifice, and the living creatures of the chariot. At its conclusion, we return to the purpose of the argument: the distinctive quality of Torah and practical mitzvot in this world.

After the twenty chapters come a short chapter returning to the first question; “Studying Further,” a section about research tools and artificial intelligence, with a continuous worked example and prompts that can be copied; eight case studies showing how conclusions changed in light of the sources; a glossary; and a source index.

Twenty Chapters: What Are We Looking for at Each Stage?

The table is intended to help readers find their bearings. On a first reading, it is enough to look through the questions column; the formulations in the final column will become clearer when you return to them after studying the chapter. That column points to the distinction worth taking away from the chapter; it does not replace the commentary or its qualifications.

Chapter	Guiding question	What to carry forward
1	How can finitude and unity be spoken of together?	Definition does not necessarily mean separation.
2	What can chainlike descent explain?	A descent in level does not by itself explain the coming into being of yesh.
3	If everything is nullified, why is the created being called yesh?	Dependence on the source, apprehension of the source, and the relationship between their natures are different questions.
4	Where does yesh begin?	A created vessel is distinguished from the Divine neshamah that gives it life.
5	Does everything in Atzilut have the same status?	Source, world, and status are not three names for the same thing.
6	What does the parenthetical passage about souls and worlds add?	Even the exceptional possibility remains within the limits of the word “possible.”

Chapter	Guiding question	What to carry forward
7	To whom does the power to create belong?	The power belongs to the Emanator alone; its operation in the vessels does not give them independence.
8	Where is the power revealed in distinct created beings?	Malchut and letters explain the place of revelation and differentiation.
9	What does birth teach?	The transition from inclusion to distinctness reveals a power; the analogy does not detail its entire mechanism.
10	How does the relationship between Torah and mitzvot change?	Root, place of revelation, and purpose require different criteria.
11	How does union operate in created worlds?	The union is local; the creative power operating in it belongs to the Emanator, rather than to the local world.
12	Who receives the three levels of radiance?	The level of the light and the status of the recipient are not interchangeable.
13	What does the language of sovev add?	Presence, inwardly vested vitality, and the bestowal of power are discussed in different relationships.
14	What becomes evident specifically in the earth?	Superiority in action is not superiority in apprehension.
15	Why is the conclusion important for understanding this superiority?	The illuminating sovev is distinguished from the kav that illuminates from below upward.
16	What does human service add?	The power to produce growth is given; sowing and planting elicit a finer manifestation.

Chapter	Guiding question	What to carry forward
17	How does the lower give to the higher?	The revealed order of levels does not exhaust their relationship to the root.
18	What does food add to Chochmah and Daat?	A person's dependence on food does not make food capable of apprehension.
19	How does the sacrifice add to its higher source?	Refinement and revelation of the root are not the return of a deposit just as it was received.
20	How does the argument come together in the mitzvah?	Action receives its purpose through the commandment, within the physical world.

Ways into the Book

For beginners. Read the preface and the basic concepts above. From the introduction, begin with four sections: "Few Words, a Whole World of Meaning," "Two Aims for One Book," "An Epistle within the Foundational Book," and "How Do We Study This Book?" The other sections can be read when you want to know where the commentary came from and how it was built. Then study the chapters in order. On a first reading of a chapter, you may follow the Epistle's wording and the explanation after it, leaving the footnotes for a second reading. Sections whose opening says they may be revisited on a second reading can be skipped the first time. When an unfamiliar term appears, open the glossary. Each chapter ends with a summary of what has been

clarified and, where a difficulty remains, what still requires investigation; it is worth reading this before proceeding. If a chapter seems too demanding, you may continue and return to it: the argument is built gradually, and it is often easier to revisit a chapter after seeing what follows it.

For those who have already studied Tanya and Chassidut. You may go from the preface to "How Do We Study This Book?" and then to chapter 1. Pay particular attention to places where a familiar concept takes on a more precise sense in the Epistle: a "neshamah" that is not a human soul, "vessels" that are not the same recipient everywhere, "above" that sometimes means the revealed level and sometimes the root from which it comes. The notes and references to the research book show where each explanation comes from, and the introduction's "Four Examples from the Investigation" shows how initial readings were corrected.

For those wishing to learn how to study with artificial intelligence. In the introduction, read "Two Aims for One Book" and "Behind the Simple Explanation," followed by the sections on our time and its tools: "A New Revelation in a Later Generation," "Standing on Their Shoulders, and Opening the Books," "Hearing from Afar, Now," "From Listening to Conversation," and "A Stone Will Cry Out from the

Wall." From there, turn to "Studying Further," especially "Studying with a Readily Available Partner: Where to Begin," "The Working Method at a Glance," the continuous worked example "How Did Moses Apprehend, If 'My Face Shall Not Be Seen'?", "Six Prompts You Can Copy," and "How to Check That a Source Is Real." The continuous example concerns a question studied in chapter 2, so it is worth studying that chapter alongside it to see how investigation becomes explanation. Then move to the eight case studies and try the approach yourself with the exercises at the end of each chapter.

For study with a partner or in a class. Each passage of the Epistle forms a natural study unit: read it aloud, try to explain it yourselves, and only then read the commentary. The four questions at the end of the map can be asked about every passage.

How a Chapter Is Structured

The section "What We Already Know" at the beginning of each chapter is also intended for someone returning to the book after a break or opening a chapter on its own. During continuous reading, while the material is still fresh, you can move straight from it to the chapter's question; when a difficulty arises, return to it for a brief reminder.

In each chapter, the wording of the Epistle is presented in short passages set as quotations; in the chapters, such a passage is sometimes also called a “unit.” Two identifying details appear to the left of each passage: its permanent identifier, such as W01-01, and its word range, such as “source words 1–7.” The identifier is used for precise reference to the passage and for checking it. The number after the letter W indicates the chapter number in the book: chapter 12, for example, contains the labels W12-01 and so on. The number after the hyphen gives the order of the passages within the chapter. The word ranges preserve the counts of the Hebrew source groups, so the number 1 may recur at the beginning of a new group. The Epistle’s sequence is preserved in the order of the passages, and the lengths of the 179 ranges total 1,640 Hebrew words.

The commentary follows the passage: first what the words say, then what question they resolve, and finally what is added to the argument. An analogy or image is accompanied by clarification of what it teaches and where its limits lie.

Each chapter begins with “What We Already Know,” briefly recalling only what is needed for the chapter at hand, and closes with a summary of what has been clarified and, where applicable, what remains open. The summary is followed by “Studying the Chapter with Artificial-Intelligence Tools”: several exercises

tied to the chapter's wording, each with three parts, what to ask the tool, what to check in the source ourselves, and where the conclusion's limits lie. General exercises that do not depend on a particular chapter are collected in "Studying Further," under "General Exercises for Every Chapter." The exercises do not depend on a particular tool. They can be skipped on a first reading and revisited later.

The notes appear at the foot of the page on which they are cited. They refer to the sources and to the "research book," the three research volumes from which the commentary grew, described in the introduction. The English research volumes use one continuous sequence of page numbers: Volume II begins on page 1088 and Volume III on page 1862, and the references follow that continuous pagination. The Rebbe's talks are sometimes cited from a "reviewed and corrected" text, which the Rebbe examined, and sometimes from an "unreviewed transcript," a record made by listeners that did not undergo his review. The notes identify this status so that the reader knows the weight of each formulation.

Four Questions for a Sentence, and One for a Chapter

It is worth carrying four questions throughout the reading: about whom is the sentence speaking? What

action is attributed to that subject? In relation to which recipient? And what has changed since the preceding sentence? These questions are particularly useful when the same term, such as neshamah, ruach, or vessels, appears in several contexts.

There is a fifth, practical question at the beginning of each chapter: what question does this chapter come to resolve, and which does it deliberately leave for the next? Answering it prevents the reader from demanding of one chapter what the book develops across an entire argument.

At the beginning of many chapters, you will also find a short list of subsidiary questions. These break the chapter's question into its components, and there is no need to memorize them: at the chapter's conclusion, you can check which have been answered and which remain open.

A Note on the Text of This Book

Within the book, one must distinguish the wording of the Epistle, the words of the additional sources, and the commentary offered to the reader. The Epistle's passages have been preserved in their wording and sequence, with an identifying label beside each to allow precise reference. See "How a Chapter Is Structured" in the reading map.

The footnotes refer to the sources and the research volumes. Questions not yet resolved are marked where they arise, allowing further study.

Introduction to the Commentary

Few Words, a Whole World of Meaning

How does a world full of differences, limits, and multiplicity emerge from the one Creator, Who has no limit? And if the light of the Holy One, blessed be He, gives life to everything, why does the world appear to us as a reality standing on its own? How is it possible that the earth's soil, which seems the simplest and lowest of things, reveals a power that the higher levels do not reveal in the same way? These questions are the backbone of Iggeret HaKodesh 20. They lead the learner, step by step, from Divine unity to the meaning of a mitzvah performed with one's hands in the physical world.

Before us is a unit within the Tanya in which a single word, an example, or a brief transition may carry an entire subject. It should therefore not be read like an article that one skims and leaves behind. Concepts familiar from other parts of the book return here in new contexts: light and vessel, nullification and separate existence, soul and body, Torah and mitzvot.

Sometimes the very same word demands a pause: does “neshamah” here mean a human soul, or the Divine power that gives life to a world? Is a “vessel” a vessel of Atzilut, or a created vessel that receives its light? Does “above” indicate the revealed level, or the root from which it comes? These small questions open the larger ones.

Two Aims for One Book

This book has two interwoven aims. The first is to understand Iggeret HaKodesh 20 deeply, in accessible language: to consider every word, ask the questions it raises, and emerge with an understanding that can also be explained to others. The second is to teach how any learner can use artificial-intelligence tools to ask, search, compare, check, and explore independently. The second aim is an invitation to the learner, and its place in the book is as central as the first. Someone who studies the introduction and the section on approaches to study will be able to open a conversation with such a tool, put a sentence from the Epistle before it, and begin to learn by the method used to build the present book.

To begin, there is no need to be a programmer, write code, or know technical terms. One asks an ordinary question in the language most comfortable to the learner and requests further explanation again and

again, without shame or embarrassment. Someone unfamiliar with the concepts can start at the very beginning and advance gradually. The experience is somewhat like a study partner available at any hour: you can challenge it, request a source, or ask it to explain again from a different angle. But such a study partner is not a rabbi, and its answer is not a ruling. The tool does not exempt the learner from learning itself; decisions on Torah questions remain in the hands of learners and rabbis who open and examine the sources. In the section on approaches to study later in the book, we will work together, step by step, through a single continuous example from the research behind the book, and also see how to check that a source is real.

The two aims support one another. The commentary on the Epistle is the content; the working method is the tool through which the commentary was built, and the book shares it openly so that the learner can follow it independently. The names of the systems we used, given in “Studying Further,” bear witness to how the work was done; the tools themselves will change and improve. The learning process will remain: asking, studying, opening a source, comparing, examining, and deepening understanding.

An Epistle within the Foundational Book

The Epistle before us is section 20 of Iggeret HaKodesh, the fourth part of Tanya. Iggeret HaKodesh contains thirty-two epistles, followed by Kuntres Acharon, printed as a separate part.[3] Its place within Tanya gives its study a particular context: it forms part of the foundational book of Chabad Chassidut and of an argument that leads understanding of Divinity toward human service.

In his talk on Shabbat of the Torah portion Noach, 5721, the Rebbe explains that Tanya is the "Written Torah" of Chassidic teaching. This includes Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah and Iggeret HaTeshuvah, "and even Iggeret HaKodesh, which was printed later by the author's sons, is also included in the 'Written Torah,' since it was written by our master the Alter Rebbe himself." By contrast, the discourses in Torah Or and Likkutei Torah were delivered orally by the Alter Rebbe and subsequently written down by the Mitteler Rebbe and by Maharil of Yanovitch.[4]

[3] The order of the parts of Tanya: Likkutei Amarim, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, Iggeret HaTeshuvah, Iggeret HaKodesh (sections 1–32), and Kuntres Acharon. On the count of thirty-two epistles and Kuntres Acharon as a separate part, see also the talk of Shabbat Parashat Chayei Sarah 5726, section 9, an unreviewed transcript, text of the talk, as cited in the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 107–108.

[4] Talk of Shabbat Parashat Noach, the second day of Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan 5721, section 1, an unreviewed transcript. The talk states: "By way of introduction: Tanya is the Written Torah of the teachings of Chassidut, and this also includes Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah and Iggeret HaTeshuvah. Even Iggeret HaKodesh, which was subsequently printed by the author's sons, is also included in the 'Written Torah,' since it was written by our master the Alter Rebbe himself. By contrast, the discourses in Torah Or and Likkutei Torah were delivered orally by our master the Alter Rebbe, and were subsequently written down by the Mitteler Rebbe and by Maharil of

The designation thus distinguishes what the Alter Rebbe himself wrote, word by word, from his teachings delivered orally and recorded by others. It expresses an attitude toward a book that is a written foundation from which extensive explanations develop; it does not transfer the laws of a Torah scroll to Tanya. It is an approach to study: great precision concerning what was written, and dedication to understanding the depth conveyed within the words. This bears directly on our study, since the wording of the Epistle that we seek to understand is part of that written foundation.

In his talk of 19 Kislev 5730, the Rebbe returns to the meaning of this designation, explaining how matters embedded in Tanya's wording can be revealed through explanation and expansion at a later time. The notes to the talk also identify a source in the words of the Rebbe Rayatz.[5] From this comes the standard we set for our commentary: if what is revealed later is already contained within the wording itself, every explanation we add must be judged by its ability to return the reader to the Alter Rebbe's words with more open eyes. The learner should sense why every word was said and how the particular combination of words opens an entire world.

Yanovitch." Note 5 there states: "See Igrot Kodesh, ibid., p. רסא [261] and following," meaning Igrot Kodesh of the Rebbe Rayatz, vol. IV.

[5]Talk on the night following Shabbat Parashat Vayishlach, 19 Kislev 5730, section 49, an unreviewed transcript. Note 323 cites Igrot Kodesh of the Rebbe Rayatz, vol. IV, p. רסא [261] and following.

An Epistle from the Alter Rebbe's Final Days

The Alter Rebbe's grandson, the Tzemach Tzedek, testifies to the time of the Epistle's writing in his Derech Mitzvotecha: it was written "in the days before his passing in the village of Piena." This testimony has interpretive weight. The Tzemach Tzedek cites it in a discussion of the very question with which our Epistle opens: whether the vessels of the sefirot are "truly in a mode of finitude" and yet "are Divinity, to create something from nothing." He writes that "greater reliance should be placed" on this discourse, because it is "from the actual sacred manuscript," the Alter Rebbe's own holy handwriting, written in his final days. The Rebbe quotes this testimony and identifies its source in Derech Mitzvotecha; it also appears at the opening of Lessons in Tanya on this Epistle.[6] This knowledge adds reverence and seriousness to the study: in those days, the Alter Rebbe committed to writing profound foundations concerning the Creator, creation, and its purpose, and the Tzemach Tzedek

[6] Derech Mitzvotecha, Discourses of the Tzemach Tzedek, "תקס"ב (ביאור ושבתה)," 170a: "However, in Iggeret HaKodesh, folio 16a, in the discourse 'Ihu vechayohi,' etc., it appears explicitly that the vessels are actually finite, and nevertheless they are Divinity, to create yesh me-ayin; see there at length. One should rely more on the above discourse, for it is from my master's own holy handwriting, of blessed memory, which he wrote in the days before his passing in the village of Piena." Text on Sefaria, Kehot edition. "דט"ז א'" is the folio reference in the edition of the Epistle available to the Tzemach Tzedek. The Rebbe's Igrot Kodesh, vol. XVI, letter 6,016, 28 Tevet 5718, in a note: "See Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20 (which he wrote in the days before his passing in the village of Piena—Derech Mitzvotecha 170a)." Likewise at the opening of Lessons in Tanya on Epistle 20.

regarded this manuscript as testimony deserving particular reliance.

This testimony about the time and place of writing does not establish whether the Epistle was completed at the point where the text that reached us ends. The closing words, “Thus far we have found,” are a note on the transmission of the text; their status and the limits of the testimony will be discussed in chapter 20.

The Epistle’s importance is also evident from its content. It asks how the limited vessels of the sefirot can be united with Ein Sof. It distinguishes something that derives successively from its source from a created being that comes into existence from nothing. It examines the status of souls, angels, and worlds; leads toward Malchut, gestation, and birth; and describes how Divine radiance reaches the very lowest realm. Finally, it turns to what lies before our eyes: soil producing growth, a seed becoming a tree, a person nourished by plants and animals, and the performance of a mitzvah with a physical object.

It thus becomes clear that study of the most exalted matters touches everyday life. The Epistle arrives at physical action through the very understanding of creation, as the purpose of the entire argument. Anyone seeking to know why parchment tefillin, woolen tzitzit, and giving charity in this world matter so greatly is invited to follow the Epistle from the

highest root to the deed itself. Understanding the argument may bring new vitality to what a person already does every day.

Why Were They Called Scribes?

Tractate Kiddushin states: "The early sages were therefore called soferim [scribes, or counters], because they counted all the letters in the Torah." The Gemara then reports what they said about the Torah's midpoint: the vav of גחון, "belly," marks the middle of its letters; דרש דרש, "diligently inquired," the middle of its words; and והתגלח, "he shall shave," the middle of its verses. A baraita counting the verses of the Torah follows. When Rav Yosef was asked to determine whether the vav of גחון belonged to the first half or the second, he replied: "They were expert in defective and plene spellings; we are not expert," meaning that they knew the spellings with omitted or added vowel letters, while we do not possess that expertise.[7]

We learn two things from this. The first is an attitude toward a text in which no detail is skipped: the letter joins the word, the word the sentence, and the sentence a complete argument. Counting safeguards precision; study seeks to understand meaning. The second is

[7] Kiddushin 30a: "Therefore the early sages were called soferim, for they counted all the letters of the Torah. They would say: the vav of gachon is the midpoint of the letters of the Torah scroll; darosh darash, the midpoint of the words; vehitgalach, of the verses." Later in the discussion, Rav Yosef says: "They were expert in defective and plene spellings; we are not expert." Text on Sefaria. Calling Tanya the "Written Torah" expresses its foundational status in the teachings of Chassidut; the comparison here concerns precision in study, not the laws of a Torah scroll.

humility: even an exact count depends on knowledge we do not always possess, and someone who counts must also know what they do not know. From the scribes, we learn a practice of attentiveness.

We took this as a model for the commentary's working method. Every word in the Epistle deserves attention. "Alone" may prevent a mistaken understanding of a sentence; "possible" and "it is reasonable to say" indicate the degree of certainty assigned to a conclusion; "and likewise" adds a case; "however" changes direction; "and from this" connects the end of the Epistle with what was explained earlier. Sometimes familiar abbreviations conceal a difference between two systems. Sometimes a small pronoun, such as "in them" or "theirs," determines the subject of the entire sentence.

The version of the Epistle on which this book is based contains **1,640 Hebrew words**, divided into 179 short source passages. The identifying label and word range appear to the left of each passage, as explained in the reading map. The count includes the transmission note at the end of the Epistle; abbreviations are counted as printed.

Counting words alone, however, is not commentary. One can go over every word and still miss the question for which the paragraph was written. We will therefore follow two paths together: preserve the sequence of the

wording and investigate the idea it expresses. The aim is for the learner to understand what is said, why it is said here, and how it changes the understanding of what follows.

Estimating How Many Drops There Are in the Sea

From exact counting, we turned to another question: how does one approach a depth that cannot be counted letter by letter? Tractate Horayot relates that Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua sailed on a ship. Rabban Gamliel brought bread, while Rabbi Yehoshua also brought fine flour. When Rabban Gamliel's bread ran out, he used Rabbi Yehoshua's flour and asked how he had anticipated the delay. Rabbi Yehoshua explained that he knew of a star that rises once every seventy years and misleads sailors, and he had feared that it might delay them too. Rabban Gamliel wondered that a person with such knowledge needed to undertake a sea journey. Rabbi Yehoshua directed his attention to two of his students on land, Rabbi Elazar Chisma and Rabbi Yochanan ben Gudgada: they knew how to estimate how many drops there are in the sea, yet had neither bread to eat nor clothing to wear. Rabban Gamliel decided to appoint them to positions of communal

leadership. When they came to him, he made clear that leadership is servitude and service to the community.[8]

The story concerns leadership as servitude and a leader's responsibility to put his students' wisdom at the community's service. For our purposes, one image is especially illuminating: an immense sea, and before it a wisdom capable of considering even its drops. The Gemara says "to estimate": to encompass by calculation and assessment what the eye cannot count.

The sea itself also appears in halachah under the category "waters without an end," and here too we must listen to what the words mean. In tractate Yevamot, in the laws concerning a woman whose husband fell into water, the Gemara asks: "What are waters that have an end?" Abaye answers: "Any place where one stands and can see in all four directions." Waters that have an end are waters that a person standing beside them can see on every side, so that if the person who fell in emerged, he would be seen. "Waters without an end" are waters that the eye cannot encompass; later in the discussion, it becomes clear that even a still lake falls into this category, because its waves may carry the person who fell in to a place outside the observer's view.[9] The definition concerns

[8] Horayot 10a–10b. The Gemara's wording: "Who know how to estimate how many drops there are in the sea, yet have neither bread to eat nor a garment to wear"; and later: "Do you imagine that I am giving you authority? I am giving you servitude." Text on Sefaria. The Gemara's wording "to estimate" (לשער) has been retained.

[9] Yevamot 121a: "What constitutes water that has an end? Abaye said: wherever one can stand and see its four sides." There follows the incident involving Rav Shila, who equated a still lake

what someone standing on the shore can see and keep under observation; it does not establish that the number of drops is literally infinite.

This very distinction gives the analogy its force. Something may be bounded and yet, from a person's perspective, appear as an expanse without an edge. The sage does not deny the sea's immensity; he finds a way to approach it through precise thought. So too in our study: the Epistle contains a limited number of words, but it does not follow that investigation of their meaning has reached its end. A short work may carry a depth to which a learner returns again and again, discovering another connection, another question, and another understanding with each reading.

Unity and Multiplicity, without Limit and within Limit

The content itself adds another layer to the analogy. The Epistle deals with infinite power and limited realities. The Creator is one; created beings are many and different. Chochmah is not Chesed, the vegetative is not the animal, and a soul is not a body. Each created being appears in a particular measure, yet its existence does not stand by its own power. How can unity and multiplicity, limitless power and a world containing

with water that has an end, then retracted: "But that is not so: since there are waves, say that the waves carried him down." Text on Sefaria. "Water that has no end" is defined in the discussion through its opposite.

limits, be understood together? This is the question at the heart of the entire Epistle.

The book we offer is bounded too. It has a beginning and an end, chapters and pages. We seek to establish an orderly path toward a subject that no human explanation exhausts. The sea analogy teaches about the learner's stance, not about Divinity itself: the infinitude of the Holy One, blessed be He, is not an enormously large number of words or worlds. What the analogy teaches is humility before depth, alongside a willingness to work precisely within the measure granted to us. Every word we understand well will illuminate its neighbor, and every question properly formulated will open a path forward.

The Sea Covers a Whole World of Life

Someone looking at the sea from the shore may see a uniform expanse of water; within it teem life, movement, and many differences. So too with the Epistle: behind its short sentences about unity and vessels, a world of distinctions opens. Our Sages taught: "Everything found on land is found in the sea, except the weasel." Immediately before this, the words of Rabbi Akiva are cited. He would say of this, "How manifold are Your works, O G-d": "You have creatures that grow in the sea, and You have creatures that grow on land. Those in the sea, if they rise onto land, die

immediately; those on land, if they descend into the sea, die immediately."[10] The example directs our attention to a world that is not visible as dry land is visible, and to life wholly bound up with the water in which it exists.

In Chassidut, the sea serves as an analogy for alma de-itkasya, the concealed world. This does not merely mean that the observer cannot see. In the discourse "Atah Echad" of 5742, the Rebbe describes "the created beings in alma de-itkasya, which are like fish in the sea, nullified to the water," connecting this image with the promise "as the waters cover the sea" and the knowledge of G-d that will be revealed in the future.[11] Fish live within the water and depend on it; water is not an external addition that can be removed while leaving their life unchanged.

This makes the subtlety of the analogy clear. When we seek to reveal what is concealed, we do not seek to turn what lives within its source into a reality independent of it. We seek to understand the connection. The same applies to studying the inner dimension of Torah, the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidut: an explanation

[10] Chullin 127a: "The Rabbis taught: everything that exists on land exists in the sea, except the weasel (chuldah)"; preceded by Rabbi Akiva's words about sea and land creatures: "How manifold are Your works, G-d." Text on Sefaria. The example is brought here in its context as an analogy for revelation and concealment.

[11] Discourse beginning "אתה אחד," Shabbat Parashat Vayetze, 9 Kislev 5742, section 8; reviewed and corrected, Kuntres 9–10 Kislev 5747. Text of the discourse. Its wording there is: "The created beings in alma de-itkasya, who are analogous to fish in the sea, which are nullified to the water"; it also discusses the promised "as the waters cover the sea."

should bring the concept closer to the intellect while preserving its depth and its relation to Divinity. A commentary that replaces the connection with a dry list of names has missed something essential.

In Kabbalistic and Chassidic sources, the sea also serves as an analogy for Malchut. In the discourse "Vayomer Lo Yehonatan" of 5728, for example, "He turned the sea into dry land" is explained in relation to the sefirah of Malchut: "the concealment [sea] was split open and the lights were revealed."[12] This does not mean that every occurrence of the sea and every occurrence of alma de-itkasya always denote the same level; each source must be read in context. In our Epistle, Malchut is also described as Keter from below upward. This connection invites reflection: precisely the place of reception and conclusion may reveal a relationship to the beginning.

The sea therefore suits our hope for this book. We do not create Torah's treasures with the new tool. We seek to reach what has been transmitted in the books, find the connections between sources, and explain them. The more openings we make, the more we also see how much remains concealed. Knowledge does not cancel humility; it gives humility substance.

[12] Discourse beginning "ויאמר לו יהונתן," 5728, explaining "He turned the sea into dry land" in Malchut: "The concealment (sea) was split open, and the lights were revealed." Text of the discourse. For the relation between Malchut and Keter from below upward, see Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the passage on returning light; this is not an identification of all the levels.

Twenty and Keter: A Tentative Reflection

In the discourse "Bati LeGani" of 5730, the Rebbe explains that "esrim [twenty] has the numerical value of keter": the two Hebrew words, עשרים and כתר, each total six hundred and twenty. He connects the twentieth chapter at the close of the series of discourses with Keter and with the ultimate purpose of the will that becomes clear at the conclusion.[13] The numbering of Epistle 20 invites us to consider the connection between the depth of unity and the purpose of action.

The series "Bati LeGani" occupies a foundational place: it concerns the indwelling of the Shechinah in the lower realms and the human service that fulfills this purpose. The series delivered in 5710 contains twenty chapters. According to the account in the "Hiskashrus" section, the Rebbe explained one chapter each year in sequence, completing twenty-year cycles in 5730 and 5750.[14] Repeated study of one chapter opens further depth in the same foundation and teaches how it is possible to expand greatly without leaving the wording of the source.

[13] Discourse beginning "באתי לגני," the night following Shabbat Parashat Bo, 10 Shevat 5730, sections 7 and 22; the reviewed and corrected text printed in Kuntres 10 Shevat 5750. Both sections state: "עשרים [twenty] has the numerical value of כתר [Keter]." In section 22 and note 131, the Rebbe refers to Likkutei Levi Yitzchak on Tanach and Rabbinic Sayings, p. קט [109], concerning Divine service reaching the gulgalta of Arich. The reference to his father is cited here on the basis of the discourse; it does not attribute the designation "the crown of Tanya" to Epistle 20.

[14] "Hiskashrut" 1121, the section on Chabad laws and customs: "A chapter of the twenty chapters (of 'באתי לגני' 5710 and the discourses that followed it)," and the completion of the cycles "in the years 5730 and 5750"; note 21 there, based on "Kfar Chabad" 795, p. 24, describes the explanation of one chapter each year. The section. This is not a total count of all the discourses delivered and edited.

There is room here for another connection. Although Epistle 20 does not conclude the thirty-two epistles of Iggeret HaKodesh, it is the final epistle written by the Alter Rebbe, in the days before his passing.[15] To understand the significance of a final written work, let us consider the Rebbe's relationship to the "Bati LeGani" series of 5710, left by the Rebbe Rayatz in anticipation of his passing.

The introduction to the English edition describes how the Rebbe regarded this series as a spiritual testament and guidance for the mission of the next generation. The Rebbe himself said that, in his final series, the master whose passing was being commemorated had clarified everything and alluded to everything; a private, unreviewed record relates that he looked there for answers to questions being asked. It is thus a living message for continuing the work: the Rebbe's will and purpose are transmitted to the chassidim, who must study, understand, and put them into practice. Repeated study of "Bati LeGani" thereby acquires a special meaning: clarifying the mission entrusted to us. In this spirit, chassidim also regard the discourse "VeAtah Tetzaveh" of 5741, the last that the Rebbe reviewed and distributed with his own hand, as a

[15] The Tzemach Tzedek, Derech Mitzvotecha, 170a: the Epistle was written "in the days before his passing in the village of Piena." The Rebbe cites this in the record of remarks on the eve of 24 Tevet 5715, section 3 (an unreviewed transcript), text of the remarks. The order of the thirty-two epistles in the book is not presented as their order of composition.

spiritual testament guiding their bond with him and their service through their own efforts.[16]

Tentatively, we may also see Epistle 20 as something akin to the Alter Rebbe's spiritual testament: an encompassing distillation of the Chassidic path, joining the depth of G-d's unity with the purpose of service in the physical world. English, too, offers a linguistic suggestion: "will" means both desire and a testament, and Keter is the aspect of will. A testament conveys the will for the path ahead, while the conclusion makes clear the purpose toward which the entire argument is directed. The allusion linking twenty and Keter, the Epistle's content, and its composition at the close of our master the Alter Rebbe's life thus come together in one reflection: the highest purpose is revealed precisely in action below.

What Does This Commentary Seek to Add?

The book's contribution lies in its combination: explanation of the wording is joined here to the results of extensive inquiry into the questions it raises. We

[16] On the Rebbe's treatment of the sequence as a spiritual testament, see the Sichos in English edition, Basi LeGani 5710, 5782, Introduction, p. ix, and the opening note to the first part: complete edition. This description is the publisher's formulation. The Rebbe's own words about the scope of the sequence: talk of Shabbat Parashat Vayakhel–Pekudei, Shabbat Mevarchim and the eve of Rosh Chodesh Nisan 5710; Likkutei Sichot, vol. II, p. 512 and following. The Hebrew translation in Torat Menachem: "In the final sequence… he clarified everything… and there he also alluded to everything." Note 2 cites an unreviewed private record referring to seeking answers to questions in this sequence. On the reception of "ואתה תצוה" as a testament among Chassidim, see the Foreword, Shiurei Chassidut BeMaamar VeAtah Tetzavveh 5741, Machon Sikkum Maamarei HaRebbe, 5783, p. 1: the file. The parallel to Epistle 20 is the author's proposal. For the meanings of the word will, see the Cambridge Dictionary, under MENTAL POWER ("what someone wants to happen") and DOCUMENT.

seek to gather the investigations of the Epistle's sections into a single accessible reading, building from them a continuous, detailed explanation faithful to the sources. We rely on the treasury of explanations transmitted in the teachings of our Rebbes, and on work involving close study, comparison, and critique. The book's merit should be judged by what the reader comes to understand through it.

The particular emphasis here is a systematic combination of three activities: attention to every word; presentation of the difficulties arising from the wording and parallel passages; and integration of the investigation's conclusions into an explanation addressed to beginners as well. Readers will encounter the result where they need it. When a term changes meaning with its context, the distinction will be explained in that chapter. When an additional source helps clarify the argument, its principal contribution will be presented in plain language. And when an investigation offers a useful direction but does not fully resolve the difficulty, that too will be stated. In this way, we seek to place inquiry at the service of understanding.

Thus, for example, we will not be satisfied with saying that "neshamah is Divinity." The term "neshamah" does not denote the same thing everywhere: a human soul and the neshamah aspect of the sefirot are not one

subject. We will ask which neshamah is being discussed, how it vests itself in a created vessel, and why the lights of nefesh and ruach receive a different status in the same paragraph. We will not be satisfied with saying that a human being is nourished by what is lower because its root is higher. "Root" here means a source, not a plant's root. We will examine what is higher in the human being, what is present in food, what is revealed through refinement, and how this connects with the Epistle's explanation of returning light. When we ask how Moses apprehended in Atzilut, we will try to preserve the question's force and honestly present what becomes clear and what still requires study.

Behind the Simple Explanation: Seven Investigations, Three Volumes, and One Book

The book before you is the accessible fruit of extensive study, and the simplicity of its language comes at the end of the work. The work on Iggeret HaKodesh 20 was founded on **only seven principal investigations**. Each concerned one fundamental question and included several rounds of questions, sources, answers, critiques, and corrections. This very narrowness teaches something: one good question, revisited again and again until it becomes clear exactly what it asks, can open an enormously broad inquiry.

The working material gathered from these investigations runs to some 3,200 pages. The reconstructed working collection contains 670 files: reports, questions, sources, and critiques. From this material, three research volumes were prepared, presenting the issues, evidence, approaches examined, and questions left open. From them were built the twenty chapters of the present book, arranging the fruits of the seven investigations according to the progression of the Epistle's wording.[17]

Some discussions were preserved in summary, and not all the conversations were retained in full. I distinguish between material preserved in its entirety, summaries that survived, and my own testimony about the work.[18]

The study moved among the wording of the Zohar, the writings of the Arizal and Etz Chaim, Pardes Rimonim by the Ramak, Shaarei Kedushah by Rabbi Chaim Vital,

[17] These figures follow the research initiator's report and the research volumes: working material of approximately 3,200 pages; 670 records in the reconstructed database (Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2893–2894, 2905–2906); the original Hebrew research volumes comprised 838, 619 and 746 pages; the concluding chapter on editing was subsequently added at the end of volume III, beginning on pp. 2924–2925. The English volumes' pages are numbered continuously: volume II begins on page 1088, and volume III on page 1862; references in this book use the continuous numbering. "Seven investigations" is the count of the principal investigations according to the research initiator's report. The archive map in volume III arranges the material by families of inquiry and rounds (ibid., pp. 2905–2908); it contains no documented assignment of each investigation to a particular chapter of the book. In volume I of the Research Book, pp. 2–3, the approximately 3,200 pages are described as earlier documentation in eight volumes, including repetitions, working instructions and facsimiles. This is the extent of the documentary material.

[18] The guide to the concluding archive (document 0366), as cited in the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2858–2861 and 2893–2894: "This is not a complete export of the conversation"; "The beginning of R1 in the conversation is truncated. A reformulation must not be given the status of an original response." See also vol. I, pp. 103–107: "This is not a complete system export of the original conversations of the three systems." The report that certain discussions were preserved only as summaries for technical reasons was supplied by the research initiator for the Introduction.

Mishnat Chassidim, Tanya, Torah Or and Likkutei Torah, Derech Mitzvotecha, Chanah Ariel by Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil, the Hemshech of 5672, and the discourses of our Rebbes. At times, understanding one sentence required moving among several of these works. It was necessary to establish the level to which each statement referred, distinguish similar terms, check whether two formulations really contradicted one another, and return to the Epistle's sentence after the picture had broadened. The aim was to draw from the inquiry an explanation that could be studied, checked, and questioned.

This work is especially evident where the first explanation seemed too simple. What does "neshamah" mean when a world's vitality is being discussed? How can the vessels be called Divinity, while created vessels are mentioned later? In what sense is there union in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah? What is the relationship between the sovev, the kav, and the earth's power to produce growth? And why must a human being, who possesses knowledge, receive vitality from bread and meat? Within each of these questions lies a world of concepts and connections. Moving from concise wording to clear commentary requires opening up the broader context, then returning to arrange it for the reader.

A student of Chassidut, even one who has studied many discourses, is not necessarily familiar with all the systems described in Kabbalistic works. Terms such as parsa, gestation, union, thirty vessels, and returning light may remain closed words to such a learner. In this Epistle, they carry part of the argument itself. The commentary therefore seeks to open a gateway: to explain concepts where they are needed, show the question they resolve, and trace how they lead toward the foundations of Chassidut and practical life. This aspiration is particularly significant in an epistle whose profound content may remain sealed to someone lacking the appropriate introduction.

Four Examples from the Investigation

So that these remarks do not remain generalities, here are four examples from the research materials themselves. Each seems small, and each teaches a principle that applies to the entire work.

A vessel that vests itself, and a vessel that is created. The Epistle's passages on the "beginning of yesh" mention both vessels of Atzilut, which are Divinity, and vessels in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, which are the beginning of created yesh. At one stage, different answers appeared to contradict one another: one said that the vessels in BYA are created, and another that the vessel of Atzilut vested there does not

become created. The investigation showed that the two concern different subjects: the local vessel in BYA is created, whereas the vessel of Atzilut vested in it does not thereby become created. The lesson recorded in the research is simple and useful: before building a diagram, ask for a table of "what vests itself in what."[19]

A sentence from the commentary presented as the Epistle's wording. At one stage, a sentence about souls in the world of Asiyah was presented as though it belonged to the text of Epistle 15 in Tanya. Examination showed that the sentence was not the Alter Rebbe's wording at all, but came from Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak Frank's commentary, Tanya LaAm, printed on the same page. The helpful reference in the commentary was retained in its place, but ceased to serve as evidence from the wording of Tanya.[20] The heading "Tanya" at the top of a page does not make every sentence on it the Alter Rebbe's words; one must check where the source ends and the explanation begins.

Abbreviations that look familiar. One discourse in Likkutei Torah, examined as a parallel to the end of the

[19] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2870–2871, the case study "Source Vessels versus Receiving Vessels": "The local receiving vessel in BYA is created, while the source vessel of Atzilut vested in it does not thereby become created"; and the lesson: "Request a table of 'what vests itself in what' before constructing a diagram."

[20] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2877–2880, the case study "A Later Explanation Presented as the Epistle's Wording": the sentence was identified as commentary in Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak Frank's Tanya LaAm; "A heading 'Tanya' above a page does not make every sentence on it the Alter Rebbe's wording."

Epistle, contains both the term “returning light” and the abbreviation א”ח עט”ב. It would have been easy to read א”ח as אור חוזר, “returning light,” since the term appears nearby. In that context, however, the abbreviation means אשת חיל עטרת בעלה, “a woman of valor is the crown of her husband.” The rule learned here applies to the entire work: testing the context comes before expanding a familiar abbreviation, and a shared word invites examination rather than providing the result in advance.[21]

The distinctive quality of the earth. The revelation of the earth’s power to produce growth does not give it a higher apprehension than a human being; the earth reveals a power that is not its own, while the human being is the one who apprehends. This is a practical outcome of opening and comparing sources, protecting the commentary from turning a beautiful analogy into an unsupported claim. The rule is that the place where a power is revealed does not in itself establish that place’s superiority in apprehension.

[21] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2912–2913, examining Likkutei Torah, the discourse beginning “ואכלתם אכול” (“And You Shall Eat Plentifully”): “In this context they are eshet chayil ateret baalah [a woman of valor is her husband’s crown], and א”ח on its own must not be expanded as or chozer [returning light] merely because that term appears nearby. The test of context precedes the expansion of a familiar abbreviation.”

This Commentary's Place alongside Earlier Commentaries

We approach the Epistle after generations of study and explanation. Lessons in Tanya, for example, offers learners a clear, continuous explanation of Tanya's wording, including this Epistle; marked additions by the Rebbe are printed alongside Rabbi Yosef Weinberg's commentary. The Rebbe's notes on Tanya also contain precise studies of this Epistle. Close parallels to the questions at the opening of the Epistle were found in Chanah Ariel by Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil, one of the great Chabad chassidim. Chassidic discourses and the explanations of our Rebbes open further depths. Our work rests gratefully on this treasury, and wherever we have used a particular explanation, we identify whose words they are.[22]

This commentary is also intended for beginners. In the expanded research book, the inquiring reader can find the discussions at length, detailed references, the parallel passages gathered, and the approaches examined. This commentary and the research volumes grow from the same study. Here are the principal conclusions and explanations needed for continuous learning; there is the detailed path leading to them,

[22] Lessons in Tanya, Epistle 20, containing Rabbi Yosef Weinberg's explanation and marked additions by the Rebbe; the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20; Chanah Ariel by Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil, the discourses for Naso and Behaalotecha (see below, in the continuous example). On the need to distinguish these layers rather than combining their authority "in a single sentence that none of them wrote," see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 103–105.

including questions that remain open. The simplicity sought here does not mean abandoning difficult questions; it is the effort to explain them well. References to the research book open the possibility of further study and do not replace the explanation in the body of this book.

Precision in Explanation, and Renewed Vitality in Service

Respect for Tanya's wording also calls for care in explaining it. In his talk of 19 Kislev 5716, the Rebbe mentions the letter of the Rebbe Rashab "concerning the prohibition on offering interpretations and 'peshatlech' [ingenious readings] of Tanya," adding that "when this results in an increase in fear of Heaven, the warning does not apply." These words were spoken at the opening of an explanation connecting the end of Tanya with its beginning.[23]

For our approach, this provides both encouragement and a standard. We seek an explanation that increases fear of Heaven and vitality in mitzvot, with every expansion remaining attentive to the words before us. A commentary that draws a person closer to the

[23] Talk of Sunday, Parashat Vayeshev, 19 Kislev 5716, section 22, an unreviewed transcript. Its wording: "As the Rebbe [Rashab], of blessed memory, wrote in his letter (printed as an addition to Kuntres Etz HaChaim and in 'HaTamim') concerning the prohibition on offering interpretations and 'little explanations' of Tanya: when this results in an increase in fear of Heaven, the aforementioned warning does not apply." Notes 124–126: addition to Kuntres Etz HaChaim, p. 87 and following; HaTamim, vol. III, p. סב [62]; Igrot Kodesh of the Rebbe Rashab, vol. II, p. תשכ [720]; Sefer HaSichot 5702, end of p. 83 and following. The warning and the reference to its effect on fear of Heaven are presented here as the Rebbe explains them in the talk.

service of G-d should also awaken a desire to study precisely. Throughout the book, we will therefore distinguish what is written in the Epistle, what is explained in parallel sources, and what we offer as an analogy, an organizing explanation, or an allusion. Where a difficulty remains, we will set it before the learner and explain why it is difficult. An honest encounter with a question can itself deepen the study.

Vitality does not arise from impassioned words alone. It grows when the learner understands why the matter concerns them: why the mitzvah they perform is more than a small detail in their life; why a limited world can reveal a higher power; and why the effort to understand a sentence in Torah may change their view of their next action. This requires patience, extensive explanation, and a willingness to return to the same point from another angle. This is the work we seek to invest in every chapter.

A New Revelation in a Later Generation: The Talk on the Third Night of Selichot

Yet the very attempt to add an explanation of our own raises a more fundamental question: how can a later generation see what was not revealed before it, without disconnecting that vision from the great teachers? A particular talk of the Rebbe gives us a way to reflect on this undertaking. On the third night of Selichot, 5735,

Monday, 25 Elul, the Rebbe spoke of the day's special significance. The talk relates that on this day the Alter Rebbe would deliver a Chassidic discourse only before his successors, the Mitteler Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek, and that the matter remained a "secret" until the Rebbe Rayatz revealed it publicly. The Rebbe asks: how does something kept secret become common knowledge? He connects this with a broader question: how are matters in Torah revealed specifically in later generations when they were not revealed in earlier generations, although the earlier generations were greater?

The analogy is a dwarf carried on a giant's shoulders: by virtue of the height given to him, he sees farther than the giant. There are two sides to the analogy. The vision rests on the giant, and the dwarf does not attain it by his own powers; at the same time, someone placed on those shoulders is required to use what has been given. The talk explains that it was precisely because darkness intensified in later generations that the matter was revealed, to provide the means to overcome it; everyone must use the revelation to fulfill their mission in the world through the inner dimension of Torah.[24] The Rebbe also uses the analogy of the dwarf

[24]Talk of Monday, 25 Elul, the eve of the third day of Selichot, 5735, an unreviewed transcript. The content is presented here according to the Hebrew summary on "The Daily Sicha" website, which played the talk on Monday, Parashat Nitzavim, 22 Elul 5785 (15.9.2025): The Daily Sicha. This is the date the talk was played on the website; the summary uses the site's wording. It states, among other things: "On this day the Alter Rebbe would deliver a discourse of Chassidut, but only before his successors, the Mitteler Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek," and gives the analogy

on the giant's shoulders in other talks, stressing in one of them that the person standing on the greater one's shoulders does not attain what he sees by his own powers.[25]

Standing on Their Shoulders, and Opening the Books

From the analogy of the dwarf in the talk on the third night of Selichot, we seek to formulate our approach to this work. The books before us are a treasury passed from generation to generation. Our work begins with a willingness to open them, study their wording, and allow their words to show us where we are mistaken. From this also comes the boldness to ask: when broader comparison becomes possible, when a source once difficult to obtain becomes accessible, and when a large body of material can be organized around one question, it is right to use that possibility to deepen understanding.

This is how the investigation before us proceeded. A sentence in the Epistle led to a Kabbalistic source; that source raised a question about an accepted interpretation or the initial explanation; the question required study of another Chassidic discourse; and the

of "a dwarf on a giant's shoulders, who sees farther than the giant." The site also offers a private transcript and a translation of the talk.

[25]See, for example, the talk of 19 Kislev 5728, section 4, an unreviewed transcript: "According to the familiar analogy of a dwarf upon a giant"; and there, concerning one who stands on a great person's shoulders, "it is not that he apprehends this through his own powers." Likewise the talk of Thursday, Parashat Balak, 12 Tammuz 5726, section 18.

comparison clarified a distinction not initially preserved. The examples we gave, the vessel that vests itself and the vessel that is created, a sentence from a commentary presented as Tanya's wording, abbreviations that seemed familiar, and the earth's superiority that is not a superiority in apprehension, are practical results of opening and comparing sources.

This is where artificial-intelligence tools belong. They assisted in working with large amounts of material, proposing interpretive possibilities, locating connections, and critiquing explanations that had initially seemed sufficient. Such a capability greatly expands the scope of work possible in a single study project. One can revisit a question many times, trace a term through several sources, and collect the points requiring examination for the person preparing the commentary. We seek to turn this newly opened field into clear, orderly explanation.

The talk on the third night of Selichot does not discuss artificial intelligence. The connection between its principle and the research tools before us is an application we propose: using the capacities given to a generation for study, investigation, and dissemination. The application must be tested in the work itself: was another source opened, was an understanding corrected, was a question answered, and does the

reader now understand something previously obscure? This is the sense in which we seek to see farther while relying on the great Torah teachers.

Hearing from Afar, Now: The Possibility and the Time It Was Given

Another talk of the Rebbe adds a further dimension: not only revelation in Torah, but also the means by which the teachings are conveyed. The question of how to enlist new means for study and dissemination did not first arise in our time. Already in his talk of 13 Elul 5742, the Rebbe pointed to a distinctive advantage of communication technologies: even a Jew overseas can hear the words as they are spoken. Such a listener also receives "the inflection and emphasis of the words through raising the voice"; a later transmission, even by a faithful messenger, is not the same listening experience. Technology thus makes shared participation possible for Jews far from one another, placing the connection between them at the service of study and action. The Rebbe goes on to explain that even when a sacred purpose exists from the outset, its actual revelation comes at a particular time: the Torah was given after twenty-six generations, and the discussion is connected to the verse "He has made everything beautiful in its time."[26]

[26] Torat Menachem—Hitvaaduyot 5742, vol. IV, talk of Wednesday, 13 Elul, section 1, pp. 2150–2151, unreviewed. Facsimile of the talk on the Chabad website, the first two pages. Page 2150 discusses immediate listening and vocal emphasis, as against transmission through a messenger;

It is worth pausing over the difference between a summary of words and hearing them. The person repeating them conveys what they heard and understood, and their faithfulness is very precious. Someone hearing the speaker himself also encounters the manner of delivery: where a word was emphasized, which sentence was spoken forcefully, and how the voice carried the argument. This is an aspect of the learning encounter that is difficult to convey in summary. The possibility of participating from afar brings even someone unable to reach the speaker's location closer to that same occasion.

"He Has Made Everything Beautiful in Its Time": Why Specifically Now?

The question of timing touches the heart of the matter: if this means can be used to disseminate Torah, why was it unavailable to earlier generations? King Solomon, the wisest of all people, teaches us in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that everything has its time. The principle that every revelation has its time also appears in an earlier talk, of 17 Kislev 5741. That talk offers the example of gold, whose purpose in creation is to serve in the Temple; once it has been created, a person retains the choice of how to use it. The same applies to

p. 2151 discusses the time of the Giving of the Torah and the verse. The facsimile reads "הכל עשה יפה בעתו" [He made everything beautiful in its time]; the full wording of Ecclesiastes 3:11 begins "את הכל." The body of this book summarizes the remarks, apart from the marked short quotations. The date is established from the printed heading; this does not assert that similar remarks were not also made on 18 Elul.

communication technologies: they can be enlisted to connect Jews and for matters of Torah and mitzvot.[27]

From this, we distinguish three things. The first is the Rebbe's own words: in the talks cited, he speaks about the communication technologies of his time, the time granted to each revelation, and the choice of how to use what has been created. The second is our belief: that a possibility opening in the world lies within the governance of the Holy One, blessed be He, and that the time at which it became accessible has meaning, even though we cannot explain why it opened in a particular year. The third is the application we propose: to consider artificial-intelligence tools in light of this principle and ask how to place them at the service of study. The talks do not discuss the systems before us, and we do not assert a particular Divine reason for their appearance. The application must be judged by its fruits.

We can therefore receive this gift with gratitude and ask what it enables us to do today: which book we can study, to whom we can explain something, and which question we can investigate more thoroughly.

Thus the question "Why only now?" leads to one that we can answer through action: "For what purpose will we use what has been given now?" There is no need to

[27] Ecclesiastes 3:11. See also Sichos in English, vol. 8, talk of 17 Kislev 5741, section 1 and notes 34–36 in the digital publication. Only the English translation was read; the original wording was not checked.

decipher the calculations of Providence in order to open a book that had been distant from us. We can begin with one study session, one explanation for someone who found a matter difficult, or an investigation whose scope previously exceeded our capacities.

Nor should we infer from the abundance of devices that we are greater than earlier generations. Continuing the analogy of the dwarf on the giant's shoulders, which we studied above, we regard the tools as assistance for learners whose capacities are limited. Our memory does not encompass the books, our attention scatters, and sometimes we do not even know how to formulate the first question. Great assistance may be given precisely at the point of deficiency. Recognizing this allows humility and boldness to be held together: acknowledging how much we need what has been transmitted to us, and energetically using what is available.

From Listening to Conversation: What Has Changed for the Learner?

The connection with our work becomes tangible when we consider the change in the manner of asking. In a broadcast, one hears a person's statement; with a conversational tool, a new answer is written in response to a request formulated by the learner. The

learner can pause precisely where understanding failed, ask for an abbreviation to be expanded, ask why an example is relevant, and submit their own explanation for critique.

On November 30, 2022, 6 Kislev 5783, ChatGPT was opened for public use.[28] For our purposes, the practical significance is that one can begin with a question in ordinary language, without knowing in advance how to formulate a specialized search query. The answer can lead to a better question, and the question to the source.

A small example from the book shows the difference. A learner reads “neshamah” and immediately thinks of a human soul. They ask for an explanation and discover that the sentence concerns the Divine vitality of the sefirot. They can now return to the sentence, write in their own words who gives life to whom, ask the tool to check whether they have confused the light with the recipient, and test the comment received against the sentence itself. The assistance is more than a shortcut to searching: it makes it possible to practice the act of understanding. When the exercise can be repeated, even a question we were embarrassed to ask becomes a beginning of learning.

[28] OpenAI, Introducing ChatGPT, November 30, 2022 (6 Kislev 5783). The announcement describes a conversational interface, follow-up questions and the ability to point out mistaken assumptions, alongside limitations including incorrect answers that appear convincing. The date marks the launch being described; it is not a claim about the invention of artificial intelligence.

This possibility is particularly helpful to someone stopped at the threshold of a book. One can request a brief explanation, admit that even this was not understood, and try again in another language or through an example. One can compare two formulations of the same question and discover that one already assumes the answer. And one can bring the matters investigated to a rabbi or study partner, with the difficulty more sharply focused. These are ways in which conversational tools may prepare a deeper learning encounter between people. We will practice them in "Studying Further."

Here, too, lies an important difference from broadcasting. A device that transmits sound is intended to convey the speaker's words; a system composing an answer may add something not stated in the source. We must therefore return to the book with the explanation. The more the system helps us ask and compare, the more precise an understanding of what we have read we can demand of ourselves. Its benefit will be measured by what the learner can understand and explain as a result of the conversation.

"A Stone Will Cry Out from the Wall": An Image That Awakens Responsibility

We can consider another image: a device made of inanimate matter now responds in language and

sometimes even points out its user's mistake. This recalls "a stone will cry out from the wall." The verse in Habakkuk appears within a rebuke of wrongdoing; in Hayom Yom for 15 Adar I, it is used to describe a future scene in which inanimate matter will demand of a person the Torah words they should have thought and spoken along their way.[29] The image raises a question: what does a person do with the capacity and time given to them, and with the matter that carries them and serves their activity?

There is room for wonder at the encounter itself: a person addresses a question to a device and receives an answer relating to their words. One can challenge it, request clarification, and receive another explanation. The experience is far removed from the ordinary use of an object that remains silent in our hands, and thus evokes the image of inanimate matter addressing a person in words. This is a reflection on the new possibility given to us, through a Chassidic image that awakens anticipation of Redemption and responsibility in the present.

The resemblance we propose concerns the demand directed back to the person. Even now, we can encounter a material tool that returns a question to us: have you read the source? Is that really what it says? Is

[29] Habakkuk 2:9–12, particularly verse 11; Hayom Yom, 15 Adar I, digital text, and the translation on the Chabad website. The Hayom Yom passage is presented here in summary, not as a full translation. The comparison to conversational tools is the research initiator's reflection; it is neither an interpretation attributed to the sources nor a claim that the promised event has been fulfilled.

your formulation fair? In my work with the systems, I encountered such correction more than once. Alongside wonder came a willingness to listen to criticism. Someone who asks a tool to examine their words must be prepared to change them when the correction is well founded, even if initially certain of the explanation offered.

This image has its place precisely when its limits are preserved. We do not say that the scene in Hayom Yom, of inanimate matter demanding an accounting from a person in the future, has been fulfilled in these tools. Nor do we say that producing an answer gives a device the status of the "speaking" order discussed in chapter 17. Even an answer demanding honesty must be examined; it does not prove that the tool has a moral will or is right every time. What is asked of the learner is clearer: to accept a well-founded correction, return to the source, and improve their work. In this way, one can be moved by the new possibility and place it at the service of human and Torah responsibility.

How Do We Study This Book?

The twenty chapters follow the Epistle's order. In each chapter, we encounter the guiding question, study the Alter Rebbe's wording with its explanation, and examine the questions arising from the inquiry more deeply. The chapter structure, the short passages, the

identifying details beside each, and the order of explanation, was described in the reading map. The explanations were written for beginners too: a new term is explained in the context where it is needed, an analogy is accompanied by clarification of what it does and does not teach, and questions are opened from the difficulty itself. The footnotes refer readers wishing to check and explore further to the sources and the research book. A glossary and a source index for further study, with references to chapters of the commentary, also appear at the end of the book.

The book seeks to make slow, fruitful study possible. It is worth pausing after a paragraph and asking the four questions proposed in the reading map: about whom is the sentence speaking, what action is attributed to that subject, in relation to which recipient, and what has changed since the preceding sentence? One can add another question particularly relevant to this Epistle: does this statement concern the source of the power, the vessel receiving it, or the result? In this way, distant terms become an argument that can be followed. When it becomes clear that an earlier formulation was too broad, we return and refine it. This is the responsibility of commentary seeking to respect every word.

One further suggestion, in the spirit of the book's two aims. In addition to the exercises at the end of each chapter, try formulating one question of your own that

remains, a small, precise question anchored in the Epistle's wording, and investigate it through the seven steps described in "Studying Further," under "The Working Method at a Glance": attach the passage, request an explanation, ask what remains difficult, open the source, check the quotation in context, compare, and record the conclusion and its limits. Anyone who does this once will discover that the book does more than convey answers. It invites continued questioning.

From letter to word, from word to idea, and from idea to action: this is the path we seek to follow.

From Earth and Water to a Seed of Learning

At the close of the Epistle, we contemplate the earth that produces growth. A seed is small and defined; the tree developing from it bears branches, leaves, and fruit that are not present in the seed in their revealed form. Water, too, participates in the plant's life and in the manifestation of the power given to the earth. In the analogy we propose for the work of learning, the question is the seed, study and review are the watering, and the developing understanding is the growth.[30]

The device we use is also made of inanimate matter. Human beings have arranged metals and

[30] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20, the passages on earth, sowing, and the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking orders; compare Epistle 8 on the analogy of the seed and the vegetative power. The analogy of a question as a seed and study as watering is our educational application; it should not be regarded as an explanation of every detail of raising mayin nukvin.

semiconductors to process information, and can now devote their operation to searching and learning. Silicon, too, like all matter in the world, comes into being through the Divine power explained by the Epistle; nonetheless, computation is the operation of a device, and one should not attribute to it a soul or infinite power. Our reflection here concerns the human capacity to take matter from the world and place it at the service of Torah, like gold shaped to serve in the Temple.

We hope that the book will be a seed. The reader will not remain a recipient of ready-made answers, but will return to the words, ask, examine, and water understanding through personal effort. Maimonides concludes his great work with a description of the messianic era. The sages and prophets, he writes, desired those days only so that they would be free to devote themselves to Torah and its wisdom; at that time, "the occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. Therefore Israel will be great sages, knowing hidden matters, and will attain knowledge of their Creator according to human capacity, as it is said: 'For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea.' " Water does not lie upon the sea's surface as a thin layer; it fills the sea and covers its entire bed. So will knowledge fill the earth. In his talk on Shabbat of the Torah portion Behar, 5733, the Rebbe

connects the promise “as the waters cover the sea” with revelation of the concealed world, “the revelation of alma de-itkasya [sea] openly, for all to see”; in Likkutei Sichot, he connects “the earth shall be filled” with the conclusion of Maimonides’ words.[31] Thus the sea analogy with which we began returns to us: what is concealed does not remain concealed forever. From these sources, we receive a goal for our work: to make one more obscure matter understandable and increase the knowledge of G-d on earth.

May the study and dissemination of the wellsprings increase understanding of G-d’s unity, vitality in Torah and mitzvot, and recognition of the power of a good deed in this world, and contribute to preparing the world for the true and complete Redemption, very soon indeed.

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[31] Rambam, Hilchot Melachim UMilchamoteihem 12:4–5, in the printed wording (in manuscripts: “Therefore they will be great sages, knowing the hidden, profound matters”); Isaiah 11:9. Rambam on Sefaria. Talk of Shabbat Parashat Behar, 17 Iyar 5733, section 4, an unreviewed transcript, text of the talk: “The revelation of alma de-itkasya (sea) in a manner visible to all.” On the connection between “the earth shall be full” and the conclusion of Rambam’s words, see Likkutei Sichot, vol. XV, Noach II, note 7. See also the discourse beginning “כי תשא,” 5734, section 5.

Part One: Unity, Finitude, and Coming into Being

Chapters 1–6

The first part of the book concerns the opening of the Epistle, which immediately presents a combination whose two sides are difficult to hold together: on the one hand, the sefirot are united with the Creator; on the other, they contain vessels, an aspect involving limit and definition. Two easy paths lie open to the reader, and both miss the essential point. One can translate every term into something familiar from the physical world, and the question then disappears. Or one can be satisfied with saying that "everything is one," and the distinctions that the Epistle itself carefully constructs disappear. The next six chapters attempt to proceed between these two paths, clarifying how the Epistle speaks about vessels, the reality of "yesh," and each thing's relationship to its source.

The path is built in stages, each chapter resting on its predecessor:

- **Chapter 1** reads the Epistle's opening, defines "light" and "vessel," and sharpens the question: how can finitude be united with the Creator? The Epistle's first answer directs attention to the power of creation, "to create something from nothing."

- **Chapter 2** distinguishes two modes of coming into being: the chainlike descent of "cause and effect," in which the effect remains within the kind of its source, and creation "something from nothing." Along the way, we pause over the apprehension of Moses our teacher.
- **Chapter 3** confronts an objection the Epistle raises against itself: if the created being too is "accounted as naught before Him," how does it differ from an effect? Here we distinguish knowledge "from above downward" from knowledge "from below upward," arriving at the utter incommensurability of their natures.
- **Chapter 4** asks where created "yesh" begins and studies the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, which are a neshamah to the worlds of BYA.
- **Chapter 5** shows that even in Atzilut itself there are things that are "yesh," the palaces and bodies of angels, and compares them with souls before their descent.
- **Chapter 6** reads the Epistle's parenthetical passage: one proposal expressed as "possible," concerning the souls of the early tzaddikim, and another expressed as "it is reasonable to say," concerning the "worlds" within the gulgalta. ("Gulgalta," from the word for skull, is a figurative name for an aspect at the head of a partzuf, an integrated configuration of sefirot; the chapter will explain both terms.) At its

conclusion, we return to the main argument, to the word “however.”

The opening question, unity with vessels that have limits, accompanies this entire part. We will encounter the concepts of light and vessel in different recipients: the vessels, palaces, bodies of angels, and souls. Each new recipient tests the concepts from another angle, so remembering the word “nullification” or “neshamah” is not enough. At every transition, we will check what remains from the preceding explanation and what requires a new distinction; in every sentence, we will ask afresh who the subject is and what is being compared with what. The same habit will serve us in working with artificial-intelligence tools: each chapter ends with exercises in which we ask the tool for an explanation and check it against the source, particularly asking whether it has preserved the sentence’s subject, its distinctions, and the degree of certainty expressed in its wording.

Chapter 1 | Unity and Finitude: What Does the Opening of the Epistle Seek to Explain?

What We Already Know

From the introduction to this part, we know that the Epistle opens with a difficult combination: the sefirot are united with the Creator, yet contain an aspect of finitude. We will read word by word, establishing the subject of each sentence and what is being compared with what. We begin by explaining “light,” “vessel,” “sefirah,” and “Atzilut,” without assuming prior knowledge.

A World of Differences and a Question about Unity

Let us begin with what everyone sees. The world is full of differences: heaven is not earth, thought is not a stone, kindness is not judgment. Within themselves too, people recognize different capacities. There are times when a person wants to give without measure, and times when they understand that precisely a restriction will protect what is good. Yet we say that all reality is created and sustained by the one G-d. This does not mean that the differences disappear or are an illusion. On the contrary: the question is how Divine unity is the source of a world with so many differences.

The Epistle's opening touches this question at its deepest point.

But the Alter Rebbe does not begin with the physical world. He begins higher, with the sefirot of Atzilut, with the way Kabbalistic works describe Divine revelation. ("Sefirot" are the aspects through which Divinity is revealed according to Kabbalistic works, Chochmah, Binah, Chesed, and so forth; "Atzilut" is the highest level in the order of revelation. Both words will be explained at length later in the chapter.) Why begin specifically there? Because before asking how something that feels separate is created, there is a prior question: already within Divine revelation itself there is an order of Chochmah, Binah, and different attributes. How is complete unity preserved there? Someone who skips this question may imagine one source above, and below it a series of powers already operating on their own. The Epistle seeks to teach us to see multiplicity without losing unity within it; it therefore begins where multiplicity and unity first meet.

Even someone who has only just begun studying may ask: what do the vessels of the world of Atzilut have to do with me? The answer begins to emerge when we look at the end of the Epistle. After the entire discussion of sefirot, vessels, and the power of creation, the Alter Rebbe writes that after these matters

it is easy for a person of understanding to grasp, "through all that has been stated above," the great superiority of practical mitzvot, which are the purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world.[32] Thus the Epistle itself derives the superiority of action from the path it has traveled. Exactly how each stage leads to the conclusion is what we will study throughout the book. In our reading, the whole Epistle forms a single argument directed toward this conclusion from its beginning. On this reading, we can already sense that the question "Can something defined be one with Ein Sof?" is not merely abstract: it also concerns why a defined, physical action can bear such great meaning.

The chapter's order follows the Epistle. First, we become acquainted with the words, light, vessel, sefirot, Atzilut, so that we can read the first sentence without guessing. Then we read the sentence itself and the parenthetical passage in which the Alter Rebbe explains it. From there, we proceed to the difficulty concerning the vessels, allowing it to be heard with its full force before seeking an answer. Only then do we hear the beginning of the answer. This order matters: someone who rushes to the answer before

[32] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20, the end of the Epistle: "And after these words and this truth, it is easy for a person of understanding to understand, through all that has been stated above, the great superiority of practical mitzvot, which are the ultimate purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world." For the distinction between the wording of the conclusion, which is the Epistle's wording, and the presentation of the entire Epistle as one progression, which is a reading of its structure, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 15–19 and 23–25.

understanding the difficulty receives an attractive sentence that resolves nothing.

Beginning with the Words: Light and Vessel

Let us begin with something one can feel even without knowing Kabbalah. A person is filled with a desire to do good. The desire is one, but in practice it must find a way: listening to someone, teaching them, giving them something they lack. Each way gives the desire a particular form. Listening reveals one aspect, giving another. Even in this example, one can distinguish the inner vitality driving the action from the manner in which it is revealed.

We can add an analogy from the soul itself. The soul's single vitality appears in different ways: in the eye it is sight, in the ear hearing, and in the intellect understanding. In this analogy, one can hear something of the meaning of "light" and "vessel": the light is revelation and vitality, and the vessel is the particular manner in which they find expression. Here we must stop the analogy at the right point. Our organs are physical and created, whereas the Epistle stresses that in Atzilut both the lights and the vessels are Divinity. The analogy teaches us to distinguish vitality from its manner of manifestation; it does not teach the depth of Divine union.

We can now give the two words an initial definition. "Light" is language for revelation and vitality, the radiance itself. "Vessel" is language for definition: the measure and form in which the radiance appears. When we speak of the sefirah of Chochmah, we do not mean an object holding light inside it, but an aspect in which the quality of wisdom is revealed. In the sefirah of Chesed, a different mode is revealed, a mode of imparting and beneficence. Thus, in every sefirah, two aspects are distinguished: its light and its vessel, the particular form that gives the light its character.

The word "vessel" itself can also mislead. Hearing "vessel," one thinks of a cup or bowl: something that stands on its own, into which something else is later placed. If we transfer this image to Atzilut, we will unconsciously assume that the vessel is a reality separate from the light before we have even begun studying. Here the vessel is the aspect that defines revelation, and in Atzilut this definition itself is united with Divinity. Thus the question that arises later is not how alien matter holds Divine light. It is how something whose entire nature is definition is united with One Who has no definition whatsoever. This is why union with the vessels is harder to understand than union with the lights: light is close in nature to its source, while the vessel seems to be its opposite.

The Zohar's chosen words also teach something. Chayohi, חיוהי, means "His life," His vitality, in Aramaic; garmohi, גרמוהי, literally means "His bones," from garma, גרמא, a bone. The language is borrowed from a living body: it has life that animates it and bones that give it structure and form. We propose understanding the designation "bone" as an allusion to the vessel's defined, stable aspect, which gives revelation measure and form. It is still more important to remember the limits of this language. The Tzemach Tzedek, the Alter Rebbe's grandson, reminds us in Derech Mitzvotecha that all bodily designations in the Kabbalists' words, such as head, hands, and feet, are "analogy and figurative language," for "you saw no form."[33] The Holy One, blessed be He, has neither a body nor the likeness of a body, and the sefirot are not His organs. The Zohar borrows bodily language so that we can grasp a distinction, not picture a form.

[33]Tzemach Tzedek, Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapters 2–4. In chapter 2: the bodily designations in the writings of the Kabbalists are "analogy and figurative expression"; the sefirah "is not the essence of G-d," and the sefirot, "although they are Divinity, are not the Creator's actual Essence," like thought, which is not the essence of the soul. In chapter 3: "Ihu refers to the essence of the Ein Sof light, and garmohi are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut," with the analogy of a king giving with his right hand and with his left. In chapter 4: the Ein Sof light gives life to the worlds through the vessels, "from which the limitation comes," not because it needs them in itself; it refers there to this Epistle. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 33–35.

Sefirot and Atzilut: What Are We Discussing?

"Sefirot" is the name for these aspects. Ten are customarily enumerated: Chochmah, Binah, Daat, Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut; in certain arrangements, Keter is counted instead of Daat. The count itself is fixed, and Sefer Yetzirah already says of the sefirot: "Ten and not nine, ten and not eleven."[34] For the Epistle's opening, we need not decide between the methods of enumeration. We need to understand why one can speak of ten distinct aspects and still say that they are united with Divinity. This is not a count of ten gods, G-d forbid. It describes distinctions in the revelation of the one G-d.

And what does "Atzilut" mean? It is the name of the level in the order of revelation at which the lights and vessels described by the Epistle are Divinity. The word comes from "emanation": a drawing down from the source, rather than creation from nothing. Atzilut is not a distant region in space. When we later pass from Atzilut to Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, we will be speaking of a change in level and manner of revelation, not movement from place to place. The imagery of "above" and "below" is convenient in speech, and it is worth remembering that it is imagery.

With these definitions, we can read the first sentence and hear two assertions in it: He and the lights are one,

[34] Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 1: ten sefirot belimah.

and He and the vessels are one. We can already anticipate that the second assertion will give rise to the question.[35]

“He and His Lights Are One; He and His Vessels Are One in Them”

W01-01
source words
1–7

He and His lights are one; He and His vessels are one in them.

The sentence is written in Aramaic, the language of the Zohar, and should be read word by word. Ihu, איהו, means “He.” Ve-chayohi, וחיוהי, means “and His vitality”; in the parenthetical passage immediately following, the Alter Rebbe will explain that it refers to the lights. Chad, חד, means “one.” Then the words Ihu and chad recur, with a new word between them: ve-garmohi, וגרמוהי, “and His bones,” which the Alter Rebbe will explain as vessels, rather than physical bones. The final word, behon, בהון, means “in them,” referring us back to the ten sefirot under discussion. This is not a general statement about every object called a vessel, but a description of the lights and vessels in Atzilut. Put simply: He and His vitality are one, and He and His vessels are one, within these sefirot.

[35] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20. The Epistle’s text is presented continuously; the word range in the identification line indicates each passage’s position within its source group (see the Reading Map, “How a Chapter Is Structured”).

And who is "He"? Put simply, the Holy One, blessed be He. But the Epistle is more precise in the line after the parentheses: when raising its difficulty, it writes, "how the Ein Sof is one with garmohi." The One called Ihu in the Zohar is called "Ein Sof" in the question. "He" is therefore neither one of the ten sefirot nor their sum; He is the One without end, not grasped by any definition. The Tzemach Tzedek likewise explains that Ihu in this statement refers "to the essence of Or Ein Sof," that is, the essence of the Ein Sof light. Atzmut, עצמות, here means the very essence, not atzamot, the bones of the body in the analogy.[33] This distinction will help us immediately. When we say "one," we do not mean that the Holy One, blessed be He, is Chochmah or Chesed, but that Chochmah and Chesed are not separate from Him.

Why are there two assertions rather than one? The repetition of Ihu and chad separates union with the lights from union with the vessels. It is easier to begin understanding the first: light is revelation, and later in the Epistle the Alter Rebbe will write that "the light is akin to the luminary," close in nature to the one illuminating. The vessel, by contrast, is the aspect that

[33] Tzemach Tzedek, Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapters 2–4. In chapter 2: the bodily designations in the writings of the Kabbalists are "analogy and figurative expression"; the sefirah "is not the essence of G-d," and the sefirot, "although they are Divinity, are not the Creator's actual Essence," like thought, which is not the essence of the soul. In chapter 3: "Ihu refers to the essence of the Ein Sof light, and garmohi are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut," with the analogy of a king giving with his right hand and with his left. In chapter 4: the Ein Sof light gives life to the worlds through the vessels, "from which the limitation comes," not because it needs them in itself; it refers there to this Epistle. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 33–35.

defines and measures, and definition seems the absolute opposite of Ein Sof. Had only the first assertion been made, there would be no great difficulty here. The repetition forces us to ask, and the Epistle's question will therefore focus on the second assertion. The Alter Rebbe will even identify it explicitly once more: "garmohi are the vessels."

The sentence is not an expression coined by the Alter Rebbe. It is taken from Tikkunei HaZohar, a work belonging to the literature of the Zohar; the introduction to Tikkunei HaZohar contains a formulation close to it, although not identical word for word.[36] The Alter Rebbe does not settle for quoting the familiar wording. He seeks to understand it, and the request itself teaches something important: this is not a declaration that everything is one and the matter ends there. There are lights and vessels, Atzilut and BYA, and the vessels are described as limited. Unity must be clarified within these distinctions, not in their place.

[36] Tikkunei HaZohar, Introduction, folio 3b: "For in the ten sefirot of Atzilut the King is within them; He and His vessels are one in them," followed later by: "which is not the case in the ten sefirot of Beriah." The order of the two statements and the word forms differ from the Epistle's wording, so this is not a verbatim quotation of its sentence. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 25–27.

“That Is”: The Alter Rebbe Explains before Raising His Question

W01-02
source words
8–16

(That is, the ten sefirot of Atzilut: chayohi (חיוהי) are the lights, and garmohi (גרמוהי) are the vessels,

A parenthesis opens here. Within it, the Alter Rebbe explains the Aramaic before questioning it, so that the difficulty concerns the right thing. פי׳ abbreviates פירוש, “meaning” or “that is.” ע”ס means “ten sefirot.” דאצילות means “of Atzilut”; the letter dalet at the beginning of an Aramaic word means “of.” In other words, the statement concerns the ten sefirot of the world of Atzilut. “Chayohi are the lights”: the word הן means “they” and makes an identification, what the Zohar calls “His vitality” is what Kabbalistic works call “the lights.” “And garmohi are the vessels”: what it calls “His bones” are “the vessels.” The definite article, the Hebrew letter heh, in “the lights” and “the vessels” shows that these are established terms in Kabbalah, which distinguishes light and vessel within every sefirah.

W01-03
source words
17–21

all of which are Divinity, unlike in BYA, etc.)

“All of which,” שכולן, means all of them, both the lights and the vessels. This word contains the distinctive point: not only the lights, which are revelation, but the

vessels too, which are definition, are included in Divinity. The word אלקות is written here with a kuf instead of a heh, following the practice of many who slightly alter words derived from the Divine name אלוהים out of care and respect; in the Hebrew body of this book, we write משא"כ .אלוקות abbreviates מה שאין כן, "unlike" or "which is not the case." בבי"ע means "in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah," the three worlds following Atzilut. וכו' means "etc.": the Alter Rebbe abbreviates, and the subject will continue to be explained. The closing parenthesis ends the explanatory remarks.

What does "unlike in BYA" mean? Simply, that the union described here does not exist in the same manner in the worlds following Atzilut, where levels of created reality already appear. Tikkunei HaZohar already states this: immediately after its assertion about the sefirot of Atzilut, it says that this is not the case with the sefirot of Beriah, where they and their vitality are not one, and they and their bones are not one.[36] The word "etc." may allude to this continuation, which the Alter Rebbe did not copy.

But the distinction must not be read as a crude division, as though everything in Atzilut were Divinity

[36] Tikkunei HaZohar, Introduction, folio 3b: "For in the ten sefirot of Atzilut the King is within them; He and His vessels are one in them," followed later by: "which is not the case in the ten sefirot of Beriah." The order of the two statements and the word forms differ from the Epistle's wording, so this is not a verbatim quotation of its sentence. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 25–27.

and everything in BYA were created. The Epistle itself will later show that even within Atzilut there is a beginning of created reality, the palaces of Atzilut and the bodies of its angels, which are "an aspect of yesh," and that BYA too contains Divine light giving them life. It will even speak of the "neshamah" of the sefirot in these worlds, "which is Divinity." "Unlike in BYA" distinguishes the worlds in broad terms; the details will be explained later. From this comes a basic habit of study: everywhere we ask exactly what is being discussed, rather than settling for the name of the world in which it is found.

A Beginner's Question: Are the Sefirot "G-d"?

Someone hearing "all of which are Divinity" for the first time may ask a simple and proper question: if the ten sefirot are Divinity, are there ten parts in Divinity? Are the sefirot the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself? Can one pray to them? This is not an impertinent question; it is the safe way to learn correctly.

The answer lies in the difference between two terms. "Divinity" means that the sefirot are not created and are not a reality separate from Him; they are united with Him. But it does not mean that they are His Essence. The Tzemach Tzedek explicitly writes that the sefirot, "although they are Divinity, are not literally the Creator's Essence," and gives an analogy: thought is a faculty and extension of the soul, yet is not the soul's

essence.[33] We therefore said that Ihu is Ein Sof Himself, Who is not defined by any attribute. Chochmah and Chesed are His revelations and are united with Him, while He is not limited by them.

This also clarifies the question of prayer. Of the verse "whenever we call to Him," our Sages said: "To Him, and not to His attributes." The Tzemach Tzedek explains that one must not pray to the attributes themselves, not even so that they should arouse mercy before Him; prayer is directed to Him.[37] Hayom Yom records that, at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, the Alter Rebbe, author of the Epistle before us, gave three explanations of the word "to Him." According to the Pardes, Pardes Rimonim by the Ramak, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, "to Him" refers to the lights vested in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut; according to the Baal Shem Tov, "to Him" refers to the Divinity within the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut; according to the plain explanation, "to Him" means the Essence of Ein Sof, present within every simple Jew through intrinsic

[33] Tzemach Tzedek, Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapters 2–4. In chapter 2: the bodily designations in the writings of the Kabbalists are "analogy and figurative expression"; the sefirah "is not the essence of G-d," and the sefirot, "although they are Divinity, are not the Creator's actual Essence," like thought, which is not the essence of the soul. In chapter 3: "Ihu refers to the essence of the Ein Sof light, and garmohi are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut," with the analogy of a king giving with his right hand and with his left. In chapter 4: the Ein Sof light gives life to the worlds through the vessels, "from which the limitation comes," not because it needs them in itself; it refers there to this Epistle. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 33–35.

[37] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 7: "To Him, not to His attributes": one must not pray to the attributes themselves, even to ask them to arouse mercy before Him. In chapter 8: the sefirot should not be likened to a king's ministers, who are separate people, since above He Himself judges and He Himself gives. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 33–36.

awareness, in simple faith.[38] There is a warm invitation in these words. The terms we are now studying, lights, vessels, Divinity within the vessels, are not a barrier between a person and their Creator. Precisely when they are understood correctly, one also understands why a simple Jew calling "to Him" addresses Ein Sof Himself.

"And It Is Necessary to Understand Thoroughly": From Assertion to Question

W01-04
source words
22–31

And it is necessary to understand thoroughly how the Ein Sof is one with garmohi (גרמוהי), namely the vessels,

The parentheses have closed, and the difficulty now begins. "And it is necessary" moves from the assertion to the obligation to explain: after stating what the Zohar says, one must understand it. "To understand thoroughly" demands understanding of the difficulty itself, rather than repetition of the formula. איך means "how." הא"ס means "Ein Sof"; here, as we saw, the identity of Ihu in the first sentence becomes clear. "One with garmohi" means one with His vessels. "Namely the vessels" again identifies the side of the union about which the question is asked: the vessels, rather than the lights. There is no doubt here about the

[38] Hayom Yom, 11 Tishrei: the Alter Rebbe's words in Liozna on the night following Yom Kippur 5556, on "to Him, not to His attributes." See also Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 11; Research Book, vol. I, pp. 48–50.

tradition of unity itself, but an attempt to understand how the description of the vessels accords with it.

It is worth feeling the weight of the request, "And it is necessary to understand thoroughly." Three easy answers present themselves to the learner, and none is sufficient. One can repeat that "everything is one," but the meaning of a unity in which distinctions remain is still unclear. One can say that the vessels receive vitality from G-d, but every created being also receives its vitality from Him, yet we do not say that every created being is united as the vessels of Atzilut are. Or one can say that the vessels are "spiritual," but something spiritual can also be defined, so this resolves nothing either. A genuine explanation must hold two assertions together: the vessels are defined, and the vessels are united with Divinity.

W01-05
source words
32–39

when the vessels are characterized by limit and finitude, as stated in Etz Chayim.

הרי, "when" or "after all," introduces the reason for the difficulty: a known fact that seems to contradict what was said. הכלים הן means "the vessels are." בבחי' abbreviates בבחינת. Bechinah is a word encountered on almost every page of Chassidic works; it means a mode, aspect, or level in which something exists or is conceived. "In an aspect of finitude" means in a mode of finitude, having the characteristic of finitude. "Limit

and finitude," גבול ותכלית, means definition and boundedness. Tachlit, תכלית, here means an end or boundary, not a purpose. This is worth remembering, because the same Epistle will use the word in other senses: Or Ein Sof unites with the vessels "with the utmost union," the most complete union; at the end of the Epistle, the mitzvot are called "the purpose of the souls' descent," its aim. In the difficulty before us, tachlit is the end at which something ceases. כמ"ש means "as it is written." בע"ח means "in Etz Chaim," Rabbi Chaim Vital's foundational work conveying the Ari's teachings. The Alter Rebbe does not identify a particular chapter here; it is enough for his purpose that the matter is written there.

The difficulty now stands in its full force and can be formulated in three steps. "Ein Sof" means having no measure or definition. "Vessel" means precisely measure and definition. To say that the two are "one" therefore sounds like a combination of opposites. It is important to notice that the difficulty does not arise from misunderstanding the words. It arises precisely from understanding them well: someone who understands that Chochmah is not Chesed and Chesed is not Gevurah also understands the need to explain a union in which these distinctions are not erased.

Finitude Does Not Mean Only Something Small

What exactly is difficult about the assertion that the vessels are united with Ein Sof? The first answer that comes to mind is size: the vessel is small, while Ein Sof is immeasurably great. But the difficulty is deeper. A limit is not only the point where something ends in space or time. It is also the definition establishing what something is and what it is not. Chochmah concerns apprehension, Chesed imparting, and Gevurah contraction and the setting of a measure. Each sefirah's particular character is itself its limit.

It is worth distinguishing quantity from kind. One can add more and more wisdom: another line of reasoning, another understanding, another piece of knowledge. Even if we cannot count them all, we are still speaking of Chochmah, not Chesed. Similarly, a map of the Land of Israel remains a map of the same place even when enlarged to cover an entire wall. The size has changed; the definition remains.

It follows that "Ein Sof" is not a number larger than every number we have known. If it were, one could solve the difficulty by enlargement: make the vessel larger until it reaches infinity. But enlargement does not erase definition. The difficulty concerns not the relationship of small to large, but the relationship

between that which has no definition whatsoever and powers that have a particular nature and role.

This is why the vessels are described as characterized by "limit and finitude." On hearing "limit," one tends to think of a deficiency to be removed. In a vessel, however, definition is also what enables it to be the particular vessel it is. If we erased every difference between Chochmah and Chesed, we would not have explained the ten sefirot; we would have erased the subject we wanted to study. Finitude, then, is not a defect to be repaired. The question is how each vessel's definition is preserved while it is simultaneously said to be one with Ein Sof.

Three Words Not to Confuse: Limit, Definition, and Separation

To make the question clear, it is worth separating three words often blended in everyday speech. "Limit" is a measure: the thing extends this far and ends here. "Definition" is a particular nature: what this thing is and is not; Chochmah is not Chesed. "Separation" means standing as a reality in its own right, a separate domain with an existence of its own. The first two are said of the vessels of Atzilut; the third is not. Not everything that can be distinguished stands on its own.[39]

[39] For the distinction between finitude, definition and separation, and the two unacceptable shortcuts, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 7–8, in the opening conclusion on this issue.

This distinction rules out two shortcuts. One says: every limit already means separation, so a limited vessel cannot be Divinity. The other says: if the vessel is Divinity, its limit consequently has no meaning. The Epistle itself permits neither, since it says of the same vessels both that they are "Divinity" and that they are "characterized by limit and finitude." For the same reason, one cannot say that everything limited is necessarily created: the vessels are limited, yet the subject is the Divine vessels of Atzilut.

The distinction between measure and separation will accompany us throughout the book. Later in the Epistle, we will encounter souls that have not yet descended from Atzilut, which the Alter Rebbe describes as "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction"; yet he will say that they are not "actual Divinity, to create something from nothing," because they have already emerged and become separate from the vessels. There we will see that contraction alone does not determine status, and that "limited" is not a single key to the entire Epistle.[40]

How Does the Vessel Reveal the Light?

To see what the vessel does, consider a teacher who understands an idea and wants to convey it. As long as the idea remains within the teacher in a

[40] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 10–12, in the discussions "Unity in Operation Does Not Erase the Vessel" and "Finitude Does Not Necessarily Mean Separation," and in the resolution of the issue.

comprehensive form, the teacher may feel its depth without yet knowing how to explain it. To teach, one must choose words, arrange stages, and give an example. Every such choice narrows: the teacher says this sentence, rather than everything that could be said. Precisely through this narrowing, the student begins to understand.

What does the example teach? That definition is not merely an obstacle. It is also the condition enabling content to appear in a particular way. Thus the "vessel of Chochmah" is not a barrier stopping the light, but the defined manner in which revelation appears as wisdom; the "vessel of Chesed" is another manner, one of imparting and giving. Without the distinction between them, we could not speak of Chochmah and Chesed as two sefirot. The experience of learning teaches something else as well: a teacher explaining one idea through several examples does not create several competing truths. A multiplicity of forms of revelation does not require a multiplicity of independent sources.

Here, however, the analogy reaches its limit, and in doing so sharpens the difficulty. The teacher's words do limit the understanding and enable the listener to encounter it, but they are not one with the teacher. They are produced and heard; they can be written on paper and set aside. Is this how the vessels of Atzilut

should be understood? The Zohar says more: of the vessels too it says "one." Thus the fact that a vessel helps define revelation is not yet an answer to the question of unity. The analogy explains what the vessel does, leaving the harder question open: how does definition exist without the vessel becoming an independent reality outside Divinity? The answer concerning creation will shed light on this question.

Keeping the Question Sharp

Before hearing the answer, let us return to the two shortcuts, this time as they sound when offered as answers to the difficulty. One says that the vessel is only an instrument in the hands of the possessor of power. But an instrument and its owner are two; we have described cooperation without yet explaining unity. The other says: everything is one, and the vessel has no real definition. But then we have canceled what is explicitly said of it: Chochmah is not Chesed, and every vessel has its own domain. The Epistle follows neither path. It preserves both assertions, that the differences exist and that they are not independent domains, and sets out to investigate their relationship.

We should be precise about what the word "one" negates and what it does not. It does not turn the ten sefirot into a single sefirah or replace the action of Chesed with that of Gevurah. What it negates is a very

particular picture: that each vessel possesses an independent power and receives the Creator's permission to act, like a minister in a kingdom whom the king appoints and grants authority, acting in the king's name but through his own powers and judgment. In discussing the analogy of the king's ministers, the Tzemach Tzedek warns against treating the analogy as literally identical to what it represents: in the analogy, the judge and the official in charge of the treasuries are people separate from the king, whereas above it is He Himself Who judges, through His attribute of Gevurah, and He Himself Who gives, through His attribute of Chesed.[37] Of the vessels of Atzilut, the Zohar says "one": they do not possess independent power.[40]

We can now appreciate the opening. One short line contains both the distinction between light and vessel and the assertion of their unity. The commentary must develop both sides, and only then show how the power of creation gives both a place within a single argument. Readers need not already picture all of Atzilut. It is enough to understand the question and why an overly

[37] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 7: "To Him, not to His attributes": one must not pray to the attributes themselves, even to ask them to arouse mercy before Him. In chapter 8: the sefirot should not be likened to a king's ministers, who are separate people, since above He Himself judges and He Himself gives. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 33–36.

[40] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 10–12, in the discussions "Unity in Operation Does Not Erase the Vessel" and "Finitude Does Not Necessarily Mean Separation," and in the resolution of the issue.

easy answer loses part of it. With this understanding, let us hear the answer.

“The Intention, However”: The Answer Turns to the Power of Creation

W01-06
source words
40–50

The intention, however, is to say that they are Divinity for creating something from nothing, like the Ein Sof,

“However,” אמנם, opens the answer; here it means “but” or “in truth, however.” “The intention” means the intention of the Zohar’s words “He and His vessels are one”: what they come to say. “That they,” שהן, means the vessels about which the question was asked. “Divinity,” אלקות, is as in the parenthetical passage. “To create” is the action through which the union is explained; later the Epistle will say that “something from nothing” is called “creation” in the Holy Tongue. “Something from nothing” means existence from ayin: a yesh that is not the continuation of a preceding nature and has no “commensurability” with it. “Commensurability” means a shared measure making comparison possible between two things: an effect is commensurate with its cause, and its source is discernible within it. Of the created being in relation to the power bringing it into being, the Epistle will say that “they are utterly incommensurate with one another,” and it is therefore called specifically

"something from nothing." "Like the Ein Sof" means like the Infinite.

The word "like" requires examination. It does not say that the vessels become limitless like Ein Sof; they remain defined. Nor does it say that the vessels are a second creator with a similar capacity of their own. Later in the Epistle, the Alter Rebbe will write of the Emanator "that His existence is from His Essence," and "therefore He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and absolute naught, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh." If creation from nothing is His capacity alone, "like the Ein Sof" does not describe a parallel capacity belonging to the vessels. It describes His capacity operating in them, because Ein Sof is united with them.

The answer is surprising. We might expect the Alter Rebbe first to explain what unity is, and only then describe what follows from it. He does the reverse, directing us toward an action: the vessels are Divinity "to create something from nothing." To understand the meaning of union, he asks us to inquire what power operates within the vessels. Do they merely pass on something already present in their source, or does the Divine power to bring a new reality into being operate within them?

Why does creation in particular explain unity? The reasoning has three steps. First, creation from nothing

is an act in which there is no partner. Light can be transmitted, increased, contracted, and arranged in stages; but bringing into being a reality that did not exist, without any preceding cause, is possible only for One Whose existence is from Himself. Second, this creation takes place in and through the vessels. Third, it follows that the vessels are not a separate reality standing outside Him. The difficulty thus receives a new criterion. The difficulty measured the vessels by asking, "Are they limited?" The answer measures them by asking, "What power operates within them?" The vessel remains limited, yet is Divinity because the power of Ein Sof Himself operates within it. The Alter Rebbe will later use the same criterion when discussing the souls we mentioned: what has emerged and become separate from the vessels is not "actual Divinity, to create something from nothing."

Intrinsic Unity and Cooperation in Action

The words "to create something from nothing" may suggest that unity is merely cooperation: several agents working together toward one purpose, like people building a house. But people building a house together remain separate people; only the action is shared. The reading "unity in action alone" is attractive and has some support: the answer itself says "to create." Later commentaries even use the formulation that the union is "with regard to action," rather than

simple identity; but this is the wording of commentators, not the Alter Rebbe's own.[41] The Epistle itself says more than "to create": at its beginning, the vessels are called "Divinity," and later Or Ein Sof is said to unite within them "with the utmost union." This reading is therefore useful if its role is to direct us toward what the Epistle actually explains, but insufficient if it means that the vessels themselves remain an alien reality and only their result is shared. The action reveals and explains the union; it does not turn it into an agreement between separate realities or replace the full meaning of that union.[40]

One analogy brings this distinction closer than that of the builders. The Tzemach Tzedek gives the analogy of a king giving a gift, sometimes with his right hand and sometimes with his left. The hands are distinct, yet in both cases one says, "The king gave"; the king is one, and his soul and intellect provide the vitality of both hands. Likewise, although the sefirot are ten differentiated aspects, the Or Ein Sof extending within them is one.[33] This analogy teaches two things that the

[41] For the status of the formulation "with regard to the operation" as explanatory wording rather than the Epistle's own wording, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 22–23 and 30–31, in the discussion "Cause and Effect versus Yesh Me-Ayin."

[40] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 10–12, in the discussions "Unity in Operation Does Not Erase the Vessel" and "Finitude Does Not Necessarily Mean Separation," and in the resolution of the issue.

[33] Tzemach Tzedek, Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapters 2–4. In chapter 2: the bodily designations in the writings of the Kabbalists are "analogy and figurative expression"; the sefirah "is not the essence of G-d," and the sefirot, "although they are Divinity, are not the Creator's actual Essence," like thought, which is not the essence of the soul. In chapter 3: "Ihu refers to the essence of the Ein Sof light, and garmohi are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut,"

builders' analogy does not: the giving belongs to the one giver, and the hand is not another person helping him but lives through his vitality. Yet its limit is clear as well. Hands are bodily organs, and above there is no body; a human hand is still created and can be thought of separately from the person. In Atzilut, the Epistle says, the vessels too are Divinity. Every analogy drawn from the soul and its faculties has a further limit: the human soul has no power to create something from nothing. The analogy helps only to explain that difference in expression does not require many independent sources; the Holy One, blessed be He, and the vessels must therefore not be described as two partners, each contributing a share of their own.

Let us summarize the beginning of the answer. The vessels do not possess a private power standing beside the power of the Holy One, blessed be He. They are united with the Divine light, and through this union the capacity to create operates in them. The differences between the vessels enable created beings to be different and defined, but the source of coming into being itself does not become limited like them. We must therefore distinguish the power that brings into being from the measure in which the created being comes into being. This is what we will do in the next section.

with the analogy of a king giving with his right hand and with his left. In chapter 4: the Ein Sof light gives life to the worlds through the vessels, "from which the limitation comes," not because it needs them in itself; it refers there to this Epistle. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 33–35.

What Belongs to Each Side, and What Must Not Be Divided

What belongs to each side? The created being must be defined: this person, this plant, this measure. Definition is connected with the vessels; from them come the measure, distinction, and multiplicity of particulars among created beings. But the very power to bring into being is not a private power belonging to them. It is the power of the Divine light united with them. Two opposite mistakes are possible here. Someone who gives a vessel an independent source of power loses "one." Someone who erases its definition loses the explanation of why created beings are many and limited. The answer must hold both sides together.

Later in the Epistle, the Alter Rebbe returns to the opening and says this explicitly: "And in order that this yesh, created by the power of Ein Sof, should have limit and measure, Or Ein Sof vested itself in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut and unites within them with the utmost union, to the point that 'He and His vessels are one,' to create in them and through them created beings possessing limit and finitude." This sentence deserves slow reading, because every component of our question appears in it. "By the power of Ein Sof": the power bringing into being is His power. "Possessing limit and measure": the created being must be defined, and for this the vessels are needed.

“Vested itself… and unites within them with the utmost union”: this is not partnership but complete union. “To the point that He and His vessels are one”: these are precisely the opening words. “To create in them and through them”: in and through the vessels; the vessels belong to the act of creation itself.

A caution follows. It is convenient to summarize: Ein Sof Himself gives existence itself, while the vessels give form. This distinction helps explain the role of each side. But if we understand it as two separate actions, one by Ein Sof and one by the vessels, we miss “He and His vessels are one.” The power and the limitation are not two creators. The vessels united with their source are the way limited multiplicity comes into being, and creation takes place “in them and through them” as one action.[42]

Why is such a way needed? Not because the Holy One, blessed be He, needs vessels in Himself. The Tzemach Tzedek explains that the need is on the side of the worlds: they possess measure and limit, and if they received vitality from Or Ein Sof itself without the mediation of the vessels, they could not be limited; the limitation comes from the vessels. For this, he refers, among other sources, to the Epistle before us.[33]

[42] On the precise wording “in them and through them,” and the caution against dividing the act of creation into two separate operations, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 31–33, in the discussion “How Does ‘He Alone’ Act through Vessels?”; on the fact that the power and the limitation “are not two creators,” see ibid., pp. 8–11, in “Mapping the Question and Its Clarification.”

[33] Tzemach Tzedek, Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapters 2–4. In chapter 2: the bodily designations in the writings of the Kabbalists are “analogy and figurative expression”;

It also follows that the question is not resolved by saying, “The limit disappears within Ein Sof.” The Epistle says that the vessels are needed precisely so that the created being should possess limit and measure. The limit is not a reader’s error; it is part of the order of coming into being. The vessel does not create through its own power, but neither is it superfluous: through it, the created being is formed with a particular measure and characteristic. The distinctive point is that the limit exists without standing as an independent domain; a power without limit is revealed in a manner that establishes a limited reality. The question will recur when the light vests itself in vessels in the lower worlds.

“And Not Merely by Way of the Chainlike Progression of Cause and Effect”

W01-07
source words
51–56

and not merely by way of the chainlike progression of cause and effect.

The sentence continues, now stating what the Zohar does not intend. “And not” connects to “the intention is to say”: the intention is to say this, not that. בבחי׳ means “in the aspect,” or “by way of.” Hishtalshelut comes from shalshelet, “chain”: an order of graduated

the sefirah “is not the essence of G-d,” and the sefirot, “although they are Divinity, are not the Creator’s actual Essence,” like thought, which is not the essence of the soul. In chapter 3: “Ihu refers to the essence of the Ein Sof light, and garmohi are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut,” with the analogy of a king giving with his right hand and with his left. In chapter 4: the Ein Sof light gives life to the worlds through the vessels, “from which the limitation comes,” not because it needs them in itself; it refers there to this Epistle. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 33–35.

drawing down, link after link, level from level. Ilah is the cause, the source; ve-alul means “and the effect,” what derives from it. Between cause and effect there is “commensurability”: the effect derives from the cause, and its connection to the source is discernible. The final Hebrew word, levad, לבד, “alone” or “merely,” is the key. It does not negate all chainlike descent; it negates being satisfied with it. The meaning is not that there is no order of cause and effect among the sefirot themselves, but that this is not the sole and sufficient description of what the vessels are and do.

Immediately after these words, the Alter Rebbe mentions the words of the Ramak, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, who wrote about a chainlike descent of cause and effect, and explains what they refer to.

To understand what “alone” adds, consider two familiar actions. An artisan takes wood and makes a table. A teacher conveys to a student an understanding they did not previously possess. In both cases, something important has been added: a new form in the first and new knowledge in the second. But the wood already existed, as did the student’s intellect. We therefore do not call these actions creation from absolute naught. The examples clarify the distinction between changing something already in existence and its very coming into being. The Epistle seeks to reach the question preceding every change and development: whence

comes the very possibility of a reality that is not the continuation of a preceding nature with which it is commensurate?

The word “alone” also determines the order of the next chapter. There is a place for the way one thing derives from another, level from level, as one thought gives rise to another. But someone who tries to explain created reality itself only by extending this chain will miss the newness of creation. We will therefore first clarify why a chain of spiritual causes, however long, is insufficient to explain creation; then we will see how power not measured according to the created being operates through defined vessels. All this is a progression of explanation, not an attempt to define the Creator’s Essence.

Summary

Reading the opening of the Epistle yields three assertions that must be understood together. The source of the power to bring into being is Ein Sof. The vessels define the manner of coming into being: that the created being should be this and not another, with this measure and not another. And in Atzilut, the vessels do not stand as a separate domain. Whoever gives up any one of the three loses the question with which the Epistle opened.

This also offers guidance for the service of G-d, arising from the explanation itself. A person commonly thinks that everything defined within them, a particular hour, a particular capacity, a particular action, is distant from Divinity by virtue of being defined. The Epistle's opening teaches us to distinguish limit from separation. We must not draw hasty conclusions about ourselves: we are not the vessels of Atzilut, and the Epistle itself said "unlike in BYA." But the distinction learned here, that a limit does not necessarily mean separation, will accompany the Epistle to its end, to the physical action of a mitzvah. Someone contemplating it stands before a wonder: unity that does not erase the varied shades, and Ein Sof Whose power is revealed precisely through measure.

Toward the Next Chapter

The beginning of the answer makes the direction of our reading clear: unity does not cancel definition, and definition is not an independent source of power. How creation itself takes place still requires investigation. The better we understand what creation and a created being are, the more we can return to the first sentence and hear in it beyond what we first heard. The word "alone" opens the next investigation; it does not close it. In the next chapter, with the words of the Ramak, we will examine what a chainlike descent of cause and effect can and cannot do.

Studying the Chapter with Artificial-Intelligence Tools

All the following exercises have the same structure: what to ask the tool, what to check in its answer against the Epistle's wording and the sources, and how far the answer can go. These three parts condense the seven stages in "The Working Method at a Glance," within "Studying Further" at the end of the book: "What to ask" opens the conversation, "What to check" returns to the source, and "The limit of the conclusion" marks how far the conclusion extends. Readers who have not yet read that section can begin this way: open a new conversation with the tool, copy the wording of the units from the book into it, and only then write the question. Do not ask the tool to quote the units from memory. When an exercise refers to the chapter's commentary, the intention is not to check whether the tool agrees with the book: the commentary too rests on sources, and where there is doubt, we open them. The same part of the book, under "General Exercises for Every Chapter," also collects exercises not tied to a particular chapter.

Exercise 1: Three Meanings of Tachlit

What to ask. Attach the unit "when the vessels are characterized by limit and finitude [גבול ותכלית], as stated in Etz Chayim," and ask: "What does the word

tachlit [תכלית] mean here? Is this the same meaning as in 'with the utmost union' [בתכלית היחוד] and 'the purpose of the souls' descent' [תכלית ירידת הנשמות]?"

What to check. Does the answer distinguish the three meanings we saw: an end or boundary in the difficulty, completeness in "with the utmost union," and purpose in "the purpose of the souls' descent"? Does it explain the meaning from the context, the pairing "limit and finitude," rather than from ordinary present-day usage?

The limit of the conclusion. Even a correct answer here teaches only the word's meaning. It decides nothing about how the limited vessels are united with Ein Sof.

Exercise 2: An Answer Given Too Quickly

What to ask. Ask the difficulty itself without attaching the Epistle's answer: "If the vessels are limited, how can they be said to be one with Ein Sof?"

What to check. Does the answer fall into either of the two easy approaches described: "Everything is one, so the differences are not real," or "The vessel is merely an instrument in the hands of the possessor of power"? Does it preserve both assertions together, that the vessels are defined and that they are united with Divinity? Does it distinguish limit, definition, and separation?

The limit of the conclusion. Even if the answer sounds convincing, it is not the Epistle's answer as long as it does not arrive at "to create something from nothing." A plausible answer is not a source.

Exercise 3: A Commentator's Wording, or the Epistle's?

What to ask. "Does the Alter Rebbe say in the Epistle that the vessels' union is 'with regard to action'?"

What to check. Search for the phrase in the wording of the units. We saw that it is the formulation of later commentators, not the Alter Rebbe's wording. Does the tool distinguish what is written in the source from what is said about it? If the tool supplies a reference, open it and check whether the wording is actually there.

The limit of the conclusion. Even when a commentator's formulation is helpful, it cannot be attributed to the Epistle. Conversely, the fact that the phrase is not written in the Epistle does not invalidate the explanation itself; it only establishes to whom it belongs.

Chapter 2 | Cause and Effect, Moses' Apprehension, and the Transition from Spirit to Matter

What We Already Know

From the previous chapter, we know that "light" is revelation and "vessel" the definition of that revelation, and that in Atzilut the vessels too are Divinity. We saw the difficulty: the vessels are "characterized by limit and finitude," so how can they be one with Ein Sof? We also saw the beginning of the answer: the vessels are Divinity "to create something from nothing," meaning that the power of creation, in which there is no partner, operates within them. The answer ended with the Hebrew word "alone": "and not merely by way of the chainlike progression of cause and effect." We have not yet explained exactly what chainlike descent is or why it is insufficient. That is the subject of this chapter.

What Is the Difference between Drawing Something Down and Creating It?

Let us read the whole sentence. The Alter Rebbe said that the vessels are "Divinity for creating something from nothing, like the Ein Sof, and not merely by way of the chainlike progression of cause and effect." The sentence implies a way in which one thing derives from another, a chainlike progression of cause and

effect, and that this way is insufficient to explain creation. Before reading the continuation of the Epistle, which examines this distinction, let us try to give the concepts a tangible form.

Let us return to the teacher and student. The teacher explains an idea, choosing an example, omitting details, and advancing slowly. The student understands less than the teacher and may still lack many details. Yet what the student understood is connected to the content the teacher taught, and this connection can be seen in three ways. The student can state the idea in their own words; the teacher can show where the student's conclusion comes from; and the student can retrace the path from the conclusion to the reasoning. One can point to the shared principle and say: this is the same reasoning as received in the student's mind. One idea has given rise to another that is related to it.

This is a close example of the expression "cause and effect." As we recall, ilah is the cause, alul what derives from it, and hishtalshelut a chain of levels, link after link. Each transition may involve great contraction: the student grasps only a little of what is in the teacher's mind. Yet there remains between them what the books call erech, "commensurability," a shared measure through which the two things can be compared and one can speak of what passed from one to the other. The effect may be lower than its source, more

restricted, and very different in its form of revelation, while it remains possible to understand how it came from that source. This is the distinguishing mark of cause and effect: they are commensurate.

But this analogy has a limit, important to the subject. It explains how content is conveyed, how one idea derives from another. It does not explain where the teacher and student themselves came from. Let us therefore change the question. Instead of asking how the student understood the idea, let us ask how there is a student at all, an intellectual faculty, and a world in which the student lives. Here, searching for the teacher's teacher, and the teacher who taught them both, will not help. Even a very long chain of teachers and students explains only how content passed from one to another; it does not explain the coming into being itself about which the Epistle asks. This is the practical significance of "alone": chainlike descent explains drawing down, but does not by itself explain creation.

Later in the chapter, the question will return with particular force when we reach physicality. A very faint thought is still a thought, not a small stone. Apprehension can be weakened again and again, but weakening in itself does not explain how something spiritual becomes a physical body. The difference here is not between much and little, but between one kind of reality and another. To show this, the Alter Rebbe will

give an example involving angels and the spirit of an animal. The example will teach what spiritual drawing down can accomplish, allowing us to distinguish what still needs explanation when discussing a body.[43]

Along the way, another kind of question will appear: the apprehension of Moses our teacher. This concerns not how something comes into being from its source, but what can be apprehended of that source. ("Apprehension" in Chassidic language means intellectual grasp and understanding: not merely knowing that something exists, but grasping what it is.) It is worth knowing in advance that these are two separate questions. A good answer about coming into being does not automatically resolve the question of apprehension, and an answer about apprehension does not explain how a body is created. In this chapter, we will study both and try not to confuse them.[44]

[43] For an examination of the relation between spiritual hishtalshelut and the coming into being of physicality, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 54–59, particularly the discussion "Why an A Fortiori Argument Is Not Needed."

[44] For an examination of Moses' apprehension, the relation between pnimiyut and panim, and the distinction between the mode of drawing down and the content of apprehension, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 54–61.

“And as for What the Ramak Wrote”: A Difficulty from the Sources

W02-01
source words
1–10

And as for what the Ramak wrote concerning the chainlike progression of cause and effect, and likewise in the holy Zohar, Parashat Bereshit,

ומ”ש means “and as for what he wrote.” הרמ”ק is the acronym for Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, one of the great Kabbalists of sixteenth-century Safed and author of Pardes Rimonim. “Concerning” indicates the subject about which he wrote. “The chainlike progression of cause and effect” is an order in which level derives from level as an effect from its source, as we have just explained. וכ”ה means “and likewise”; בזוה”ק means “in the holy Zohar”; פ’ בראשית means “Parashat Bereshit,” the part of the Zohar arranged according to the Torah portion Bereshit.

Why does the Alter Rebbe mention the Ramak precisely here? Because he anticipates an objection. He has just said that the vessels are not adequately described as “merely by way of the chainlike progression of cause and effect,” yet the student of Kabbalistic works encounters this language again and again. In Pardes Rimonim, in the gate concerning the arrangement of the sefirot, the Ramak writes: “Every cause encompasses its effect, and the effect is

encompassed by its cause"; in the following chapter, he discusses "the order of the sefirot from cause to effect."[45] In the Zohar too, in Parashat Bereshit, the worlds "above and below" are described as layers one within another, "this within that."[46] If the sources themselves describe the sefirot as a chain of cause and effect, is there not a contradiction between their words and "and not... alone"?

How does the Alter Rebbe answer? He does not reject the Ramak's words, say that he was mistaken, or present two schools of thought here. He does something subtler: he defines the subject of the statements. A description correct in its own setting may become an incorrect answer when transferred to another question. Someone who correctly describes how a river flows from a mountain to the sea has not yet

[45] Pardes Rimmonim by the Ramak, Gate 6 ("The Order of the Sefirot's Positions"), chapter 3: "It is known that every cause encompasses what it causes, and every ilah encompasses its alul, while the alul is encompassed by its ilah, just as the point of the earth is in the middle of the heavens, and the heavens surround the earth"; and at the end of the same chapter: "What we say here about a sefirah within a sefirah, and these matters, is not intended to mean that things are literally so, G-d forbid... for one who believes such things, G-d forbid, corporealizes Divinity." Ibid., chapter 4: "The order of the sefirot from cause to effect." Likewise Gate 2, chapter 7: "It is known that every alul is encompassed by its ilah, and the ilah encompasses the alul." In the transcription on Sefaria: Pardes Rimmonim 6:3; 6:4; 2:7. In the English translation of Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (Lessons in Tanya), the translator's reference here is Gate 6, chapter 6, "and elsewhere."

[46] Zohar, vol. I, 19b–20a (Parashat Bereishit): "And the whole world is in this manner, above and below," followed by: "This within that, and this within that" (Sefaria, Zohar, Bereishit, paragraphs 105–106). This passage is cited in the English translation of Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (Lessons in Tanya, in the translator's note: "I, 19b ff.") as the source for "and so it is in the holy Zohar, Parashat Bereishit." The Zohar there uses the analogy of a kernel and shells, one inside the other, and does not use the words "ilah and alul"; the application to cause and effect is that of the person supplying the reference. In Zohar, Bereishit, vol. I, 22b, the discussion concerns "the Cause of causes, the Cause of these causes," none of which acts "until it receives permission from the one above it" (Sefaria, Zohar, Bereishit, paragraph 168); this too is related to the subject. The Epistle does not specify which of these passages the Alter Rebbe intended.

explained where its water came from; the two descriptions do not contradict one another, because they answer different questions. In this way, we can distinguish the question of drawing down from the question of coming into being. Thus, immediately after citing the Ramak's words, comes the word haynu, "this refers to."

"This Refers To": Where Cause and Effect Apply

W02-02
source words
11–17

this refers to the unfolding of the sefirot within the sefirot themselves (in the aspect of the vessels),

Haynu, היינו, means "that is," "this is what is meant." "In the unfolding of the sefirot" means the order in which one sefirah derives from another. "Within the sefirot themselves" means within the system of the sefirot, from sefirah to sefirah. Rabbi Yosef Weinberg illustrates this in his Lessons in Tanya: the way one sefirah comes and unfolds from another, "as, for example, Binah comes from Chochmah."[47] The

[47] Rabbi Yosef Weinberg, Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20 (in English translation: Lessons in Tanya). In this work the Rebbe's additions are marked separately ("Addition by the Rebbe"); the remaining material is the author's. What is quoted here is the author's wording, as presented on the Chabad website: "As one sefirah comes and develops through hishtalshelut from another sefirah, for example, as Binah comes from Chochmah"; " 'Beli mah' means that they are not in the category of yesh and a nature apprehensible to created beings"; "Thus the vessels of the sefirot too are called 'beli mah,' without a nature, for this is not any nature apprehensible to the intellect of created beings. It is in this regard that hishtalshelut is said of the sefirot: one sefirah does not come into being from another through creation yesh me-ayin... Rather, it is 'beli mah': it comes by way of cause and effect." he.chabad.org—Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Epistle 20; read on the daily-study pages for 4 and 5 Tishrei (4 Tishrei; 5 Tishrei).

parenthetical words “(in the aspect of the vessels)” belong to the Epistle’s own text and are not an addition by a printer or commentator. ”בבחי means “in the aspect”; “the vessels” are the vessels of the sefirot, the defined side of each sefirah, which we studied in the previous chapter.

This definition delimits the Ramak’s words in two ways. It states their subject: the sefirot in relation to one another. And it states the aspect involved: the vessels. Between Chochmah and Binah, between Chesed and Gevurah, there is an order of source and effect. The vessel of Binah derives from the vessel of Chochmah, and their relationship is one of cause and effect. This is the description’s place, and in this place it is correct.

We should also be precise about the scope of “this refers to.” The word does not establish that cause and effect exist nowhere else; shortly, the Epistle itself will give an example of chainlike descent outside the sefirot, the animal’s spirit deriving from the “face of an ox.” Nor does it cancel the chainlike descent among the sefirot. Its role is one thing: to prevent the mechanism of chainlike descent, spoken of concerning the sefirot themselves, from being transferred to another question and presented as an explanation for a created yesh coming into being. The Ramak described the order of the sefirot. Here the Alter Rebbe asks how

a yesh is created, showing that the other description, correct in its own place, does not answer this question.

“Without Whatness”: What Cannot Be Grasped

W02-03
source words
18–26

which are called “without whatness” (בלי מה) in Sefer Yetzirah, for they are not in the category of yesh and apprehensible nature,

“Which are called” means that the sefirot under discussion are called this. Beli mah, בלי מה, consists of two words: without a “what,” without a nature that one can point to, ask “What is it?”, and receive an answer. בס”י means “in Sefer Yetzirah,” an ancient work among the foundations of Kabbalah. Its first chapter repeatedly uses the expression “ten sefirot without whatness”; in several mishnayot, the two words are written as one, בלימה. The Ramak explains that the single word too comprises “two words, beli mah, meaning without a nature.”[48] One more small point about the book’s name: in a note to the English translation of Lessons in Tanya, the Rebbe observed that the name “Yetzirah” also includes the formation of the sefirot themselves. Sefer Yetzirah is therefore not a

[48] Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 1: ten sefirot belimah. This appears in several mishnayot, for example: “Ten sefirot belimah: ten and not nine, ten and not eleven”; and in mishnah 2, in the Warsaw 5644 printed text on Sefaria: “Ten sefirot beli mah,” as in the Epistle’s wording. The Ramak, Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 1, chapter 1: “He said that they are belimah, meaning two words, beli mah, and the intention is: without a nature.” Sefer Yetzirah 1:2; Pardes Rimmonim 1:1.

book concerned only with the world called “the world of Yetzirah.”[49]

“For they are not in the category of yesh and apprehensible nature”: this is how the Alter Rebbe explains the designation. Three words carry the sentence. Yesh is a reality standing as a thing of which one can say, “Here it is.” Mahut, “nature,” is what the thing is. Musag, “apprehensible,” is what the intellect can apprehend, grasp, and hold. The phrase “yesh and apprehensible nature” thus describes something that is both a defined reality and a nature that created intellect can grasp. The sefirot are not such things. Rabbi Weinberg likewise explains: “Without a nature, for this is not any nature accessible to the intellect of created beings.”[47]

Why is this important precisely here? Because it explains why the description of cause and effect fits the

[49]The Rebbe’s notes to the English translation (Lessons in Tanya, Epistle 20, notes 17–18 in the Epistle’s continuous numbering, marked “Note by the Rebbe”). Note 17, on “Sefer Yetzirah”: “Including the formation (Yetzirah) of the sefirot”. Note 18, on “which are not in the category of yesh”: “Not even of the yesh of Beriah, the proof of this being—and to the extent that—they are not [even of an apprehensible nature to created beings]”. The Hebrew translation in the body of the chapter is ours; no Hebrew text of these two notes was found in the online version of Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya. chabad.org—Lessons in Tanya, the daily lesson for 4 Tishrei.

[47]Rabbi Yosef Weinberg, Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20 (in English translation: Lessons in Tanya). In this work the Rebbe’s additions are marked separately (“Addition by the Rebbe”); the remaining material is the author’s. What is quoted here is the author’s wording, as presented on the Chabad website: “As one sefirah comes and develops through hishtalshelut from another sefirah, for example, as Binah comes from Chochmah”; “ ‘Beli mah’ means that they are not in the category of yesh and a nature apprehensible to created beings”; “Thus the vessels of the sefirot too are called ‘beli mah,’ without a nature, for this is not any nature apprehensible to the intellect of created beings. It is in this regard that hishtalshelut is said of the sefirot: one sefirah does not come into being from another through creation yesh me-ayin… Rather, it is ‘beli mah’: it comes by way of cause and effect.” he.chabad.org—Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Epistle 20; read on the daily-study pages for 4 and 5 Tishrei (4 Tishrei; 5 Tishrei).

sefirot. Rabbi Weinberg explains the argument as follows: one sefirah does not come into being from another through creation of something from nothing, since it is not "yesh," an apprehensible nature; it is "without whatness," and therefore comes by way of cause and effect. Let us spell out the steps. Chainlike descent is the way one sefirah derives from another, both being "without whatness." Here there is no new thing of another kind that must come into being, so chainlike descent is sufficient. But when a "yesh" must come into being, a reality standing as a thing, this way is no longer sufficient.

In another note to the same English translation, the Rebbe added that the sefirot are not "yesh" even in the sense of the yesh of the world of Beriah, the first created world; the evidence is that they are not even a nature apprehensible to created beings.[49] This note prevents an easy mistake: thinking that negating "yesh" means only that the sefirot are not physical. Even spiritual yesh, a created reality without matter, is not the correct description of the sefirot.

[49]The Rebbe's notes to the English translation (Lessons in Tanya, Epistle 20, notes 17–18 in the Epistle's continuous numbering, marked "Note by the Rebbe"). Note 17, on "Sefer Yetzirah": "Including the formation (Yetzirah) of the sefirot". Note 18, on "which are not in the category of yesh": "Not even of the yesh of Beriah, the proof of this being—and to the extent that—they are not [even of an apprehensible nature to created beings]". The Hebrew translation in the body of the chapter is ours; no Hebrew text of these two notes was found in the online version of Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya. chabad.org—Lessons in Tanya, the daily lesson for 4 Tishrei.

Knowing about Something without Grasping Its Nature

Here we must beware of a common mistake. If the sefirot are "without whatness," perhaps nothing can be said about them and all study of Kabbalah is guesswork? That is not so. Negating "apprehensible nature" does not negate all knowledge. Kabbalistic and Chassidic works speak extensively about the sefirot: their names, order, actions, and relationships. We learn that Chesed imparts and Gevurah limits, that Binah derives from Chochmah, and that there is a fixed order among them. All these are true forms of knowledge. What is negated is something particular: that a sefirah should stand before the intellect like an object one can point to and say, "This is what it is."

A close analogy is our knowledge of our own faculties of the soul. A person knows that they see, hear, and remember. They know what they saw, when they remembered, and what they forgot; the activity of sight can be described in detail. But when they try to grasp the faculty of sight itself as something standing before them, "This is the faculty; this is what it looks like," they have no such thing. They know the faculty through its activities, not as a nature standing before them. This analogy, too, has a clear limit: the faculty of sight is created, while the sefirot are Divinity. It teaches only the distinction between knowing about something

and grasping its nature. We will need this distinction immediately when we come to Moses our teacher.

"And Are Like the Ein Sof" and "My Face Shall Not Be Seen"

W02-04
source words
27–37

and are like the Ein Sof, whom no thought grasps at all, as it is written, "My face shall not be seen,"

"And are like the Ein Sof" means like the Infinite. דלית מחשבה תפיסא ביה כלל is Aramaic for "whom no thought grasps at all." דלית means "there is no"; תפיסא means "grasps"; ביה means "Him"; כלל strengthens the negation, "at all." The wording comes from the second introduction to Tikkunei HaZohar, beginning "Patach Eliyahu," where it is spoken in direct address to the Holy One, blessed be He: לית מחשבה תפיסא בך כלל, "No thought grasps You at all." The Epistle changes it to the third person, ביה, "Him."[50] וכמ"ש means "and as it is written." "My face shall not be seen" is the end of the verse in Exodus: "You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

The sentence deepens the negation. The Alter Rebbe compares the sefirot to Ein Sof: just as no thought

[50] Tikkunei HaZohar, second introduction ("Patach Eliyahu"), folio 17a: "No thought grasps You at all"; and there: "Tiferet is the body. Netzach and Hod are the two legs." Sefaria, Tikkunei HaZohar 17a. The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("רשימות על התניא — מראה מקומות, הגהות והערות קצרות לספר של בינונים"), section 20, p. מז [47], notes on "no thought grasps Him at all": "Introduction to Tikkunei Zohar: Patach Eliyahu." File on chabad.org; the quotations from the Reshimot in this chapter were read by decoding the text layer, which is stored in a legacy encoding.

grasps Ein Sof, the sefirot are not an apprehensible nature. The comparison is understandable in light of the previous chapter, where we learned that the vessels are "Divinity." But "like" does not mean that the vessels and Ein Sof are equal in every respect. The vessels are defined, Chochmah is not Binah, while Ein Sof is wholly undefined. The comparison concerns one point alone: neither is grasped as a nature by created intellect.

Why does the Alter Rebbe cite specifically the verse "My face shall not be seen"? Let us recall the context. After the sin of the golden calf, Moses requested: "Show me, please, Your glory." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live," and at the end: "You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen." These words were addressed to Moses, the greatest of the prophets. If even to him it was said, "My face shall not be seen," this is not the limit of a weak learner or a diminished generation; it is a limit of created apprehension as such. Rabbi Weinberg explains that "My face" here means the inner dimension, referring "also to the inner dimension of the vessels, which too is beyond even the vision and apprehension of Moses our teacher."[51]

[51] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words), as presented on the website. On "My face shall not be seen": "Even for Moses our teacher, this is not an apprehensible nature. 'My face,' the inner dimension, here also means the inner dimension of the vessels, which too are beyond even Moses' vision and apprehension." On the sentence about Moses: "The prophecy of Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, and his apprehension were only from the upper segment of Netzach of Ze'ir Anpin... As mentioned in the preceding epistle (section 19), the sefirot Netzach–Hod–Yesod are only the vessels of imparting and descent to the recipient, so they are only the outer dimension of

Here a question arises. We have just been told that the sefirot are not an apprehensible nature, and the verse brought as evidence concerns Moses. Yet in the next sentence, the Epistle names Moses, saying that his prophecy and apprehension "were" from a particular place within the sefirot. If the sefirot cannot be apprehended, what did Moses apprehend?

"And the Prophecy of Moses Our Teacher": Apprehension within the Negation

W02-05
source words
38–47

and the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, and his apprehension were from the upper segment of Netzach of Ze'ir Anpin.

"And the prophecy of Moses our teacher" means the prophecy revealed to Moses; ע"ה means "peace be upon him." "And his apprehension" means what he apprehended and understood. The two words are not redundant: "prophecy" is the revelation that came to him from above, while "apprehension" is what he received from it in his understanding. "Were from…" means came from, had their source in… "Upper segment" means the upper part; "of Netzach" means of the sefirah of Netzach; "of ZA" means of Ze'ir Anpin. The sentence specifies a very precise place, and to a reader unfamiliar with Kabbalistic language, each

the sefirot and not their inner dimension." Likewise in the English translation. The verses: Exodus 33:18–23. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya (ibid.): "And as it is written, 'My face': Exodus 33:23."

word needs explanation. Let us first draw the map, then ask what the sentence does in its context.

A Small Map: ZA, Netzach, the Upper Segment, and NeHYM

"Ze'ir Anpin" is an Aramaic expression meaning "small face." In Kabbalistic language, anpin, "face," is used here as a name for a partzuf: not a physical face, but an integrated configuration of interconnected sefirot operating as one unit, like the organs of one body. Ze'ir Anpin is the partzuf of the six attributes, Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, in the world of Atzilut. It is called ze'ir, "small," relative to the partzufim above it, foremost among them Arich Anpin, "long face," the partzuf of Keter. Its abbreviation is ZA.

Within this partzuf, the sefirot are described in the image of a body. In Tikkunei HaZohar, in the same introduction from which "No thought grasps You at all" was taken, it says: "Tiferet is the torso; Netzach and Hod are the two legs."[50] "Netzach" carries the sense of victory and perseverance. "Segment," perek, here means a section of a limb, like the joints of a finger or leg. "The upper segment of Netzach" is the upper part

[50] Tikkunei HaZohar, second introduction ("Patach Eliyahu"), folio 17a: "No thought grasps You at all"; and there: "Tiferet is the body. Netzach and Hod are the two legs." Sefaria, Tikkunei HaZohar 17a. The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("רשימות על התניא — מראה מקומות, הגהות והערות קצרות לספר של בינונים"), section 20, p. מז [47], notes on "no thought grasps Him at all": "Introduction to Tikkunei Zohar: Patach Eliyahu." File on chabad.org; the quotations from the Reshimot in this chapter were read by decoding the text layer, which is stored in a legacy encoding.

of the sefirah of Netzach, adjacent to the torso, Tiferet above it.

This entire description is figurative language. Above, there is no body, no legs, and no joints. The Kabbalists used the human image to describe an order of powers and relationships: what is higher and lower, inward and outward, and what is connected to what. When we say "the upper segment of Netzach," we are not pointing to a place in space, but to a particular aspect within the order of imparting.

Finally, NeHYM, נהי"מ, is the acronym for Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut, the four lower sefirot. In the preceding Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 19, the Alter Rebbe describes their role: the NeHYM of the higher "vest themselves in the lower to give it life, for they are the vessels of imparting and drawing vitality downward."[52] These are, in other words, the sefirot through which influence descends to its recipient. The term will recur immediately, because that same Epistle uses it to describe Moses' apprehension.

[52] Iggeret HaKodesh 19: "The panim aspect is the sefirah itself, united with its Emanator, the blessed Ein Sof, in the ultimate unity"; "That which shines and extends from His wisdom below, into the lower realms… is called achorayim"; "The Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut of the higher vest themselves in the lower to give it life, for they are the vessels of imparting and of bringing vitality down from the higher to the lower in all the worlds." abc770.org—Iggeret HaKodesh 19; Research Book, vol. I, pp. 79–82 and 251–253.

Why Is Moses Mentioned Here?

Let us first understand the sentence's role in its context. It can be read as a direct continuation of the evidence. Rabbi Weinberg explains that Moses' prophecy and apprehension were "only" from the upper segment of Netzach; Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, "as mentioned in the preceding Epistle," are "only the vessels of imparting and descent to the recipient, and are thus only the outer dimension of the sefirot, not their inner dimension."[51] On this reading, the sentence reinforces "My face shall not be seen": even for Moses our teacher, apprehension came from the place where the sefirot descend toward the recipient, not from the "face." The sentence does not contradict the negation; it demonstrates it in the most striking case. Its structural position also fits. Before it come "without whatness" and "My face shall not be seen"; after it, "and in the chainlike progression, the effect is encompassed by the cause." It is a kind of remark within the argument, and the Epistle does not elaborate: it does not investigate all the details of Moses' prophecy here or compare it with that of the other prophets.

[51] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words), as presented on the website. On "My face shall not be seen": "Even for Moses our teacher, this is not an apprehensible nature. 'My face,' the inner dimension, here also means the inner dimension of the vessels, which too are beyond even Moses' vision and apprehension." On the sentence about Moses: "The prophecy of Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, and his apprehension were only from the upper segment of Netzach of Ze'ir Anpin… As mentioned in the preceding epistle (section 19), the sefirot Netzach–Hod–Yesod are only the vessels of imparting and descent to the recipient, so they are only the outer dimension of the sefirot and not their inner dimension." Likewise in the English translation. The verses: Exodus 33:18–23. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya (ibid.): "And as it is written, 'My face': Exodus 33:23."

This reading explains the sentence's role in its context, but the question we asked before reading it remains. The sefirot are not "yesh and apprehensible nature," yet Moses' prophecy and apprehension "were from the upper segment of Netzach," from within the sefirot. There is therefore an apprehension whose source is in the sefirot; what did Moses apprehend, if the sefirot are not apprehensible? The question becomes still sharper when we add the wording of the preceding Epistle, Epistle 19.

What Does Epistle 19 Say?

In the preceding Epistle, the Alter Rebbe discusses Moses' apprehension at length. He writes that "the apprehension of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was not in the inner dimension of supernal Chochmah." The Hebrew abbreviation מרע"ה means Moses our teacher, peace be upon him; his apprehension was not within the inner dimension of supernal Chochmah in Atzilut. The inner dimension of Chochmah, he explains, extends and descends to the end of the four lower sefirot, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut, "and there was the apprehension of his prophecy in an inward mode, that is, from the inner dimension of Netzach–Hod–Yesod–Malchut. But above Netzach–Hod–Yesod–Malchut he had no apprehension of the inner dimension, only of the back-aspect of

Chochmah… as it is written, 'You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.' "[53]

Three things emerge from this wording. The first is the place: Epistle 19 too locates Moses' apprehension in NeHYM, the lower levels that are vessels of imparting, rather than in Chochmah and Binah. The second is its quality: Moses had apprehension "in an inward mode." This is not external knowledge, like that of someone who has heard that a king exists without knowing anything about him; it is genuine prophetic apprehension. The third is the limit: the same Epistle concludes its description with "You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen." Within a single description, apprehension of the inner dimension and the limit of "My face shall not be seen" therefore coexist; this is what must be understood.

Epistle 19 also defines the words. "The aspect of the face," it says, "is the sefirah itself, united with its Emanator, Ein Sof, blessed be He, with the utmost union"; whereas "what shines and extends from His wisdom, blessed be He, downward into the lower realms" is called "the back-aspect."[52] "Face," then, is not merely another high rung on a ladder. It is the

[53]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 19: Moses' apprehension and the inner dimension of the levels.

[52]Iggeret HaKodesh 19: "The panim aspect is the sefirah itself, united with its Emanator, the blessed Ein Sof, in the ultimate unity"; "That which shines and extends from His wisdom below, into the lower realms… is called achorayim"; "The Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut of the higher vest themselves in the lower to give it life, for they are the vessels of imparting and of bringing vitality down from the higher to the lower in all the worlds." abc770.org—Iggeret HaKodesh 19; Research Book, vol. I, pp. 79–82 and 251–253.

sefirah as united with its source, with Ein Sof. The "back-aspect" is what shines from it and descends to the lower realms.

Why "Netzach Is Lower than Chochmah" Is Not Enough

The first answer that comes to mind is: Netzach is lower than Chochmah. Moses did not apprehend the higher sefirot, but a lower sefirah. This answer, however, is insufficient. Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchut are indeed lower relative to Chochmah and Binah, but they are still sefirot of Atzilut. They too are called "without whatness" and are not "yesh and apprehensible nature." The question was not why a person fails to reach the highest sefirah. It was how a created being's apprehension relates to levels whose nature cannot be apprehended. The same difficulty remains even at a lower level: how can one apprehend that whose nature cannot be apprehended?[44]

We must therefore preserve the sharpness of the difficulty rather than weaken it with an overly convenient answer. What will help here is not a lower level, but distinctions. We will examine two, each in its own short section: the distinction between the source, path, and content of revelation, and the distinction between panim, "face," and pnimiyut, "inner

[44] For an examination of Moses' apprehension, the relation between pnimiyut and panim, and the distinction between the mode of drawing down and the content of apprehension, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 54–61.

dimension." A third section will examine two brief answers that appear sufficient but are not: that Moses apprehended only the light and not the vessels, and that Moses' nullification resolves the question.

Source, Path, and Content

The first distinction separates three questions that we tend to combine. From where does the revelation come? By what path is it drawn down to the recipient? And what exactly is revealed to that recipient? "Were from the upper segment of Netzach" answers the first question, the question of source. Describing NeHYM as "vessels of imparting" answers the second, the question of path. Neither answer alone establishes what was apprehended, the third question.

A simple analogy will clarify the structure. A letter arrives by a messenger. Its reader does not learn only about the messenger; the reader understands the writer's words. Someone who knows the city from which the letter was sent still does not know what it says. Source, path, and content are three different questions. The analogy clarifies why identifying the place from which prophecy was drawn, or the channel through which it passed, does not by itself resolve the difficulty of apprehension.

This distinction has a basis in the words of the Kabbalists themselves. In Pardes Rimonim, the Ramak

answers a difficulty: do we not say that the prophets apprehended from the sefirot? He replies that "the prophets never saw the actual essence of the sefirot, and even to Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, it was said, 'You shall see My back' "; when a particular prophecy is said to be in a particular sefirah, "the intention in all this is not that they actually apprehended within the sefirot, but that from there they drew their sustenance. Their intellectual apprehension, however, was in the palaces."[54] "Drawing sustenance" means nourishment, the source of the power; "intellectual apprehension" is the understanding itself; "palaces" are levels below the sefirot themselves. The Ramak explicitly distinguishes the source of prophecy from what the prophet understood. In the same passage, he also mentions the customary expression "Netzach and Hod are the two true prophets," meaning that Netzach and Hod are the source of prophecy, and establishes that this too does not mean that the prophets apprehended the sefirot

[54] Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 6, chapter 6: "Nor should we find it difficult that they were seen by the prophets, for the prophets never saw the actual essence of the sefirot; even Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, was told, 'You shall see My back,' etc. When we say that Moses' prophecy was in Tiferet and that of the other prophets in Malchut, and likewise when we say that Netzach and Hod are the two prophets of truth, none of this means that they actually apprehended the sefirot, but that from there they drew sustenance. Their intellectual apprehension, however, was in the heichalot" (Sefaria). Shaarei Kedushah by Rabbi Chaim Vital, part III, Gate 6: "For Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, would ascend as far as Atzilut and from there see directly; yet this was through its vesting in Beriah alone, and even this was only by way of passage, for Atzilut alone is inaccessible. This is the secret of 'For man shall not see Me and live.' The other prophets would see in Atzilut through complete vesting in the lights of Beriah" (Sefaria; the parenthetical reference there to "Exodus chapter 13" is a transcription error; the verse is Exodus 33:20). Research Book, vol. I, pp. 81–82.

themselves. From this, we can understand why Kabbalistic works connect prophecy particularly with Netzach and Hod, and why Moses' prophecy is mentioned in the Epistle in relation to Netzach.

In Shaarei Kedushah by Rabbi Chaim Vital, Moses is described as "ascending as far as Atzilut and seeing actually from there," although this too is "through its vesting in Beriah alone, and even this only by way of passage, for Atzilut alone is inaccessible; this is the mystery of 'no man shall see Me and live.' " The other prophets, by contrast, "would see in Atzilut through complete vesting in the lights of Beriah."[54] Here too, Moses' prophecy surpasses every other prophecy, yet even for him there is a path, and even for him the vision of Atzilut "alone" is inaccessible. The verse "no man shall see Me and live," which precedes "My face shall not be seen" in the Torah passage, is interpreted there as this limit.

In these two sources, the description of Moses' prophecy differs from the description in Tanya. The

[54] Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 6, chapter 6: "Nor should we find it difficult that they were seen by the prophets, for the prophets never saw the actual essence of the sefirot; even Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, was told, 'You shall see My back,' etc. When we say that Moses' prophecy was in Tiferet and that of the other prophets in Malchut, and likewise when we say that Netzach and Hod are the two prophets of truth, none of this means that they actually apprehended the sefirot, but that from there they drew sustenance. Their intellectual apprehension, however, was in the heichalot" (Sefaria). Shaarei Kedushah by Rabbi Chaim Vital, part III, Gate 6: "For Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, would ascend as far as Atzilut and from there see directly; yet this was through its vesting in Beriah alone, and even this was only by way of passage, for Atzilut alone is inaccessible. This is the secret of 'For man shall not see Me and live.' The other prophets would see in Atzilut through complete vesting in the lights of Beriah" (Sefaria; the parenthetical reference there to "Exodus chapter 13" is a transcription error; the verse is Exodus 33:20). Research Book, vol. I, pp. 81–82.

Ramak locates Moses' prophecy there in Tiferet; Rabbi Chaim Vital speaks of vision from Atzilut through vesting in Beriah; Tanya says "from the upper segment of Netzach of Ze'ir Anpin." The formulations should not be merged into one sentence, nor is it necessary to declare that they disagree. They may be describing different sides of the same matter, such as root and channel, or a general and a detailed description. What they clearly teach is the principle: prophecy "from" a level does not necessarily mean apprehension of that level's nature.

Panim and Pnimiyut: Face and Inner Dimension

The second distinction concerns two words that sound close: panim, פנים, "face," and pnimiyut, פנימיות, "inner dimension." Epistle 19 says that Moses apprehended "in an inward mode" and cites, in the same place, "My face shall not be seen." If pnimiyut and panim were the same, there would be a contradiction within a single description. It follows that they are not the same. "The inner dimension of NeHYM" is the inward side within a particular level, within the vessels of imparting. "Face," according to that Epistle's definition, is "the sefirah itself, united with its Emanator." Something can therefore be inward relative to one framework while belonging to the aspect that shines and descends to the lower realms relative to a broader framework.

An analogy will bring this possibility closer. A student can understand from within the explanation the teacher has given. The student does not merely hear sounds, but grasps the course of the reasoning, can repeat it, and can apply it. This is an inward understanding of the explanation. Yet the depth in the teacher's mind from which the explanation arose has not become the student's own. The inner dimension of the explanation is not the teacher's "face." In this way, one can understand that pnimiyut need not mean apprehension of everything.

This distinction resolves the verbal contradiction between "apprehension in an inward mode" and "My face shall not be seen." It still does not establish the precise content of such inward apprehension or why it does not fall within "apprehensible nature." We will return to this at the end of the investigation.

Two Answers That Are Too Brief

The first answer rests on the distinction between light and vessel. It might be proposed as follows: Moses apprehended the light vested in the vessels, not the vessels themselves, and it was the vessels that were called "without whatness." The distinction between light and vessel is fundamental, as we learned in the previous chapter, but it must not be used to erase part of the source. Epistle 19 speaks of NeHYM themselves as "vessels of imparting" vested in the lower and of

apprehension "from the inner dimension of Netzach–Hod–Yesod–Malchut." It does not simply say that only the light is revealed and that there is no apprehension of the vessels at all.

One might think that Moses' nullification resolves the question. Moses was "exceedingly humble, more than any man," and received his prophecy in complete nullification. But nullification describes the recipient's relationship to what is revealed; it does not say what was revealed. Here we should distinguish three concepts that tend to become confused. Lack of independence means that something does not stand on its own before its source. The recipient's nullification means that the recipient does not feel themselves to be a reality standing opposite what is revealed. Failure to grasp a nature means that the intellect does not grasp the thing as a nature. All three are true in relation to Moses' prophecy, but each is a different claim, and none proves the others.

What Chanah Ariel Adds

Chanah Ariel by Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil approaches our question. In the discourse for Parashat Naso, it speaks of the "image of the 'without whatness' of the vessels of Atzilut" that Moses apprehended; in the discourse for Parashat Behaalotecha, it describes the partzuf of NeHY, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, revealed to Moses, "which too is without whatness," connecting

the reception of the revelation to Moses' nullification.[55] These parallels reinforce two things. What was revealed to Moses remained within the domain of the vessels of Atzilut and remained "without whatness"; and the revelation was received in nullification. One can therefore speak of genuine revelation that does not turn what is revealed into "yesh and apprehensible nature."

One caution is necessary when using these parallels: each sentence must be read in context. In the same discourse for Parashat Behaalotecha, a sentence negates seeing a sefirah's vessel, but it belongs to a passage concerning Chochmah and the nourishment of the soul, before the discourse turns to prophetic vision and Moses' prophecy; it must not be transferred to Moses. Even the correct parallels do not yet explicitly explain our question: they describe what was revealed as "without whatness," but do not explicitly explain why the apprehension "in an inward mode" in Epistle 19 does not fall within the "apprehensible nature" negated in Epistle 20.

[55] Chanah Ariel by Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil: discourse for Parashat Naso, "וישלחו מן המחנה": "The beli mah image of the vessels of Atzilut"; discourse for Parashat Behaalotecha, "והאספסוף": the partzuf of Netzach, Hod and Yesod revealed to Moses, "which is also beli mah." These were read in digital transcription during the research, and were not compared with the printed edition. On the context of the sentence denying vision of the sefirah's vessel, which belongs to the passage discussing Chochmah, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 56–58, 81–84.

What Has Been Clarified, and What Remains for Study

Several distinctions emerge from the investigation. Within Epistle 20 itself, there is no contradiction: the sentence about Moses appears within the negation and, according to Rabbi Weinberg's explanation, illustrates it, since even Moses did not apprehend the "face." Between Epistle 20 and Epistle 19, the verbal contradiction is resolved: the "inner dimension" of NeHYM is not the "My face" of the verse, and Epistle 19 itself brings the two together with the verse "My face shall not be seen." The distinction between the source, path, and content of prophecy, grounded in Pardes Rimonim and Shaarei Kedushah, shows that "prophecy from a sefirah" does not necessarily mean apprehension of the sefirah's nature. Chanah Ariel adds that what was revealed remained "without whatness" and was received in nullification.

What has not yet been fully clarified? We still lack an explicit explanation in the sources: what is the content of such inward apprehension, and why is it not "apprehensible nature"? The distinctions show that there is no contradiction and put the question in order; they do not yet define the apprehension itself. Nor have we yet found an explicit source in the writings of the Arizal for the phrase "the upper segment of Netzach" concerning Moses' prophecy. In his notes on Tanya,

the Rebbe recorded a reference for investigation here: “Consult Shaar HaNevuah.”[56] The question therefore remains open, without diminishing the value of what we have learned so far.

Readers wishing to see how this investigation developed, from the first difficulty to the marking of what remains open, will find it described step by step in the continuous example “How Did Moses Apprehend, If ‘My Face Shall Not Be Seen’?” in “Studying Further,” including the quick answers examined and rejected along the way.

It is worth adding a word about the approach to study. A question not immediately closed is not a failure. The inquiry has already taught us three things: why one answer is insufficient, which distinctions help, and what is still missing. Moses’ greatness does not permit us to erase the difference between apprehension and grasping a nature, and that difference does not turn his prophecy into empty knowledge. The Epistle presents a genuine encounter with Divine revelation while carefully defining the limits of its description. Apprehension is one question; coming into being is

[56] The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מז [47]: “Was from the segment: consult Shaar HaNevuah” (one decoding of the text layer yielded a question mark after these words). The precise source in the Arizal’s writings for the wording “the upper segment of Netzach” concerning Moses’ prophecy was not located in this investigation; see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 72–76, 103–105, 176–177. For further study, in a different context: Torah Or, Mishpatim, in the explanation of the discourse beginning “שש שנים יעבד”: “But Moses in Atzilut and in Beriah are equal, for he is an aspect of the inner dimension, the aspect of the kav and thread of the Ein Sof light that is equal in all the worlds” (Sefaria, Torah Or, Mishpatim 4:12); this sentence does not address the question of apprehension under discussion here and does not resolve it.

another. The Epistle now returns to the question of coming into being.

"Encompassed by the Cause and Nullified in Its Existence in Relation to It"

W02-06
source words
48–55

And in hishtalshelut, the effect is encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence in relation to it,

"And in hishtalshelut" means when speaking of chainlike descent, the order of cause and effect. After the remark about Moses, the word returns us to the mechanism discussed by the Ramak. "The effect" means the result. "Encompassed by the cause" means surrounded by the cause, included within it. "And nullified in its existence" means that it has no existence of its own. "In relation to it" means relative to the cause.

The expression "encompassed" is taken from the Ramak's own words. In Pardes Rimonim, he writes: "Every cause encompasses what it causes, and every ilah encompasses its alul; the effect is encompassed by its cause, as the point of the earth is in the middle of the firmament and the firmament surrounds the earth."[45] The image comes from the picture of the

[45] Pardes Rimmonim by the Ramak, Gate 6 ("The Order of the Sefirot's Positions"), chapter 3: "It is known that every cause encompasses what it causes, and every ilah encompasses its alul, while the alul is encompassed by its ilah, just as the point of the earth is in the middle of the heavens, and the heavens surround the earth"; and at the end of the same chapter: "What we say here about a sefirah within a sefirah, and these matters, is not intended to mean that things are literally so,

world as spheres and firmaments: the firmament surrounds the earth, and every higher sphere encompasses the spheres below it. Yet the very same chapter warns against reading this literally. When speaking of "a sefirah within a sefirah," the Ramak writes, "the intention is not that the words are literally so"; anyone understanding them in that manner "corporealizes Divinity." Thus "encompassed" does not mean a large circle with a smaller circle inside it. It describes a relationship: the effect is included in its source, depends upon it, and does not stand outside it.

"Nullified in its existence" is a strong expression, easily taken too far. It does not mean that the effect does not exist or that nothing is drawn down or revealed. It means that, relative to the cause, the effect has no standing as a reality of its own. Rabbi Weinberg distinguishes two stages here. Before the effect unfolds and emerges, it is still included within its cause, "encompassed" by it. But even after it unfolds and is revealed, "the effect is nevertheless nullified in its existence to the cause." This also applies, he adds, to the drawing down of the sefirot themselves: what is drawn down and revealed is nullified to the higher sefirah from which it unfolds.[57]

G-d forbid... for one who believes such things, G-d forbid, corporealizes Divinity." Ibid., chapter 4: "The order of the sefirot from cause to effect." Likewise Gate 2, chapter 7: "It is known that every alul is encompassed by its ilah, and the ilah encompasses the alul." In the transcription on Sefaria: Pardes Rimmonim 6:3; 6:4; 2:7. In the English translation of Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (Lessons in Tanya), the translator's reference here is Gate 6, chapter 6, "and elsewhere."

[57]Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "In hishtalshelut the alul is encompassed by the ilah: this is before the alul develops from the ilah, while it is still included within its ilah... Even

From this comes the conclusion the Epistle is preparing. Through such a drawing down, "yesh" cannot come into being: a reality that feels itself to be a reality. Rabbi Weinberg concludes: "Through such a manner of drawing down, there could not have come into being a 'yesh' that is a reality in its own perception, feeling itself to be a reality and not nullified to its source." The Rebbe added there: "And likewise with the yesh of Asiyah," the yesh of the world of Asiyah.[57] The claim thus concerns not only the spiritual yesh of the world of Beriah, about which the Rebbe commented in the note we saw earlier, but also the yesh of the world of Asiyah, which includes our physical world. The reasoning is simple: an effect, by its very nature, remains included in its source and nullified to it, whereas "yesh" is precisely what does not feel itself nullified. A "yesh" therefore cannot be merely another link in such a chain.

after the alul develops and is revealed from the ilah, the alul nevertheless remains nullified in its existence to the ilah. This is how it is in the drawing down of the sefirot themselves: what is drawn down and revealed is nullified in its existence to the ilah, the higher sefirah from which it develops"; "In such a mode of drawing down, a yesh that is an entity in its own perception, that feels itself to be an entity and is not nullified to its source, could not come into being." Immediately afterward: "Addition by the Rebbe: And likewise with the yesh of Asiyah." In the English translation (Lessons in Tanya, note 21, "Note by the Rebbe"): "So, too, regarding the yesh of Asiyah".

[57]Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "In hishtalshelut the alul is encompassed by the ilah: this is before the alul develops from the ilah, while it is still included within its ilah... Even after the alul develops and is revealed from the ilah, the alul nevertheless remains nullified in its existence to the ilah. This is how it is in the drawing down of the sefirot themselves: what is drawn down and revealed is nullified in its existence to the ilah, the higher sefirah from which it develops"; "In such a mode of drawing down, a yesh that is an entity in its own perception, that feels itself to be an entity and is not nullified to its source, could not come into being." Immediately afterward: "Addition by the Rebbe: And likewise with the yesh of Asiyah." In the English translation (Lessons in Tanya, note 21, "Note by the Rebbe"): "So, too, regarding the yesh of Asiyah".

“Like the Sun’s Radiance within the Sun”: What the Analogy Shows

W02-07
source words
56–61

like the sun’s radiance within the sun, as stated in the Ramak’s Pardes.

“Like the sun’s radiance” means like its glow, the light extending from the sun and illuminating its surroundings. “Within the sun” means while it is within the sun, in its source. כמ”ש means “as it is written”; “in the Ramak’s Pardes” means in Pardes Rimonim by the Ramak.

The analogy sets before us two states of the same light. Outside the sun, its radiance illuminates the world, and we can speak of it as a thing: it fills a room, falls on a wall, makes sight possible. Within the sun itself, the radiance does not appear in this way. There it is not discernible as something in its own right; its entire existence is the luminary. In chapter 3 of Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe explains this analogy at length; we will study it in the next chapter.[58] For now, what matters is what the analogy illustrates here: an effect, even when drawn down and revealed,

[58] Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 6, chapter 6, near its end: “The essence that extends is united with its source, like the sun’s ray united with the sun, and like the soul united with its powers that extend through the body” (Sefaria). The expression “the radiance of the sun” (זיו השמש) was not found in this chapter; whether it appears elsewhere in Pardes was not checked. The analogy of the sun’s radiance within the sun in Tanya: Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 3: “Only there, in its very place, this radiance is accounted as actual nothingness and naught, for it is actually nullified in its existence in relation to the body of the sun’s orb.” On the fact that within the Epistle this analogy already serves to illustrate the alul’s nullification, so that the difference between an alul and a created being is examined through the mode of coming into being rather than through the analogy itself, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 115–116.

does not stand as an independent reality before its source, just as the radiance does not stand opposite the sun.

The reference to Pardes requires precision. In gate 6 of Pardes Rimonim, a close analogy appears: “The essence that extends is united with its source, like the sun’s spark united with the sun.” The Ramak speaks there of a spark rather than radiance, illustrating union: the essence that extends is united with its source.[58] The phrase “nullified in its existence in relation to it, like the sun’s radiance within the sun,” and the use of the analogy to describe the effect’s nullification within its cause, are the Alter Rebbe’s wording and application. There is no contradiction. The union described by the Ramak and the nullification described by the Epistle are two sides of one relationship: what is wholly united with its source does not stand before it as another reality.

[58] Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 6, chapter 6, near its end: “The essence that extends is united with its source, like the sun’s ray united with the sun, and like the soul united with its powers that extend through the body” (Sefaria). The expression “the radiance of the sun” (זיו השמש) was not found in this chapter; whether it appears elsewhere in Pardes was not checked. The analogy of the sun’s radiance within the sun in Tanya: Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 3: “Only there, in its very place, this radiance is accounted as actual nothingness and naught, for it is actually nullified in its existence in relation to the body of the sun’s orb.” On the fact that within the Epistle this analogy already serves to illustrate the alul’s nullification, so that the difference between an alul and a created being is examined through the mode of coming into being rather than through the analogy itself, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 115–116.

What the Analogy Illustrates, and What It Does Not

The analogy of the sun's radiance is beautiful, making it easy to load it with more than it carries. It illustrates a relationship of non-independence: one can speak of light and revelation while understanding that, relative to its source, it has no standing of its own. There the analogy ends. It is not a physical model for the production of matter, does not explain how a body comes into being, and does not say that every relationship comparable to radiance within the sun is identical in all its details to cause and effect.

The last point is particularly important, because shortly the same analogy will be used in another context. In the next chapter, the Epistle will say that the created being too, the yesh created from nothing, is nullified in its existence to the power bringing it into being, "and like the sun's radiance within the sun." The analogy itself therefore cannot decide between an effect and a created being; it applies to both at one point, nullification relative to the source. The difference must be examined elsewhere: in the manner of coming into being, and in whether the result and its source are commensurate.

Being within the Source without Standing Opposite It

To gain a sense of "nullified in its existence," consider particulars included within a general idea. A broad idea contains many particulars even before they are stated. When stated, they become revealed, yet remain particulars of that same idea. They have no standing of their own opposite the idea from which they came, and anyone detaching them from it loses their meaning. Likewise, the cause is not merely something that once started a process and then withdrew. The effect remains included within it and nullified to it.

From this we can understand why "effect" and "yesh" do not fit together. "Effect" means something wholly derived from a source that continues to "encompass" it. Someone imagining an effect as a reality standing through its own power is no longer speaking of an effect. There is revelation, drawing down, and difference of levels here; there is no separate reality standing before its source. As Rabbi Weinberg concluded, a yesh will therefore not come into being in this way. This analogy too, of an idea and its particulars, has a limit: the particulars and the idea are contents of one intellect, whereas the effect within the sefirot is not "content" in someone's mind. The analogy serves only to illustrate a relationship of inclusion and non-independence.

“Very Many Contractions”: Reduction Does Not Change the Kind

W02-08
source words
62–72

And even very many contractions, too, will not suffice for matter as coarse as earth to arise

“And even… too,” ואף גם, is emphatic: even if we add more and more. “Contractions”: tzimtzum is the limitation and concealment of light so that a lower level can receive it. Light after contraction illuminates less, or in a more limited way, than in its source. “Very many” means a very large number of such limitations, one after another. “Will not suffice” means will not be enough. “To arise” means to exist, to come into being. Geshem means physicality, matter. Av, “coarse,” means thick, gross, unrefined. “As earth” means like earth, the extreme example of matter.

How great are the contractions of which the Epistle speaks? Rabbi Weinberg sharpens the point: these are contractions “that contract the light so that the light after the contraction bears no proportion at all to the light before the contraction.”[59] Even such a contraction, after which the light differs so greatly that it cannot be compared with the preceding light, is insufficient. Here lies the argument’s force. It

[59] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author’s words): “Even very numerous contractions, which contract the light so that the light after the contraction is utterly incommensurate with the light before it, even these contractions would not suffice to produce physical matter as dense as earth.”

concerns not a slight contraction that might be insufficient, but every possible multiplicity of contractions. Yet spirituality will not become matter.

Notice the word “proportion,” erech, in his words, because it will return in the next chapter with a different meaning. Here it concerns the intensity of the light: the light after the contraction is so faint that it cannot be compared with the light before it. Yet both are light, both spiritual. In the next chapter, we will encounter “utterly incommensurate” in a deeper sense, concerning not the measure of the light but its nature: the relationship between the created being and the power bringing it into being. We can already see that distance in measure, however immense, is not the distance of which creation speaks.

Why are contractions insufficient? Because reduction, however great, changes a thing’s measure rather than its kind. Let us return to the teaching analogy. An idea can be conveyed in a long article, then a summary, then one sentence, and finally a one-word hint. At every stage, there are fewer details and less revelation. Yet even if we shorten it a thousand times, the idea will not produce a stone that can be held in the hand. Shortening changes the measure of the content’s manifestation; it does not turn its nature into physicality. “Less of the same thing” is still not “a thing

of another kind." The distinction here is between a change in quantity and a change in the kind of reality.

Nevertheless, the opposite picture, that reduction is sufficient, is very attractive. We are accustomed to thinking of spirituality as "subtle" and matter as "coarse," as if their whole difference were a degree of subtlety; if so, one need only thicken the spiritual again and again for it to become matter. The Epistle rejects this picture. "Faint," "limited," and "distant" are all words of measure, and they do not explain a change in the kind of reality. We must also be precise about the claim's scope: it does not say that every transition between two spiritual levels is self-evident. It makes a focused statement about the limits of explaining through chainlike descent alone.

Why did he say "matter as coarse as earth," rather than simply "matter"? The Rebbe asked this in his notes on Tanya: "Seemingly superfluous," since it would have sufficed to say that chainlike descent does not produce matter. Tentatively, using "perhaps," he suggested: "Perhaps he adds this because the principal purpose of this Iggeret HaKodesh is to explain the superiority specifically of practical mitzvot, Malchut, the element of earth."[60] According to this suggestion, earth may be

[60] The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מז [47]: " 'Dense as earth': seemingly superfluous. Perhaps he adds this because the principal purpose of this Iggeret HaKodesh is to explain the superiority specifically of practical mitzvot, Malchut, the element of earth." On the connection between the Epistle's opening and its conclusion, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 88–99, in the register of claims.

mentioned here in connection with the Epistle's conclusion, which concerns the superiority of practical mitzvot performed with physical things. Already at the opening of the discussion of creation appears the lowest example of physicality: earth, the height of coarseness, which cannot result from a chainlike descent of spirituality.

"Separate Intelligences, Even Those of the Angels"

W02-09
source words
73–79

through the chainlike descent of spirituality from separate intelligences, even those of the angels,

These words continue the preceding sentence, stating from what matter will not arise. "Through the chainlike descent of spirituality" means from an unfolding of spirituality, were we to try to derive matter from an order of spiritual levels. "From separate intelligences" means from the "separate intelligences." "Even those of the angels" means even those belonging to the angels.

"Separate intelligences" is a term from medieval philosophy. "Intelligences" means beings whose entire character is apprehension; "separate" means separated from matter, not vested in a body. Maimonides writes that there are created beings that are "form without any matter at all, and these are the angels"; philosophers

called such beings intelligences. In the wording of The Guide of the Perplexed in Ibn Tibbon's translation: "He will say separate intelligences, and we will say angels."[61] The term also occurs in several places in the teachings of our Rebbes, and the Rebbe listed several of these in his notes. When the Alter Rebbe says "separate intelligences" here, he speaks of spiritual created beings without a physical body.

Interestingly, Maimonides too, in The Guide of the Perplexed, used a similarly structured argument. He argued against the philosophers' position that the entire world necessarily unfolded from the first intelligence: "The first intelligence is the cause of the second, and the second the cause of the third; even if their levels numbered thousands, the last intelligence among them would unquestionably be simple. From where, then, did composition arise?"[61] In other words,

[61] Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:3: "Some are created beings that are form with no matter at all; these are the angels" (Sefaria). Guide of the Perplexed 2:6, in Ibn Tibbon's translation: "He will say 'separate intelligences,' and we will say 'angels' "; and ibid., 2:22: "The first intelligence is the cause of the second, and the second the cause of the third; even if their levels numbered in the thousands, the last intelligence among them would undoubtedly be simple. Whence, then, did the composition found in these existing beings arise by way of necessity, as Aristotle thinks?" Ibn Tibbon's translation uses שכלים נבדלים; נפרדים is the wording of other translations and of our Rebbes. The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya (section 20, p. מז [47]) lists places where "שכלים נבדלים" [separate intelligences] are mentioned: "Torah Or 41d. Likkutei Torah, Shemot 7b, Vayikra 53b, Bamidbar 45a, 46a, Devarim 47a. Or HaTorah, Bereishit 28b. Discourse beginning החלצו, 5659."

[61] Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:3: "Some are created beings that are form with no matter at all; these are the angels" (Sefaria). Guide of the Perplexed 2:6, in Ibn Tibbon's translation: "He will say 'separate intelligences,' and we will say 'angels' "; and ibid., 2:22: "The first intelligence is the cause of the second, and the second the cause of the third; even if their levels numbered in the thousands, the last intelligence among them would undoubtedly be simple. Whence, then, did the composition found in these existing beings arise by way of necessity, as Aristotle thinks?" Ibn Tibbon's translation uses שכלים נבדלים; נפרדים is the wording of other translations and of our Rebbes. The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya (section 20, p. מז [47]) lists places where "שכלים נבדלים"

a chain of simple intelligences, however long, does not explain the appearance of a composite body. Although Maimonides is not mentioned here in the Epistle, the resemblance between the arguments shows that the question of whether a spiritual chain can give rise to matter occupied Jewish sages in other ways too.

What does "even" add? The Rebbe explained it in two places. Lessons in Tanya records in his name: "even [from separate intelligences] of the angels." In the wording of his notes cited in the footnote, with a question mark at the end, he wrote: " 'Even': refers to what precedes it ['from separate intelligences, even'], since separate intelligences means angels?"[62] "Refers to what precedes it" means that "even" does not add a new kind of created beings beyond the separate intelligences; it returns to the separate intelligences and emphasizes: even the separate intelligences, which are the angels. There are not two groups on a ladder, intelligences followed by angels, but one group, within which the Epistle emphasizes the angels.

[separate intelligences] are mentioned: "Torah Or 41d. Likkutei Torah, Shemot 7b, Vayikra 53b, Bamidbar 45a, 46a, Devarim 47a. Or HaTorah, Bereishit 28b. Discourse beginning החלצו, 5659."

[62] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya: " 'Even from separate intelligences'—Addition by the Rebbe: from the separate intelligences of the angels"; and the publisher's note to the Reshimot (note 11), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1523: "Even (from the separate intelligences) of the angels"; in the English translation: "[Insertion by the Rebbe: 'of the abstract intelligences']". The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'Even': refers to what precedes it ('even from separate intelligences'), for separate intelligences means angels?" (the question mark is as in the decoded source). Rabbi Weinberg's comments on "possessing matter and form" are the author's explanation at that point. See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 79–81.

Why emphasize angels in particular? Rabbi Weinberg explains: "Angels do possess matter and form, yet since their matter is of spiritual elements, 'coarse' matter like earth will not come into being from it."[62] The emphasis addresses a thought that may arise: angels already have something of "matter," so perhaps actual matter could unfold from them. The Epistle negates this. Even what is called the angels' "matter" is spiritual, and no matter as coarse as earth will arise from their chainlike descent. Maimonides, as we saw, describes angels as "form without matter"; Rabbi Weinberg uses "possessing matter and form," immediately emphasizing that their matter is spiritual. For our purpose, both formulations lead to the same conclusion: angels contain no physical matter from which earth could unfold.

Why Does the Epistle Move from Sefirot to Angels?

The passage began with the sefirot, in Atzilut, yet the example now turns to angels, which are created beings, an entirely different level. Tanya itself says that "the abode of the angels is in the world of Yetzirah," adding in a gloss that "there are higher angels in the

[62] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya: " 'Even from separate intelligences'—Addition by the Rebbe: from the separate intelligences of the angels"; and the publisher's note to the Reshimot (note 11), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1523: "Even (from the separate intelligences) of the angels"; in the English translation: "[Insertion by the Rebbe: 'of the abstract intelligences']". The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'Even': refers to what precedes it ('even from separate intelligences'), for separate intelligences means angels?" (the question mark is as in the decoded source). Rabbi Weinberg's comments on "possessing matter and form" are the author's explanation at that point. See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 79–81.

world of Beriah."[63] Why do they enter the discussion of the vessels of Atzilut?

The answer is that, at this stage, the Epistle is testing a mechanism, rather than a level. The question is what a chainlike descent of spirituality can produce. If we find that even from spiritual created beings, which are not Divinity, chainlike descent produces only spirituality, spirit rather than body, then the mechanism itself cannot produce matter.

The argument is more modest than it may seem, and therein lies its strength. It confines itself to one case of spiritual drawing down and delimits its result: one begins with spirituality and arrives at spirituality. We must therefore not build additional assumptions upon it, such as that angels are the spirituality closest to matter or the final link before physicality. For the same reason, one must not construct an a fortiori argument from it: "If it is impossible from the nearer angels, all the more so from the distant sefirot." Such an argument assumes that every spiritual descent approaches matter by the same mechanism, an assumption that has not been proved.[43]

[63] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 39: "For the abode of the souls of the righteous is in the world of Beriah, and the abode of the angels in the world of Yetzirah"; and in the gloss: "This refers to ordinary angels, but there are higher angels in the world of Beriah whose service is with intellectual fear and love." Sefaria.

[43] For an examination of the relation between spiritual hishtalshelut and the coming into being of physicality, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 54–59, particularly the discussion "Why an A Fortiori Argument Is Not Needed."

“The Animal Spirit… from the Face of the Ox”: What Chainlike Descent Can Do

W02-10
source words
80–88

but only for the animal spirit to arise from the face of the ox, as stated elsewhere; see there.

“But only”: this is what chainlike descent can do. “To arise” means to cause to exist. “The animal spirit” means the animal’s vitality, the spirit that gives it life and its character, not its body. The expression is familiar from Ecclesiastes: “and the spirit of the animal that descends below to the earth.” “From the face of the ox” means from the “face of an ox” in the chariot, the vision of the living creatures seen by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:10). כמ”ש במ”א means “as explained elsewhere”; וע”ש means “and see there.”

The “face of the ox” comes from Ezekiel’s vision of the chariot. The prophet saw four living creatures, each with four faces: “The likeness of their faces was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right for all four, and the face of an ox on the left for all four, and the face of an eagle for all four.”[64] In the teachings of our Rebbes, the faces of the living creatures in the chariot are spiritual roots of kinds of created beings. In

[64] Ezekiel 1:10 (the Masoretic spelling is “מהשמאול”). In Chagigah 13b, the Gemara raises a difficulty from Ezekiel 10:14, where “the face of the cherub” is listed in place of the ox’s face, and answers in the name of Resh Lakish: “Ezekiel pleaded for mercy on its behalf, and He changed it into a cherub… Shall the accuser become the defender?” (Sefaria). The Gemara is cited here only as background for the name “the face of the ox.”

Torah Or, in the discourse "Yaviu Levush Malchut," the Alter Rebbe writes: "For the soul of animals is drawn from the aspect of the face of the ox in the chariot, and birds from the face of the eagle."[65] Torah Or says "the soul of animals"; "the animal spirit" is the wording of the Epistle here.

Here, for the first time in the passage, the Epistle says what chainlike descent can do. The animal spirit is very distant from its source in the "face of the ox" in the supernal chariot, yet, in Rabbi Weinberg's words, "chainlike descent has the power to bring about the unfolding of the animal's spirit, because the animal's spirit too is something spiritual."[65] From a higher

[65]Torah Or, Megillat Esther, discourse beginning "יביאו לבוש מלכות" (90b): "All the more so for physicality to come into being from ayin to yesh, since physicality does not come into being from spirituality through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, for there is no commensurability at all between spirituality and physicality. For the fact that the soul of the animals is drawn from the aspect of the ox's face in the chariot, and that of the birds from the eagle's face"; "But the physical bodies of human beings, domesticated and wild animals, and birds did not come into being from spirituality at all. Rather, physical coming into being is from the radiance of the aspect of the blessed Ein Sof itself" (Sefaria, Torah Or, Megillat Esther 1:9–10). Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "Nevertheless, hishtalshelut has the power to cause the spirit of the animal to develop through it, since the spirit of the animal too is spiritual, although it is very, very much lower in level than the ox's face in the chariot." On the identification of "elsewhere": ibid., "The Rebbe notes here that it may be said that the Alter Rebbe is referring to Torah Or, the discourse beginning 'יביאו לבוש מלכות,' and elsewhere"; likewise in the publisher's note to the Reshimot (note 12), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1524; and in the English translation: "The Rebbe notes that this may be referring, for example, to the discourse entitled Yaviu Levush Malchut in Torah Or" (the reference there is 90b). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'And see there': somewhat difficult, since he did not specify the 'elsewhere'; what is meant by 'and see there,' which ordinarily follows only an explicit reference?" Rabbi Weinberg's comments on Chochmah as "something" ("And wisdom, from where shall it be found?" Job 28:12) are the author's summary, not the wording of Torah Or. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 77–79.

[65]Torah Or, Megillat Esther, discourse beginning "יביאו לבוש מלכות" (90b): "All the more so for physicality to come into being from ayin to yesh, since physicality does not come into being from spirituality through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, for there is no commensurability at all between spirituality and physicality. For the fact that the soul of the animals is drawn from the aspect of the ox's face in the chariot, and that of the birds from the eagle's face"; "But the physical bodies of human beings, domesticated and wild animals, and birds did not come into being

spirit, a lower spirit can unfold. The difference in level is enormous, but the kind is preserved: spirit from spirit. This is precisely what we learned about cause and effect: great distance, yet commensurability remains.

The body, by contrast, is not included in this principle. In that passage of Torah Or, the Alter Rebbe writes: "But the physical body of human beings, domestic animals, wild animals, and birds did not come into being from spirituality at all"; there he explains: "Physicality does not come into being from spirituality through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, because spirituality and physicality are utterly incommensurate." (עו"ע abbreviates "cause and effect.")[65] What can unfold from the "face of the ox" is

from spirituality at all. Rather, physical coming into being is from the radiance of the aspect of the blessed Ein Sof itself" (Sefaria, Torah Or, Megillat Esther 1:9–10). Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "Nevertheless, hishtalshelut has the power to cause the spirit of the animal to develop through it, since the spirit of the animal too is spiritual, although it is very, very much lower in level than the ox's face in the chariot." On the identification of "elsewhere": ibid., "The Rebbe notes here that it may be said that the Alter Rebbe is referring to Torah Or, the discourse beginning 'יביאו לבוש מלכות,' and elsewhere"; likewise in the publisher's note to the Reshimot (note 12), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1524; and in the English translation: "The Rebbe notes that this may be referring, for example, to the discourse entitled Yaviu Levush Malchut in Torah Or" (the reference there is 90b). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'And see there': somewhat difficult, since he did not specify the 'elsewhere'; what is meant by 'and see there,' which ordinarily follows only an explicit reference?" Rabbi Weinberg's comments on Chochmah as "something" ("And wisdom, from where shall it be found?" Job 28:12) are the author's summary, not the wording of Torah Or. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 77–79.

[65]Torah Or, Megillat Esther, discourse beginning "יביאו לבוש מלכות" (90b): "All the more so for physicality to come into being from ayin to yesh, since physicality does not come into being from spirituality through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, for there is no commensurability at all between spirituality and physicality. For the fact that the soul of the animals is drawn from the aspect of the ox's face in the chariot, and that of the birds from the eagle's face"; "But the physical bodies of human beings, domesticated and wild animals, and birds did not come into being from spirituality at all. Rather, physical coming into being is from the radiance of the aspect of the blessed Ein Sof itself" (Sefaria, Torah Or, Megillat Esther 1:9–10). Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya

the vitality; flesh and bones are a physical reality whose formation needs another explanation. Torah Or there already points toward that explanation, saying that physicality comes into being "from the radiance of the actual aspect of Ein Sof, blessed be He"; our Epistle will reach this in its own way.

The Same Animal, Two Questions

Why is this example so important? Because it distinguishes two questions within the very same animal: whence its vitality and spiritual character, and whence its physical existence itself? When we see an animal, it appears to us as one unit, making the questions easy to confuse. The Epistle separates them so that we can see how far an explanation through chainlike descent reaches, to the spirit, and where an explanation through creation is needed, in the body.

The example rests on the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidut about the roots of created beings. It shows how spirit unfolds from spirit, thereby also clarifying the limit of chainlike descent.

(the author's words): "Nevertheless, hishtalshelut has the power to cause the spirit of the animal to develop through it, since the spirit of the animal too is spiritual, although it is very, very much lower in level than the ox's face in the chariot." On the identification of "elsewhere": ibid., "The Rebbe notes here that it may be said that the Alter Rebbe is referring to Torah Or, the discourse beginning 'יביאו לבוש מלכות,' and elsewhere"; likewise in the publisher's note to the Reshimot (note 12), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1524; and in the English translation: "The Rebbe notes that this may be referring, for example, to the discourse entitled Yaviu Levush Malchut in Torah Or" (the reference there is 90b). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'And see there': somewhat difficult, since he did not specify the 'elsewhere'; what is meant by 'and see there,' which ordinarily follows only an explicit reference?" Rabbi Weinberg's comments on Chochmah as "something" ("And wisdom, from where shall it be found?" Job 28:12) are the author's summary, not the wording of Torah Or. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 77–79.

The example has a further aspect. The "face of the ox" was not chosen at random. Later in the Epistle, the Alter Rebbe will return to the "higher angels in the chariot, the face of the ox and the face of the eagle," which benefit and are nourished "by the spirit of the animal and the bird that rises over them from the sacrifices upon the altar."[66] Already here, in the example of the limit of chainlike descent, the understanding that will later explain sacrifices is being planted. In Likkutei Torah, too, in Parashat Ki Tetze, "the aspects of domestic and wild animals" are linked to their root "in the supernal chariot, the face of the lion, the face of the ox," in the context of the fire descending from heaven upon the sacrifices.[67]

"Elsewhere; See There"

The two final expressions remain: "as stated elsewhere; see there." The Alter Rebbe refers to an "elsewhere" where the matter is explained, without saying where. Lessons in Tanya records that the Rebbe indicated here "that it may be said that the Alter Rebbe's intention is Torah Or, the discourse beginning 'Yaviu Levush Malchut,' and elsewhere": this is one suitable place, and there may be others. In his notes, the Rebbe

[66] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later in the Epistle: "And through this one can thoroughly understand, with good reason and knowledge, why the higher angels of the chariot, the ox's face and the eagle's face, derive great enjoyment, nourishment and sustenance from the spirit of the animal and the bird that ascends upon them from the sacrifices on the altar" (abc770.org—Iggeret HaKodesh 20; he.chabad.org).

[67] Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, "כי תצא למלחמה," sections 1 and 4: the root of the animal order, and Torah and mitzvot as ratzo and shov.

commented on “see there”: “This requires some further study: since he did not identify the ‘elsewhere,’ what is ‘see there,’ which usually follows only a specific reference?”[65] צע”ק means “requires some further study.” “See there” usually comes after an explicit reference, making its appearance after an unspecified “elsewhere” surprising. This is a question of precision in wording, and the Rebbe left it as a question. For our purposes, the parallel in Torah Or explains the idea well, while the precise destination of “elsewhere” is not stated in the Epistle.

[65]Torah Or, Megillat Esther, discourse beginning “יביאו לבוש מלכות” (90b): “All the more so for physicality to come into being from ayin to yesh, since physicality does not come into being from spirituality through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, for there is no commensurability at all between spirituality and physicality. For the fact that the soul of the animals is drawn from the aspect of the ox’s face in the chariot, and that of the birds from the eagle’s face”; “But the physical bodies of human beings, domesticated and wild animals, and birds did not come into being from spirituality at all. Rather, physical coming into being is from the radiance of the aspect of the blessed Ein Sof itself” (Sefaria, Torah Or, Megillat Esther 1:9–10). Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author’s words): “Nevertheless, hishtalshelut has the power to cause the spirit of the animal to develop through it, since the spirit of the animal too is spiritual, although it is very, very much lower in level than the ox’s face in the chariot.” On the identification of “elsewhere”: ibid., “The Rebbe notes here that it may be said that the Alter Rebbe is referring to Torah Or, the discourse beginning ‘יביאו לבוש מלכות,’ and elsewhere”; likewise in the publisher’s note to the Reshimot (note 12), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1524; and in the English translation: “The Rebbe notes that this may be referring, for example, to the discourse entitled Yaviu Levush Malchut in Torah Or” (the reference there is 90b). The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘And see there’: somewhat difficult, since he did not specify the ‘elsewhere’; what is meant by ‘and see there,’ which ordinarily follows only an explicit reference?” Rabbi Weinberg’s comments on Chochmah as “something” (“And wisdom, from where shall it be found?” Job 28:12) are the author’s summary, not the wording of Torah Or. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 77–79.

“And Something from Nothing Is Called Creation”

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And something from nothing is called beriah in the Holy Tongue.

“And something from nothing” means the coming into being of yesh from ayin. “Is called” means its name is “creation,” beriah. בלה”ק means “in the Holy Tongue,” the language of Torah.

This short sentence names the newness we have examined. There are two ways of coming into being. One is the drawing down of an effect from its cause: in Rabbi Weinberg’s words, the effect “exists beforehand too, but in another manner”; it derives from its source and remains nullified to it. The other is the coming into being of a yesh that is not a continuation of a preceding source with which it is commensurate. The second way, says the Epistle, has a particular name in the Holy Tongue: “creation.” The Rebbe noted in his notes that this is “as Nachmanides writes on Genesis 1:1.” Indeed, in his commentary on the Torah’s first verse, Nachmanides writes: “In the Holy Tongue, we have no expression for bringing forth something from nothing other than bara, ‘created.’ ”[68] The Rebbe added a short

[68] Ramban, Genesis 1:1: “The Holy One, blessed be He, created all created beings from absolute nothingness. In the Holy Tongue, we have no term for bringing yesh forth from ayin other than bara”; and later: “After the hyle He created nothing, but formed and made” (Sefaria). The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘Is called creation’: to exclude hishtalshelut?”; “ ‘In the Holy Tongue’: as Ramban writes, Genesis 1:1.” Likewise in the English translation (Lessons in Tanya, note 24, not marked as a note by the Rebbe). Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author’s

question: " 'Is called creation': to exclude chainlike descent?" In other words, does the word come to exclude chainlike descent from "creation"? This may be the word's intention within the argument: to distinguish what is drawn down through chainlike descent from "creation."

The sentence's scope is limited. It defines "creation" within the Epistle, rather than redefining every appearance of the Hebrew root ברא in Scripture. Nachmanides himself immediately adds that after the creation of the first matter, "He created nothing, but formed and made."[68] The Epistle uses "creation" as the name of a type of coming into being, something from nothing, and will continue to use it this way.

Is Only Physical Matter Created from Nothing?

Earth is the passage's most striking example, making it easy to think mistakenly that all spirituality derives through chainlike descent while all physicality is created from nothing. But "something from nothing" is not a synonym for physical matter. The Rebbe, as we saw, commented that the sefirot are not even like the

words): " 'Creation' means that something new comes into being that did not exist before (unlike cause and effect, where the effect existed beforehand too, but in a different manner)."

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"yesh" of the world of Beriah, which is a spiritual yesh; later in the Epistle, spiritual vessels and lights of the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah will be counted among created beings, as the beginning of created yesh. What determines the matter is not whether the result is physical or spiritual, but its relationship to its source. If the result is a continuation of its source and they are commensurate, this is cause and effect. If it is a new reality, not a continuation of a preceding source with which it is commensurate, the power of creation is required.

Why, then, did the Epistle give a physical example? Because the distance between spirituality and physicality highlights the difficulty more than any other example. One can mistakenly think that a lower spirit is merely a contracted higher spirit; it is harder to make that mistake about earth. The example sharpens the question without restricting "creation" to what can be touched with the hand.

One further small distinction will help readers studying other Chassidic discourses. Sometimes "something from nothing" is also used in a relative sense. Rabbi Weinberg summarizes the words of Torah Or in "Yaviu Levush Malchut," saying that, according to them, even supernal Chochmah of Atzilut, since it is called "Chochmah," is "something" rather than "ayin"; relative to what is above it, it too therefore comes by

way of "something from nothing," as the verse says, "And wisdom is found from ayin."[65] But this is not the created yesh discussed by the Epistle here. Chochmah of Atzilut is Divinity; created yesh is a created reality. Remembering the distinction will prevent confusion when the expression is encountered in its two senses.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

The passage we have studied is short, but it has traveled a long path. These are its principal points:

- **The difficulty from the sources.** The Ramak and the Zohar describe the sefirot in terms of cause and effect. The Alter Rebbe does not disagree with them, but states what their words concern: "the unfolding

[65]Torah Or, Megillat Esther, discourse beginning "יביאו לבוש מלכות" (90b): "All the more so for physicality to come into being from ayin to yesh, since physicality does not come into being from spirituality through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, for there is no commensurability at all between spirituality and physicality. For the fact that the soul of the animals is drawn from the aspect of the ox's face in the chariot, and that of the birds from the eagle's face"; "But the physical bodies of human beings, domesticated and wild animals, and birds did not come into being from spirituality at all. Rather, physical coming into being is from the radiance of the aspect of the blessed Ein Sof itself" (Sefaria, Torah Or, Megillat Esther 1:9–10). Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "Nevertheless, hishtalshelut has the power to cause the spirit of the animal to develop through it, since the spirit of the animal too is spiritual, although it is very, very much lower in level than the ox's face in the chariot." On the identification of "elsewhere": ibid., "The Rebbe notes here that it may be said that the Alter Rebbe is referring to Torah Or, the discourse beginning 'יביאו לבוש מלכות,' and elsewhere"; likewise in the publisher's note to the Reshimot (note 12), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1524; and in the English translation: "The Rebbe notes that this may be referring, for example, to the discourse entitled Yaviu Levush Malchut in Torah Or" (the reference there is 90b). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'And see there': somewhat difficult, since he did not specify the 'elsewhere'; what is meant by 'and see there,' which ordinarily follows only an explicit reference?" Rabbi Weinberg's comments on Chochmah as "something" ("And wisdom, from where shall it be found?" Job 28:12) are the author's summary, not the wording of Torah Or. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 77–79.

of the sefirot within the sefirot themselves [in the aspect of the vessels]."

- **"Without whatness."** The sefirot are not "yesh and apprehensible nature," like Ein Sof, Whom no thought grasps, and like "My face shall not be seen," said even to Moses. Because they are not yesh, an order of cause and effect suits them.
- **Moses' apprehension.** His prophecy is a genuine revelation whose source is in Atzilut, yet even of him it is said, "My face shall not be seen." Two distinctions, source, path, and content; and panim and pnimiyut, show that there is no contradiction. Briefer answers, that Netzach is lower than Chochmah, that Moses apprehended only the light, or that his nullification resolves the question, were examined and found insufficient. The precise content of his apprehension remains open.
- **The effect's nullification.** The effect is "encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence in relation to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun," so a yesh will not come into being in this way.
- **The limit of chainlike descent.** Very many contractions, even from the separate intelligences of the angels, do not produce "matter as coarse as earth." Chainlike descent produces spirit from spirit, such as the animal spirit from the "face of the ox," not a body.

- **The name.** The coming into being of something from nothing is called “creation” in the Holy Tongue; “something from nothing” is not a synonym for physical matter.

Toward the Next Chapter

A difficulty now arises that the Epistle itself immediately raises. We said that the effect is nullified within its source like the sun’s radiance within the sun and therefore cannot be “yesh.” But the created being too, the yesh created from nothing, depends wholly upon the Divine power bringing it into being. Of it too we can say that it is “accounted as naught before Him,” nullified to the power flowing into it; and of it too the Alter Rebbe says, “and like the sun’s radiance within the sun.” If so, what remains of the distinction we built between effect and created being? This question, opening with “And although,” is the subject of the next chapter.

Studying the Chapter with Artificial-Intelligence Tools

This chapter is full of places where it is easy to receive an overly confident answer: a reference that the source did not specify, a disagreement that is not a disagreement, a question left open, and the distinction between what is created from nothing and what derives through chainlike descent.

Exercise 1: "Elsewhere; See There"

What to ask. Attach the unit "but only for the animal spirit to arise from the face of the ox, as stated elsewhere; see there," and ask: "To which place is the Alter Rebbe referring here?"

What to check. You may receive a confident answer with a discourse title and perhaps even a page number. Compare it with what we learned: according to Lessons in Tanya, the Rebbe indicated concerning Torah Or, the discourse beginning "Yaviu Levush Malchut," only that "it may be said" that this is intended, adding "and elsewhere"; in his notes, he commented on "see there" that it "requires some further study."[65] Did the answer preserve "it may be said," or turn it into an assertion?

[65] Torah Or, Megillat Esther, discourse beginning "יביאו לבוש מלכות" (90b): "All the more so for physicality to come into being from ayin to yesh, since physicality does not come into being from spirituality through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, for there is no commensurability at all between spirituality and physicality. For the fact that the soul of the animals is drawn from the aspect of the ox's face in the chariot, and that of the birds from the eagle's face"; "But the physical bodies of human beings, domesticated and wild animals, and birds did not come into being from spirituality at all. Rather, physical coming into being is from the radiance of the aspect of the blessed Ein Sof itself" (Sefaria, Torah Or, Megillat Esther 1:9–10). Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "Nevertheless, hishtalshelut has the power to cause the spirit of the animal to develop through it, since the spirit of the animal too is spiritual, although it is very, very much lower in level than the ox's face in the chariot." On the identification of "elsewhere": ibid., "The Rebbe notes here that it may be said that the Alter Rebbe is referring to Torah Or, the discourse beginning 'יביאו לבוש מלכות,' and elsewhere"; likewise in the publisher's note to the Reshimot (note 12), citing Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, p. 1524; and in the English translation: "The Rebbe notes that this may be referring, for example, to the discourse entitled Yaviu Levush Malchut in Torah Or" (the reference there is 90b). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'And see there': somewhat difficult, since he did not specify the 'elsewhere'; what is meant by 'and see there,' which ordinarily follows only an explicit reference?" Rabbi Weinberg's comments on Chochmah as "something" ("And wisdom, from where shall it be found?" Job 28:12) are the author's summary, not the wording of Torah Or. See also the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 77–79.

The limit of the conclusion. The parallel in Torah Or explains the idea well, but the precise destination of "elsewhere" is not stated in the Epistle. An answer closing the question with complete confidence does not add knowledge; it erases the source's caution. When a source says "it may be said" or "requires further study," the answer must preserve that language too.

Exercise 2: Disagreement, or Definition?

What to ask. Attach the units "And as for what the Ramak wrote…" and "this refers to the unfolding of the sefirot…" and ask: "Does the Alter Rebbe disagree with the Ramak here?"

What to check. Does the answer present "two approaches"? We saw that "this refers to" does not reject the Ramak, but defines the subject of his words: the sefirot in relation to one another, in the aspect of the vessels. Does the tool distinguish a description correct in its own setting from using it as an answer to another question, that of yesh coming into being?

The limit of the conclusion. These units can teach only how the Alter Rebbe reads the Ramak here. They cannot teach the Ramak's position throughout all his works, and one must not attribute a doctrine to him on the basis of this sentence.

Exercise 3: The Question about Moses, without Closing It

What to ask. "If the sefirot are 'without whatness' and cannot be apprehended, what did Moses apprehend when his prophecy was 'from the upper segment of Netzach of Ze'ir Anpin'?"

What to check. Does the answer settle for "Netzach is lower than Chochmah"? We saw why this is insufficient: Netzach too is a sefirah of Atzilut, "without whatness." Does it distinguish source, path, and content, and panim from pnimiyut? If it gives a source in the writings of the Arizal for "the upper segment of Netzach," open it and check the context: we have not yet found an explicit source for this.

The limit of the conclusion. The distinctions show that there is no contradiction, but do not define the content of the apprehension. This question remained open in the chapter, and an answer from the tool does not close it. Only a checked source can advance it.

Exercise 4: Does "Something from Nothing" Mean Matter?

What to ask. "What is created from nothing, and what derives through chainlike descent?"

What to check. Does the answer divide by "spiritual/physical": the spiritual through chainlike descent, the physical from nothing? We saw that this is mistaken.

What determines the matter is the relationship between the result and its source, not its material; spiritual vessels and lights of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah will also later be called the beginning of created yesh. Check also whether the tool distinguishes "something from nothing" in the relative sense, sometimes used even of Chochmah of Atzilut, from the created yesh of the Epistle.

The limit of the conclusion. This chapter teaches only the principle. Exactly where created yesh begins will be stated later in the Epistle and discussed in chapter 4.

Chapter 3 | Nullification from Above and Separate Existence from Below

What We Already Know

This chapter rests on the distinction established in chapter 2. In a chainlike descent of cause and effect, the effect is "encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence in relation to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun," and it shares with its source erech, a common measure. Such a process cannot produce "yesh," a reality standing as a thing and feeling itself to be a reality. The coming into being of yesh has another name, "creation," something from nothing, and this

"yesh" is not necessarily physical. One further term is needed here: "apprehension" is intellectual grasp of what something is, and one can know about a thing without apprehending its nature.

An Objection the Epistle Raises against Itself

On these foundations, an objection now arises. The Alter Rebbe does not wait for the reader to raise it; he raises it himself. After all, the created being too, the yesh created from nothing, does not stand independently before the Holy One, blessed be He. It does not merely need help to stay alive; its very being as yesh depends at every moment on the power bringing it into being. Of it too it is said, "All before Him is accounted as naught," everything before Him is as though it were not. If the created being is also nullified in this way, "like the sun's radiance within the sun," how does it differ from an effect? Was the distinction we built in the previous chapter merely a distinction in words?

This objection matters because it protects us from two opposite mistakes. One is to think that, once created, the world stands and sustains itself, as though the Holy One, blessed be He, gave it a beginning and it has continued by its own power ever since. This is not creation as Tanya explains it: the created being exists at every moment through the Divine vitality flowing into it. The second mistake is to hear in "nullification"

that the world does not exist, and that a person must say there is no table before them, no body, and no mitzvah to perform. We eat, study, give charity, and help another person; the Epistle itself will go on to emphasize precisely the great superiority of action in the world. The question is not whether the world exists, but how it exists: through its own power, or because the Creator brings it into being and gives it life.[69]

The Epistle's answer has two stages, which are worth knowing in advance. First, it distinguishes "before Him," the thing as it is before the Holy One, blessed be He, in His knowledge from above downward, from knowledge from below upward, the created being's own knowledge. Then it adds that the difference does not concern knowledge alone: in nature too, the created being and the power bringing it into being do not share the commensurability that an effect shares with its cause. To keep our bearings, we will ask three questions throughout the chapter, trying not to confuse them: from what does the thing derive its continued existence? What does it know about its source? And what is the relationship between its nature and the nature of its source?

[69] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 303–306, in the discussion "Nullification in Existence and Knowledge from Below."

“And Although”: The Created Being Too Is “Accounted as Naught before Him”

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And although the created yesh is also accounted as naught before Him,

“And although,” והגם, means even though; it opens an objection. “The created yesh” means the reality created from nothing. “Is also” means it too, like the effect discussed earlier. “Accounted as naught,” כלא חשיב, is Aramaic for considered as nothing. Kameih, קמיה, means “before Him,” relative to the Holy One, blessed be He.

The expression “accounted as naught before Him” is familiar from the Zohar. The Zohar’s introduction says, “And all before Him are accounted as naught,” connecting this to the wording of the verse in Daniel: “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as naught.”[70] The Alter Rebbe himself uses the expression in chapter 20 of Likkutei Amarim: “because all before Him is accounted as naught, and as actual nothing and naught.” In his notes on these

[70] Introduction to the Zohar, folio 11b: “וְכֹלָּא קַמֵּיהּ כְּלָא חֲשִׁיבִין” [and all are accounted as naught before Him], introduced there by “As it has been said, ‘And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as naught’ ” (Sefaria, Zohar, Introduction, paragraph 191); the verse in Daniel 4:32 reads: “וְכָל דָּיְרֵי אַרְעָא כְּלָה חֲשִׁיבִין” (Sefaria). The Zohar uses the plural, חשיבין; the singular, כלא חשיב, is Tanya’s wording. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 20: “For all is accounted as naught before Him, and as actual nothingness and naught” (Sefaria). The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘Accounted as naught before Him’: referenced in part I, chapter 20,” meaning that the source of the expression was already cited in his notes to Likkutei Amarim, chapter 20 (file on chabad.org; the quotations from the Reshimot in this chapter were read by decoding the text layer, which is stored in a legacy encoding).

words in the Epistle, the Rebbe refers to Likkutei Amarim, chapter 20, where he had already identified the expression's source.[70] The objection thus rests on a familiar, accepted foundation. It is not a reader's claim against the Epistle; it is a truth the Epistle itself accepts, from which it asks its question.

Ke-la: "As Naught," Not "Naught"

One word here requires precision and protects us from the second mistake mentioned. The text says כלא, ke-la, "as naught," rather than לא, la, "not." The kaf marks a comparison: "like not," like nothing, rather than actual nonexistence. The Tzemach Tzedek explicitly addresses this in Derech Mitzvotecha: "The meaning of ke-la is not that they have no existence at all, for that would be actual la, not ke-la with the comparative kaf." He concludes that "before Him it is as naught, like the nullification of the radiance explained above, and not actual nonexistence." In his notes on "This is before Him" in our Epistle, the Rebbe referred precisely to

[70] Introduction to the Zohar, folio 11b: "וְכֹלָּא קַמֵּיהּ כְּלָא חֲשִׁיבִין" [and all are accounted as naught before Him], introduced there by "As it has been said, 'And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as naught' " (Sefaria, Zohar, Introduction, paragraph 191); the verse in Daniel 4:32 reads: "וְכָל דָּיְרֵי אַרְעָא כְּלָה חֲשִׁיבִין" (Sefaria). The Zohar uses the plural, חשיבין; the singular, כלא חשיב, is Tanya's wording. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 20: "For all is accounted as naught before Him, and as actual nothingness and naught" (Sefaria). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'Accounted as naught before Him': referenced in part I, chapter 20," meaning that the source of the expression was already cited in his notes to Likkutei Amarim, chapter 20 (file on chabad.org; the quotations from the Reshimot in this chapter were read by decoding the text layer, which is stored in a legacy encoding).

these words: “where he also stresses ‘ke-la’ [with the comparative kaf], and not actual la.”[71]

What does “like nothing” mean? The created being exists, but before the Holy One, blessed be He, it has no status as an independently standing reality. Notice that the Tzemach Tzedek himself explains ke-la through the nullification of radiance, the same analogy the Epistle will shortly offer. The sun’s radiance exists, since it is the very light illuminating the earth; yet within the sun it is accounted as nothing. “Nullification” thus means that something has no standing of its own before its source, rather than that it disappears.

“Nullified in Its Existence in Relation to the Power and Light Flowing into It”

W03-02
source words
9–16

that is, it is nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it

“That is,” דהיינו, explains “accounted as naught before Him.” “It is nullified in its existence” means that it has no independently standing existence. This is the same

[71]Tzemach Tzedek, Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Ha’amanat Elokut, chapter 8 (54b): “What we have said, that the tzimtzum has existence, presents no difficulty in relation to the statement that all is accounted as naught before Him, which implies that it is as actual nothingness and naught… As explained in Likkutei Amarim, part II (chapter 6), כלא does not mean that they have no existence at all, for that would be literally לא [not], rather than כלא [as naught], with the kaf of comparison… Rather, before Him it is כלא, like the nullification of the radiance explained above, and not literally לא; sufficient for the discerning” (Sefaria, Derekh Mitzvotekha, Mitzvat Ha’amanat Elokut, chapter 8). The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘That is, before Him’: note Mitzvat Ha’amanat Elokut, chapter 8, which likewise emphasizes כלא (with the kaf of comparison), and not literally לא.”

expression the Alter Rebbe used in the preceding chapter to describe the effect: "nullified in its existence in relation to it." The comparison is deliberate, and gives rise to the objection. "In relation to" means relative to. "The power and light" means the power bringing into being and the light revealed within it. "Flowing into it" means flowing toward the created being and operating within it. "It" refers back to the created yesh.

In Lessons in Tanya, the Rebbe added a brief note here: the nullification is "not only in relation to His Essence, which is beyond the category of world and creation, but within the matter of creation." In other words, not only relative to His Essence, which is beyond the category of world and creation, but also within creation, relative to the power flowing into the created being. The Hebrew abbreviation עצמו"ה refers to His Essence; כ"א means "but rather."[72] This note is important because it prevents an overly easy reading. One might think that "all before Him is accounted as naught" compares the world with the Creator's Essence, transcending every world and creation: beside the Infinite, everything seems as nothing, just as a small candle counts for

[72] Rabbi Yosef Weinberg's Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20, as presented on the Chabad website: " 'That is, it is nullified in its existence'—Addition by the Rebbe: 'נישט נאר (not only) in relation to His Essence, which is outside the category of world and creation, but within the matter of creation'—'in relation to the power [and light flowing into it].' " עצמו"ה means His Essence; כ"א means "but." Likewise in the English translation (Lessons in Tanya): "Insertion by the Rebbe: 'not only in relation to G-d's Essence, which utterly transcends worlds and creation, but also within creation' ". he.chabad.org—Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Epistle 20; daily lesson, 5 Tishrei.

nothing beside the sun. On that reading, the created being is "as naught" only because it is very small relative to what is above it. The Epistle says something sharper. The created being is nullified relative to the power within creation itself, the power and light flowing into it and bringing it into being. It is not merely small compared with what is above it; relative to the power establishing it, it has no existence of its own.

Why does the text say "the power and light," using two words? In the explanation we propose, "power" emphasizes the action, the capacity bringing into being and giving life, while "light" emphasizes revelation, the source's presence in what it effects. These are two sides of one influence, not two sources. The word "flowing" is in the present tense: the power flows into the created being now, not merely at some past moment. In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe explains that if the Creator's power withdrew from the created being, "the created being would return to actual nothing and naught."[73] Dependence is not the memory of a beginning; it is a fact of every moment.

[73] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 2: "Were the Creator's power to depart from the created being, G-d forbid, the created being would return to actual nothingness and naught" (Sefaria).

“From the Vessels of the Ten Sefirot of ABYA, in Which the Kav… Shines”

W03-03
source words
17–25

from the vessels of the ten sefirot of ABYA, in which the kav, the light of the Ein Sof, blessed be He, shines,

“From the vessels” states whence comes “the power and light flowing into it.” די”ס means “of the ten sefirot.” דאבי”ע means “of the four worlds”: Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. “In which the kav” refers to the kav. אור א”ס ב”ה means “the light of Ein Sof, blessed be He.” “Shines in them” means shines within these vessels.

“Kav” is a term from the writings of the Arizal, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, whose teachings were transmitted in Etz Chaim. It describes the drawing down of Or Ein Sof in a measured, orderly way, “like a line,” into the order of the worlds. It is not a physical line, nor Or Ein Sof as it is in itself; it is a particular drawing down from it, allowing it to illuminate defined levels. Indeed, in his notes on the words שהקו אור, “the kav, the light,” the Rebbe remarked: “Seemingly it should read ‘from the light’? Or ‘of the light’?” Perhaps the text should read שהקו מאור אין־סוף, “the kav from Or Ein Sof,” or שהקו דאור אין־סוף, “the kav of Or Ein Sof”: the kav drawn from the light, or the kav of the light.[74] This verbal precision

[74]The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘שהקו אור’: seemingly it should read מאור? Or דאור?” Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author’s words): “This power and light are from

teaches something about the content: kav is not a synonym for Or Ein Sof, but a drawing down from it.

What does the sentence add to the objection? It explains why this nullification may be called “before Him.” The sequence is as follows: the power flowing into the created being comes from the vessels of the sefirot; the kav shines in these vessels; and the kav is the revelation of Or Ein Sof in the worlds. Rabbi Yosef Weinberg explains this in Lessons in Tanya: although the subject is “the Divine power bringing it into being,” the nullification is called “before Him,” “because within the vessels of the sefirot, from which the Divine power comes, shines the kav, which is the revelation of Or Ein Sof in the worlds.”[74] What brings the created being into existence is neither an alien power nor a second power. Through the vessels, the light of Ein Sof shines within it, and the created being is therefore nullified before Him.

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the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut–Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah, in which the kav of the blessed Ein Sof light shines. Therefore this is called ‘before Him,’ although the subject is the Divine power bringing it into being: for in the vessels of the sefirot from which the Divine power comes shines the kav, which is the revelation of the Ein Sof light within the worlds.” Likewise in the English translation: “this too may be termed ‘before Him’ since within these kelim is found the radiance of the Ein Sof-light”.

[74]The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘שהקו אור’: seemingly it should read מאור? Or דאור?” Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author’s words): “This power and light are from the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut–Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah, in which the kav of the blessed Ein Sof light shines. Therefore this is called ‘before Him,’ although the subject is the Divine power bringing it into being: for in the vessels of the sefirot from which the Divine power comes shines the kav, which is the revelation of the Ein Sof light within the worlds.” Likewise in the English translation: “this too may be termed ‘before Him’ since within these kelim is found the radiance of the Ein Sof-light”.

The sentence lists the vessels of all four worlds as the source from which the power flows, by virtue of the kav shining within them. A different question concerns the status of the vessels of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah themselves: are they Divinity like the vessels of Atzilut, or already the beginning of created beings? The Epistle will discuss this later, and we will study it in chapter 4. Here, we leave that question in its place.

"And Like the Sun's Radiance within the Sun": The Same Analogy, a Sharper Objection

W03-04
source words
26–31

and like the sun's radiance within the sun, as stated in Likkutei Amarim, Part II.

"And like the sun's radiance within the sun" means like the sun's radiance inside the sun. כמ"ש means "as it is written," "as explained." בלק"א ח"ב means "in Likkutei Amarim, Part II," Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the second part of Tanya. In his notes, the Rebbe specified chapter 3 there.[75]

In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe explains the analogy at length. Sunlight extends and illuminates enormous distances; since it shines so far away, it certainly also shines in its own place, within the sun itself. "Only there, in its very place, this radiance is accounted as actual nothing and naught,

[75] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 3: the analogy of the sun's radiance and the nullification of the created being.

because it is truly nullified in its existence relative to the body of the sun's sphere, the source of this light and radiance." In its source, "the name 'yesh' does not apply to it at all, only the names 'nothing' and 'naught.' "[75] The radiance does not cease to be; but there, in its source, it is not called "yesh." There is no "light" in the sun additional to the sun.

The analogy clearly teaches what the Epistle seeks to say: something can be real and yet wholly nullified within its source. But precisely here, the objection reaches its height. In the preceding chapter, the Alter Rebbe used the same analogy, in the same words, to describe the effect within its cause. Now he uses it to describe the created being relative to the power bringing it into being. If the analogy is the same and the nullification is the same, why is one called an "effect" and the other "something from nothing"?

The answer begins with a simple understanding of the analogy's role. An analogy need not explain every side of what it represents. In both places, the sun's radiance illuminates one point: lack of independence before the source. How the result comes into being from its source, and whether the two are commensurate, must be clarified from the Epistle's words. One analogy can therefore serve two subjects sharing a characteristic without making them identical. The difference must be

[75] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 3: the analogy of the sun's radiance and the nullification of the created being.

sought in the sentences following the analogy, and indeed the Epistle immediately continues with a qualification: “This is specifically before Him.”

“Specifically before Him”: Knowledge from Above Downward

W03-05
source words
32–39

This is specifically before Him, which is His knowledge, blessed be He, from above downward.

“This is,” היינו, means “that is.” “Specifically before Him”: “specifically” limits the statement; nullification like the sun’s radiance within the sun is said in this aspect, not in every aspect. “Which is His knowledge, blessed be He” means His knowledge. “From above downward” means from the higher to the lower, from the source to what comes into being from it.

The answer begins here. The Alter Rebbe explains “before Him” as “His knowledge, blessed be He, from above downward”: the thing as it is in relation to its source, as known from its source. From the source’s side, the created being has no separate existence. It does not stand as a reality additional to the power bringing it into being, just as the radiance within the sun is not a light additional to the sun. An important conclusion follows: “before Him,” from the source’s side, the created being is not a second reality, and therefore cannot obscure or conceal G-d’s unity.

The word “knowledge” may mislead, as though this were a psychological process in the Holy One, blessed be He, like a person looking at something and forming an impression of it. “Knowledge from above downward” is a way in the Holy Tongue of expressing how things are from their source’s side. Chassidut speaks of this as “two knowledges”: “higher knowledge” and “lower knowledge.” In Torah Or, in the discourse “Moshe Yedabber VehaElohim Yaanennu VeKol,” the Alter Rebbe expounds the verse “For G-d is a G-d of knowledges,” two knowledges, describing them as follows: “Higher unity, from above downward: the lower something is, the more it is as naught and as nothing, and the higher it is, the more it is accounted as yesh”; “and lower unity, from below upward, is the aspect of something from nothing: the lower something is, the more it is accounted as yesh and appears to fleshly eyes as a thing in its own right, perceptible.”[76] The Rebbe cited this source in his notes on our words, together with additional passages. In

[76]Torah Or, Yitro, discourse beginning “משה ידבר והאלהים יעננו בקול” (68a): “The higher unity, from above downward: the lower something is, the more it is as naught and as nothing, while the higher it is, the more it is accounted as yesh. The lower unity, from below upward, is the aspect of yesh me-ayin: the lower something is, the more it is accounted as yesh and appears to fleshly eyes as a thing in its own right, perceptible”; the discourse there expounds the verse “For G-d is a G-d of knowledges” (I Samuel 2:3): “two knowledges” (Sefaria, Torah Or, Yitro 2:16–17). The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘His knowledge… but in the knowledge’: see also Torah Or 68a. Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar 83a. Hemshech 5666, 27, and elsewhere.” The publisher’s notes there quote Hemshech 5666 (p. רכ [220] and following): “There are two kinds of knowledge, higher knowledge and lower knowledge. Higher knowledge is from above downward, from the giver’s perspective; lower knowledge is knowledge from below upward, from the recipient’s perspective.” The references to Hemshech 5666 and Likkutei Torah are cited according to the publisher’s notes; the sources themselves were not opened.

one of them, as reported in the publisher's notes to his notes, "higher knowledge" is defined as knowledge "from the side of the bestower," and "lower knowledge" as knowledge "from the side of the recipient."[76]

The reversal in Torah Or is surprising and illuminates the subject. In knowledge from below, the lower and more physical something is, the more it appears to be substantial "yesh": a stone seems more tangible to us than a thought, and a thought more tangible than a higher spirit. In knowledge from above, the order is reversed: the farther something is from the source, the more it is "as naught and as nothing." This is not an arbitrary change of viewpoint. Knowledge from above sees the thing from the side of what establishes it; knowledge from below sees it from the side of what it feels and shows.

Two Knowledges, Not Two Truths

How do the two knowledges fit together? Two easy answers come to mind, neither precise. According to

[76]Torah Or, Yitro, discourse beginning "משה ידבר והאלהים יעננו בקול" (68a): "The higher unity, from above downward: the lower something is, the more it is as naught and as nothing, while the higher it is, the more it is accounted as yesh. The lower unity, from below upward, is the aspect of yesh me-ayin: the lower something is, the more it is accounted as yesh and appears to fleshly eyes as a thing in its own right, perceptible"; the discourse there expounds the verse "For G-d is a G-d of knowledges" (I Samuel 2:3): "two knowledges" (Sefaria, Torah Or, Yitro 2:16–17). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'His knowledge… but in the knowledge': see also Torah Or 68a. Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar 83a. Hemshech 5666, 27, and elsewhere." The publisher's notes there quote Hemshech 5666 (p. רכ [220] and following): "There are two kinds of knowledge, higher knowledge and lower knowledge. Higher knowledge is from above downward, from the giver's perspective; lower knowledge is knowledge from below upward, from the recipient's perspective." The references to Hemshech 5666 and Likkutei Torah are cited according to the publisher's notes; the sources themselves were not opened.

the first, there are two equal truths, like two observers of equal standing, each seeing the world from their own window: each is right "from their perspective," without resolution. According to the second, knowledge from below is mere imagination, an error to be erased.

The precise picture differs from both. "Before Him" is the truth of dependence: this is how the thing truly is relative to its source, and there is no source of existence additional to the Divine power. Thus there are neither two equal truths nor two observers of equal standing: one is the source's knowledge of what it brings into being, and the other the recipient's knowledge. Yet knowledge from below does not contradict that truth; it is the way a created being encounters its own reality. Nor is it mere imagination, since, as we shall shortly see, it rests on a real fact: the power bringing into being is not apprehensible to the created being, and the two are incommensurate. The two knowledges describe the same reality, from its source's side and from its appearance to the one created.

An analogy from speech can illustrate the distinction. A person speaks. For the listener, the words are something encountered from outside: a sound that has reached them and can be repeated and analyzed. For the speaker, they express what is within and depend entirely upon the speaker; if the speaker stops, they

stop. The same reality is seen here from its source's side and from the way it appears to the recipient. The analogy's limit is clear: the speaker does not create the listener from nothing, and the listener can in principle understand the speaker. In what the analogy represents, the difference is incomparably deeper, precisely as the Epistle will now say.

"But in Knowledge from Below Upward": A Separate Thing, within This Knowledge

W03-06
source words
40–49

But in knowledge from below upward, the created yesh is an entirely separate thing

"But" establishes a contrast with what was said about "before Him." "In knowledge from below upward" means knowledge proceeding from the created being toward its source, from the lower toward the higher. "The created yesh is an entirely separate thing" means that the created being is a distinct thing, standing on its own, "entirely."

W03-07
source words
50–61

in this knowledge and apprehension from below, for the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all, in any way,

"In this knowledge and apprehension from below" means within this knowledge and apprehension, that from below. These words repeat what has already been

said, and the repetition itself teaches: separateness is asserted "in this knowledge and apprehension." The Alter Rebbe does not say that the created being is truly separate from the Creator; he says that in the created being's knowledge and apprehension it is separate. "For" means because. "The power flowing into it" is the power flowing toward the created being and bringing it into being. "Is not apprehended at all, in any way" means it is not grasped in any manner; the repetition כלל וכלל strengthens the negation.

What does "a separate thing" mean? A reality with limits of its own, standing as a thing and feeling itself to exist. This is how we encounter the world. A person sees a stone, a tree, and another person. One can examine their forms, study their characteristics, and discover much about the relationships between them. But the Divine power bringing them into being does not appear in the picture as the object's details appear. The Epistle says that the power is not apprehended by the created being in its knowledge from below; it does not say that the power is not operating.

The Alter Rebbe cites our Epistle in Likkutei Torah, in Parashat Shemini, using an analogy from the sea. He speaks of souls created "to be yesh and a separate thing in their own right in the world of Beriah," and writes, "This is as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu VeChayohi,' " meaning our Epistle. By

contrast, of levels whose "nature may not have changed to become something separate from Divinity," he says that they are "like fish of the sea, which are within the sea, and the sea covers them, and they cannot separate from the sea"; those created "to be yesh and a separate thing are called animals of the land."[77] The fish lives within its source, with water covering it on every side; the land animal stands on ground of its own, appearing to have an existence that stands independently. The analogy there concerns levels of souls. For our investigation, the fish illustrates a reality situated within its source, while the land animal illustrates one appearing to stand on its own.

Knowing That There Is a Source without Apprehending It

"Is not apprehended at all, in any way" does not mean that the created being cannot know it has a Creator. A believing person knows, and even understands intellectually, that the world does not stand by itself. Rabbi Weinberg emphasizes this: the created being "knows that it has a source bringing it into being, and

[77] Likkutei Torah, Shemini (2:3 in Sefaria's division): "This is as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi': the creation of souls from it, to be a yesh and a separate thing in their own right in the world of Beriah"; "By contrast, nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut itself... it is possible that their nature has not changed to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc. This is like the fish of the sea, which are within the sea and the sea covers them, and they cannot be separated from the sea"; "But the souls created from Malchut of Atzilut in Beriah, to be a yesh and a separate thing, are called the beasts of the land" (Sefaria, Likkutei Torah, Shemini 2:3). The tool's readings yielded both "להפרד מהים" [to be separated from the sea] and "להיות נפרד מהים" [to be separate from the sea]; the content is the same. See also Iggeret HaKodesh 20 itself: "It is possible that their nature has not changed to become a thing separate from Divinity."

that this source is a Divine power."[78] What is negated is apprehension of the power itself: grasping what it is, as the intellect grasps something standing before it. This is the same distinction we learned in the previous chapter concerning the sefirot as "without whatness": one can know "that it is" without apprehending "what it is."

According to Rabbi Weinberg's explanation, this also gives the meaning of ayin, "nothing," in "something from nothing." The created being calls its source "ayin," not because it thinks the source does not exist, but for two reasons: the source is not apprehended by it, "nothing" within its world of apprehension; and the source does not exist in the same kind of reality in which the created being exists.[78] The first reason is what we have just learned; the second will be explained later in the chapter, in "and also the two are utterly incommensurate." We will return to both when we reach "And therefore it is specifically called something from nothing."

[78]Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "Although the created being too knows that it has a source bringing it into being, and that this source is a Divine power"; and at the end of the passage: "This is because of both aspects: it is not understood or apprehended by the created yesh, and it does not exist within the category of existence of the created yesh." The English translation specifies the two meanings of ayin: "incomprehensible" and "existing differently".

[78]Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya (the author's words): "Although the created being too knows that it has a source bringing it into being, and that this source is a Divine power"; and at the end of the passage: "This is because of both aspects: it is not understood or apprehended by the created yesh, and it does not exist within the category of existence of the created yesh." The English translation specifies the two meanings of ayin: "incomprehensible" and "existing differently".

Dependence, and Awareness of Dependence

Here it is worth separating two things easily confused: dependence itself and awareness of dependence. A person sits in a lit room reading a book. At that moment, they are not thinking about the source of the light; they see the book, table, and wall. Their lack of attention is neither what maintains the light nor something that disconnects it from its source. Likewise, an infant receives life and care from its parents long before knowing how to describe this. Knowledge does not create the dependence, and its absence does not cancel it.

The created being's dependence is deeper than all these: its very existence is sustained through the Creator's power. Even when it acknowledges this dependence, the power bringing it into being does not become something it sees before it, for it "is not apprehended at all, in any way." Knowing about dependence and apprehending the power itself are therefore two different things.

An overly brief answer may arise here: "Everything is truly nullified; only our feeling differs." There is a true aspect to this sentence: the created being is indeed not independent, even when it feels so. But if we stop there, we lose the distinction we have built. If the entire difference between an effect and a created being were a difference in feeling, one could say that creation

is simply a chainlike descent we do not understand. The Epistle does not say this. It adds a second claim, and that claim concerns nature.[69]

"And Also the Two Are Utterly Incommensurate": Not Only Knowledge, but Nature

W03-08
source words
62–68

and also the two are utterly incommensurate, in every respect,

"And also" adds a new claim beyond concealment in knowledge. "Utterly incommensurate" means no proportion, no relationship permitting comparison. "The two" means the created yesh and the power bringing it into being. "In every respect" means in no manner whatsoever.

W03-09
source words
69–76

bearing neither the relationship nor any fraction of the relationship of the effect to the cause,

לא מיניה ולא מקצתיה is Aramaic for "neither of it nor any portion of it." "Of the relationship of the effect to the cause" means of the commensurability between an effect and its cause. The Aramaic expression is drawn from the Gemara's language, as the Rebbe noted in his notes: "In the manner of the Talmud's expression,

[69] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 303–306, in the discussion "Nullification in Existence and Knowledge from Below."

Sotah 5a."[79] There, concerning arrogance, one of the Amoraim said that a Torah scholar should possess "one-eighth of an eighth" of it, and Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak replied: "Neither of it nor any portion of it." The language negates not only the whole thing, but even its smallest part.

What, then, does the sentence say? Between the created being and the power bringing it into being, there is not even a small fraction of the commensurability between an effect and its cause. Notice the kind of claim being made. The wording does not measure distance, as though saying "very far" or "very, very far." It negates the very kind of relationship. "Commensurability" between effect and cause means, as we saw in the previous chapter, a shared measure permitting comparison and an understanding of what passed from one to the other. Between the created being and the power bringing it into being, there is no such shared measure at all.

Here the distinction between two meanings of erech, mentioned in the previous chapter, returns. Of a light that has undergone many contractions, one can say that it "bears no proportion at all" to the light before

[79]Sotah 5a: "Rabbi Chiyya bar Ashi said in Rav's name: a Torah scholar should possess one-eighth of an eighth [of pride]"; "Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: neither any of it nor any portion of it. Is it a small matter that it is written of it, 'Every haughty heart is an abomination to G-d'?" (Sefaria); Rashi's opening words there are "לא ממנה ולא ממקצתה" [neither any of it nor any portion of it]. The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'לא מיני' ולא מקצתי': after the wording of the Talmud, Sotah 5a." Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya renders it "לא ממנו ולא ממקצת ממנו" [neither any of it nor any portion of it].

the contraction, meaning that their intensity cannot be compared; yet both are light, of the same kind. “Utterly incommensurate” in the Epistle concerns nature, the kind of reality. It therefore emphasizes “in every respect” and “neither… nor any fraction.” The gap here is not quantitative, like the gap between a great sage and a beginning student, which is an abundance or paucity of the same knowledge.

Let us briefly return to the student to see the difference. A student who has not understood the teacher’s explanation can hear it again, receive another analogy, and finally grasp the reasoning. The difficulty lies within a field in which there is a relationship of understanding between things. What happens when we try to grasp, from the nature of a physical object, the Divine power bringing it into being from nothing? Here, more than an explanation is missing. The object is not a small part of the Divine nature that would show us its source if we enlarged it in thought. It is created through His power, but the two do not share the relationship of cause and effect. Thus progress in understanding nature can increase a person’s recognition of the wisdom in creation and deepen their wonder, yet still does not turn the power bringing into being into something graspable through an object’s characteristics.

What Makes an Effect an Effect

What is the "commensurability" between an effect and its cause that does not exist between a created being and its source? The Epistle now details it from two sides. It begins with knowledge, momentarily returning to "is not apprehended at all, in any way"; then, with "and also in their nature and essence," it moves to nature.

W03-10
source words
77–82

for the effect knows and apprehends something of its cause

"For the effect" begins the explanation of the point of comparison. "Knows and apprehends" means knows and grasps. "Something" means some apprehension, not necessarily complete apprehension of the cause's entire nature. "Of its cause" means of its source, its cause.

W03-11
source words
83–88

and is nullified in relation to it through this knowledge and apprehension,

"And is nullified in relation to it" means nullified toward it. In his notes, the Rebbe remarked: "Seemingly it should read etzlah," אצלה, using the feminine form rather than אצלו, since the Hebrew word ilah, "cause," is feminine; this is the wording in Lessons in Tanya.[80] The meaning does not change: the

[80] The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'ובטל אצלו' [and is nullified to it, masculine]: seemingly it should read אצלה [feminine]?" The publisher's note there states: "Likewise in He'arot VeTikkunim, tentatively." The online text of Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya reads: "ובטל אצלה על ידי ידיעה והשגה זו" [and is nullified to it, feminine, through this knowledge and apprehension].

effect is nullified toward its cause. ע"י means "through." "This knowledge and apprehension" means the partial apprehension just mentioned.

These two units teach something precise. The effect too is nullified, but its nullification passes through its own knowledge: it apprehends something of its source and is nullified toward it through that apprehension. It therefore cannot feel itself to be an independent "yesh": it recognizes its source, however slightly. "Something" is important. There is no need to claim that the effect apprehends its source completely; it is enough that their relationship allows it to apprehend something of it.

The created being's nullification, by contrast, is "before Him," in knowledge from above, and does not pass through the created being's own knowledge. From the created being's perspective, the power bringing it into being "is not apprehended at all, in any way," so in its knowledge it is "an entirely separate thing." Here we already have half the answer to the objection: both are "nullified," but the effect is nullified within its own knowledge, and the created being is nullified only before Him. This also makes clearer what we saw in the preceding chapter, that a yesh feeling itself to be a reality cannot come into being through cause and effect: an effect, by the very fact of being an effect, recognizes its source and is nullified to it.

This is how the effect's nullification is described here. The created being's nullification "before Him" is genuine and exists even when the source is not apprehended by the created being. Nullification can therefore operate through apprehension, as with the effect, and can exist without it, as with the created being.

"In Their Nature and Essence": Cause and Effect of the Same Kind

W03-12
source words
89–100

and also in their nature and essence there is no such great difference, except that this is the cause and that is the effect,

"And also" moves the Epistle from knowledge to nature. "In their nature and essence" means in what they are, in their very existence. "There is no such great difference" means no difference so great in comparison with the gap about to be described. "Except that this is the cause and that is the effect" means that one is the source and the other the result.

How can there be no great difference between cause and effect "in their nature and essence"? Rabbi Weinberg offers an example from the soul. The heart's attributes, such as love and fear, are born of the intellect: a person contemplates something, understands its worth, and love awakens from that

understanding. Even before the love awakens in the heart, it is already present in the intellect in another form, as "attributes within the intellect," an understanding already containing inclination and emotion. The attribute within the intellect and the attribute within the heart differ in their manner of existence, but are the same in nature.[81] This is an example of cause and effect: the result already "was" within its source and is drawn from it.

"Except that this is the cause and that is the effect" is familiar from Kabbalistic works. In his notes, the Rebbe referred to Pardes Rimonim, gate 2, chapter 7, and to the Raavad's words in the introduction to his commentary on Sefer Yetzirah. In Pardes, the Ramak writes of Keter and its source: "For there is no difference between the Emanator and the emanated other than the difference between cause and effect." In the Raavad's words, as quoted in Shomer Emunim, it is said of Keter: "To the point that there is nothing between it and its cause, except that this is the cause and that is the effect."[82] The difference between cause

[81] Rabbi Yosef Weinberg, Lessons in Tanya, Epistle 20: "Essentially, emotion is already to be found in its source, as 'emotion within intellect' (middot shebaseichel), even before it exists alone as a distinct entity. But though 'emotion within intellect' exists in a different manner from pure emotion, they are in essence the same"; the translation in the body of the chapter is ours. In Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, concerning intellect and a stone: "Intellect does not exist at all within the category of existence of the yesh, and with regard to this category of existence, it makes no difference whether the stone comes into being from 'nothing' or from intellect." chabad.org—Lessons in Tanya, the daily lesson for 5 Tishrei.

[82] Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 2, chapter 7: "Keter differs from Chochmah in that Chochmah is an effect of Keter, and Keter is a cause of Chochmah"; "For the difference between the Emanator and the emanated is only the difference between cause and effect"; and at the beginning of the chapter: "Apart from other differences, whose explanation does not concern us at present" (Sefaria). The

and effect is a difference of place within an order: which is source and which is result.

Here too, precision matters. "Such great" is comparative language: relative to the gap in creation, the difference between cause and effect is small. It does not establish that there is no other difference between every cause and every effect. The Ramak himself adds in that same chapter that there are "other differences whose explanation does not concern us now."[82]

"The Difference between the Nature of the Created Yesh and the Nature of the Power"

W03-13
source words
101–109

and neither it nor any fraction of it approaches the difference between the nature of the created yesh

Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'Only that this is a cause and that an effect': note Pardes, Gate 2, chapter 7; Elimah, Ein Kol, Tamar 2, chapter 5; the Raavad in the introduction to his commentary on Sefer Yetzirah, as referenced in Shomer Emunim, first dialogue, section 141 and following." The publisher's note there quotes the Raavad from Shomer Emunim: "From the Cause of causes there necessarily follows the supernal Keter… until there is nothing between it and its cause, except that this is a cause and that an effect." We did not ourselves open Elimah or Shomer Emunim.

[82] Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 2, chapter 7: "Keter differs from Chochmah in that Chochmah is an effect of Keter, and Keter is a cause of Chochmah"; "For the difference between the Emanator and the emanated is only the difference between cause and effect"; and at the beginning of the chapter: "Apart from other differences, whose explanation does not concern us at present" (Sefaria). The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'Only that this is a cause and that an effect': note Pardes, Gate 2, chapter 7; Elimah, Ein Kol, Tamar 2, chapter 5; the Raavad in the introduction to his commentary on Sefer Yetzirah, as referenced in Shomer Emunim, first dialogue, section 141 and following." The publisher's note there quotes the Raavad from Shomer Emunim: "From the Cause of causes there necessarily follows the supernal Keter… until there is nothing between it and its cause, except that this is a cause and that an effect." We did not ourselves open Elimah or Shomer Emunim.

“And neither it nor any fraction of it”: the Aramaic expression recurs, this time concerning the difference. “The difference between the nature of the created yesh” means the difference between what the created being is… The sentence does not end here; the other side of the comparison appears in the next unit, and their connection is the heart of the claim.

W03-14
source words
110–117

and the nature of the power and light flowing into it to bring it into being from nothing to something.

“And the nature of the power and light flowing into it” means what the power and light flowing within the created being are. “To bring it into being” means to establish its existence, not merely nourish something already standing on its own. “From nothing to something” means from ayin to yesh.

The sentence is now complete: the difference between cause and effect is not even a small fraction of the difference between the nature of the created being and that of the power bringing it into being. Rabbi Weinberg explains this with a striking example. Suppose a stone were to come into being from intellect. Within the stone’s kind of reality, intellect is not present at all; from the perspective of that kind of reality, therefore, “it is the same whether the stone comes into being from ‘nothing’ or from intellect.”[81]

[81] Rabbi Yosef Weinberg, Lessons in Tanya, Epistle 20: “Essentially, emotion is already to be found in its source, as ‘emotion within intellect’ (middot shebaseichel), even before it exists alone

From the stone's perspective, intellect is "ayin": there is nothing of the stone within it, and it does not exist within the domain in which the stone exists. Likewise, and incomparably more profoundly, the power bringing the created being into being is "ayin" relative to it.

The hypothetical example of intellect and stone clarifies "utterly incommensurate": a source that does not belong to the kind of reality of what it brings into being.

Yet "utterly incommensurate" does not mean "unconnected": without the power flowing into it, the created being would not exist for even a moment. "Utterly incommensurate" negates a particular relationship, one in which the result derives from its source as a continuation of a similar nature; it does not negate dependence. Someone blurring this distinction will think that every source on which a created being depends is an ilah, a cause. Yet later in the Epistle, the Alter Rebbe says of the power of creation that it operates "without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh."[69]

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as a distinct entity. But though 'emotion within intellect' exists in a different manner from pure emotion, they are in essence the same"; the translation in the body of the chapter is ours. In Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, concerning intellect and a stone: "Intellect does not exist at all within the category of existence of the yesh, and with regard to this category of existence, it makes no difference whether the stone comes into being from 'nothing' or from intellect." chabad.org—Lessons in Tanya, the daily lesson for 5 Tishrei.

[69] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 303–306, in the discussion "Nullification in Existence and Knowledge from Below."

Why the Difference Is Not "Knowing More or Less"

We can now answer a question the reader has surely asked: the effect too apprehends only "something," while the created being does not apprehend at all. Is this not merely a difference of more or less knowledge? The answer is no, because the difference in knowledge arises from the difference in nature. The effect apprehends something of its source because it and its source are of the same kind: the attribute in the heart recognizes the intellect from which it was born, because in its nature it was already there. The created being does not apprehend the power bringing it into being, not because it lacks just a little more understanding, but because this power does not belong to its kind of reality. No addition of knowledge of that same kind will bridge this.

Concealment in knowledge and the absence of commensurability in nature are therefore connected, but are two things. The first states what the created being knows; the second states what it is. The Epistle mentions both in sequence, "is not apprehended at all, in any way" and "and also the two are utterly incommensurate"; one must not be substituted for the other.

Let us now return to the three questions with which we began. From what does the created being derive its continued existence? From the Divine power

constantly bringing it into being; "before Him," it has no existence of its own. What does it know about its source? It can know that there is a source but does not apprehend the power itself, and therefore in its knowledge it is "an entirely separate thing." What is the relationship between its nature and its source's nature? "Utterly incommensurate," "neither… nor any fraction." The three questions are connected, but none replaces the others. Later in the Epistle, we will encounter levels whose answers do not coincide: we have already seen the Alter Rebbe speak of levels whose "nature may not have changed to become something separate from Divinity," yet which are not "actual Divinity, to create something from nothing." All reality therefore cannot be arranged on a single ladder of "more nullification" and "less nullification." In each place, we must ask which relationship is being described.[69]

"And Therefore It Is Specifically Called Something from Nothing": The Answer to "And Although"

W03-15
source words
118–122

And therefore it is specifically called something from nothing.

"And therefore" draws a conclusion from the difference in knowledge and the difference in nature. "Is called"

[69] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 303–306, in the discussion "Nullification in Existence and Knowledge from Below."

states its name: “something from nothing.” “Specifically” means precisely this, rather than another name.

Let us return to the objection that opened with “And although”: if the created being too is “accounted as naught before Him,” nullified like the sun’s radiance within the sun, why is it not an effect like any other? The answer becomes clear in three steps.

First: yes, the created being is nullified like the sun’s radiance within the sun, but “specifically before Him,” in the knowledge of the Holy One, blessed be He, from above downward, when the thing is considered from the side of the source bringing it into being. Second: in knowledge from below, the created being’s own knowledge, it is “an entirely separate thing,” because the power bringing it into being is not apprehended by it at all. In this it differs from the effect, which apprehends something of its cause and is nullified toward it within its own knowledge. Third: the difference does not concern knowledge alone. Between effect and cause, there is no great difference “in their nature and essence,” whereas between the created being and the power bringing it into being there is utter incommensurability. The name “something from nothing” therefore fits: “something,” because in its own knowledge it is a reality standing as a thing; “from nothing,” because its source is “ayin” relative to it,

both because it is not apprehended and because it does not exist within its kind of reality.

A note of the Rebbe included in the English translation of Lessons in Tanya, whose words are incorporated into the commentary itself in the Hebrew version, states here: "also according to the truth."[83] The name "something from nothing" is thus not merely a description of the created being's feeling, as though "in truth" everything were chainlike descent and the created being simply failed to understand. According to the truth too, this is creation from nothing, because the difference in nature is real: the created being and its source are incommensurate. Nullification "before Him" is true, and the name "something from nothing" is true; they do not contradict, because they answer different questions. The first says that the created being has no existence of its own; the second says that it is not a continuation of its source's nature and is incommensurate with it.

An Analogy, and Its Limit

To hold all this together, let us combine two analogies already encountered. Each illuminates a different side.

[83] Lessons in Tanya, Epistle 20, note 26, marked "Note by the Rebbe": "[Not only from the perspective of the yesh but] also according to the truth". In the online text of Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya these words are integrated into the commentary without being marked: "Therefore it is called, also according to the truth, specifically 'yesh' from 'ayin.' " At the end of that passage: "The source becomes 'ayin,' although 'everything is from You'... Rather, as stated, this is because of both aspects: it is not understood or apprehended by the created yesh, and it does not exist within the category of existence of the created yesh."

The sun's radiance shows how a reality can depend wholly upon its source and be nullified within it, yet still be real: the radiance exists, but within the sun it is not called "yesh." Intellect and stone show the meaning of "utterly incommensurate": a source that has no place within the kind of reality of what it brings into being, and is therefore "ayin" relative to it.

Each analogy lacks what the other possesses. The sun's radiance alone does not show the difference between effect and created being, which is why the Epistle could use it for both. Intellect and stone do not show constant dependence, since a stone already formed does not need to be held in existence at every moment. Both analogies are taken from created beings, among which no source creates something from nothing. An analogy therefore does not replace what it represents. Each time, it helps us know which point it illuminates and which point must be learned from the sentences themselves. This way of reading will help throughout the book: one analogy illuminates dependence, another the meaning of "utterly incommensurate," and in the coming chapters we will encounter analogies illuminating further aspects. There is no need to load the Epistle's entire structure onto any one of them.

What Does the Word Ayin Mean?

After all these preliminaries, we can hear "something from nothing" afresh. The "nothing" does not mean the absence of a Creator, power, or source; the entire Epistle concerns the power bringing the created being into existence. "Ayin" indicates that the source of coming into being does not stand before the created being as a yesh commensurate with it, as an effect stands before a cause it can apprehend. From the perspective of knowledge from below, there is no preceding nature here, a kind of "material" from which the thing developed. This is also what the Epistle later says, that the power of creation operates "without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh": there is no additional cause and no preceding material, but there is a Creator.

One further conclusion follows. Even after studying the sefirot, vessels, and kav, we have not turned creation into a sophisticated human craft. The names of the levels give us a way to follow the order of influence described by Torah, but do not turn the very power of bringing into being into a mechanism we can grasp. The learner may, and indeed must, ask how these things are connected, while preserving the distinction between understanding relationships and grasping the Divine nature.

Nullification That Does Not Erase Service

One might fear that if the created being is nullified within its source, its actions too are unimportant. The Epistle's argument leads in the opposite direction. Precisely because the created being is "yesh" in its knowledge, and because the world has room for choice and action, human service has meaning. Recognizing dependence does not erase the task; it teaches that the source of the capacity to act and the purpose of action are not separate from the Creator. A human example will illustrate this: someone given tools and responsibility for a task does not possess that capacity through their own power, yet the way they use what they were given matters. The example is limited, because the created being's dependence is deeper than any human dependence; but indifference to action cannot be inferred even from it.

This also explains why knowledge from below must not be erased as though it were an error. It is the starting point of the person studying and serving in the world: one knows oneself as existing and acting, and learns from Torah the source of one's existence. Understanding can change one's relationship to reality without demanding its denial.

When a person gives charity, the hand, coin, and recipient do not vanish from the story because the giver has learned that their existence depends upon

G-d. On the contrary, the person begins to see the act within creation's purpose: the reality given to them is the place where they respond to their Creator's will. Nullification is not an invitation to disregard the world; it is a change in one's relationship to it. The world is not its own source, and the ability to act within it is itself a gift. Later in the Epistle, this recognition will connect with the superiority of practical mitzvot, and it will become clear that limited created beings were created to receive His commandments. Already here we can understand why "yesh" and "nullified" are not mutually exclusive: there is a reality in which to serve, and it has no independent existence outside the source bringing it into being.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified

The chapter has answered the objection the Epistle raised against itself with "And although": the created being too is "accounted as naught before Him," like the effect, yet it is "specifically called something from nothing" for two reasons: the power bringing it into being "is not apprehended at all, in any way," and "the two are utterly incommensurate, in every respect."

We can thus say that the world is not independent without saying that the feeling of yesh is meaningless; we can say that the created being does not apprehend its source without disconnecting it from that source. Nullification "before Him" and substantial existence

"from below upward" are not an apparent contradiction to be made to disappear; they are two sides of what the Epistle calls "something from nothing."

Toward the Next Chapter

These two sides will remain before us as the Epistle shows where created reality begins. Anyone expecting to find its beginning in a stone or animal is in for a surprise. There we will need to ask, each time, the three questions learned here: from what does the thing derive its continued existence, what does it apprehend, and how does its nature relate to its source? We must not settle for asking how "nullified" it is.

Studying the Chapter with Artificial-Intelligence Tools

This chapter provides a useful test for any explanation, including one received from an artificial-intelligence tool: the three questions. In the following exercises, we will use them and add the traps particular to this chapter.

Exercise 1: The Three Questions

What to ask. Attach the chapter's units, from "And although the created yesh" through "And therefore it is specifically called something from nothing," and ask: "If both the effect and the created being are nullified

‘like the sun’s radiance within the sun,’ what is the difference between them?”

What to check. Does the answer address each of the three questions separately: from what does the thing derive its continued existence, what does it know about its source, and how does its nature relate to the nature of its source? A common answer will say, “The difference is only in the feeling.” This is precisely the overly brief answer the chapter warned against, since the Epistle adds “and also the two are utterly incommensurate,” a claim about nature. If the answer mixes the questions, ask the tool to answer each separately and identify beside each claim the unit from which it is learned.

The limit of the conclusion. A claim not anchored in the wording of the units is the tool’s explanation, not the source’s wording, and must be marked as such. Even a well-organized answer does not turn “utterly incommensurate” into something graspable; it only arranges the distinctions.

Exercise 2: Ke-la, or La?

What to ask. “What does ‘accounted as naught before Him’ mean? Does the world not exist?”

What to check. Does the answer notice the comparative kaf, “like nothing” rather than actual nothing, as the Tzemach Tzedek and the Rebbe

stressed? Does it fall into either of the two mistakes with which the chapter opened: that the world stands through its own power, or that the world does not exist and has no meaning?

The limit of the conclusion. Precision concerning the kaf prevents a mistake but does not by itself explain the difference between effect and created being. For that, the continuation of the Epistle is needed.

Exercise 3: Two Meanings of Erech

What to ask. "What is the difference between 'bears no proportion at all,' said of light after contractions, and 'the two are utterly incommensurate, in every respect,' in the Epistle?"

What to check. Does the answer distinguish proportion in intensity, two lights of the same kind whose strength cannot be compared, from commensurability in nature, a different kind of reality? Does it explain "neither… nor any fraction" according to its source in the Gemara, Sotah 5a, as negating even the smallest portion?

The limit of the conclusion. Distinguishing the two meanings clarifies the claim. It does not prove it or describe the power bringing into being itself.

Exercise 4: Points of Textual Precision

What to ask. "Is there a linguistic difficulty in the wording 'the kav, the light of Ein Sof, blessed be He' [שהקו אור א"ס ב"ה] and 'is nullified in relation to it' [ובטל אצלו]?"

What to check. We saw that the Rebbe remarked in his notes, "Seemingly it should read 'from the light'? Or 'of the light'?" and also, "Seemingly it should read etzlah [אצלה]." Does the tool present these remarks with "seemingly," as comments, or as definite textual corrections? If it suggests other corrections, do they have a source?

The limit of the conclusion. The textual comments teach, for example, that the kav is a drawing down from the light rather than its synonym. They do not permit alteration of the units' text, which is given in the book as it stands.

Exercise 5: Your Explanation, with the Tool as Critic

What to ask. Write your own explanation, in three or four sentences, of the difference between an effect and a created being according to the chapter's three questions. Attach it to the conversation along with the wording of the units, and ask: "Find a step in my explanation that is not supported by the wording of the

units, or a word I used in two senses. Do not write a new explanation; point to the place."

What to check. Check each comment from the tool against the wording of the units: is the step it marked really unsupported, or is the tool itself seeking to add something to them? A comment grounded in a word of the Epistle is a reason to correct the explanation; a comment without such an anchor remains a suggestion.

The limit of the conclusion. The tool can help find a weak point in an explanation, but does not certify it. The explanation passes the test if, beside each sentence, one can point to the Epistle's words on which it rests.

Chapter 4 | The Beginning of Created Yesh and the Thirty Vessels of Malchut

What We Already Know

Three chapters have prepared us for the short sentence we will now study:

- **Light and vessel** (chapter 1): light is vitality and revelation; the vessel is the definition, measure, and form of revelation. In the ten sefirot of Atzilut, the

lights and vessels are "all… Divinity," "unlike in BYA."

- **Divinity** (chapter 1): that which is united with its source and is not a separate reality. It does not mean the Creator's Essence.
- **Effect and created being** (chapters 2–3): the effect apprehends something of its cause, and they are commensurate, sharing a common measure. The created being does not apprehend the power bringing it into being, "and also the two are utterly incommensurate, in every respect"; it is therefore specifically called "something from nothing." In knowledge from below upward, it is "a separate thing."
- **Yesh is not necessarily matter** (chapter 2): a spiritual reality too can be created. What determines the matter is its relationship to its source.

Where Does Yesh Begin?

Now that the meaning of "created being" has become clear, a simple question suggests itself: where does this yesh first appear? From which level in the order of the worlds can one say, "Here there is already a created being"?

The reader may expect the answer to be matter: a stone, a body, a world one can touch. We are accustomed to thinking of "yesh" as something

physical. But the Epistle points much higher: to the vessels of the ten sefirot in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and to the lights called "nefesh" and "ruach." The beginning of created yesh thus consists of very spiritual levels. We already saw in chapter 2 that "spiritual" does not necessarily mean "Divine"; here we encounter this rule precisely where yesh begins.

The sentence we will study is very short, twenty-five Hebrew words, and contains three surprises. First: yesh begins with spiritual vessels rather than matter. Second: "lights" too are counted among created beings, although "light" sounds to us almost synonymous with Divinity. Third: the source from which these things were created is called "neshamah." The Epistle says of it "which is Divinity," identifying it with "the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut," thirty vessels of the world of Atzilut. Vessels of Atzilut, which are Divinity, serve here as a neshamah for the created worlds. "Neshamah" here does not mean a human soul; we will address this immediately so that the familiar name does not pull us toward a different subject.

These surprises give rise to the questions that will accompany us in this chapter. How can a light be created? What does "neshamah" mean when a human being is not the subject? If the vessels of Atzilut give life to Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah and vest themselves

within them, how can the vessels of those worlds be called created? Why thirty vessels, and what is their connection to the three worlds? Why does the boundary between Divinity and created being pass specifically between “neshamah” and “ruach” and “nefesh”? First, we will read the sentence word by word, then examine the questions one by one.

Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah of the Sefirot

Before reading, it is worth pausing over three familiar words: nefesh, ruach, and neshamah. We usually hear them when speaking of a human being: one person has nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, different levels of their vitality. Here the words are used for a different subject. The Epistle speaks of “the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA” and “the lights nefesh and ruach,” levels of vitality of the ten sefirot in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. The subject is the vitality of the sefirot themselves, not a particular person’s soul or the souls of created beings living in these worlds. When the Epistle later reaches human souls and the souls of angels, it will explicitly turn to a different subject, and we must turn with it.

The familiar usage can help us understand the role described by the word. When a person is called “the soul of the community,” the meaning is that they awaken and enliven it from within. The word describes

their activity in relation to the community. Here too, we will need to establish separately what the neshamah gives life to and what its status is.

This distinction will help greatly, because our sentence contains three kinds of words. Some describe a role: "light" and "vessel." As we learned at the Epistle's opening, light is vitality and revelation, while the vessel is the defining aspect, the measure and form in which revelation appears, and the side receiving it. Some describe a level: "nefesh," "ruach," and "neshamah" are names of levels within vitality, with neshamah the innermost, from which the others live. Some describe a status: "Divinity" and "created being," whether something is united with its source and not a separate reality, or a reality newly brought into being from nothing. Almost every mistake in this chapter arises from confusing these three kinds.

Here is an almost inevitable example of such confusion. One may hear "neshamah" and immediately infer "Divinity," just as a Jew's soul is "truly a part of G-d above" (Tanya, chapter 2). One may hear "nefesh" and think of the animal soul. But here the neshamah's status is not learned from its name. The Epistle itself says of it "which is Divinity" and explains what it is: "the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." The status of nefesh and ruach is also learned from the sentence itself: they are counted within "the

beginning of created yesh." The name describes the level of vitality; the context teaches whether it is Divinity or created reality.

Reading the Sentence Word by Word

W04-01
source words
1–5

And behold, the beginning of created yesh and its inception

"And behold" is a transition. After explaining "something from nothing," the Epistle turns to the order of levels and shows where this yesh begins. "Beginning" means the first point, the start. "Yesh" is reality felt as a thing, which we saw in the preceding chapter is "a separate thing" in knowledge from below upward. "Created" means created from nothing, rather than drawn down through cause and effect. "And its inception" means the start of this yesh. The doubling, "the beginning… and its inception," emphasizes that the point of beginning itself is meant: here, in the order of which the sentence speaks, created reality begins and continues from there.

We must be precise about "beginning." It is first in the order, not the source of the power: the first created being did not receive the power to create other beings by its own capacity; as we have already learned, the power of creation belongs to Ein Sof alone. Nor does it mean the highest created being in all reality: already in the next sentence, the Epistle will say "and likewise in

Atzilut," listing created beings there too. "The beginning of yesh" thus means the beginning of yesh in the system of the sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.

W04-02
source words
6–13

are the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and also the lights nefesh and ruach,

"Are" makes an identification: the beginning of yesh consists of the things about to be listed. "The vessels" are the defining and receiving aspects of the sefirot. די"ס means "of the ten sefirot." דבי"ע means "of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah," the three worlds following Atzilut. These worlds too have ten sefirot, with lights and vessels; sefirot are not found only in Atzilut. "And also" adds something the reader does not expect. "The lights" means the vitality shining within the vessels. "Nefesh and ruach" are two levels of these lights, their lower levels. The sentence does not say simply "and also the lights," but "the lights nefesh and ruach": not all the lights of the sefirot of BYA are counted here, only these.

Why does it say "and also"? Because the vessels are the expected place for yesh to begin: a vessel is definition, measure, limit. "Light," by contrast, sounds to us like revelation and nullification, almost like Divinity itself. "And also" teaches that in the worlds of BYA some of the lights already belong to created reality. No less

important is what the list omits: the neshamah was not counted in it. We will immediately hear why.

W04-03
source words
14–20

and they were created from the aspect of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity,

"And they were created" means the vessels and lights listed. The verb is plural, and its subject is the preceding list: the vessels, and nefesh and ruach. "Were created" comes from "creation," which the Epistle has already defined: "something from nothing" is called "creation" in the Holy Tongue. מבחי' means "from the aspect"; we already know "aspect" from chapter 1, and the letter mem indicates the source from which they came. "The neshamah" is the inner vitality of the sefirot. די"ס דבי"ע means "of the ten sefirot in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah." "Which," שהוא, refers to the neshamah aspect; we will discuss its masculine grammatical form later. "Divinity" means not created and not a separate reality, but united with its source. As we learned in the first chapter, it does not mean that the thing is the Creator's Essence, but that it is Divine revelation united with Him.

What is within the sefirot of BYA thus divides into two sides. The neshamah aspect is Divinity; the vessels, and nefesh and ruach, were created. The lights of the very same sefirot do not all share one status: the neshamah light, innermost of the three, is Divinity,

while the two lights below it, ruach and nefesh, are created. A question remains: how can one say "were created from…" when creation is "something from nothing"? We will examine this later in the chapter.

W04-04
source words
21–25

and these are the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut.

"And these," והן, is plural. It refers back to "the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA": the neshamah aspect of the ten sefirot in each of the three worlds. הלמ"ד means the letter lamed, whose numerical value is thirty; here the word is written as the letter's name. The initial heh, the definite article, indicates the known thirty, familiar from Kabbalah. "Vessels" is the same word again, now said of the source. דמל' means "of Malchut," the sefirah of Malchut, the tenth sefirah. "Of Atzilut" means the world of Atzilut, where, as stated at the Epistle's opening, the lights and vessels are "all… Divinity."

The sentence thus ends in a surprising place. It began with the created vessels of BYA and ends with the Divine vessels of Atzilut. The neshamah aspect of the sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity, is the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. What is called "vessels" in Atzilut is called "neshamah" in BYA: the same thing in two roles.

Let us arrange the entire sentence in four links. The beginning of created yesh is the vessels of the sefirot of BYA, together with the lights nefesh and ruach. They

were created from the neshamah aspect of those sefirot. This neshamah aspect is Divinity. And it itself is the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. Each link rests on the preceding one. Anyone inadvertently changing the subject in one of them will arrive at a contradiction not written in the Epistle.

"And Also the Lights": Light That Is Yesh

Let us begin with the second surprise, because it teaches a rule without which we will not understand the rest. We are accustomed to hearing "light" and thinking of Divinity, and hearing "vessel" and thinking of a created being. In the paragraph before us, neither correspondence is generally correct. The reason is the distinction already encountered between words of role and words of status. "Light" and "vessel" answer the question of role: what gives life and what receives, what reveals and what defines. "Divinity" and "created being" answer the question of status: is the thing united with its source, or newly brought into being from nothing? Since the two questions do not coincide, all their combinations can be found.

Even in the familiar world, we can see that the questions are separate. A living person has vitality and organs that receive it and act through it. The vitality is the body's "light," and the organs its "vessels." Yet both body and vitality are created. Inner vitality does not become a creator because it is inward. We thus see

that the distinction between light and vessel exists within created reality too.

At the Epistle's opening, we already saw one side of the rule: in the ten sefirot of Atzilut, "chayohi are the lights, and garmohi are the vessels, all of which are Divinity." There are therefore vessels that are Divinity. Now we see the other side: in the sefirot of BYA, there are lights, nefesh and ruach, that are created. A vessel is not created by virtue of being a vessel, and light is not Divinity by virtue of being light. The matter can be arranged in a small table:

	Light: vitality and revelation relative to a vessel	**Vessel: definition, measure, and recipient**
Divinity	Lights of the ten sefirot of Atzilut; the neshamah aspect of the sefirot of BYA	Vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, including the thirty vessels of Malchut
Created	Lights nefesh and ruach of the sefirot of BYA	Vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA

Notice the table's upper row. The thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut appear there twice: in the "vessel" column when discussed in their place in Atzilut, and in the "light" column when discussed as the neshamah giving life to BYA. Their role has changed relative to the recipient, while their status remains: they belong in the Divinity row. In every sentence, we must establish which vessel and which light are being discussed.

The Alter Rebbe states this explicitly in one of his discourses: "The aspect of the neshamah light in every

world, even in the world of Asiyah, is still an aspect of Divinity, while the aspects of nefesh and ruach are created; the vessels of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah are all created, even the vessel of neshamah." (נר"נ abbreviates nefesh, ruach, and neshamah.) In another discourse from the same year, speaking about nefesh and ruach in the world of Asiyah, he emphasizes the surprise in one word: "even their lights are created."[84] "Even" in the discourse and "and also" in the Epistle answer the same expectation. We might have thought that light is never created; yet lights too can be created.

This does not contradict their role. Nefesh and ruach are light relative to their vessels: they give them life and shine within them. At the same time, they are created relative to their source. The two descriptions do not compete, since each answers a different question. Nor should this become a rule of names, as though every "nefesh" were created and every "neshamah" Divinity. Etz Chaim describes nefesh,

[84]Maamarei Admur HaZaken, 5566, pp. עח [78] and צו [96], comparing the Divine neshamah aspect with the nefesh and ruach in the worlds of BYA. The precise passages: vol. I, p. עח [78], in the discourse beginning "להבין בתוס' ביאור שרש ענין הנ"ל" (which begins on p. עו [76]), section 2: "To explain the matter: it is known from the Arizal's writings that there are three levels in each world, namely nefesh, ruach and neshamah. Their root in general is in the thirty vessels of Atzilut, which become the general nefesh, ruach and neshamah in BYA and divide into the particular nefesh, ruach and neshamah in each world, etc. The light of the neshamah in each world, even in the world of Asiyah, is still an aspect of Divinity, whereas nefesh and ruach are in the category of the created; the vessels of nefesh, ruach and neshamah are all in the category of the created, even the vessel of the neshamah, etc. It is known that the vessels of the higher world become lights in the lower world" (Lubavitch Library, p. עח). Vol. I, p. צו [96], in the discourse beginning "ותוספת ביאור הדברים הנ"ל" (which begins on p. צה [95]), concerning the souls drawn from the unions in the world of Asiyah: "In the neshamah of Asiyah, the vessel is in the category of the created and the light is Divinity, unlike the nefesh and ruach of Asiyah, whose lights too are in the category of the created" (Lubavitch Library, p. צו).

ruach, and neshamah within Atzilut itself, all of them Divinity.[85][86] The division in our sentence concerns the sefirot of BYA, and applies there.

[85]Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[86]Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 5: "It is known that Atzilut is Abba and is chayah; Beriah is Imma and is neshamah; Yetzirah is Ze'ir Anpin and is ruach; Asiyah is Nukva and is nefesh"; "The three garments called the vessels of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut are all the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of all the worlds of BYA… but in relation to chayah, these three are called its bodies"; "They are called vessels only in relation to chayah"; "All of Atzilut is complete Divinity, for the vessels are actual

Why Does Yesh Begin with Spiritual Vessels?

Why, then, does yesh begin here rather than with matter? Because the definition of "created being" does not depend on a thing's coarseness. As we learned in the preceding chapter, a created being is a reality incommensurate with the power bringing it into being, and in knowledge from below upward it is "a separate thing." Spirituality does not contradict this. An entirely spiritual angel is created; Tanya says of the world of Beriah that "the souls and angels in Beriah were created" (chapter 52). There is therefore no reason to expect yesh to begin only with the appearance of matter. Later in the Epistle, we will also hear about the distinctive character of physical reality, but the beginning of yesh long precedes it.

We must still understand why it begins specifically with the vessels of BYA rather than those of Atzilut. Here an analogy given by the Alter Rebbe himself helps, as he explains the difference between the vessels of Atzilut and what is in BYA. A person has organs: head, hands, feet. The faculties of the soul dwell within them. The organs are vessels for the soul, yet cannot be taken off; they are united with the soul's faculties and never exchanged. By contrast, a person has garments: thought, speech, and action. These can be put on and removed, one thought exchanged for

Divinity"; "The three worlds of BYA are all complete vessels, and therefore are not Divinity, and therefore are called the seals of Atzilut" (Sefaria).

another, “You will change them like a garment.” The vessels of Atzilut resemble organs: they “unite with the lights as one essence.” In BYA, however, the vessels “are called garments that cover the body,” since they are “separate from the aspect of essence,” like the faculty of thought that a person “takes off and puts on.” From this, the Alter Rebbe says, “the reason for the difference is understood: in Atzilut, He and His lights and His vessels are one, etc., unlike in BYA.”[87]

The analogy clarifies the manner of connection between the vessel and the vitality: is the vessel united with it like an organ, or like a garment distinguishable from it?

Etz Chaim expresses the matter differently: the worlds of BYA “are all complete vessels, and therefore are not Divinity, and therefore are called the impressions of Atzilut.”[86] A seal’s impression in wax carries the seal’s

[87] Maamarei Admur HaZaken, 5566, vol. I, in the discourse beginning “להבין בתוס’ ביאור שרש ענין הנ”ל,” pp. עז–עח [77–78]: “By way of analogy, a garment that a person can remove and put on because it is separate, whereas he cannot remove his bodily organs, for they are intrinsic to his soul, although they are only vessels for it to dwell in, etc.; sufficient for the discerning. By this analogy an understanding person may grasp the principal difference above between Atzilut and BYA… namely, the lights of the Emanator vested in vessels that unite with the lights as one essence… By contrast, in BYA they are called garments that cover the body, etc., meaning that they can be removed from the essence of Adam of Atzilut, like the power of thought that one takes off and puts on, as stated above; sufficient for the discerning. Through all this, the reason for the difference is understood: in Atzilut, He and His lights and His vessels are one, etc., whereas in BYA it is not so” (Lubavitch Library, p. עח). The verse “Like a garment You shall change them” (Psalms 102:27) is cited there on p. עז [77] in connection with changing thought (p. עז). Likewise in the discourse beginning “ותוספת ביאור הדברים הנ”ל,” p. צה [95]: the vessels of Atzilut are “connected and united with the lights of the blessed Emanator, for He and His vessels are one, and are not separate garments like the garments of thought, speech and action” (p. צה).

[86] Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 5: “It is known that Atzilut is Abba and is chayah; Beriah is Imma and is neshamah; Yetzirah is Ze’ir Anpin and is ruach; Asiyah is Nukva and is nefesh”; “The three garments called the vessels of Ze’ir Anpin of Atzilut are all the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of all

form but is not the seal. Likewise, the vessels of BYA carry the form of the ten sefirot, yet are another reality. Here, where definition is no longer united with light like an organ but stands as a garment, like a seal's impression, yesh begins. The Epistle immediately adds that some of the vitality shining within these vessels, nefesh and ruach, already belongs to the same reality.

What Was Created, from What, and What Is Divinity: The Sentence's Chain

In the word-by-word reading, we sketched the course of the sentence. Now let us check it grammatically, because in this sentence the relationship between words is part of the content. Three small words hold it together: "and they were created," "which is," and "and these are." Each refers to something preceding it; by asking what, we can check every link in the argument.

"And they were created" is plural and has no new subject. It refers back to the preceding list: "the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and also the lights nefesh and ruach." The vessels, and nefesh and ruach, are what were created. "The neshamah" is not the subject of "were created"; it is the source from which they were created.

the worlds of BYA… but in relation to chayah, these three are called its bodies"; "They are called vessels only in relation to chayah"; "All of Atzilut is complete Divinity, for the vessels are actual Divinity"; "The three worlds of BYA are all complete vessels, and therefore are not Divinity, and therefore are called the seals of Atzilut" (Sefaria).

"Which is Divinity" follows "the neshamah." But neshamah is a feminine word, whereas שהוא, she-hu, "which is," is masculine. To what does she-hu refer? This question is not new. In his notes on Tanya, the Rebbe remarked here: " 'Of BYA, which is [she-hu]': seemingly it should read she-hi [שהיא]?" In other words, the feminine form would seem appropriate. He wrote this with "seemingly" and a question mark, without correcting the text. The editors' notes to his notes point out that in the Tzemach Tzedek's Or HaTorah, Parashat Vaera, printed from his holy manuscript, the wording here is שהן, she-hen, "which are."[88] We preserve the current wording, she-hu, rather than emend it by conjecture. A grammatical difficulty, even alongside one textual witness, does not decide what the author wrote.

Can she-hu be understood as it stands? The Epistle itself returns to this subject later, sometimes speaking of "the neshamah light." Once it writes "in the neshamah light of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is [she-hu] Divinity," using the masculine appropriate to "light"; another time, "the neshamah light within them, which is [she-hi] Divinity," using the feminine

[88] The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("References, Glosses and Brief Notes"), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'דב"ע שהוא' [of BYA, which is, masculine]: seemingly it should read שהיא [feminine]?" The editors' notes there state: "In Or HaTorah, Va'era (vol. VIII)... (printed from the Tzemach Tzedek's own holy handwriting): שהן [which are, feminine plural]" (file on chabad.org). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 316–319, 339–341, 347–349, 398–400 and 429–430, documents that no witness to the reading שהיא was found in the Tanya versions examined, and that the existing wording must not be emended on the basis of reasoning alone.

appropriate to "neshamah."[89] Thus, in our sentence too, she-hu may refer to neshamah as light, or to the entire aspect as one subject. This is a suggestion for understanding the wording, not evidence for a reading. For our purpose, it makes no difference: whether she-hu, she-hi, or she-hen, Divinity is asserted of the neshamah aspect, not of the vessels and nefesh and ruach that were created.

"And these," והן, is also plural and refers back to neshamah. How does a plural fit neshamah? Because the subject is not one neshamah. Each of the ten sefirot in each of the three worlds has a neshamah aspect, and "and these" says of them all that they are "the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." From here, it is easy to slide into the simple calculation "three worlds times ten sefirot equals thirty" and build the entire structure from it. We will study the division of the thirty and its relationship to the three worlds later from its source in Etz Chaim. Here the linguistic connection suffices: "and these" refers back to the neshamah aspects. It cannot refer to the vessels listed at the sentence's

[89] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later: "Similarly, from the union of ZON of BYA, all the created, formed and made beings were created from ayin to yesh, through the light of the neshamah within them, which is Divinity from the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut of Atzilut"; "The radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the light of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity; and a radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh and ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even in all their vessels"; "To the light of the neshamah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, which is actual Divinity from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." These paragraphs repeat the three aspects in our sentence: neshamah, nefesh and ruach, and the vessels; each time, the neshamah is Divinity (Sefaria, Iggeret HaKodesh 20).

beginning, since those were just called created, whereas the vessels of Atzilut are "all… Divinity."

The chain thus becomes clear. The vessels and nefesh and ruach → were created from the neshamah aspect → the neshamah aspect is Divinity → and it itself is the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. The last two links say the same thing from two sides: "which is Divinity" states the neshamah's status, while "and these are the thirty vessels" states what it is.

"Were Created from…": A Source That Is Not an Ilah

The word "from the aspect" may raise a question. "Something from nothing" means that a created being is not a continuation of a preceding nature. How, then, can the vessels and nefesh and ruach be said to have been "created from the neshamah aspect"? Is there not a cause here from which the effect emerged?

The answer lies in what we learned in the preceding chapter. An effect resembles its cause, apprehends it, and is commensurate with it. That is not the case here: the neshamah is Divinity, the vessels and nefesh and ruach are created yesh, and the two are incommensurate. The mem, "from," in "from the aspect" therefore indicates the place where the Divine power bringing them into being operates. It does not say that created beings are made from the neshamah

like an object from material, or that they are its continuation at a lower level. Later in the Epistle, it will be explained that only He, blessed be He, "alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and absolute naught, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh," and that Or Ein Sof vests itself in and unites with the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, "to create in them and through them created beings possessing limit and finitude, particularly through their vesting in BYA."[90]

Thus "they were created from the neshamah aspect" does not insert a created cause between the Creator and the created beings. The neshamah is Divinity, and the Divine power operates through it; it is not a first created being producing the others through its own power. For the same reason, there are not two separate actions here, as though the Creator gave existence and the vessels gave form, each on its own. The wording is "in them and through them": one action of the Creator, taking place in the vessels united with Him, as we learned in chapter 1. Why the power of creation belongs to Him alone, and what "in them and through

[90] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later: "Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh. In order for this yesh, created by the power of Ein Sof, to possess limit and measure, the Ein Sof light vested itself in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and unites within them in the ultimate unity, to the point that He and His vessels are one, to create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude, particularly through their vesting in BYA"; "The radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut pierced the parsa with them and shines in them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself"; "Shines toward the inner kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and by shining within the vessels gives them power and strength to create yesh me-ayin" (Sefaria, Iggeret HaKodesh 20).

them" means, will be explained in its place in the Epistle.

The Source's Vessel and the Recipient's Vessel

We now reach the chapter's fundamental question. The Epistle says that the vessels of the ten sefirot in BYA are the beginning of created yesh. It also says that the neshamah aspect of those sefirot is Divinity, "and these are the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." The thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut are thus present in BYA and give it life. Seemingly, if these vessels are now in the world of Beriah, and the vessels of Beriah are created, has the descent changed their status? Have the vessels of Atzilut become created because they descended? Or does the sentence contradict itself?[91]

The investigation begins with a simple question: are the two occurrences of "vessel" speaking of the same thing? There is a vessel whose source is in Atzilut, which descends, vests itself, and gives life to the lower world. And there is the lower world's own vessel, within which that influence is received. Anyone calling both, for short, "the vessel in Beriah" loses the distinction precisely where it is needed.

Etz Chaim describes the matter with great precision. Explaining how the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut become a neshamah for Beriah, it says that they

[91] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 313–316, in the discussion "The Source Vessel and the Recipient's Vessel: The Decisive Correction."

"descended, entered, and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah, and became a neshamah for them." In the following chapter, moving from Atzilut to the worlds below it, it says of their Nukva, their Malchut: "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA consists of thirty other vessels, with their essence and neshamah within them." Of the world of Beriah, it says: "Her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them."[85] Two small words

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

are decisive here. "Other": the world of Beriah has its own vessels, different from those of Atzilut. "Themselves": the vessels of Atzilut themselves descended, not a copy of them. There are thus two systems of vessels, one within the other: the source's vessels from Atzilut, which vest themselves and serve as neshamah, and the lower world's local vessels, the recipient's vessels, within which they are vested.

The difficulty now becomes clear. The source's vessels of Atzilut, vested in the lower world, remain Divinity; Etz Chaim calls them there "neshamah and actual Divinity," and the Epistle says "which is Divinity." The local vessel of the world of Beriah, which receives the influence, is created; the Epistle itself says this: "the beginning of created yesh… are the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA." There is no need to say that Divinity became created in order to give life to a created being. On the contrary, the Epistle seeks to show how Divinity operates within created reality without erasing their distinction. It will itself say later that the radiance of the kav, which shone in the vessels of Malchut, "pierced the parsa with them and shines within them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself."[90] (The parsa is the

[90] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later: "Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh. In order for this yesh, created by the power of Ein Sof, to possess limit and measure, the Ein Sof light vested itself in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and unites within them in the ultimate unity, to the point that He and His vessels are one, to create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude, particularly through their vesting in BYA"; "The radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut pierced the parsa with them and shines in them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself"; "Shines toward the inner kav through the vessels of the ten

partition separating Atzilut from the worlds below it.) The vessels of Malchut pass through this partition and remain in the lower worlds what they were in Atzilut.

Two Divisions Not to Confuse

There is a shortcut to beware of precisely because it sounds correct: "In BYA the vessel is created, and only its light is Divinity," as a formula for every case. It is partly correct. The Alter Rebbe explicitly says that in every world "the vessels of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah are all created, even the vessel of neshamah"; elsewhere he says that "in the neshamah of Asiyah, the vessel is created and the light is Divinity."[84] The local vessel in which the neshamah dwells is thus also created, and the Divinity is the neshamah shining within it.

Where does the formula fail? When applied to the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut themselves, as

sefirot of BYA, and by shining within the vessels gives them power and strength to create yesh me-ayin" (Sefaria, Iggeret HaKodesh 20).

[84]Maamarei Admur HaZaken, 5566, pp. עח [78] and צו [96], comparing the Divine neshamah aspect with the nefesh and ruach in the worlds of BYA. The precise passages: vol. I, p. עח [78], in the discourse beginning "להבין בתוס' ביאור שרש ענין הנ"ל" (which begins on p. עו [76]), section 2: "To explain the matter: it is known from the Arizal's writings that there are three levels in each world, namely nefesh, ruach and neshamah. Their root in general is in the thirty vessels of Atzilut, which become the general nefesh, ruach and neshamah in BYA and divide into the particular nefesh, ruach and neshamah in each world, etc. The light of the neshamah in each world, even in the world of Asiyah, is still an aspect of Divinity, whereas nefesh and ruach are in the category of the created; the vessels of nefesh, ruach and neshamah are all in the category of the created, even the vessel of the neshamah, etc. It is known that the vessels of the higher world become lights in the lower world" (Lubavitch Library, p. עח). Vol. I, p. צו [96], in the discourse beginning "ותוספת ביאור הדברים הנ"ל" (which begins on p. צה [95]), concerning the souls drawn from the unions in the world of Asiyah: "In the neshamah of Asiyah, the vessel is in the category of the created and the light is Divinity, unlike the nefesh and ruach of Asiyah, whose lights too are in the category of the created" (Lubavitch Library, p. צו).

though they too had been created and only their "light" were Divinity. The Epistle says that the neshamah aspect, which is Divinity, is these vessels themselves: "and these are the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." What is created is the local vessel in which they are vested, not the descending source. There are thus two divisions. The first is between the source's vessels of Atzilut, which become neshamah and remain Divinity, and the world's local vessels, which are the beginning of yesh. The second, within the local aspect called neshamah, is between the Divine neshamah light and its local vessel, which is created. The second division sharpens the recipient's side; it does not turn the source's vessels into created beings.[91]

Two opposite mistakes therefore threaten the explanation. Someone who says that a vessel of Atzilut becomes created because it operates in a lower world loses the foundation the Epistle seeks to establish: Divinity operating within created reality. Someone who says that Beriah's local vessel becomes Divinity because the Divine source vests itself in it loses the distinction between source and recipient and contradicts the Epistle's wording, which calls those vessels "the beginning of created yesh." The explanation must make room for both and for the relationship joining them.

[91] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 313–316, in the discussion "The Source Vessel and the Recipient's Vessel: The Decisive Correction."

The teaching analogy can help, cautiously. A teacher teaches a student something profound. Three things are present: the teacher's intellect, the explanation conveyed, and the student's understanding that receives it. The explanation lives and shines within the student's intellect, and one can call it the "neshamah" of the subject in the student's understanding. Yet the student's faculties of understanding have not become the teacher's intellect, nor has the teacher's intellect become the student's. These are two sides of one encounter. The analogy's limit is clear: it contains two separate people, both created, whereas Divine union is far deeper, and the source is not "another person" standing opposite the world. What the analogy does teach is a reading habit: in every sentence, ask who the source is, what passes from it, and who the recipient is. Without these questions, a description applied to one is easily transferred to the other.

Tanya itself also describes a Divine source vested in a created world. Chapter 52, already mentioned, describes the Shechinah, "which is Malchut of Atzilut," vesting itself in the palace of the Holy of Holies of the world of Beriah; "through their vesting in Malchut of Beriah, the souls and angels in Beriah were created," and likewise in the worlds of Yetzirah and Asiyah.[92] A

[92]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 52: "As written in the Zohar and Etz Chaim, the Shechinah, which is Malchut of Atzilut [...] vests itself in the Holy of Holies of Beriah... Through their vesting in Malchut of Beriah, the souls and angels in Beriah were created"; "Likewise, in this way, the Shechinah descended and vested itself in the Holy of Holies of Asiyah"; and there in parentheses,

student of Tanya does not infer that the Shechinah became created because it vested itself in a created world. Vesting connects source and recipient; it does not change the status of either.

"Become a Neshamah": Relationship, Not Transformation

We can now understand "become a neshamah" without imagining Divinity turning into a created being. Etz Chaim repeatedly uses the expressions "became a neshamah for them," "becomes an actual neshamah aspect for them," and "become neshamah and actual Divinity."[85] "Become" here describes a new

concerning Malchut of Atzilut: "Therefore it is called 'the word of G-d' and 'the breath of His mouth,' as it were, by way of analogy, just as human speech reveals one's hidden and concealed thought to the listeners" (Sefaria).

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and

relationship toward a recipient, rather than a change of nature. The vessels of Malchut were vessels in Atzilut, and they "become" neshamah in relation to BYA. They continue to be what they were while acquiring a role toward another world.

The Alter Rebbe states this as a rule: "It is known that from the aspect of the vessels of the higher world, the aspect of lights in the lower worlds is made."[84] Etz Chaim says that the vessels of Atzilut "are called vessels only relative to chayah," the light above them.[86]

yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity... The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished... her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[84]Maamarei Admur HaZaken, 5566, pp. עח [78] and צו [96], comparing the Divine neshamah aspect with the nefesh and ruach in the worlds of BYA. The precise passages: vol. I, p. עח [78], in the discourse beginning "להבין בתוס' ביאור שרש ענין הנ"ל" (which begins on p. עו [76]), section 2: "To explain the matter: it is known from the Arizal's writings that there are three levels in each world, namely nefesh, ruach and neshamah. Their root in general is in the thirty vessels of Atzilut, which become the general nefesh, ruach and neshamah in BYA and divide into the particular nefesh, ruach and neshamah in each world, etc. The light of the neshamah in each world, even in the world of Asiyah, is still an aspect of Divinity, whereas nefesh and ruach are in the category of the created; the vessels of nefesh, ruach and neshamah are all in the category of the created, even the vessel of the neshamah, etc. It is known that the vessels of the higher world become lights in the lower world" (Lubavitch Library, p. עח). Vol. I, p. צו [96], in the discourse beginning "ותוספת ביאור הדברים הנ"ל" (which begins on p. צה [95]), concerning the souls drawn from the unions in the world of Asiyah: "In the neshamah of Asiyah, the vessel is in the category of the created and the light is Divinity, unlike the nefesh and ruach of Asiyah, whose lights too are in the category of the created" (Lubavitch Library, p. צו).

[86]Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 5: "It is known that Atzilut is Abba and is chayah; Beriah is Imma and is neshamah; Yetzirah is Ze'ir Anpin and is ruach; Asiyah is Nukva and is nefesh"; "The three garments called the vessels of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut are all the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of all the worlds of BYA... but in relation to chayah, these three are called its bodies"; "They are called vessels only in relation to chayah"; "All of Atzilut is complete Divinity, for the vessels are actual Divinity"; "The three worlds of BYA are all complete vessels, and therefore are not Divinity, and therefore are called the seals of Atzilut" (Sefaria).

Thus the name “vessel” is not a fixed label attached to a thing; it says what that thing is relative to the light above it. The same entity is called “vessel” when considered from above, and “neshamah” or “light” when considered from the world it gives life to. A change of name may express only a change of role.

An example from the soul will help us read “vesting.” The word comes from clothing, but does not mean a garment surrounding a body from outside while the two remain side by side. Spiritual vesting is a more inward relationship: a power operating within a recipient in a manner suited to it. In Tanya, Malchut of Atzilut is called “the word of G-d,” “just as in a person, speech reveals concealed and hidden thought to the listeners.”[92] Thought vests itself in speech. The listener encounters sounds and words, receiving the thought’s content through them. The content does not become mere sound, and the sound does not become the faculty of thought itself. Both participate in one relationship without losing their distinction. This illustrates how a source operates within a recipient without becoming the recipient’s nature.

[92]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 52: “As written in the Zohar and Etz Chaim, the Shechinah, which is Malchut of Atzilut [...] vests itself in the Holy of Holies of Beriah... Through their vesting in Malchut of Beriah, the souls and angels in Beriah were created”; “Likewise, in this way, the Shechinah descended and vested itself in the Holy of Holies of Asiyah”; and there in parentheses, concerning Malchut of Atzilut: “Therefore it is called ‘the word of G-d’ and ‘the breath of His mouth,’ as it were, by way of analogy, just as human speech reveals one’s hidden and concealed thought to the listeners” (Sefaria).

This also calls for caution in drawing diagrams. A diagram can help greatly, but may inadvertently create stages not stated in the text. If we draw "vessel of Atzilut," then "neshamah," then "neshamah light," then "vessel of Beriah," we may have turned several descriptions of one relationship into four entities. The vessels of Malchut of Atzilut and their role as neshamah to BYA are one source and its role toward a recipient, not two things. Three distinctions remain here: the source that vests itself, the receiving vessels, and the vitality relative to the vessels, within which neshamah is Divinity while nefesh and ruach are created. Three distinctions do not necessarily form a chain of three entities. Before every diagram, we should ask: does the new name indicate another source, another aspect within the same subject, or a new role toward the recipient?[91][93]

The remaining question too must be formulated precisely. It is not at what point Divinity itself "became created," since we have seen that no such transformation takes place. The question is how created vitality comes into being from the Divine source, and what is the inner reason that the boundary

[91] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 313–316, in the discussion "The Source Vessel and the Recipient's Vessel: The Decisive Correction."

[93] For further discussion of the boundary between neshamah and ruach and nefesh, and the distinction between "three distinctions" and "a chain of three entities," see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 366–369 and 422–430. The sources allow the distinction to be explained; the first reason for the boundary's location remains open.

falls specifically between neshamah and ruach. We will return to that question at the chapter's end.

The Thirty Vessels of Malchut

Why Specifically Malchut?

Before asking about the number, let us ask about the name. Why is the neshamah of the sefirot of BYA specifically the vessels of Malchut, rather than the vessels of another sefirah? Malchut is the tenth sefirah, the last in Atzilut. In Etz Chaim it is called "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin": the six sefirot preceding it, from Chesed through Yesod, are collectively called "Ze'ir Anpin," while "the tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin,"[85] its female counterpart, receiving from

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when

it. Malchut is the receiving side of Atzilut and its last aspect, and precisely for this reason touches what is below it.

Etz Chaim connects the descent of Malchut's vessels into BYA with "the diminution of the moon." This means the descent of the Shechinah, which is Malchut of Atzilut, as we saw in Tanya's wording. Of the Shechinah, Etz Chaim says that it descended "to become a head to foxes," a head to the worlds below Atzilut. The language comes from the Mishnah: "Be a tail to lions, and do not be a head to foxes" (Avot 4:15). What is last in the higher level becomes first in the level below it. The Alter Rebbe states this as a rule of the order of the worlds: "The lower aspect of the higher world becomes the head of the lower world."[94] This answers the question about the name: Malchut, lowest in Atzilut, becomes head, source, and neshamah to Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. Later in the Epistle, the

the moon was diminished... her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[94]Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapter 1: "The matter is the diminution of the moon... for when the Shechinah was driven away and descended below to become a head to foxes, which are in these three worlds called BYA" (Sefaria). Mishnah, Avot 4:15: "Be a tail to lions, and do not be a head to foxes." Maamarei Admur HaZaken, 5566, vol. I, p. צו [96]: "All this is the order of hishtalshelut of ABYA: Malchut of Atzilut becomes Atik of Beriah, and likewise Malchut of Yetzirah, etc.; the lowest aspect of the higher world becomes a head to the lower world" (Lubavitch Library, p. צו). Later in Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "However, it is well known that the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah, for there is no king without a people, etc."

Alter Rebbe will return to Malchut of Atzilut and say that "the principal coming into being of yesh and an entirely separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah." Its distinctive character will be explained there; here it is enough to know that the name is not accidental.

Where Does the Number Thirty Come From?

The Epistle speaks of ten sefirot, yet mentions thirty vessels of Malchut. The reader may think there are two different lists, or that Malchut has divided into thirty sefirot. One might also calculate easily: three worlds times ten sefirot equals thirty, and build the whole picture from that. But this calculation is not the source, and must not be the sole foundation. Etz Chaim explains the number's source, which we will now read.[95]

Etz Chaim says that Malchut of Atzilut has ten sefirot, "and in each sefirah there are three levels: front, back, and middle." These three levels are three layers of vessels, one within another, "and they are three garments, each comprising ten." It adds: "These three levels we have described are the thirty names belonging to Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body."[85] The thirty are thus the vessels of Malchut

[95] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 315–316, in the discussion "Thirty Vessels and Two Maps of Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah."

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are

itself: ten sefirot, each with three layers. “Front” is the inner layer, closest to the light; “back” is the outer layer; between them is the middle. The number arises from the structure of Malchut’s vessels, not from a calculation of worlds.

Only after this structure is clear does Etz Chaim describe its connection with the three worlds. When the Shechinah descended, “the inner garment, the ten inner sefirot of Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin of Atzilut, descended, entered, and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah, and became a neshamah for

three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin, which are her body”; “These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon”: the inner garment “descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them”; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and “the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot,” to Asiyah, “and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin.” The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: “They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin herself in Atzilut.” In BYA: “It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah.” Further there: “Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze’ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON”; Ze’ir Anpin’s vessels on his own are “twenty-seven levels,” “for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot.” Chapter 2: “Ze’ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels”; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. “Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah”; “The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, ‘From there it divides’; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching.” On the world of Asiyah: “They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation,” and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word “created beings” here; its wording is “the world of separation.” It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels “created yesh.” (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

them"; her ten middle sefirot descended to Yetzirah; and "the outer garment, her ten back-aspect sefirot," descended to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin [ruach and nefesh]."[85] Each layer of ten becomes neshamah to the ten sefirot of one world: the inner to Beriah, the middle to Yetzirah, and the outer to Asiyah. The descending layer becomes neshamah to those sefirot. It does not become their local vessels.

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle... These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin... Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity... The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished... her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

The local vessels are the other system, listed at the sentence's beginning as the beginning of yesh. After neshamah come each world's levels of "ruach" and "nefesh," which are already created vitality, not the vessels of Malchut themselves.

We can now understand what we said about "and these." The neshamah aspects of the ten sefirot in each of the three worlds are the thirty vessels of Malchut, a layer of ten for each world. The division into layers enables each world to receive Divine vitality according to its level: Beriah does not receive all of Atzilut unchanged, while Asiyah, which receives the outer layer, is not disconnected from the source. Later, the Epistle itself speaks of "the neshamah light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, which is actual Divinity, from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut."[89] Even at the lowest point of Asiyah, its Malchut of Malchut, the neshamah is "actual Divinity," and its source is the outer dimension of Malchut of Atzilut's vessels. "Outer dimension" accords with Etz Chaim's description, in which the outer layer of Malchut's vessels descends to Asiyah. The Epistle may, however,

[89] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later: "Similarly, from the union of ZON of BYA, all the created, formed and made beings were created from ayin to yesh, through the light of the neshamah within them, which is Divinity from the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut of Atzilut"; "The radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the light of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity; and a radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh and ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even in all their vessels"; "To the light of the neshamah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, which is actual Divinity from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." These paragraphs repeat the three aspects in our sentence: neshamah, nefesh and ruach, and the vessels; each time, the neshamah is Divinity (Sefaria, Iggeret HaKodesh 20).

be speaking there of the vessels' outer dimension in a broader sense; this is therefore a correspondence, not conclusive proof of the entire map.

The Number Alone Does Not Identify the Subject

We should beware of the temptation to learn everything from the number. Thirty does not prove in every instance that Malchut is the subject. Etz Chaim itself says of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut that it contains "ten particular sefirot, each having three aspects of vessels, outer, middle, and inner, making thirty vessels." In the preceding chapter, it counts Ze'ir Anpin's own vessels as twenty-seven, "for Malchut completes it to ten sefirot."[85] The same number is thus used in different

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the

contexts, and the same partzuf is counted with different numbers depending on the method of enumeration. We must therefore first establish the subject from the sentence and context, and only then interpret the calculation. In the Epistle before us, Malchut of Atzilut is explicitly named; there is no need to infer it from the number.

Etz Chaim adds that this order is not unique to Malchut: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin." The author of Etz Chaim adds humbly: "However, I did not merit hearing anything but the aspects of ZON alone." (א"א is Arich Anpin; או"א is Abba and Imma, the partzufim of Chochmah and Binah; זו"ן is Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva, that is, Malchut.)[96][85] The Epistle chose to

ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[96]This is only an initial definition. The names Arich Anpin, Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva are explained at length in chapter 2 ("A Small Map: Ze'ir Anpin, Netzach, the Upper Segment and NeHYM"), chapter 5 (in the explanation of "from the union of ZON," with "Abba and Imma" there as well), and chapter 6 ("Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin: Names of Partzufim").

[85]Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for

discuss Malchut's vessels in accordance with Malchut's role as a source for the worlds below it.

Chassidic works also contain another formulation of Malchut's thirty vessels. In his notes on Tanya, on the words "thirty vessels of Malchut," the Rebbe cites: "That is, the thirty vessels of Ze'ir Anpin that shine in Malchut," referring to a discourse by the Rebbe Rashab beginning "Tik'u," from 5650.[97] According to this formulation, the thirty in Malchut are the vessels of Ze'ir Anpin as they shine within it. This is an additional description from another source, emphasizing Ze'ir Anpin's illumination within Malchut. Its precise

them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin... Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity... The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished... her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[97]The Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48]: " 'Thirty vessels of Malchut': 'That is, the thirty vessels of Ze'ir Anpin that shine in Malchut'—the discourse beginning תקעו, 5650"; the editors' notes there: "Sefer HaMaamarim 5650, end of p. רפח [288]" (file on chabad.org).

relationship to Etz Chaim's description of Malchut's thirty vessels must be investigated from the sources.

Two Maps of Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah

A further difficulty arises when this map is combined with another familiar description. Etz Chaim says: "It is known that Atzilut is Abba and is chayah; Beriah is Imma and is neshamah; Yetzirah is Ze'ir Anpin and is ruach; Asiyah is Nukva and is nefesh."[86] The worlds themselves are thus called neshamah, ruach, and nefesh: Beriah is neshamah, Yetzirah ruach, and Asiyah nefesh. If Yetzirah is "ruach," how can it be said to contain a Divine neshamah? If Asiyah is "nefesh," how can it contain neshamah, with created nefesh and ruach beside it? The names seemingly conflict.[95]

The conflict arises when we forget what each map asks. The general map compares the worlds with one another: the entire world of Beriah stands at a level called neshamah relative to Yetzirah and Asiyah, Yetzirah at a level called ruach, and Asiyah at a level called nefesh. The local map enters one world and asks about its vitality: what within it is the neshamah, the

[86] Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 5: "It is known that Atzilut is Abba and is chayah; Beriah is Imma and is neshamah; Yetzirah is Ze'ir Anpin and is ruach; Asiyah is Nukva and is nefesh"; "The three garments called the vessels of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut are all the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of all the worlds of BYA... but in relation to chayah, these three are called its bodies"; "They are called vessels only in relation to chayah"; "All of Atzilut is complete Divinity, for the vessels are actual Divinity"; "The three worlds of BYA are all complete vessels, and therefore are not Divinity, and therefore are called the seals of Atzilut" (Sefaria).

[95] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 315–316, in the discussion "Thirty Vessels and Two Maps of Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah."

Divine source giving it life, and what is ruach and nefesh, vitality already belonging to its created reality? One can therefore speak of neshamah within Yetzirah without saying that Yetzirah has become Beriah, and of ruach within Beriah without reducing Beriah to Yetzirah's general status.

The Alter Rebbe holds both maps together in one sentence: "There are three levels in every world, namely nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, and their root in general is in the thirty vessels of Atzilut, which become the general nefesh, ruach, and neshamah in BYA and divide into particular nefesh, ruach, and neshamah in every world."[84] There are general nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, dividing BYA into three worlds, and particular nefesh, ruach, and neshamah within each world. The maps do not compete; each answers a different question.

When several descriptions in Etz Chaim are placed side by side, we see how much the names depend on

[84] Maamarei Admur HaZaken, 5566, pp. עח [78] and צו [96], comparing the Divine neshamah aspect with the nefesh and ruach in the worlds of BYA. The precise passages: vol. I, p. עח [78], in the discourse beginning "להבין בתוס' ביאור שרש ענין הנ"ל" (which begins on p. עו [76]), section 2: "To explain the matter: it is known from the Arizal's writings that there are three levels in each world, namely nefesh, ruach and neshamah. Their root in general is in the thirty vessels of Atzilut, which become the general nefesh, ruach and neshamah in BYA and divide into the particular nefesh, ruach and neshamah in each world, etc. The light of the neshamah in each world, even in the world of Asiyah, is still an aspect of Divinity, whereas nefesh and ruach are in the category of the created; the vessels of nefesh, ruach and neshamah are all in the category of the created, even the vessel of the neshamah, etc. It is known that the vessels of the higher world become lights in the lower world" (Lubavitch Library, p. עח). Vol. I, p. צו [96], in the discourse beginning "ותוספת ביאור הדברים הנ"ל" (which begins on p. צה [95]), concerning the souls drawn from the unions in the world of Asiyah: "In the neshamah of Asiyah, the vessel is in the category of the created and the light is Divinity, unlike the nefesh and ruach of Asiyah, whose lights too are in the category of the created" (Lubavitch Library, p. צו).

the map. In one place, Etz Chaim says that the three garments "called the vessels of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut are all the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of all the worlds of BYA."[86] Elsewhere, it describes how, within every sefirah, neshamah dwells in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle, and nefesh in the outer.[85]

[86] Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 5: "It is known that Atzilut is Abba and is chayah; Beriah is Imma and is neshamah; Yetzirah is Ze'ir Anpin and is ruach; Asiyah is Nukva and is nefesh"; "The three garments called the vessels of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut are all the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of all the worlds of BYA... but in relation to chayah, these three are called its bodies"; "They are called vessels only in relation to chayah"; "All of Atzilut is complete Divinity, for the vessels are actual Divinity"; "The three worlds of BYA are all complete vessels, and therefore are not Divinity, and therefore are called the seals of Atzilut" (Sefaria).

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle... These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin... Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity... The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished... her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of

From these sources, we propose a combined reading in which the level's name is understood according to the map's scope. In the general map, the outer layer of Atzilut's vessels is the "nefesh" aspect of the entire order of worlds, corresponding to Asiyah. In the local map, that same outer layer descends into Asiyah and becomes its "neshamah and actual Divinity." Of Malchut's vessels, the Epistle explicitly says that the neshamah light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah is "actual Divinity, from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." The same reality bears one name when worlds are compared and another when viewed from within the world it gives life to.

The contradiction appears only when two things bearing the same name are carelessly compared. "Ruach" in the general map designates the whole world of Yetzirah in relation to the other worlds. "Ruach" in the local map is a particular light within each world, counted by the Epistle among created beings. Anyone identifying the two will arrive at a strange conclusion: that the entire world of Yetzirah, including its Divine neshamah, is created; or conversely, that every ruach is Divinity like neshamah. The words recur, but the map's scope changes.

Before drawing a map, establish the sentence's scope: does it compare worlds or describe the levels within

separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

one world? The repetition of the same names then ceases to look like confusion and begins to reveal an order recurring at different levels.

Why Does Specifically Neshamah Remain Divinity?

We can now ask a deeper question. Knowing what is written is not enough; we want to understand why the boundary falls here. Why is the neshamah aspect Divinity, while nefesh and ruach are included in the beginning of created yesh? "Because neshamah is higher" is insufficient, since it restates the order in other words without explaining it. Spiritual subtlety is no proof either, since we have seen that even spiritual, refined lights can be created. An explanation from the human soul, as though intellect were more nullified than emotion and therefore more "Divine," is also inappropriate here. What is described is a boundary between a source and what is created from it, rather than a ranking of qualities.

Etz Chaim explicitly establishes the boundary: "It follows that the neshamah components in BYA are Divinity, but from the aspect of ruach onward is the aspect of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah, or Asiyah." In the following chapter: "The three back-aspect vessels, which are the aspect of nefesh, and also their ruach, are those of which it is

said ‘from there it divides,’ and they are not Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah, and yechidah that are there in BYA are complete Divinity.”[85] (“Chayah” and “yechidah” are the two levels above “neshamah”; together with nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, they are five levels of vitality.)[98] “From there it divides” comes from the verse about the river flowing from Eden: “A river goes out of Eden to water the garden, and from

[85]Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: “The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin”; “The Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin, which are her body”; “These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon”: the inner garment “descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them”; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and “the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot,” to Asiyah, “and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin.” The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: “They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin herself in Atzilut.” In BYA: “It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah.” Further there: “Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze’ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON”; Ze’ir Anpin’s vessels on his own are “twenty-seven levels,” “for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot.” Chapter 2: “Ze’ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels”; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. “Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah”; “The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, ‘From there it divides’; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching.” On the world of Asiyah: “They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation,” and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word “created beings” here; its wording is “the world of separation.” It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels “created yesh.” (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[98]The five names appear in Shaar HaGilgulim, introduction 1: “The soul has five names, and this is their order from below upward: nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, yechidah”; see chapter 6 and the note there.

there it divides and becomes four heads" (Genesis 2:10). Up to a certain point, it is one river; from there onward, it divides. Likewise here: through the neshamah aspect, Divinity is one; from ruach onward begins the "world of separation," separate reality.

Immediately afterward, Etz Chaim explains why neshamah is Divinity: "The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward is called complete Divinity in Beriah."[85] This is the reason: Beriah's neshamah is not

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore,

a product of Beriah. It is the vessels of Atzilut themselves, "themselves," which descended into it. It is therefore Divinity, not because it is higher or subtler, but because it is the source itself. The Epistle says the same thing very concisely: "which is Divinity, and these are the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." The second part can be read as the reason for the first: neshamah is Divinity because it is the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut.

What remains unexplained is the other side of the boundary. Why do the descending vessels of Atzilut become specifically the worlds' neshamah aspect, while their ruach and nefesh are already the worlds' own vitality? Why does separation begin specifically with ruach rather than elsewhere? Etz Chaim establishes this as a fact of the order, and its author himself notes the limit of what he received: "But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I did not receive [a teaching]."[85] Two things must therefore be

from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[85] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for

held together. The structure is well founded, and the reason that neshamah is Divinity is also transmitted in the sources: it is the vessels of Atzilut themselves, descended and vested. But the underlying reason that the boundary was set precisely here still requires further study.[93] Leaving the question open does not cancel the explanation attained; it prevents us from replacing a deep question with a circular sentence.

Between the Previous Chapter and the Next

In the preceding chapter, we read that the power flowing into the created being comes "from the vessels

them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin... Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity... The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished... her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

[93] For further discussion of the boundary between neshamah and ruach and nefesh, and the distinction between "three distinctions" and "a chain of three entities," see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 366–369 and 422–430. The sources allow the distinction to be explained; the first reason for the boundary's location remains open.

of the ten sefirot of ABYA, in which the kav, the light of the Ein Sof, blessed be He, shines," leaving open the status of the vessels of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. The Epistle has now answered: the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA are the beginning of created yesh. Is there a contradiction? How does the power of creation flow through vessels that are themselves created?

There is no contradiction, because these are again two questions: what is the vessel's status, and what operates within it? The local vessels of BYA are created; the power operating within them is not their own. Later in the Epistle, it will be explained that the encompassing Or Ein Sof illuminates the inward kav "through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and in shining within the vessels gives them power and strength to create something from nothing"; the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended into BYA carry the kav's radiance with them, "and it shines within them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself."[90] A created vessel can be a channel through which Divine power operates without becoming Divinity; a Divine vessel can operate within a created world without becoming created. We will

[90] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later: "Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh. In order for this yesh, created by the power of Ein Sof, to possess limit and measure, the Ein Sof light vested itself in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and unites within them in the ultimate unity, to the point that He and His vessels are one, to create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude, particularly through their vesting in BYA"; "The radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut pierced the parsa with them and shines in them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself"; "Shines toward the inner kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and by shining within the vessels gives them power and strength to create yesh me-ayin" (Sefaria, Iggeret HaKodesh 20).

study the details in their place. Here it is enough to see again that status and role are not the same question.

The previous chapter's questions also continue to accompany us. There we learned to ask of each thing from what it derives its continued existence, what it apprehends, and how its nature relates to its source. Now new questions have been added: which vessel is meant, the source's vessel or the recipient's? Does the name describe a role, a level, or a status? Within which map is the name used, a comparison of the worlds with one another or the interior of a single world?

These questions are needed immediately. "The beginning of yesh," as stated, means the beginning of yesh in the system of the sefirot of BYA. But the next sentence of the Epistle opens with "and likewise in Atzilut." It tells us that even within Atzilut, "from the outer dimension of the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, which are Divinity," were created the palaces of Atzilut and the bodies of the angels of Atzilut, "which are an aspect of yesh." In this chapter, we saw that vessels of Atzilut present in BYA remain Divinity. In the next, we will see the other side: even in Atzilut there is created reality. A thing's location alone does not determine its status, below or above. Immediately afterward, the Epistle will ask about the souls of angels and human souls before their descent into BYA, finding them a special place between the two sides. What these

palaces and bodies are, and what status the souls have, is what we will study in the next chapter.

Summary

The chapter's short sentence established where created yesh begins: in the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA and their lights of nefesh and ruach. These were created from the neshamah aspect of those sefirot, which is Divinity and is itself the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. From neshamah upward is "complete Divinity"; from ruach onward is "the world of separation." Why the boundary falls precisely there remains for study.

The learner leaves the chapter with a new ability to read. On encountering "vessel," one asks whether this is the source's vessel or the recipient's. On encountering "light," one does not immediately infer "Divinity," nor on encountering "vessel" immediately infer "created." On encountering "neshamah," one checks whether it is a human soul or the vitality of the system of sefirot, and whether the name describes a role or a status. On encountering a world's name, one knows that the name alone does not determine the status of everything within it.

Above all, the picture drawn by the short sentence remains. Created yesh begins very high, on spiritual levels: in the vessels of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah

and their lights of nefesh and ruach. Within it, as its neshamah, dwells actual Divinity: the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, which descended and became neshamah to the worlds without ceasing to be what they are. The created being is not disconnected from its source, and the source does not become created. Between these two sides moves the entire continuation of the Epistle.

Studying the Chapter with Artificial-Intelligence Tools

This chapter concerns structure: what was created, from what, and what remains Divinity. Artificial-intelligence systems tend to organize their answers in structures, tables, and diagrams, making it particularly important here to check that the resulting structure is faithful to the sentence. Remember the caution about diagrams: a diagram may turn several descriptions of one relationship into a chain of separate entities.

Exercise 1: To What Does "And These" Refer?

What to ask. "In this sentence, to what does 'and these' [והן] refer? And to what does 'which is' [שהוא] refer?"

What to check. "And these" must refer to the neshamah aspects, not the vessels at the beginning of the sentence, which were called created. As for she-hu, "which is": does the answer mention the Rebbe's

remark "Seemingly it should read she-hi [שהיא]?" as a question, and the reading she-hen [שהן] cited in the editors' notes? Or does it emend the text by conjecture?

The limit of the conclusion. The grammatical difficulty does not decide what the author wrote, and we preserve the current wording. For our purpose, it makes no difference: in all the readings, Divinity is asserted of the neshamah aspect.

Exercise 2: Where Does the Number Thirty Come From?

What to ask. "Why 'thirty vessels,' thirty rather than ten?"

What to check. Does the answer settle for "three worlds times ten sefirot," as though that were the source? We saw that, according to Etz Chaim, the thirty are Malchut's ten sefirot, each with three layers; the connection to the three worlds comes afterward. Check also whether the answer mentions that thirty vessels are described in Etz Chaim in Ze'ir Anpin too, meaning that the number alone does not identify the subject.

The limit of the conclusion. The calculation can aid memory but is not evidence. The formulation "the thirty vessels of Ze'ir Anpin that shine in Malchut," which the Rebbe cited from a discourse of the Rebbe Rashab, also comes from a different source; one should not build a new table from it in place of Etz Chaim.

Exercise 3: Two Maps

What to ask. "If the world of Yetzirah is called 'ruach,' how does it contain a 'neshamah' that is Divinity?"

What to check. Does the answer distinguish the general map, comparing worlds with one another, from the local map within each world? Does it cite the Alter Rebbe's words about "the general nefesh, ruach, and neshamah in BYA, dividing into particular nefesh, ruach, and neshamah in every world"? An answer deciding that "one map is wrong" has missed the essential point.

The limit of the conclusion. Distinguishing the maps removes the contradiction. The combined reading of several places in Etz Chaim is our reading, not the explicit wording of one source.

Exercise 4: Preserving What Remains Open

What to ask. "Why does the boundary between Divinity and created being fall specifically between neshamah and ruach?"

What to check. Does the answer settle for "neshamah is higher," a circular statement? Does it cite Etz Chaim's reason, that neshamah is the vessels of Atzilut "themselves," descended? Does it acknowledge that the underlying reason why the boundary was set precisely here remains for study, and that the author of

Etz Chaim wrote of chayah and yechidah, "I did not receive [a teaching]"?

The limit of the conclusion. Here the chapter leaves a question open. An answer closing it without a source does not fill a gap; it covers it up.

Chapter 5 | Palaces, the Bodies of Angels, and Souls before Their Descent

What We Already Know

In the passage before us, the Epistle finds things that are "an aspect of yesh" even in Atzilut. To understand why this is new, three things suffice. In the ten sefirot of Atzilut, the lights and vessels are "all… Divinity," united with their source, but not the Creator's Essence (chapter 1). "Yesh" is a created being incommensurate with the power bringing it into being, "a separate thing" in knowledge from below; "nullification" is lack of independence before the source (chapters 2–3). In chapter 4, we saw that the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut become "neshamah" to the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, while those worlds' vessels and their lights, nefesh and ruach, are created. The source does not become created because it vests itself in a

recipient, and the recipient does not become Divinity because the source vests itself within it.[99] From this comes the reading habit that will accompany the chapter: a thing's location alone does not determine its status, so of each thing we will also ask what it is, from what it came into being, and what its status is.

[99] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut and their distinction from the recipients in the worlds of BYA. Chapter 1: "The tenth sefirah is Malchut, called Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Atzilut has ten sefirot, and in each sefirah there are three levels, face, back and middle… These are three garments, each comprising ten. These three levels of which we have spoken are the thirty names possessed by Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, which are her body"; "These three levels mentioned above vest themselves in BYA, and the matter is the diminution of the moon": the inner garment "descended, entered and vested themselves within the ten sefirot of Beriah and became a neshamah for them"; the middle ones descend to Yetzirah, and "the outer garment, which is her ten back-sefirot," to Asiyah, "and became a neshamah for them. Afterward there are the aspects of ruchin and nafshin." The nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Malchut within Atzilut itself are the letters of the Name vested in the three layers of its vessels: "They are only in the category of nefesh, ruach and neshamah for Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin herself in Atzilut." In BYA: "It follows that the portions of neshamah in BYA are Divinity, but from ruach onward it is the category of the world of separation, whether in Beriah, Yetzirah or Asiyah." Further there: "Just as all these aspects are present in Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin, as stated above, so all these aspects are present in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin… Yet I was privileged to hear only about ZON"; Ze'ir Anpin's vessels on his own are "twenty-seven levels," "for Malchut completes him to ten sefirot." Chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels, outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels"; neshamah vests itself in the inner vessels, ruach in the middle ones, and nefesh in the outer ones. "Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of ABYA is another thirty vessels, within which are their essence and neshamah"; "The three back-vessels, which are the nefesh aspect, and their ruach too, are those of which it is said, 'From there it divides'; they are not in the category of Divinity. Only the neshamah, chayah and yechidah there in BYA are in the category of complete Divinity… The reason is as stated: when the moon was diminished… her ten inner vessels themselves descended into Beriah, within the ten vessels of Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin of Beriah, and were there as a neshamah for them. Therefore, from neshamah upward it is called complete Divinity in Beriah. But concerning the chayah and yechidah there, I have received no teaching." On the world of Asiyah: "They become a neshamah and actual Divinity; from ruach onward, the world of separation," and likewise regarding the world of Yetzirah. Etz Chaim does not use the word "created beings" here; its wording is "the world of separation." It is the Epistle itself that calls the local vessels "created yesh." (Sefaria, chapter 1; Sefaria, chapter 2)

Where We Stand

The Epistle now continues: "And likewise in Atzilut." The same pattern, a Divine source and what is created from it, exists within Atzilut too. For a reader accustomed to thinking that all of Atzilut is Divinity, this is a real surprise. The chapter adds a second surprise, the opposite of the first: there is also something that is not "yesh," although it is not a vessel of a sefirah. These are the souls of angels and human beings, before their descent into Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.

Four groups are mentioned in the passage:

1. **The vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut**: Divinity. From their outer dimension is created what will immediately be mentioned.
2. **The palaces of Atzilut**: created from the vessels' outer dimension. A physical hall is not meant; the palaces are discussed here as an outer aspect, within which "the aspect of the igulim" of the sefirot is vested. What igulim, "circles," are will be explained later in the chapter.
3. **The bodies of the angels of Atzilut**: these too were created from the vessels' outer dimension and are called "an aspect of yesh"; as we shall see, this assertion also applies to the palaces. "Body" here does not mean flesh and bones, and must be distinguished from the angel's soul. Of them, the

verse “And He charges His angels with deficiency” is cited.

4. **The souls of angels** that emerged from the union of kisses, and **human souls** that emerged from the union of Ze’ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut, before descending to BYA: these are not “yesh,” but “a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction,” resembling the vessels of the sefirot, which are limited yet Divinity. “Union,” zivug, is a Kabbalistic term for the joining of a bestower and recipient from which a new reality is drawn forth; the two kinds of union will be explained in their place in the chapter. “Souls” here are souls of angels and human beings, not the neshamah aspect of the sefirot of BYA studied in chapter 4.

The passage concludes by explaining the source of limitation in the vessels, “the contraction of Or Ein Sof, namely the kav,” and comparing it with the first tzimtzum.

Four Questions for Reading

To move through the passage without confusion, we will ask four questions about everything mentioned:

- **What is it?** A sefirah’s vessel, a palace, a body, or a soul.

- **From what, and in what manner, did it come into being?** From which aspect of the vessels, and was it "created" or did it "emerge from a union"?
- **What is its status?** Divinity, "a likeness of Divinity," or created "yesh."
- **Where, and at what stage?** In Atzilut, or after descending to Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.

The world's name answers only the final question, sometimes only part of it. Anyone answering all of them at once, "It is in Atzilut, therefore it is Divinity," misses the passage's principal new point.[100]

About the Images

The passage uses words drawn from human life: palace, body, union, kiss, descent. Kabbalah chooses this language deliberately, because it carries a structure of relationships: a setting and what is within it, vitality and what expresses it, bestower and recipient and what is born of their connection. In each place, we will ask two questions: what does the image teach, and where does it stop teaching? There are two familiar ways to go wrong: to picture halls in the heavens and winged beings, or to dismiss the words with the general statement "It is spiritual," which teaches nothing. The right approach is to seek each word's precise role.

[100] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 492–497: the opening of the issue "Yesh in Atzilut: Heichalot and Angelic Bodies," "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification," and "Resolving the Issue: The Name of a World Does Not Alone Determine the Status of What Is in It." Three distinctions are proposed there: world, status, and mode of coming into being; the reading order is first what the thing is, then how it came into being, and only then what its status is.

“And Likewise in Atzilut”: A Divine Source and What Is Created from It

W05-01
source words
1–8

And likewise in Atzilut, from the outer dimension of the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, which are Divinity,

And likewise means “and similarly.” It connects the sentence to the preceding one: just as in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah recipients were created from a Divine source, so too in Atzilut. What recurs is the pattern, source and result, not an assertion that everything in Atzilut is created.

In Atzilut means in the world of Atzilut. It indicates a level in the order of the worlds and answers “where?” It does not by itself state the status of everything found there.

From the outer dimension of the vessels means from their outer side. This is the source from which the things about to be mentioned were created. A sefirah’s “vessel” is its defining side: Chesed as Chesed rather than Gevurah, Gevurah as Gevurah rather than Chesed. The Alter Rebbe writes that in Atzilut, “Chesed itself is what is called the aspect of a vessel,” immediately adding: “Nevertheless, the vessels of Atzilut are actual Divinity, and this is called ‘He and His vessels are one,’ ” the Zohar’s wording with which

the Epistle opened.[101] The Ari's writings describe several layers within the vessels of the sefirot, outer, middle, and inner, with the sefirah's lights of vitality within them.[102] The outer layer does not cleave to the inner light as the inner layer does, but remains part of the vessel and is therefore Divinity too.

The vessels of the ten sefirot: די"ס abbreviates "of the ten sefirot."

Of Atzilut: דאצי' means of Atzilut. These are the vessels of the sefirot of Atzilut itself, not the vessels of the sefirot of BYA discussed in the preceding sentence.

Which are Divinity: these vessels are Divinity. The two Hebrew words emphasize that the source's status does not change. Someone hearing that something was "created from the outer dimension of the vessels" might infer that the outer dimension itself descended to the status of a created being. The words say the

[101]Likkutei Torah, Discourses for Yom Kippur, in the discourse "שבת שבתון הוא לכם": "Souls are drawn from the inner dimension of the vessels, and angels from their outer dimension. The meaning of the vessels of Atzilut is that Chesed itself is what is called a vessel... whereas the light is in the category of 'He is not of any of these attributes at all.' Nevertheless, the vessels of Atzilut are actual Divinity, and are called 'He and His vessels are one.'" See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 668–669.

[102]Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels: outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels... Within them is the vitality of the essence, which is their neshamah, and it is divided into nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah and yechidah: nefesh vests itself... within the ten sefirot of vessels called the back; ruach... within the ten sefirot of middle vessels; and neshamah... within the ten sefirot of inner vessels." On Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin: "She too has ten sefirot, thirty vessels, and within them the essence of nefesh, ruach and neshamah." On the two layers of vessels, outer and inner, "in every world of ABYA," and on the fact that the inner "becomes more refined" through the inner light's cleaving to it, see Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10.

opposite: the source remains Divinity even when something that is not Divinity is created from it.

Why Is "Atzilut" Not an Answer to Every Question?

The rule "Atzilut is Divinity" is correct for the subject to which it was applied at the Epistle's opening: the lights and vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut. The mistake begins when this becomes a rule for everything mentioned in connection with Atzilut. The sentence before us demonstrates this itself: within one world, it mentions three kinds of things, Divine vessels, palaces and bodies that were created, and souls that are "a likeness of Divinity."

We must therefore separate three relationships. **The relationship to the world** answers which system contains the thing. **The relationship to the source** answers from what it came into being. **Status** answers what it is in itself: Divinity or yesh. The name "palaces of Atzilut" conveys only the first relationship. The second is conveyed by "from the outer dimension of the vessels," and the third by "were created" and "an aspect of yesh."

A bookcase and the books within it stand in the same study hall, yet are different things. In reading too, we should distinguish two questions: where a thing is, and what it is.

Source and Result: What Must Not Be Transferred from One Side to the Other

Two opposite mistakes await the reader, each transferring a characteristic from one side to the other. The first transfers the result's characteristic to the source: "If the palaces and bodies are yesh, then the outer dimension from which they were created must also be yesh." The Epistle blocks this with "which are Divinity." The second transfers the source's characteristic to the result: "If they were created from Divine vessels and within Atzilut, they too must be Divinity." The Epistle blocks this with "which are an aspect of yesh," which follows immediately.

A Divine source can bring a created recipient into being without itself becoming created. We learned this pattern in the previous chapter; the new point is that it appears in the higher world too.

A further step follows: the source alone does not determine the result's status. In Torah Or, the Alter Rebbe writes that angels too have the task "to nullify their yesh and body through their soul, which is of the aspect of ayin and is taken from the outer dimension of the vessels."[103] From the vessels' outer dimension thus

[103] Torah Or, Bereishit, the discourse opening "להבין הטעם שנשתנה יצירת גוף האדם משאר כל הנבראים." (א [1]) "Angels too have this service, to nullify their yesh and body through their neshamah, which is of the aspect of ayin and is taken from the outer dimension of the vessels. Likewise, Israel too must nullify the yesh, which is their physical body, through their Divine soul... taken from the inner dimension of the vessels, which is higher than the source from which the angels' souls are hewn." (ב [2]) In parentheses in the same discourse: "The difference between the union of kisses, from which angels come into being, which is exceedingly spiritual but nevertheless only

come both the angels' bodies, which are yesh, and their souls, which are an aspect of "ayin." Combining the two sources, the Epistle and Torah Or, shows two things of different status coming from the same source. The source is therefore not the whole answer. There is a hint of this in the Epistle's own wording: of the palaces and bodies it says "were created," while of the souls it says "which emerged from a union." The manner of coming into being is also part of the answer.

"Were Created the Palaces": The World's Framework and Its Igulim

W05-02
source words
9–16

were created the palaces of Atzilut, in which the aspect of the igulim of the ten sefirot vests itself,

Were created: "created," not "emanated" or "drawn down." The verb itself teaches status. Earlier, the Epistle established: "And something from nothing is called creation in the Holy Tongue."[104] The palaces are

an external imparting, and therefore they cannot vest themselves in a physical body; whereas bodily union, from which souls come, although it is a physical imparting, has its root specifically in the inner dimension, and therefore they vest themselves in bodies." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 665–668.

[104] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, in the paragraphs preceding our passage (discussed in chapters 2–3): "In hishtalshelut, the alul is encompassed by the ilah and nullified in its existence to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun"; " 'Yesh me-ayin' is called 'creation' in the Holy Tongue. Although the created yesh too is accounted as naught before Him, meaning that it is nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it... this is specifically 'before Him,' which is His blessed knowledge from above downward"; "But in knowledge from below upward, the created yesh is a wholly separate thing in this knowledge and apprehension from below... Nor is there any commensurability whatsoever between the two, not any of it nor any portion of it, of the commensurability of the alul with the ilah: the alul knows and apprehends some apprehension of its ilah and is nullified to it through this knowledge and apprehension, and in their nature

a new reality brought into being from the vessels, not the vessels themselves extending outward.

The palaces: a "palace," heichal, is a framework. Etz Chaim describes every world through five aspects: root, souls, and bodies, which "are one aspect with no separation between them," and additionally garments and palaces, which are "two aspects separate" from the first three. The palaces are the outermost of all, "like houses in which a person dwells."[105] A person lives in their body, wears garments, and dwells in a house. Likewise, every world has a "house," the general framework containing everything within it. This too is an analogy: "house" here is not a structure in a place, but a world's outermost framework.

Of Atzilut: the palaces of the world of Atzilut. The higher world too has such a framework, and it was created.

In which… vests itself: within which it is vested. "In them" refers to the palaces. "Vests itself" describes a

and essence too there is no such great difference, except that this is a cause and that an effect… Therefore it is called specifically 'yesh' from 'ayin.' "

[105] Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 3: "Know that the root, souls and bodies are one aspect with no separation between them, whereas the garments and heichalot are two aspects separate from the above three"; "The heichalot are the igulim mentioned everywhere, which surround the encompassing lights that are the garments… They are the circular firmaments, which are the heichalot of that world… for they are like houses in which a person dwells"; "For even within the houses and heichalot, which are exceedingly, exceedingly large vessels, they cannot be contracted there, all the more so in small vessels like bodies… For, on the contrary, because of their great magnitude they do not vest themselves in a body, but in an exceedingly, exceedingly broad space; the broader the space, the greater the light that encompasses." For the proposal to explain a heichal as "a large vessel for an encompassing light," and its limits, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 494–495 ("A Heichal Is Not a Proven Definition of an Encompassing Light"), 496–497, 512–513 and 521–522.

relationship in which a higher aspect is present and revealed within a framework lower than itself.

The aspect of the igulim: igulim means circles. The word is new to us; in the Ari's writings it denotes one of two configurations of the ten sefirot: "circles, one within another," and yosher, the upright arrangement, an order of three lines "in the appearance of a person with head, arms, legs, torso, and feet."[106] In yosher there are above and below, right and left: each sefirah has a defined role and place in the order. In igulim there are no right and left; the sefirot surround one another as circles within circles. In Etz Chaim's words, in this arrangement "they will all be near and cleave to Ein Sof surrounding them in complete equality." The igulim are the general, encompassing side of the sefirot, as opposed to their detailed, inward side.

Of the ten sefirot: the igulim belong to the sefirot themselves; the palaces are the framework in which this aspect is vested.

[106] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 2: "There were two aspects in the ten sefirot: one was their being circular, in the form of ten circles one within another; they also had another aspect, being ten sefirot in an upright configuration along three lines, resembling a person with a head, arms, legs, body and feet"; "When the emanated entities are in the form of circles, they are all near and cleave to the Ein Sof surrounding them in complete equality"; "See Parashat Pekudei... which says that the heichalot and what is within them are circles"; "Ein Sof contracted itself... and then there remained a vacant space, air and an empty void"; "It drew from the Ein Sof light one straight line... which extends downward into that void... and in that void it emanated, created, formed and made all the worlds"; "For if the light were drawn to them from all around them as well, the emanated entities would be in the category of the Emanator Himself, without limit or measure. Moreover, even that line is very thin... so that the light drawn to the emanated entities will be in measure and proportion."

What the Image of a House Teaches, and Where It Stops

The sources themselves connect the palaces with igulim. Etz Chaim cites from the Zohar "that the palaces and what is within them are igulim"; elsewhere it writes: "The palaces are the circles mentioned everywhere… and they are the aspect of the circular firmaments, which are the palaces of that world."[106][105] The logic is fairly simple: the general, encompassing side of the sefirot finds its place in the world's general, encompassing framework rather than its inward details. What is general vests itself in what is general.

Etz Chaim even uses an image of size. Of the encompassing lights, it says: "Because of their great

[106]Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 2: "There were two aspects in the ten sefirot: one was their being circular, in the form of ten circles one within another; they also had another aspect, being ten sefirot in an upright configuration along three lines, resembling a person with a head, arms, legs, body and feet"; "When the emanated entities are in the form of circles, they are all near and cleave to the Ein Sof surrounding them in complete equality"; "See Parashat Pekudei… which says that the heichalot and what is within them are circles"; "Ein Sof contracted itself… and then there remained a vacant space, air and an empty void"; "It drew from the Ein Sof light one straight line… which extends downward into that void… and in that void it emanated, created, formed and made all the worlds"; "For if the light were drawn to them from all around them as well, the emanated entities would be in the category of the Emanator Himself, without limit or measure. Moreover, even that line is very thin… so that the light drawn to the emanated entities will be in measure and proportion."

[105]Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 3: "Know that the root, souls and bodies are one aspect with no separation between them, whereas the garments and heichalot are two aspects separate from the above three"; "The heichalot are the igulim mentioned everywhere, which surround the encompassing lights that are the garments… They are the circular firmaments, which are the heichalot of that world… for they are like houses in which a person dwells"; "For even within the houses and heichalot, which are exceedingly, exceedingly large vessels, they cannot be contracted there, all the more so in small vessels like bodies… For, on the contrary, because of their great magnitude they do not vest themselves in a body, but in an exceedingly, exceedingly broad space; the broader the space, the greater the light that encompasses." For the proposal to explain a heichal as "a large vessel for an encompassing light," and its limits, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 494–495 ("A Heichal Is Not a Proven Definition of an Encompassing Light"), 496–497, 512–513 and 521–522.

size, they do not vest themselves in the body but in an exceedingly spacious place, and the more spacious the place, the greater the encompassing light." In the same passage, it also limits the image: "For even within the houses and palaces, which are exceedingly large vessels, they cannot contract themselves there." The palace is thus not a large jar into which the encompassing light enters and remains confined. "Spaciousness" is an analogy for a relationship, what is general and encompassing in contrast to what is defined and inward, rather than for volume.

The Alter Rebbe sharpens this in Likkutei Amarim: "The meaning of surrounding and encompassing from above is not spatial, G-d forbid, for the aspect of place does not apply to spirituality at all. Rather, it means surrounding and encompassing from above with regard to the revelation of influence." Influence apprehended by the recipients is called "vested"; hidden influence that they do not apprehend is called "encompassing and surrounding."[107] "Encompassing" is not a higher location, but a manner of influence.

[107] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: "The meaning is not that it surrounds and encompasses from above in a spatial sense, G-d forbid, for spatiality does not apply to spirituality at all. Rather, 'surrounds and encompasses from above' refers to the revelation of influence: influence that is revealed within the worlds is called 'vesting'... whereas influence that is not revealed but concealed and hidden, which the worlds do not apprehend, is not called 'vested,' but encompassing and surrounding." Compare later in our Epistle: "'There is no place devoid of Him,' even in this physical earth; only He is in the mode of encompassing and surrounding, as the meaning has been explained in Likkutei Amarim." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 811–812 and 830–832.

One word remains that the image does not fully explain: "vests itself." If the igulim are an encompassing aspect, why are they said to "vest themselves" in the palaces? One may suggest that, relative to the palace itself, the palace is the vessel and garment in which the aspect of igulim finds its place, whereas relative to the sefirot's inward order, the igulim remain an encompassing aspect. The sources we examined contain no explicit resolution, and the question remains open for study.[108]

Of all this, one point matters for our purposes. A Divine aspect, the igulim of the ten sefirot, vests itself in the palaces, yet the palaces "were created." The vesting of a higher aspect in a recipient does not change the recipient's status. This is precisely what we learned in the preceding chapter about the Divine neshamah of the sefirot of BYA, vested in created vessels.

"And Also the Bodies of the Angels": Yesh, and a Verse about Deficiency

W05-03
source words
17–27

and also the bodies of the angels of Atzilut, which are an aspect of yesh, and as it is written: "And He charges His angels with deficiency."

And also adds a second item to the same list: these too were created from the vessels' outer dimension.

[108] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 495–496, in the discussion "Heichalot, Igulim and Angelic Bodies: The Limits of the Model."

The bodies of the angels: the angels' "bodies," rather than simply "the angels." This precision matters: had the Epistle said "the angels are yesh," the next sentence, about their souls, would sound contradictory. From the outset, it divides the angel into two sides, body and soul. We will discuss the meaning of an angel's "body" later.

Of Atzilut: someone who has learned in Likkutei Amarim that "the abode of the angels is in the world of Yetzirah" may wonder: angels in Atzilut? But there, as the gloss explains, the subject is "ordinary angels, while there are higher angels in the world of Beriah"; Etz Chaim explicitly says that "angels exist in every world."[109][110] There the place of residence of the angels familiar to us, their "abode," is discussed. Here the source and status of the angels of Atzilut are discussed. Abode, root, and manner of coming into being are three different questions, and an answer to one does not answer another.

[109]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 39: "The abode of the souls of the righteous is in the world of Beriah, and the abode of the angels in the world of Yetzirah"; in the gloss there: "This refers to ordinary angels, but there are higher angels in the world of Beriah…" For the distinction between abode, root and mode of coming into being, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 513–515.

[110]Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10: unions and birth in each of the worlds. "Angels exist in each and every world"; angels' souls come from the union of the outer vessels: "Angels are made from kisses, and human beings from complete union, for kisses are the cleaving of the outer vessels"; the angel's neshamah "vests itself within the ruach, nefesh and vessels of the angels themselves." From the union of the inner vessels: the sparks "that come from the world of Beriah are called the neshamot of the righteous; the sparks in Yetzirah are called ruchin, and the sparks of Asiyah are called nefashot." There also: "The angels themselves are not the outer dimension of the worlds; likewise, the souls themselves are not the inner dimension of the worlds."

Which are an aspect of yesh: this states their status. "Yesh" is a created reality standing as a thing and not wholly nullified within its source; the following words will explain this. "Which," שהן, is adjacent to the bodies, but in the later parenthetical passage of the Epistle, in chapter 6, it says "like the palaces of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh," implying that the palaces too are "yesh." The assertion therefore applies to both.

And as it is written: a verse is brought in support.

And He charges His angels with deficiency: a verse in Job 4:18, from the words of Eliphaz.

What Does Tehillah Mean, and Why Is the Verse Cited?

The full verse says: "Behold, He places no trust in His servants, and He charges His angels with tehillah." A modern Hebrew reader hears תהלה, tehillah, and understands praise. But Rashi explains: "Tehillah: an expression of folly," like "folly" in Ecclesiastes, something imperfect, a flaw. On this reading, the verse says that G-d finds a flaw even in His angels. The Metzudot explain it differently. Metzudat Tzion says: "Tehillah: an expression of light," as in "when His lamp shone." Metzudat David says that "not" also applies to the verse's second half: G-d "did not place

within His angels themselves a light of their own, for everything comes from Him at every moment."[111]

Both explanations teach that angels have no perfection of their own. In our reading, Rashi's explanation fits the Epistle's context particularly well: the verse supports "which are an aspect of yesh," and the next sentence explains the deficiency, "For they are not in a state of complete nullification." On this reading, tehillah is an expression of deficiency.

We should also notice the limits of the evidence. The verse does not mention Atzilut or distinguish an angel's body from its soul. The identification with the bodies of the angels of Atzilut is established by the Kabbalistic discussion in which the verse is cited. This is how a verse functions within commentary: it supplies language and an anchor for the subject, while the subject determines the aspect in which the verse is read.[112]

[111] Job 4:18: "Behold, He puts no trust in His servants, and charges His angels with folly" (Eliphaz's words). Rashi there: "תהלה: an expression of folly" (compare Ecclesiastes 10:13). Metzudat Tziyon: "תהלה: an expression of light, as in 'when His lamp shone.'" Metzudat David: "The word 'not' serves both clauses... He did not place light of their own within His angels themselves, for everything comes from Him at every moment."

[112] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 508–510 and 515–516, in the answers to "Why Is 'Like an Effect in Relation to Its Cause' a Test of Complete Nullification?" and "What Does 'He Charges His Angels with Folly' Prove?": "Like an effect in relation to its cause" is a local criterion distinguishing coming into being through hishtalshelut from coming into being yesh me-ayin, not a general scale of all degrees of nullification; the verse does not itself identify either the world of Atzilut or the body as distinct from the neshamah.

“For They Are Not in a State of Complete Nullification”: Which Nullification Is Meant?

W05-04
source words
28–34

For they are not in a state of complete nullification like an effect in relation to its cause.

For they are not explains “an aspect of yesh.” The pronoun refers to the angels’ bodies, and according to the continuation, also to the palaces.

In a state of nullification: “nullification” is lack of independence before the source; the thing does not stand on its own, but is included within what is above it.

Complete is the key word. Complete nullification is negated, not all nullification.

Like an effect in relation to its cause is the criterion, familiar from chapter 2: ilah is a cause, and alul the effect deriving from it through chainlike descent, level after level. “In relation to” means relative to. Here too, there is no absolute judgment, but a description of a defined relationship: the recipient relative to its source.

Three Kinds of Nullification

“Nullification” occurs several times in the Epistle, not always with the same meaning. To understand what is negated here, we will distinguish three kinds.

The first kind: nullification "before Him," from above. The Epistle established that the created yesh too "is also accounted as naught before Him," nullified in its existence relative to the Divine power bringing it into being, adding: "This is specifically 'before Him,' which is His knowledge, blessed be He, from above downward."[104] Such nullification holds for every created being, including the palaces and the angels' bodies. Our passage does not negate it.

The second kind: an effect's nullification within its cause. This is the nullification studied in chapters 2 and 3. The effect is "encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence in relation to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun"; it "knows and apprehends something of its cause and is nullified in relation to it through this knowledge and apprehension"; "in their nature and essence there is no such great difference, except that this is the cause and that is the effect." The effect is close in nature to its cause, so even "from below," from its own side, it apprehends its source and

[104] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, in the paragraphs preceding our passage (discussed in chapters 2–3): "In hishtalshelut, the alul is encompassed by the ilah and nullified in its existence to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun"; " 'Yesh me-ayin' is called 'creation' in the Holy Tongue. Although the created yesh too is accounted as naught before Him, meaning that it is nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it… this is specifically 'before Him,' which is His blessed knowledge from above downward"; "But in knowledge from below upward, the created yesh is a wholly separate thing in this knowledge and apprehension from below… Nor is there any commensurability whatsoever between the two, not any of it nor any portion of it, of the commensurability of the alul with the ilah: the alul knows and apprehends some apprehension of its ilah and is nullified to it through this knowledge and apprehension, and in their nature and essence too there is no such great difference, except that this is a cause and that an effect… Therefore it is called specifically 'yesh' from 'ayin.' "

is nullified to it. Between created yesh and the power bringing it into being, by contrast, "the two are utterly incommensurate, in every respect, bearing neither the relationship nor any fraction of the relationship of the effect to the cause," "and therefore it is specifically called something from nothing."

The third kind: nullification in Divine service. Angels genuinely serve G-d. The Alter Rebbe writes that "they have self-sacrifice and are nullified to Him, blessed be He"; elsewhere, that their service is "to nullify their yesh and body through their soul," meaning the angel's soul, the inner side, not a level within a human soul.[113][103]

We can now read the sentence precisely. "For they are not in a state of complete nullification like an effect in relation to its cause" negates only the second kind. The palaces and angels' bodies did not derive from the vessels as an effect from its cause; they "were created,"

[113]Torah Or, Yitro, in the explanation of the discourse beginning "זכור את יום השבת לקדשו": "The angels too requested the Torah… but it was not given to them, because they are of the world of speech… being of the outer dimension of the vessels, and have no ability to draw anything down, although they have self-sacrifice and are nullified to Him, blessed be He…" See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 673–675.

[103]Torah Or, Bereishit, the discourse opening "להבין הטעם שנשתנה יצירת גוף האדם משאר כל הנבראים." (א [1]) "Angels too have this service, to nullify their yesh and body through their neshamah, which is of the aspect of ayin and is taken from the outer dimension of the vessels. Likewise, Israel too must nullify the yesh, which is their physical body, through their Divine soul… taken from the inner dimension of the vessels, which is higher than the source from which the angels' souls are hewn." (ב [2]) In parentheses in the same discourse: "The difference between the union of kisses, from which angels come into being, which is exceedingly spiritual but nevertheless only an external imparting, and therefore they cannot vest themselves in a physical body; whereas bodily union, from which souls come, although it is a physical imparting, has its root specifically in the inner dimension, and therefore they vest themselves in bodies." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 665–668.

something from nothing. From their own side, therefore, they do not possess the complete nullification of something close in nature to its source. They are nullified "before Him" like every created being, and angels also engage in the service of nullification. Their holiness remains intact, and there is no accusation of arrogance or rebellion here. "Yesh" describes a manner of existence, not a mark of praise or blame.[112]

We can expand a little on the image the Epistle itself supplies, "like the sun's radiance within the sun." A ray of light within the body of the sun belongs to the sunlight itself, and within the sun it is utterly nullified. A stone illuminated by the sun receives light, but the stone is not "of the sun." This expansion is our own proposal, and it has a clear limit: between stone and sun there is a natural relationship of recipient and source of influence, whereas coming into being from nothing has no exact analogy in the world. The image teaches only one thing: there is a difference between the nullification of something inherently close to its source and the reception of something that is not of the same kind.

[112] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 508–510 and 515–516, in the answers to "Why Is 'Like an Effect in Relation to Its Cause' a Test of Complete Nullification?" and "What Does 'He Charges His Angels with Folly' Prove?": "Like an effect in relation to its cause" is a local criterion distinguishing coming into being through hishtalshelut from coming into being yesh me-ayin, not a general scale of all degrees of nullification; the verse does not itself identify either the world of Atzilut or the body as distinct from the neshamah.

An Angel's Body and Soul

What Does "Body" Mean Where There Is No Flesh?

An angel has a spiritual body that defines and limits its existence and the measure of vitality it receives. This does not mean flesh and bones. We shall clarify the meaning of this body through the descriptions in the sources.

The Alter Rebbe describes this body in several places. "The angels have a body," he writes, "and therefore the angels occupy space"; and because they belong to the category of space, they also belong to the category of time. Of souls, by contrast, he says that "the soul as it is above is entirely separate from the aspect of body, and they do not belong to the category of space." Elsewhere: "The soul as it is above has no body or limiting vessel at all, unlike the angels, who have bodies"; there he calls them "spiritual bodies." In a third place: the supernal angels can receive "only according to what is drawn down to them in measure, each according to its level … because they have become vested in bodies of the element of fire and the element of air." Souls not yet vested in bodies, however, can receive Or Ein Sof "as it is in the aspect of Ein Sof … because they are literally included and united in their Emanator, blessed be He."[114]

[114] Likkutei Torah, Behar, discourse beginning "את שבתתי תשמרו": "Angels have a body… and therefore angels occupy space… Since they are in the category of space, they are also in the category of time… By contrast, souls have no aspect of time and space… for the soul as it is above

These sources reveal the body's function: it is a "limiting vessel." It gives the angel a defined measure of reception and a defined "place" in the spiritual order. An angel receives "in measure," according to its level, and cannot receive beyond it. The soul above, by contrast, is not limited in this way, and can therefore receive "as it is in the aspect of Ein Sof." The distinction the Epistle will draw between the angels' bodies and their souls already begins to emerge here.

Nevertheless, we must preserve the limits of what can be learned. These sources speak of angels generally, and "fire and air" derive from the verse "He makes His angels winds, His ministers a flaming fire." They do not define what the bodies of the angels of Atzilut are made of, and this description must not be transferred to them. From the Epistle we learn only their status: "an aspect of yesh." One further linguistic precision will be useful in studying Kabbalah: the word "body" is used for a physical body, the root of the body, and a

is entirely separate from any aspect of body, and is not in the category of space." Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, discourse beginning "שניך כעדר הרחלים": "For the soul as it is above has no body or limiting vessel at all, unlike the angels, which have bodies of winds and blazing fire"; there also: "The difference in level between the angels, which are in spiritual bodies, and the souls, which have no body at all." Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, discourse beginning "צאינה וראינה": "The daughters of Jerusalem are the souls that have not yet vested themselves in human bodies... whereas the higher angels can receive only what is drawn to them in measure, each according to its level... because they have vested themselves in bodies of the element of fire and the element of air... But souls that have not yet vested themselves in bodies can receive the blessed Ein Sof light as it is in the aspect of Ein Sof... because they are actually included and united in their blessed Emanator." These sources discuss angels and souls in general; they do not define the bodies of the angels of Atzilut. See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 513–515, 723–724, 735–737 and 755–758.

"body" within the structure of a partzuf. The word is the same; the meanings differ.[108]

Why Are Palace and Body Listed Separately?

If both are "yesh," why does the Epistle count them as two items? Because they are two different things. The palace is the framework of the entire world, the "house." The body belongs to a particular living creature, the angel, and is considered in relation to its soul. In Etz Chaim too, "body" and "palace" stand on opposite sides of a dividing line: root, souls, and bodies are "one aspect with no separation between them," whereas garments and palaces "are separate." There the reference is to bodies within the structure of the world rather than to angels' bodies, but this illustrates that in the language of Kabbalah these are two different aspects.[105] The Epistle lists them together because of their shared status, and separately because they differ from one another.

[108] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 495–496, in the discussion "Heichalot, Igulim and Angelic Bodies: The Limits of the Model."

[105] Etz Chaim, Gate 42, chapter 3: "Know that the root, souls and bodies are one aspect with no separation between them, whereas the garments and heichalot are two aspects separate from the above three"; "The heichalot are the igulim mentioned everywhere, which surround the encompassing lights that are the garments… They are the circular firmaments, which are the heichalot of that world… for they are like houses in which a person dwells"; "For even within the houses and heichalot, which are exceedingly, exceedingly large vessels, they cannot be contracted there, all the more so in small vessels like bodies… For, on the contrary, because of their great magnitude they do not vest themselves in a body, but in an exceedingly, exceedingly broad space; the broader the space, the greater the light that encompasses." For the proposal to explain a heichal as "a large vessel for an encompassing light," and its limits, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 494–495 ("A Heichal Is Not a Proven Definition of an Encompassing Light"), 496–497, 512–513 and 521–522.

Is the Palace "More Yesh" Than the Body?

The question naturally arises: perhaps the outer framework is farther from vitality than the body and is therefore "more yesh"? But the order of the words, "the palaces … and also the bodies of the angels," does not prove a ranking. To rank them, we would have to know what is being measured: distance from the source? The manner of receiving vitality? The sense of separateness? The Epistle supplies no such criterion, and we have no source that settles the question. The ranking of "more yesh" and "less yesh" thus remains open to further study. The explicit statement is only this: both are yesh in relation to the vessels from which they were created.[108]

"But": From Body to Soul

The next sentence begins with the word אך, "but," which marks the turn. Until now, the discussion concerned the angels' bodies; from here onward, it concerns their souls. The same angel has two sides, and they do not have the same status.

Etz Chaim describes this structure: the angel's neshamah "vests itself within the ruach, nefesh, and vessels of the angels themselves."[110] And the Alter

[108] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 495–496, in the discussion "Heichalot, Igulim and Angelic Bodies: The Limits of the Model."

[110] Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10: unions and birth in each of the worlds. "Angels exist in each and every world"; angels' souls come from the union of the outer vessels: "Angels are made from kisses, and human beings from complete union, for kisses are the cleaving of the outer vessels"; the angel's neshamah "vests itself within the ruach, nefesh and vessels of the angels themselves."

Rebbe, as we have seen, distinguishes between "their yesh and body" and "their soul, which is of the aspect of ayin."[103]

This yields a rule for reading: each side is judged by what is said about it. From the fact that the body is yesh, one cannot infer that the soul is yesh; and from the fact that the soul is "a likeness of Divinity," one cannot infer that the body has risen above its status.

In the human being, this distinction is very familiar to us. The Divine soul is "truly a part of G-d above," while the body is flesh and blood. Together they are one person, and no one concludes from this that the body is Divine or the soul physical.[115] In the angel, both sides are spiritual, so their difference is not between spirit and matter, but between "yesh" and what is not "yesh." The comparison has a limit: we cannot infer from it that an angel has exactly the same structure of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah as a human being. Etz Chaim

From the union of the inner vessels: the sparks "that come from the world of Beriah are called the neshamot of the righteous; the sparks in Yetzirah are called ruchin, and the sparks of Asiyah are called nefashot." There also: "The angels themselves are not the outer dimension of the worlds; likewise, the souls themselves are not the inner dimension of the worlds."

[103]Torah Or, Bereishit, the discourse opening "להבין הטעם שנשתנה יצירת גוף האדם משאר כל הנבראים." (א [1]) "Angels too have this service, to nullify their yesh and body through their neshamah, which is of the aspect of ayin and is taken from the outer dimension of the vessels. Likewise, Israel too must nullify the yesh, which is their physical body, through their Divine soul... taken from the inner dimension of the vessels, which is higher than the source from which the angels' souls are hewn." (ב [2]) In parentheses in the same discourse: "The difference between the union of kisses, from which angels come into being, which is exceedingly spiritual but nevertheless only an external imparting, and therefore they cannot vest themselves in a physical body; whereas bodily union, from which souls come, although it is a physical imparting, has its root specifically in the inner dimension, and therefore they vest themselves in bodies." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 665–668.

[115]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 2: "The second soul in Israel is truly a part of G-d above."

describes the angels as having a neshamah vested in ruach, nefesh, and vessels, but a complete correspondence with the structure of the human soul is not established.[116]

“But the Souls of the Angels That Emerged from the Union of Kisses”

W05-05
Hebrew-source words 35–40

But the souls of the angels that emerged from the union of kisses,

אך — But: a qualifying word. It excludes what follows from the preceding list of things that are “yesh.”

נשמות המלאכים — The souls of the angels: the angels’ inward vitality; the other side of the very creatures whose bodies were just mentioned.

שיצאו — That emerged: “that emerged,” not “that were created.” This is the language of emergence and birth from a union. The wording also imposes a restriction: the subject is the souls that emerged from the union of kisses, not an all-embracing statement about the soul of every angel, in every world and every state.

מזיווג — From a union: from the joining of a source of influence and a recipient, from which a new existence is drawn forth. The Tzemach Tzedek defines it thus:

[116] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 549–552, in the discussion “Two Systems That Must Not Be Confused”: the axis of limit–measure–form and the axis of separation–yeshut. “Thus the vessels of Atzilut can be finite in form and measure while remaining Divinity by virtue of their unity”; there also is the qualification that the claim that angels have the same nefesh–ruach–neshamah structure as human souls is unproven. Likewise vol. II, pp. 1094–1097: “Contraction, measure and separation are not synonyms”; “Finitude in a vessel of Atzilut is not identical with the status of a separate yesh.”

"The matter of unification and union, wherever it occurs, is a wondrous matter in the aspect of drawing down a new light from Ein Sof, blessed be He."[117] A union is not merely the combination of two; it opens the way to a new drawing down from above.

הנשיקין — Of kisses: "the kisses." This is the name of a supernal, spiritual union. Etz Chaim states: "There are two kinds of unions: the first is the supernal, spiritual union, called the union of kisses; the second is a lower, bodily union of Yesod with Yesod." The words of the Zohar are also cited there: "דלית רחימו דדביקותא דרוחא ברוחא בר נשיקה," meaning that there is no love of cleaving spirit to spirit except in a kiss.[118] The Tzemach Tzedek adds that the union of kisses, "אתדבקות רוחא ברוחא," the cleaving of spirit to spirit, is "the aspect of ChaBaD with ChaBaD": Chochmah, Binah, and Daat cleaving to one another.[117] Etz Chaim further explains: "The kisses are the cleaving of the outer vessels; although an inner light emerges, namely

[117] Derech Mitzvotecha by the Tzemach Tzedek, Mitzvat Periyah VeRiviyah, section 2: "The matter of unification and union, wherever it occurs, is a wondrous matter of drawing new light from the blessed Ein Sof, in an addition greatly exceeding the original"; "There are also two kinds of union: the first is called the union of kisses in Etz Chaim and the cleaving of spirit to spirit in the Zohar, which is Chochmah–Binah–Daat with Chochmah–Binah–Daat, and from this is the root of the angels; the second is bodily union, Yesod with Yesod, and from this is the root of souls." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 675–679.

[118] Etz Chaim, Gate 39, discourses 4 and 9: souls, angels and forms of union.

[117] Derech Mitzvotecha by the Tzemach Tzedek, Mitzvat Periyah VeRiviyah, section 2: "The matter of unification and union, wherever it occurs, is a wondrous matter of drawing new light from the blessed Ein Sof, in an addition greatly exceeding the original"; "There are also two kinds of union: the first is called the union of kisses in Etz Chaim and the cleaving of spirit to spirit in the Zohar, which is Chochmah–Binah–Daat with Chochmah–Binah–Daat, and from this is the root of the angels; the second is bodily union, Yesod with Yesod, and from this is the root of souls." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 675–679.

the breath, nevertheless no drop of mochin from the inner vessels is drawn down there."[110] That is: in kisses, the outer vessels cleave together; an inner light, "the breath," does indeed emerge through them, but no drop of mochin is drawn down through them from the inner vessels. We shall return to this distinction when asking what is born of each union.

The image of a kiss was chosen deliberately. In a human being, a kiss brings spirit and breath close, without generating a body. The sources use it to describe a connection entirely on the inward, spiritual plane, "spirit with spirit," whose offspring has no need of a body. The lower union, described in the language of "Yesod" and a "drop," is the connection whose offspring becomes vested in a body. These terms describe modes of drawing down and imparting within the sefirot: the manner of connection and what is drawn forth from it.

[110] Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10: unions and birth in each of the worlds. "Angels exist in each and every world"; angels' souls come from the union of the outer vessels: "Angels are made from kisses, and human beings from complete union, for kisses are the cleaving of the outer vessels"; the angel's neshamah "vests itself within the ruach, nefesh and vessels of the angels themselves." From the union of the inner vessels: the sparks "that come from the world of Beriah are called the neshamot of the righteous; the sparks in Yetzirah are called ruchin, and the sparks of Asiyah are called nefashot." There also: "The angels themselves are not the outer dimension of the worlds; likewise, the souls themselves are not the inner dimension of the worlds."

“And Likewise the Soul of Man … Before They Descended to BYA”

W05-06
Hebrew-source words
41–50

and likewise the soul of man that emerged from the union of ZA and Nukva of Atzilut, before they descended to BYA,

וכן — And likewise: “and similarly”; human souls too are included in the status about to be stated.

נשמת האדם — The soul of man: the souls of human beings. The wording before us has נשמת, “the soul of,” in the singular, followed by שיצאו, “that emerged,” in the plural; the commonly available vocalized text reads נשמות האדם, “the souls of man.” The predicate “are not … they are” shows that the whole category is intended. We should neither build an interpretation on the grammatical number of the word nor emend the quotation.[119]

שיצאו — That emerged: that emerged from the union, like the souls of the angels.

מזיווג דזו”נ — From the union of ZON: from the union of Ze’ir Anpin and Nukva. We encountered both names in the previous chapter: “Ze’ir Anpin” names the six attributes, from Chesed through Yesod, when

[119]The text before us reads “וכן נשמת האדם שיצאו מזיווג דזו”נ דאצי” [and likewise the human neshamah, singular, that emerged, plural, from the union of ZON of Atzilut]. The vocalized Kehot edition reads “וכן נשמות האדם שיצאו מזיווג דז”א ונוקבא דאצילות” [and likewise the human souls that emerged from the union of Ze’ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut]. The verb שיצאו and the predicate אינן...הן are plural; the explanation does not depend on deciding between the versions.

organized as one "partzuf," a complete configuration of powers; "Nukva" is Malchut as the partzuf that receives from Ze'ir Anpin. Here the Epistle states **who** joins, not **how**.

דאצי' — Of Atzilut: belonging to Atzilut.

קודם שירדו — Before they descended: before their descent. This is a condition concerning a stage, which we shall examine at length.

לבי"ע — To BYA: to the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.

Who, How, and What: Three Questions About Every Union

For the reading that follows, it is important to distinguish the participants in a union, the mode of union, and what is drawn forth from it; the details in the sources below will help us maintain that distinction.

Notice the asymmetry in the Epistle's wording. For the angels, it specifies the **mode** of union: "kisses." For human beings, it specifies the **participants**: "Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut." If we place these examples in two columns of a table, "kisses—angels" opposite "ZON—human beings," we will be comparing items of different kinds. "Kisses" answers **how**; "ZON" answers **who**; "angel" and "human being" answer **what**

is born. Three different axes do not constitute a single classification.[120][121]

We can illustrate the distinction through a conversation between a father and his son. "Father and son" says who participates; "face to face" or "by letter" says how the conversation takes place; what the son learns from it is the result. These are three questions about the same encounter.

Let us now ask the three questions and see what the sources add.

Who? According to the Alter Rebbe, "The angels are born from the union of kisses of ZON."[122] Thus the angels too emerge from a union of Ze'ir Anpin and

[120]See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 541–542, in the discussion "The Union of Kisses Is Not Exclusive to Angels."

[121]Research Book, vol. I, pp. 539–543: the issue "Souls, Kisses and ZON: Source, Mode and Product" and its resolution, "The Mode of Drawing Down, the Participants and the Product": three axes that do not constitute one division, and two separate questions: from what the aspect is drawn, and at what stage it becomes an entity emerging from it. Likewise pp. 495–496, "Kisses Do Not Mean Only Angels Everywhere": the difficulty in Etz Chaim concerning the first kisses, and the question of whether "Abba and Imma" there are the partzufim or the Chochmah and Binah within Ze'ir Anpin. The source records themselves: pp. 560–565, 643–647, 665–669 and 675–679.

[122]Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, explanation of the discourse beginning "ששים המה מלכות": "The root of souls is in the inner dimension of Chochmah, and the root of angels' souls is in the outer dimension, for angels are born from the union of kisses of ZON, which is spiritual... By contrast, the birth of the souls of Israel, since they come from bodily union... its end is embedded in its beginning, and specifically in it the radiance of the inner dimension is drawn down. This may be understood by an analogy from the human soul: in speech there is the radiance and vesting of intellect through hishtalshelut from thought, etc., and this is only the outer dimension of intellect... Yet we see that the drawing forth of the drop born from the father's brain comes from the inner dimension of the power of intellect, to the point that he begets one like himself... Similarly, an understanding person may grasp the matter above: since angels are born from spiritual union, which is in the mode of hishtalshelut, they are only of the outer dimension. But the souls of Israel, which come from bodily union, the aspect of the drop of Abba, are specifically of the inner dimension of Chochmah"; there also: "For this reason one may understand why it is specifically souls that possess the power of reproduction... whereas angels do not." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 675–678 and 695–699.

Nukva; "kisses" and "ZON" are not opposites. Etz Chaim describes an even broader picture. Both human souls and angelic souls are rooted in the unions of Abba and Imma, that is, Chochmah and Binah as partzufim, but "they are not rectified and completed until afterward, through the union of ZON, in which there are also an upper and a lower union: the angels from the upper, and the souls of human beings from the lower." The reason is "שאל"כ היתה מעלתן גדולה מזו"נ, וזה א"א": otherwise, their level would be greater than that of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva, which is impossible.[118] The Epistle itself will later say that "the entire essence and root of the drop" that Nukva receives from Ze'ir Anpin "is from the mochin of 'Abba and Imma.' "[123] Accordingly, the wording "the union of ZON of Atzilut" describes the stage of completion and does not exclude a higher root.

How? Shaar HaGilgulim states: "We have already explained elsewhere, in the discourse on the root of the souls of angels and human beings, the difference between them: these emerge from the upper union of kisses, while those emerge from the lower union in

[118] Etz Chaim, Gate 39, discourses 4 and 9: souls, angels and forms of union.

[123] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later (to be explained in the following chapters): "All the more so, since the creation of souls is from it [= from Malchut of Atzilut], to become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right in the world of Beriah, and is called 'birth'... So it is in the creation of souls and angels into the world of Beriah"; "The entire essence and root of the drop it receives, and with which it becomes pregnant, from Ze'ir Anpin is from the mochin of Abba and Imma... Only everything is concealed in the mochin, until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot into the world of Beriah." The heichalot mentioned there are born into the world of Beriah; nothing can be inferred from this about how the heichalot of Atzilut in our passage are created.

Yesod."[124] This is precisely the distinction on which the Epistle relies. But Etz Chaim also says: "Know that there are souls of human beings that also come from the aspect of the union of kisses." For angels, however, "the union of kisses alone sufficed," whereas human souls, "although they emerge from the kisses, had to return" and emerge through the lower union. Moreover: "There is no union in the world that is not preceded by the upper union of kisses."[118] Kisses, then, are not one of two alternatives; they are a stage preceding every union.

What is born? In Etz Chaim: the angelic souls that come from the union of kisses, "since it is an entirely supernal, spiritual union, have no need of a body"; human souls, by contrast, need "to emerge through a lower, bodily union, and had to become vested in a body and bring about rectification through mitzvot and good deeds performed by the body itself."[118] The Alter Rebbe writes that the union of kisses is "exceedingly spiritual, yet nevertheless it is only an outward imparting, and therefore they cannot become vested in a physical body; but the bodily union, from which souls derive, although it is a physical imparting, has its

[124]Shaar HaGilgulim, introduction 19: "We have already explained elsewhere, in the discourse on the root of the souls of angels and human beings, the difference between them: these emerge from the upper union of kisses, and those from the lower union in Yesod. Through this it was explained into how many levels they divide... and thus there are endlessly many different levels in the roots of souls." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 560–565.

[118]Etz Chaim, Gate 39, discourses 4 and 9: souls, angels and forms of union.

[118]Etz Chaim, Gate 39, discourses 4 and 9: souls, angels and forms of union.

root specifically in the inward dimension, and therefore they become vested in bodies."[103]

A paradox appears here. The "upper," spiritual mode produces what comes from the outward dimension, while the "lower" mode bears the inward dimension. The Alter Rebbe explains this through an analogy from the human soul, in which speech corresponds to the spiritual union and the drop to the bodily union. In speech, which is spiritual, the intellect passes "through successive derivation from thought," so that "only the outward dimension of the intellect" reaches it. By contrast, "the drawing forth of the drop born from the father's brain is from the inward dimension of the intellectual faculty, to the point that it begets its like." "Likewise it may be understood … above: because the angels are born from a spiritual union that belongs to the aspect of successive derivation, they are only from the outward dimension; but the souls of Israel, which come from a bodily union, the aspect of the drop of Abba, are specifically from the inward dimension of Chochmah." In the same discourse he concludes that

[103]Torah Or, Bereishit, the discourse opening "להבין הטעם שנשתנה יצירת גוף האדם משאר כל הנבראים." (א [1]) "Angels too have this service, to nullify their yesh and body through their neshamah, which is of the aspect of ayin and is taken from the outer dimension of the vessels. Likewise, Israel too must nullify the yesh, which is their physical body, through their Divine soul… taken from the inner dimension of the vessels, which is higher than the source from which the angels' souls are hewn." (ב [2]) In parentheses in the same discourse: "The difference between the union of kisses, from which angels come into being, which is exceedingly spiritual but nevertheless only an external imparting, and therefore they cannot vest themselves in a physical body; whereas bodily union, from which souls come, although it is a physical imparting, has its root specifically in the inner dimension, and therefore they vest themselves in bodies." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 665–668.

souls possess "the power of generation," while angels do not.[122] Elsewhere he summarizes: "Souls are drawn from the inward dimension of the vessels, and angels from the outward dimension of the vessels."[101]

	Souls of the angels	Human souls
The Epistle's wording	"That emerged from the union of kisses": the name of a mode	"That emerged from the union of ZON of Atzilut": the names of participants
Who (according to parallel sources)	Rooted in the unions of Abba and Imma; completed in the upper union of ZON	Rooted in the unions of Abba and Imma; completed in the lower union of ZON
How	An upper union, "spirit with spirit," of the outer vessels	A lower union, "Yesod with Yesod," in which a drop is drawn down from the inner vessels; some began with kisses and returned to emerge through the lower union

[122]Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, explanation of the discourse beginning "ששים המה מלכות": "The root of souls is in the inner dimension of Chochmah, and the root of angels' souls is in the outer dimension, for angels are born from the union of kisses of ZON, which is spiritual… By contrast, the birth of the souls of Israel, since they come from bodily union… its end is embedded in its beginning, and specifically in it the radiance of the inner dimension is drawn down. This may be understood by an analogy from the human soul: in speech there is the radiance and vesting of intellect through hishtalshelut from thought, etc., and this is only the outer dimension of intellect… Yet we see that the drawing forth of the drop born from the father's brain comes from the inner dimension of the power of intellect, to the point that he begets one like himself… Similarly, an understanding person may grasp the matter above: since angels are born from spiritual union, which is in the mode of hishtalshelut, they are only of the outer dimension. But the souls of Israel, which come from bodily union, the aspect of the drop of Abba, are specifically of the inner dimension of Chochmah"; there also: "For this reason one may understand why it is specifically souls that possess the power of reproduction… whereas angels do not." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 675–678 and 695–699.

[101]Likkutei Torah, Discourses for Yom Kippur, in the discourse "שבת שבתון הוא לכם": "Souls are drawn from the inner dimension of the vessels, and angels from their outer dimension. The meaning of the vessels of Atzilut is that Chesed itself is what is called a vessel… whereas the light is in the category of 'He is not of any of these attributes at all.' Nevertheless, the vessels of Atzilut are actual Divinity, and are called 'He and His vessels are one.'" See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 668–669.

	Souls of the angels	Human souls
What is born	A soul that has no need to become vested in a physical body; from the outward dimension	A soul that becomes vested in a body and effects rectification through mitzvot; from the inward dimension

Etz Chaim itself marks passages that require further study, and it is also necessary to clarify whether "Abba and Imma" in some of the discourses means the partzufim themselves or Chochmah and Binah within Ze'ir Anpin.[121]

The sources show why three simple classifications are insufficient. The shorthand "kisses—angels alone" is rejected, since some human souls begin with kisses. The shorthand "ZON—human beings alone" is rejected, since angels are born from the kisses of ZON. The rule that "the higher mode necessarily produces the higher result" is also rejected, as we saw in the paradox. The Epistle does not seek to set out all the combinations of unions here. It supplies two examples, consistent with the Ari's fundamental distinction, in order to say one thing: souls that emerged from a union in Atzilut are not "yesh" before their descent.

[121] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 539–543: the issue "Souls, Kisses and ZON: Source, Mode and Product" and its resolution, "The Mode of Drawing Down, the Participants and the Product": three axes that do not constitute one division, and two separate questions: from what the aspect is drawn, and at what stage it becomes an entity emerging from it. Likewise pp. 495–496, "Kisses Do Not Mean Only Angels Everywhere": the difficulty in Etz Chaim concerning the first kisses, and the question of whether "Abba and Imma" there are the partzufim or the Chochmah and Binah within Ze'ir Anpin. The source records themselves: pp. 560–565, 643–647, 665–669 and 675–679.

"Before They Descended to BYA": What Does the Condition Apply To, and What Does It Limit?

What does the condition apply to? The words "before they descended to BYA" stand at the end of the second clause, after human souls and before the shared predicate "are not included in the category of yesh." They can be read in two ways.

- **A broad reading:** the condition applies to both clauses, both angelic and human souls. Supporting it is the shared predicate, which says of both together, "are not … rather, they are." Also supporting it is the continuation of the Epistle, which says, "And so it is in the creation of souls and angels for the world of Beriah," and that Nukva gives birth to "the souls, angels, and palaces for the world of Beriah." Angels too emerge from Atzilut into Beriah, so "before they descended" also applies to them.[123]
- **A narrow reading:** the condition applies only to human souls, since it directly follows them; and the parentheses at the end of the sentence discuss souls descending to tzaddikim in this world.

[123] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later (to be explained in the following chapters): "All the more so, since the creation of souls is from it [= from Malchut of Atzilut], to become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right in the world of Beriah, and is called 'birth'… So it is in the creation of souls and angels into the world of Beriah"; "The entire essence and root of the drop it receives, and with which it becomes pregnant, from Ze'ir Anpin is from the mochin of Abba and Imma… Only everything is concealed in the mochin, until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot into the world of Beriah." The heichalot mentioned there are born into the world of Beriah; nothing can be inferred from this about how the heichalot of Atzilut in our passage are created.

The broad reading seems more natural in context, but the narrow reading is not ruled out, and we shall leave the question open. Choosing between them does not alter the essential point: on either reading, the subject is souls as they exist in Atzilut, after emerging from the union.

What does the condition limit? The statement "are not included in the category of yesh" describes one stage: after emergence from the union and before descent to BYA. The human soul as it is now, vested in a body, and post-descent states generally, are not under discussion here. The Epistle itself will later say that the creation of souls from Malchut of Atzilut is "to become a yesh and an entity separate in its own right in the world of Beriah, and this is called 'birth.' "[123] Torah Or says of "the hosts of souls and angels of Beriah" that "they are truly created and newly brought into being from ayin to yesh, and are not Divinity at all, unlike Atzilut, which is the aspect of actual Divinity."[125] And in Likkutei Torah: "The souls were initially included in

[123] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later (to be explained in the following chapters): "All the more so, since the creation of souls is from it [= from Malchut of Atzilut], to become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right in the world of Beriah, and is called 'birth'... So it is in the creation of souls and angels into the world of Beriah"; "The entire essence and root of the drop it receives, and with which it becomes pregnant, from Ze'ir Anpin is from the mochin of Abba and Imma... Only everything is concealed in the mochin, until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot into the world of Beriah." The heichalot mentioned there are born into the world of Beriah; nothing can be inferred from this about how the heichalot of Atzilut in our passage are created.

[125] Torah Or, Bo, discourse beginning "בעצם היום הזה": "This is the matter of the name Tzevaot... These are the hosts of souls and angels of Beriah, whose hosts are innumerable. They are created and newly brought into being from actual ayin to yesh, and are not Divinity at all, as Atzilut is actual Divinity." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 702–704.

the aspect of gestation in Atzilut, and afterward are drawn forth in the aspect of birth in BYA, and then become finite."[126] The commentary Lessons in Tanya likewise emphasizes that everything said here concerns souls "as they are still in 'Atzilut,' before they become vested in a body."[127]

Where do souls stand at this stage? They have already "emerged" from the union and, in the Epistle's later wording, "have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot."[128] They are therefore no longer the vessels of the sefirot. Yet they have not descended to the worlds in which a created being is a "yesh and a separate entity." This is an intermediate level, between a Divine vessel and a created yesh. "Before" can indicate not only time but

[126] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, explanation of the discourse beginning "שחורה אני ונאוה": "The souls were initially included in the state of gestation in Atzilut, and afterward are drawn forth in the state of birth in BYA, and then become finite, for the aspect of Ein Sof exists only in Atzilut, where the radiance of the kav and thread of the Ein Sof light ends... This finitude is at the birth of souls in BYA, unlike their gestation in Atzilut, where He and His lights and His vessels are one." "Finite" there denotes the finitude of created beings: measure together with separation, like an angel whose entire service is "with love" or "with fear," and who cannot receive beyond its measure; whereas the "aspect of finitude" of the vessels of Atzilut in our Epistle is definition without separation. See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 711–713.

[127] Rabbi Yosef Weinberg, Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, on Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20 (and its English counterpart, Lessons in Tanya): the kav "vested in nefesh, ruach and neshamah" is explained there as referring to the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of the sefirot of Atzilut; on "and like the first tzimtzum," it states that this tzimtzum "is not a diminution of the light but a withdrawal of the light"; at the end of the passage it stresses that everything said concerns the souls "as they are still in Atzilut, before they vest themselves in a body." These formulations are from Rabbi Weinberg's explanation.

[128] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later (to be explained in chapter 7): "Yet they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin, since they have already emerged and separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot in which the kav from the Ein Sof light is vested. For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, whose existence is of His own Essence and who is not an effect of any cause preceding Him, G-d forbid. Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin..."

also an ordering of levels: prior to the descent, and above it.[129]

In the next chapter, the Epistle will suggest, with the cautious word "possibly," that for the "early tzaddikim" the nature of their souls may not have changed even after their descent to this world. This is a qualified extension, and we shall discuss it in its place. For now, let us read the condition "before they descended" as it stands: a description of one stage, not of every soul in every state.

"Are Not Included in the Category of Yesh": A Status That Is Neither Yesh nor Essence

W05-07
Hebrew-source words 51–61

are not included in the category of yesh and an independently separate entity; rather, they are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity

אינן — Are not: the shared predicate of angelic souls and human souls.

בכלל — Included in the category: "within the category of," not "at all," as בכלל can mean in contemporary Hebrew. The souls are not counted in the category of "yesh" in which the palaces and bodies were counted.

[129] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 529–532: souls before their descent as an "intermediate level," not a description of every human soul in its present state; pp. 825–828: "before" and the priority of souls, priority in level, not only in time; pp. 880–881: three distinct questions—whether the soul has separated from the vessels, whether it is "a yesh and a separate thing," and whether it can create.

יש — Yesh: created existence, as defined above, which is not utterly nullified as an effect is in its cause.

ודבר נפרד — And a separate entity: the yesh stands and feels itself to be a thing in its own right, separate from its source. This refers to the way it stands and knows itself, "in knowledge from below upward," as we learned in Chapter 3; "before Him" all is nullified, and it is not truly separate from G-d.

בפ"ע — In their own right: an abbreviation of בפני עצמן, standing on their own, as an independent existence.

אלא — Rather: after the negation comes the positive description.

הן — They: the souls.

מעין — A likeness of: "of the kind of," "similar to." The word indicates a similarity in kind, not identity. Thus Shabbat is called "a likeness of the World to Come": Shabbat is not the World to Come, but it contains something of its flavor and kind.

בחי' — An aspect of: an abbreviation of בחינת, a level or mode. This term is very common in the language of Chassidut, and a conclusion should not rest on it alone; but it accords with the caution expressed by "a likeness of."

אלקות — Divinity: as we learned in Chapter 1, that which is united with its source and is not a separate

existence. Here, however, the word follows "a likeness of an aspect of," and its force changes.

What "A Likeness of an Aspect of Divinity" Says, and What It Does Not

The word "a likeness of" sets an upper boundary for these souls. Later, the Epistle will distinguish the light from "the Luminary": "For the light is akin to the Luminary, namely the nature and Essence of the Emanator, blessed be He, whose existence is from His Essence."[128] If even the light itself is described only as "akin to" the Luminary, then all the more so souls that are "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity" are not the Essence. Concerning creation, the Epistle will explicitly say of them: "But they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing, since they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the 'kav' from Or Ein Sof is vested."[128] The word "a likeness of" prepares this distinction in advance.

[128] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later (to be explained in chapter 7): "Yet they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin, since they have already emerged and separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot in which the kav from the Ein Sof light is vested. For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, whose existence is of His own Essence and who is not an effect of any cause preceding Him, G-d forbid. Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin…"

[128] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later (to be explained in chapter 7): "Yet they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin, since they have already emerged and separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot in which the kav from the Ein Sof light is vested. For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, whose existence is of His own Essence and who is not an effect of any cause preceding Him, G-d forbid. Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin…"

At the same time, "are not included in the category of yesh" sets a lower boundary for them. From the fact that they are subject to "immense contraction," we cannot infer that they are separate created beings; we shall address this immediately. Nor should the statement be extended beyond these souls, since the same passage itself established that the palaces and angels' bodies are yesh. "A likeness of Divinity" is a particular status of particular souls at a particular stage, not a general statement about everything in Atzilut.

What, positively, is said of them? That these souls, at the stage before their descent, are close to their source and do not stand on their own. Likkutei Torah describes souls "not yet vested in bodies" as able to receive Or Ein Sof "as it is in the aspect of Ein Sof … because they are literally included and united in their Emanator, blessed be He."[114] That discourse does not explicitly discuss the world of Atzilut, so it is a parallel

[114] Likkutei Torah, Behar, discourse beginning "את שבתתי תשמרו": "Angels have a body… and therefore angels occupy space… Since they are in the category of space, they are also in the category of time… By contrast, souls have no aspect of time and space… for the soul as it is above is entirely separate from any aspect of body, and is not in the category of space." Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, discourse beginning "שניך כעדר הרחלים": "For the soul as it is above has no body or limiting vessel at all, unlike the angels, which have bodies of winds and blazing fire"; there also: "The difference in level between the angels, which are in spiritual bodies, and the souls, which have no body at all." Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, discourse beginning "צאינה וראינה": "The daughters of Jerusalem are the souls that have not yet vested themselves in human bodies… whereas the higher angels can receive only what is drawn to them in measure, each according to its level… because they have vested themselves in bodies of the element of fire and the element of air… But souls that have not yet vested themselves in bodies can receive the blessed Ein Sof light as it is in the aspect of Ein Sof… because they are actually included and united in their blessed Emanator." These sources discuss angels and souls in general; they do not define the bodies of the angels of Atzilut. See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 513–515, 723–724, 735–737 and 755–758.

rather than a definition; but it illustrates what it means that they are not "a separate entity." Two questions remain open even after this clarification: what is the precise positive content of "a likeness of Divinity," and exactly how similar are the souls to the vessels?[130]

"Under Immense Contraction, and Akin to the Vessels": Limitation Without Separation

W05-08
Hebrew-source words 62–70

under immense contraction, and akin to the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, which are in an aspect of limitation

בצמצום — Under contraction: tzimtzum is a concealment and limitation of revelation; the light is revealed not as it is, but in measure.

עצום — Immense: very great. The aspect described as "a likeness of Divinity" is concealed and limited to a great degree in these souls. The source is not weak; its revelation within them is greatly contracted.

וכעין — And akin to: "and similar to": another qualified likeness. מעין … וכעין, "a likeness of … and akin to": likeness, rather than identity, is stated twice.

הכלים די"ס דאצי' — The vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut: the vessels of which it was said at the beginning of the passage "that they are Divinity."

שהן — Which are: referring to the vessels.

[130] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1093–1095, in the discussion "Correcting 'Their Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah': Even a Question's Premise Can Fall."

בבחי' גבול — In an aspect of limitation: every vessel is defined. Chesed is Chesed, not Gevurah; it has a form, measure, and function.

Limitation and Divinity: How Can They Be Reconciled?

Let us return to the question that opened the Epistle in Chapter 1: how can the vessels be limited and nevertheless be Divinity? To frame it precisely, we propose distinguishing two questions.

One question: in what measure and form does the thing appear? Chesed appears as Chesed, in a certain measure and a certain form. This is the question of limitation and definition.

A second question: does the thing stand as a separate existence? Is it a "yesh and an entity separate in its own right"? This is the question of separation and yeshut.

The vessels of the sefirot of Atzilut are defined, and nevertheless "He and His vessels are one." The palaces and angels' bodies are defined, and they are also "yesh." The souls before descent resemble the vessels in this respect: they are "under immense contraction," yet are not "yesh and a separate entity." In the distinction we propose, measure and separation are two different questions, as we saw in Chapter 1.[116]

[116] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 549–552, in the discussion "Two Systems That Must Not Be Confused": the axis of limit–measure–form and the axis of separation–yeshut. "Thus the vessels of

A person's hand is defined: it has its own form and function. Nevertheless, it lives through the vitality of the entire body. This can illustrate that definition does not necessitate separate existence. The description of the souls is more complex, since they have already emerged from the vessels; we must learn their relationship to their source from the Epistle's words.

What is being compared, and how far does the comparison extend? It says one thing: for souls, as for vessels, contraction and limitation do not necessitate "yesh." That is its entire content. "Akin to" indicates a likeness and does not identify souls with vessels in every respect. The vessels' power of creation will explicitly be denied to the souls, and the vesting of the kav in souls as in vessels has not been stated, as we shall see immediately. The comparison is limited in the other direction too: it does not teach that all limitation is without separation, since the palaces are limited and also separate.

Atzilut can be finite in form and measure while remaining Divinity by virtue of their unity"; there also is the qualification that the claim that angels have the same nefesh–ruach–neshamah structure as human souls is unproven. Likewise vol. II, pp. 1094–1097: "Contraction, measure and separation are not synonyms"; "Finitude in a vessel of Atzilut is not identical with the status of a separate yesh."

In brief: contraction, measure, and separation are not synonyms, and limitation in a vessel of Atzilut is not identical to the status of a separate yesh.[116][126]

“Which Is the Kav Vested in Their Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah”: A Slow Reading

W05-09
Hebrew-source words 71–79

through contraction of the Ein Sof light, which is the kav vested in their nefesh, ruach and neshamah,

ע”י — Through: an abbreviation of על ידי, “by means of.” Here begins the explanation of where the limitation in the vessels comes from.

צמצום — Contraction: concealment and limitation, as above.

אור הא”ס — The Ein Sof light: Or Ein Sof. Not the Essence, but the light, as we distinguished above.

[116]Research Book, vol. I, pp. 549–552, in the discussion “Two Systems That Must Not Be Confused”: the axis of limit–measure–form and the axis of separation–yeshut. “Thus the vessels of Atzilut can be finite in form and measure while remaining Divinity by virtue of their unity”; there also is the qualification that the claim that angels have the same nefesh–ruach–neshamah structure as human souls is unproven. Likewise vol. II, pp. 1094–1097: “Contraction, measure and separation are not synonyms”; “Finitude in a vessel of Atzilut is not identical with the status of a separate yesh.”

[126]Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, explanation of the discourse beginning “שחורה אני ונאוה”: “The souls were initially included in the state of gestation in Atzilut, and afterward are drawn forth in the state of birth in BYA, and then become finite, for the aspect of Ein Sof exists only in Atzilut, where the radiance of the kav and thread of the Ein Sof light ends… This finitude is at the birth of souls in BYA, unlike their gestation in Atzilut, where He and His lights and His vessels are one.” “Finite” there denotes the finitude of created beings: measure together with separation, like an angel whose entire service is “with love” or “with fear,” and who cannot receive beyond its measure; whereas the “aspect of finitude” of the vessels of Atzilut in our Epistle is definition without separation. See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 711–713.

הוא הקו — Which is the kav: here הוא, "it is," means "that is"; the contracted Or Ein Sof is called "the kav." Etz Chaim describes how, after the first tzimtzum, "He drew one straight kav from Or Ein Sof … which descends successively into that void." The light is drawn down in a line, not from all sides, "for if the light were drawn to them … from all around them, the emanated beings would be in the aspect of the Emanator Himself, without limit or bound." The kav itself is specifically thin, "so that the light drawn to the emanated beings should be in measure and bound."[106] The kav is the conduit through which Or Ein Sof is drawn down in measure, and it is the source of the limitation of the emanated beings.

המלובש — Vested: becoming vested, present and revealed within a recipient, as explained above. The kav is within, and the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah are like its garment.

בנר"נ — In nefesh, ruach, and neshamah: levels of inward light and vitality.

[106] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 2: "There were two aspects in the ten sefirot: one was their being circular, in the form of ten circles one within another; they also had another aspect, being ten sefirot in an upright configuration along three lines, resembling a person with a head, arms, legs, body and feet"; "When the emanated entities are in the form of circles, they are all near and cleave to the Ein Sof surrounding them in complete equality"; "See Parashat Pekudei… which says that the heichalot and what is within them are circles"; "Ein Sof contracted itself… and then there remained a vacant space, air and an empty void"; "It drew from the Ein Sof light one straight line… which extends downward into that void… and in that void it emanated, created, formed and made all the worlds"; "For if the light were drawn to them from all around them as well, the emanated entities would be in the category of the Emanator Himself, without limit or measure. Moreover, even that line is very thin… so that the light drawn to the emanated entities will be in measure and proportion."

שלהם — **Their**: whose? This is the question we shall now address.

To Whom Do "Their Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah" Belong?

To answer, let us separate the sentence into its layers:

1. **The subject:** the souls of angels and human beings "are not included in the category of yesh … rather, they are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction."
2. **The comparison:** "and akin to the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut."
3. **A clause describing the vessels:** "which are in an aspect of limitation through contraction of the Ein Sof light."
4. **An explanation of the contracted Or Ein Sof:** "which is the kav vested in their nefesh, ruach, and neshamah."
5. **An analogy:** "and like the first tzimtzum, to create a void, etc."

"Their" can refer back to one of two nouns: **the vessels of the sefirot of Atzilut**, the nearer noun, which the clause concerns; or **the souls**, the main subject of the whole sentence.

In favor of reading "of the sefirot":

- The clause "which are in an aspect of limitation through contraction of the Ein Sof light, which is the

kav …" explains the limitation **of the vessels**. It is natural that the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah mentioned in it should belong to those vessels.

- In the Ari's writings, the sefirot themselves have nefesh, ruach, and neshamah. Etz Chaim describes, within the thirty vessels of Ze'ir Anpin, "the aspect of the vitality of the essence, which is their soul, divided into NaRaNChaY" (nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, and yechidah): nefesh is vested in the outer vessels, ruach in the intermediate vessels, and neshamah in the inner vessels.[102]
- Already in the sentence studied in the previous chapter, the Epistle speaks of "the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA" and of the sefirot's "lights, nefesh and ruach." Later it says: "And a radiance of a radiance becomes vested in the nefesh–ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even also in all their vessels"; here "their" clearly refers back to the sefirot.[131]

[102] Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapter 2: "Ze'ir Anpin in Atzilut has ten particular sefirot, and in each there are three aspects of vessels: outer, middle and inner, making thirty vessels… Within them is the vitality of the essence, which is their neshamah, and it is divided into nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah and yechidah: nefesh vests itself… within the ten sefirot of vessels called the back; ruach… within the ten sefirot of middle vessels; and neshamah… within the ten sefirot of inner vessels." On Nukva of Ze'ir Anpin: "She too has ten sefirot, thirty vessels, and within them the essence of nefesh, ruach and neshamah." On the two layers of vessels, outer and inner, "in every world of ABYA," and on the fact that the inner "becomes more refined" through the inner light's cleaving to it, see Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10.

[131] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20: "Also the lights of nefesh and ruach, and they were created from the neshamah aspect of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity" (in the paragraph preceding our passage); "Nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it from the vessels of the ten sefirot… in which the kav of the blessed Ein Sof light shines"; "From the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav is vested"; "The radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the light of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity; and a radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh and ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even in all their vessels." In this last use, שלהם [their], in the masculine, refers back to the sefirot.

- Throughout the Epistle, the kav is described as being in the vessels of the sefirot: "from the vessels of the ten sefirot … in which the 'kav,' Or Ein Sof, blessed be He, shines"; "from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the 'kav' from Or Ein Sof is vested."[131]
- This is also the explanation in the widely used Lessons in Tanya: the kav is vested in the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of the sefirot.[127]

In favor of reading "of the souls":

- The souls are the main subject of the sentence.
- The term "nefesh, ruach, and neshamah" is used of souls immediately afterward, in the parentheses: "And even also after the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut descended to this world to the early tzaddikim."

Conclusion. Grammar alone does not decide the question. Several nouns are nested within this

[131] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20: "Also the lights of nefesh and ruach, and they were created from the neshamah aspect of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity" (in the paragraph preceding our passage); "Nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it from the vessels of the ten sefirot… in which the kav of the blessed Ein Sof light shines"; "From the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav is vested"; "The radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the light of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity; and a radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh and ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even in all their vessels." In this last use, שלהם [their], in the masculine, refers back to the sefirot.

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sentence, and we must clarify which one the pronoun refers to. But the context favors the reading "of the sefirot": the clause concerns the vessels' limitation, and the Epistle consistently describes the kav as being in the vessels of the sefirot. It is therefore not necessary to understand the sentence as saying that the kav is vested in the souls exactly as it is vested in the vessels.[130]

What changes as a result? Since the Epistle does not say here that the kav is vested in souls as it is in vessels, a difficulty should not be built on such an equivalence. Why the vessels participate in creation while the souls do not create remains a real question, and the Epistle itself will answer it: "since they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the 'kav' is vested."[128] This answer explicitly denies the souls the power of creation; it does not require denying them every radiance, nor does it depend on proving that they contain no radiance from the kav whatsoever. What remains open is their precise positive status.[130]

[130]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1093–1095, in the discussion "Correcting 'Their Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah': Even a Question's Premise Can Fall."

[128]Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later (to be explained in chapter 7): "Yet they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin, since they have already emerged and separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot in which the kav from the Ein Sof light is vested. For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, whose existence is of His own Essence and who is not an effect of any cause preceding Him, G-d forbid. Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin…"

[130]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1093–1095, in the discussion "Correcting 'Their Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah': Even a Question's Premise Can Fall."

What role do nefesh, ruach, and neshamah play in the sentence? On this reading, the sentence describes a chain of three links. Or Ein Sof is contracted and becomes a "kav"; the kav vests itself in nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, the sefirot's inward lights; and the lights vest themselves in the vessels. Through this chain, the infinite light reaches the vessels in measure, and they become defined, "in an aspect of limitation," while at the same time remaining united with the light.

"And Like the First Tzimtzum, to Create a Void"

W05-10
Hebrew-source words 80–85

and like the first tzimtzum, to create a void, etc.

וכמו — And like: a comparison with the first tzimtzum. Contraction has already been mentioned twice in the sentence; we shall immediately clarify which of these the analogy relates to.

צמצום הראשון — The first tzimtzum: the contraction with which Etz Chaim begins its account of hishtalshelut: "Know that before the emanated beings were emanated and the created beings created, a simple supernal light filled all existence … and when it arose in His simple will to create the worlds … then Ein Sof contracted Himself … and there remained an empty place, air, and a vacant void."[106]

[106] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 2: "There were two aspects in the ten sefirot: one was their being circular, in the form of ten circles one within another; they also had another aspect, being ten

להיות — To create: literally, "so that there should be"; what results from the contraction.

חלל — A void: an "empty place" in which emanated and created beings can exist. In Etz Chaim: "And in the place of that void, He emanated, created, formed, and made all the worlds." In what sense it is "empty" will be discussed below.

וכו' — Etc.: "and so forth." The Alter Rebbe abbreviates, referring to the familiar continuation: after the void, the kav was drawn into it, and in the place of the void the worlds were emanated and created.

What Is Compared with the First Tzimtzum, and in What Respect?

The word "contraction" appears three times in the sentence: "under immense contraction," concerning the souls; "through contraction of the Ein Sof light, which is the kav," concerning the vessels; and "and like the first tzimtzum," the analogy. The nearest and most natural connection is between the analogy and the contraction immediately preceding it: the limitation of the vessels through Or Ein Sof contracted into the kav

sefirot in an upright configuration along three lines, resembling a person with a head, arms, legs, body and feet"; "When the emanated entities are in the form of circles, they are all near and cleave to the Ein Sof surrounding them in complete equality"; "See Parashat Pekudei... which says that the heichalot and what is within them are circles"; "Ein Sof contracted itself... and then there remained a vacant space, air and an empty void"; "It drew from the Ein Sof light one straight line... which extends downward into that void... and in that void it emanated, created, formed and made all the worlds"; "For if the light were drawn to them from all around them as well, the emanated entities would be in the category of the Emanator Himself, without limit or measure. Moreover, even that line is very thin... so that the light drawn to the emanated entities will be in measure and proportion."

resembles the first tzimtzum. Just as the first tzimtzum made a "void" in which defined existence could be possible, so the contraction of light into the kav makes the vessels defined. The shared point is one: **contraction opens room for measure and definition.** The analogy can also be related to "under immense contraction" at the beginning of the sentence, that is, to the souls. On this reading too, the shared point is the same: contraction makes measure and definition possible, and does not by itself create separation.

Lessons in Tanya adds a precision here concerning the nature of the contraction. It says of the first tzimtzum that it "is not a matter of diminishing the light, but of withdrawing the light": not a reduction of the light's intensity, but its concealment.[127] On this approach, the contraction in the vessels too is not a weakening of the light, but a concealment that makes measure possible.

This comparison too has clear limits. What is shared is the contraction, not its result: neither the vessels nor the souls are the "void" itself. The first tzimtzum and the kav are two different things: the kav is drawn down **after** the contraction, and is itself a contracted, thin light. And the result of the contraction in the vessels is

[127] Rabbi Yosef Weinberg, Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, on Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20 (and its English counterpart, Lessons in Tanya): the kav "vested in nefesh, ruach and neshamah" is explained there as referring to the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of the sefirot of Atzilut; on "and like the first tzimtzum," it states that this tzimtzum "is not a diminution of the light but a withdrawal of the light"; at the end of the passage it stresses that everything said concerns the souls "as they are still in Atzilut, before they vest themselves in a body." These formulations are from Rabbi Weinberg's explanation.

not a separate "yesh": the vessels, limited by the kav, are Divinity.

One Word, Many Uses

In the language of Chassidut, the word "tzimtzum" serves several purposes, and context determines which is intended:

- **The first tzimtzum:** the fundamental concealment that made a "void," room for limited existence.
- **The contraction of light into the kav:** the measured drawing down after the first tzimtzum, through which the light is drawn "in measure and bound."
- **The "immense contraction" in the souls:** the degree of contraction of the aspect called "a likeness of Divinity" in souls before descent.
- **The contraction and concealment through which the world appears separate:** "the cause and reason for this contraction and concealment, through which the Holy One, blessed be He, hid and concealed the world's vitality, so that the world should appear to be an entity separate in its own right."[132]

[132] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7: "The reason and purpose of this contraction and concealment, by which the Holy One, blessed be He, concealed and hid the world's vitality, is that the world should appear to be a separate thing in its own right…"; "The error of some who are wise in their own eyes… who erred and were mistaken in their study of the Arizal's writings, understanding the tzimtzum mentioned there literally, as though the Holy One, blessed be He, had removed Himself and His Essence, G-d forbid, from this world… Besides the fact that it is entirely impossible to speak of tzimtzum literally, which is an attribute of bodies, concerning the Holy One, blessed be He…"; "This is what is written in the Tikkunim… 'There is no place devoid of Him, neither in the higher realms nor in the lower' "; " 'I, G-d, have not changed' means that there is no change at all: just as He was alone before the world's creation, so He is alone after it was created."

The word is the same; the functions differ. Anyone who transfers the properties of one usage to another without checking will go wrong. For example, someone who infers from "immense contraction" that souls are "yesh and a separate entity" has transferred to the souls the contraction and concealment through which the world appears separate.

The Void Is Not a Place Empty of Divinity

A reader might imagine the "void" as an empty place from which G-d has withdrawn. The Alter Rebbe firmly rejects this. He writes of "the error of certain sages … who erred and went astray in their study of the writings of the Ari, of blessed memory, and understood the tzimtzum mentioned there literally, as though the Holy One, blessed be He, had withdrawn Himself and His nature, G-d forbid, from this world," and states: "It is utterly impossible to speak of tzimtzum literally, which is among the properties of a body, in relation to the Holy One, blessed be He." He cites the Tikkunim: "דלית אתר פנוי מיניה, לא בעילאין ולא בתתאין," "there is no place empty of Him, neither in the upper realms nor in the lower," and adds: " 'I, the L-rd, have not changed' … just as He was alone before the creation of the world, so He is alone after it was created."[132] Our Epistle too will

[132]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7: "The reason and purpose of this contraction and concealment, by which the Holy One, blessed be He, concealed and hid the world's vitality, is that the world should appear to be a separate thing in its own right…"; "The error of some who are wise in their own eyes… who erred and were mistaken in their study of the Arizal's writings, understanding the tzimtzum mentioned there literally, as though the Holy One, blessed be He,

later say: "And 'there is no place empty of Him,' even in this physical earth, except that He is in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding."[107]

The "void" is thus a "place" in which the infinite light is not revealed as it is, but Divinity is present there too. The concealment is relative to the recipients, allowing limited existence to be possible.

The familiar sky can illustrate the relationship between concealment and revelation. The stars are there during the day too, but sunlight hides them. When the sun sets, they become visible, each in its own light and place. Thus concealing a great light can make possible the revelation of smaller, defined lights.

The sentence thus closes where it began. Souls before descent, like the vessels of the sefirot, are limited through contraction, yet are not "yesh." Contraction allows measure and definition; separation is something else, so contraction alone does not make something a "yesh."

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had removed Himself and His Essence, G-d forbid, from this world… Besides the fact that it is entirely impossible to speak of tzimtzum literally, which is an attribute of bodies, concerning the Holy One, blessed be He…"; "This is what is written in the Tikkunim… 'There is no place devoid of Him, neither in the higher realms nor in the lower' "; " 'I, G-d, have not changed' means that there is no change at all: just as He was alone before the world's creation, so He is alone after it was created."

[107]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: "The meaning is not that it surrounds and encompasses from above in a spatial sense, G-d forbid, for spatiality does not apply to spirituality at all. Rather, 'surrounds and encompasses from above' refers to the revelation of influence: influence that is revealed within the worlds is called 'vesting'… whereas influence that is not revealed but concealed and hidden, which the worlds do not apprehend, is not called 'vested,' but encompassing and surrounding." Compare later in our Epistle: " 'There is no place devoid of Him,' even in this physical earth; only He is in the mode of encompassing and surrounding, as the meaning has been explained in Likkutei Amarim." See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 811–812 and 830–832.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

The passage's four groups, with the error to avoid beside each:

What is mentioned	Source and manner	Status	What must not be inferred
Vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut	The source itself; their limitation is "through contraction of the Ein Sof light, which is the kav"	Divinity; "He and His vessels are one"; "in an aspect of limitation"	That limitation necessitates separation
Palaces of Atzilut	"Were created" from the vessels' outward dimension; the aspect of igulim becomes vested in them	Yesh	That the vesting of igulim changes their status; that they are a "large vessel" in space
Bodies of the angels of Atzilut	"Were created" from the vessels' outward dimension	Yesh; "are not in a state of complete nullification like an effect in relation to its cause"	That they have no holiness or nullification at all; that they are physical
Souls of the angels (kisses) and human souls (ZON), before descent	"That emerged from a union" in Atzilut	"Are not included in the category of yesh"; "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction"	That they are the Essence; that they create; that the kav is vested in them as in vessels; that this is also their status after descent

Besides the status of each group, the passage taught several habits of reading:

- Ask four questions about everything: what it is, from what and in what manner it came into being, what its status is, and where and at what stage it exists.
- Do not determine status by the name of the world alone, or by the source alone: a Divine source can bring yesh into being without becoming yesh.
- Read "yesh" as a description of a mode of existence, not as an accusation.
- Distinguish an angel's body from its soul: they do not have the same status.
- Distinguish names answering different questions: "kisses," how; "ZON," who.
- Check the antecedent of a pronoun before building a difficulty upon it.
- Remember that contraction and limitation are not separation.

The passage also leaves questions open:

- What exactly is the positive content of "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity," and how closely do souls resemble vessels?
- What is the nature of an angel's "body" in Atzilut, beyond its status as yesh?
- Is there a way to rank the palaces and bodies, and by what criterion?

- Why is it said specifically that the igulim "become vested" in the palaces?
- Does "before they descended to BYA" apply to both kinds of souls or only to human souls? The broad reading seems more natural but is not necessary.
- How do the Epistle's two examples fit the wider map of unions in the Ari's writings, in which some points remain in need of further study?

Toward the Next Chapter

From here the Epistle continues in parentheses: "And even also after they descended …" In cautious language, it will examine whether the status we have studied here can persist after descent as well, and in whom. That is the subject of the next chapter.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This passage is long and detailed, with several pitfalls that recur throughout the book: a world's name that seems to determine status, a pronoun that can refer to two nouns, and bodily images. The exercises below focus on these.

Exercise 1: "Their": One Pronoun, Two Readings

What to ask. Supply the units "under immense contraction, and akin to the vessels" and "through contraction of the Ein Sof light, which is the kav vested in their nefesh, ruach, and neshamah," and ask: "To

whom does ‘their’ refer?” If the answer chooses one reading without mentioning the other, ask the tool to formulate the arguments for each and say what changes in the understanding of the sentence under each reading.

What to check. Compare the arguments with those in the chapter: the clause explaining the vessels’ limitation, parallels from Etz Chaim and the continuation of the Epistle, and the wording of Lessons in Tanya, against the fact that souls are the main subject. Has the tool built a difficulty on one reading without checking whether its premise is written in the sentence?

Limit of the conclusion. The aim is not to make the tool agree with the book. It is to learn to ask, before building a difficulty, whether its underlying premise really appears in the sentence. Even on the reading “of the sefirot,” the souls’ precise positive status remains open.

Exercise 2: “In Atzilut, Therefore Divinity”

What to ask. “Is everything found in the world of Atzilut Divinity?”

What to check. Does the answer mention “the palaces of Atzilut” and “the bodies of the angels of Atzilut, which are an aspect of yesh”? Does it distinguish three of the chapter’s four reading questions: where the

thing is, from what it came into being, and what its status is? An answer that responds to all three at once, "It is in Atzilut, therefore it is Divinity," has missed the passage's central point.

Limit of the conclusion. The passage teaches that location alone does not determine a thing's status. It does not provide an exhaustive list of everything in Atzilut.

Exercise 3: "Yesh": Description or Accusation?

What to ask. "What does it mean that the angels' bodies 'are not in a state of complete nullification'? Are the angels proud or rebellious?"

What to check. Does the answer distinguish the three kinds of nullification: "before Him," an effect's nullification in its cause, and nullification in Divine service? Does it understand that only the second kind is denied here? If it cites the verse "And to His angels He ascribes folly," does it mention both interpretations, Rashi's and that of the Metzudot?

Limit of the conclusion. "Yesh" describes a mode of existence; it is neither praise nor blame. Nothing about the "material" of the bodies of the angels of Atzilut can be learned from this passage.

Exercise 4: Who, How, and What Is Born?

What to ask. "What is the difference between the union of kisses from which angelic souls emerged and the union of ZON from which human souls emerged?"

What to check. Does the answer set "kisses" against "ZON" as two alternatives of the same kind? We saw that "kisses" answers how, "ZON" answers who, and "angel" and "human being" answer what is born. Does the tool know that some human souls begin with kisses, and that angels are born from the kisses of ZON? Also check that the answer contains no bodily images the sources did not state.

Limit of the conclusion. The Epistle gives two examples, without setting out all the combinations of unions. The chapter's table summarizes rather than exhausts the subject; it contains points that the sources themselves mark for further study.

Chapter 6 | Early Tzaddikim, Adam, and Worlds in the Skull

What We Already Know

This chapter concerns a long parenthesis. Let us first recall what was said before it:

- **Nefesh, ruach, and neshamah** (Chapter 4): names for levels of vitality. In Chapter 4 they described the vitality of the sefirot in BYA; in a human being they are levels of the soul.
- **Arich Anpin, Ze'ir Anpin, and Nukva** (Chapters 2 and 4): names of "partzufim," complete configurations of sefirot. Ze'ir Anpin is the partzuf of the six attributes, and Nukva is Malchut.
- **Yesh and the third level** (Chapter 5): in the previous chapter we studied a sentence with two sides. On one hand, even in the world of Atzilut "the palaces of Atzilut" and "the bodies of the angels of Atzilut" were created, "which are an aspect of yesh." On the other hand, angelic souls that emerged from the union of kisses, and human souls that emerged from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut before descending to Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, "are not included in the category of yesh and an independently separate entity; rather, they are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction." Thus a third level stands between created yesh and the Divinity in the vessels of the sefirot: an existence greatly contracted, not separate from its source, yet not the vessels themselves.
- **What will follow the parentheses:** the next sentence in the main course of the Epistle will establish this level's upper boundary: "But they are

not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing."

Parentheses Along the Way

Between these two sentences, between "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity" and "but they are not actual Divinity," the Alter Rebbe opens parentheses. This is a long parenthesis, fifty-six Hebrew-source words, comprising the whole chapter before us.[133] Why pause here, and why specifically in parentheses?

A sentence in parentheses is an aside. The main course can pass over it and continue, and indeed the "but" after the parentheses continues exactly the sentence that preceded them. Yet a good aside does not depart from the subject. Often it tests the boundaries of what has just been said. The preceding sentence discussed souls "before they descended to BYA." A careful reader will immediately ask: what about after descent? Does descent itself turn every soul into a separate yesh? The parentheses answer cautiously: "And even also after they descended," not only to Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah but "to this world," into a body, it is "possible" that the nature of these souls did

[133] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20. The Wikisource text, using the printed abbreviations, reads: "And like the first tzimtzum, to produce a void, etc. (And even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous... and are called worlds in relation to the gulgalta and dikna) yet they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin." Likewise in the Kehot text on Sefaria, where the abbreviations are expanded: the parentheses open with "And even after they descended," close after "dikna," and the following sentence begins "Yet they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin" (Sefaria).

not change. This is said of "the early tzaddikim," not of every soul. The parentheses then add a second matter: it is also "plausible to say" that "the thousands and myriads of worlds" the Zohar describes in the skull of Arich Anpin and of Ze'ir Anpin are not yesh like the palaces, but resemble angelic souls.

The two parts of the parentheses concern different subjects, but one question runs through both: what determines that something is "yesh and a separate entity"? In the first part, the question arises in terms of place: a soul has descended as far as this world, into a physical body, and descent alone does not decide the matter. In the second, it arises in terms of the name: something is called "almin," worlds, and the name alone does not decide the matter. In both cases, status is determined by the relationship to the source, not by place or name. This directly continues what we learned in the previous chapter, where we saw that even within the world of Atzilut there are created beings: the name of the world alone does not determine the status of what is within it.

Why in parentheses, rather than in the main argument? Because the main argument now turns to another distinction. Having learned that these souls are not a separate yesh, we must learn that they also lack the power to create something from nothing. The parentheses expand the intermediate level, "a likeness

of an aspect of Divinity," adding examples. They do not raise it above its boundary. As soon as they close, the boundary comes: "but."

What Does a Qualification Add to an Explanation?

Something else stands out in the parentheses on a first reading: their cautious language. "It is possible that [it] did not change," "it is plausible to say," "akin to the souls of the angels." Without these words, the sentence changes its meaning, so they are part of the answer itself, not a delay on the way to it. The Alter Rebbe allows room for supernal levels and relationships difficult for us to grasp, while indicating the degree of certainty with which he speaks. Let us define the three expressions. "Possible" means: here is a reasoned possibility, but not an assertion. "Plausible to say" means: this is the probable understanding, close to the truth, yet still offered as a proposal. "Akin to" means likeness, not identity. Our reading must preserve both the substance of the statements and their degree of decisiveness.[134][135]

[134]See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–927, in the discussion "Adam, Enoch and the Early Righteous," and pp. 926–928, in the resolution "The Qualification Is Part of the Explanation." For the distinction between the departure of the entire soul and the departure of an addition or an aspect, and for models of ibur that do not prove the mechanism in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 921–922 and 924–926. On Adam as a system of roots, on "head" and "heel" not being a map of nefesh, ruach and neshamah, and on Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see ibid., pp. 955–956 and 961–964. For the Chassidic sources in which the expression "the early righteous" occurs, and in which no closed list of names was found, see ibid., pp. 1014–1017.

[135]See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 926–927, in the discussion "Thousands and Myriads of Worlds: Source, Number and Relation." On the distinction between the two passages in the Idrot,

Throughout the chapter we shall clarify what is proposed here, what the proposal rests on, and what remains open.

The chapter is divided like the parentheses themselves. First we shall read the first part: what "the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut" are, who "the early tzaddikim" are, what "departs," and when. Then we shall read the second part: what Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin, skull and beard are; where "the thousands and myriads" come from; and in what sense they "are called worlds." Finally, we shall see what the parentheses add to the argument and how they prepare for the word "but."

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(And even also after the nefesh–ruach–neshamah of Atzilut descended to this world to the early tzaddikim

"(": the parentheses open here; they will close after the word "and the beard." "ואף גם — And even also": a doubled expression of addition, not only what was said before, but even this. "After they descended": set against "before they descended to BYA" in the preceding sentence. "The nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut": the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of the world of Atzilut; soul levels belonging to Atzilut, not every soul as such. The definite article

the Epistle's summarizing formulation and the question of the dikna, see ibid., pp. 962–964, in the discussion "A Precise Critique of the Worlds in the Gulgalta," and pp. 977–979.

indicates aspects familiar from the context. “To this world”: not only to Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, but all the way to the physical world, into a human body. “To the early tzaddikim”: the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut descended to them to be their souls. Adam, Enoch, and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai are not mentioned here by name; we shall examine proposed identifications through parallels, without inserting them into the Epistle’s wording.

“Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah of Atzilut”: What Are They, and Whose Are They?

We already encountered the words nefesh, ruach, and neshamah in the fourth chapter, but there they described the levels of vitality of the ten sefirot in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. At the end of the preceding chapter too, a few words before the parentheses, “the kav vested in their nefesh, ruach, and neshamah” was mentioned; there we preferred to read them as referring to the vitality of the vessels of the sefirot. Here they return to their more familiar use: levels within a human soul. The context teaches this, “after they descended” corresponding to “before they descended to BYA,” which was said of human souls; it is also explicit in the Likkutei Torah passage we shall shortly quote. To understand the expression “nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut,” we need two preliminary points from the Ari’s writings, both simple.

The first preliminary point: the human soul has several levels. "The soul has five names, in this order from below upward: nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, yechidah." The second: these levels are related to the worlds. "The human being connects all four worlds of ABYA, and therefore must necessarily contain parts from all four worlds"; consequently, "all nefashot are from the world of Asiyah alone, all ruchot are from the world of Yetzirah, and all neshamot are from the world of Beriah."[136] One who has attained nefesh, ruach, and neshamah carries within oneself levels from Asiyah, Yetzirah, and Beriah. This is the usual map.

"Nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut" are therefore levels higher than all these: nefesh, ruach, and neshamah belonging to the world of Atzilut itself. A question arises here. Every soul has a root in Atzilut; what, then, is special about the tzaddikim to whom the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut are said to have "descended"? Precisely this question is asked in Likkutei Torah, in the discourse "עוד ביאור הדברים ע"פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע" ("A Further Explanation of These Matters on the Verse 'My Dove in the Clefts of the Rock' "). It cites the distinction "that specifically the early tzaddikim alone are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the

[136] Shaar HaGilgulim, introduction 1: "We shall begin with the Sages' statement that the soul has five names, and this is their order from below upward: nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah, yechidah"; "It is known that the human being links all four worlds of ABYA, and therefore necessarily has portions from all four worlds"; "Know that all nefashot are only from the world of Asiyah, all ruchot from the world of Yetzirah, and all neshamot from the world of Beriah" (Sefaria).

other souls, which are of BYA." The answer distinguishes the soul's root from the soul vested in the body. For most souls, "tzaddikim and beinonim," "this aspect of the soul's root from Atzilut is neither vested nor shines in the body at all; rather, the light remains in the aspect of Atzilut, in a concealed and encompassing aspect alone over the soul vested in the body," while the soul vested in the body "is only nefesh, ruach, or neshamah of BYA." By contrast, "the souls of the early tzaddikim means that the soul actually vested in their bodies is the actual aspect of Atzilut."[137]

In the same passage, Likkutei Torah quotes our sentence itself: "And along the lines of what is written

[137] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "עוד ביאור הדברים ע"פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע וגו": "The souls drawn from the union of ZON of Atzilut mean that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, from Atzilut to become actual Beriah. But a soul of Atzilut means actual Divinity, the aspect of Atzilut as it actually is in Atzilut, far, far above creation yesh me-ayin; only they are from the vessels of Atzilut... Of the souls drawn from the vessels, the soul is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity." Later: "If so, one must understand what it means that specifically only the early righteous are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the other souls, which are of BYA, etc. The matter is that the souls of the early righteous mean that the soul actually vested in their body is actual Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body, actually below; as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' that even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous, it is possible that their nature did not change to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc.; see there. By contrast, the generality of other souls of Israel, righteous and intermediate, etc., called souls of BYA, means that although the root of all souls is in Atzilut, this aspect of the soul's root from Atzilut is nevertheless not vested and does not shine within the body at all. Rather, the light remains in the state of Atzilut, solely concealed and encompassing the soul vested in the body; the soul drawn down and vested in the body is only a nefesh, ruach or neshamah of BYA, and not of Atzilut at all, and is therefore called only nefesh, ruach and neshamah of BYA" (Sefaria). The quotation from the Epistle there is in the plural, "שלא נשתנו מהותן" [their nature did not change]. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("References, Glosses and Brief Notes"), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48], the words "It is possible that... not" are annotated: "Mentioned in Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 19c" (file on chabad.org). On the status of the example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the distinction between it and identifying those meant in the Epistle's parentheses, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 964–965 and 968–971; on the distinction between souls born from the union of ZON and "souls of Atzilut itself," see ibid., pp. 976–977.

in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu ve-chayohi,' that even after the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut descended to this world to the early tzaddikim, it is possible that their nature did not change to become something separate from Divinity."[137] This gives a clear answer to the question of whose souls these are. The subject is the soul vested in the bodies of the early tzaddikim, which is a level of Atzilut, not the supernal root possessed by every soul. The definite article, "the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut," accords with this: the subject is soul levels in Atzilut, like the souls discussed in the preceding sentence while still above, "before they descended." The novel point is that in the

[137] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "עוד ביאור הדברים ע"פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע וגו": "The souls drawn from the union of ZON of Atzilut mean that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, from Atzilut to become actual Beriah. But a soul of Atzilut means actual Divinity, the aspect of Atzilut as it actually is in Atzilut, far, far above creation yesh me-ayin; only they are from the vessels of Atzilut… Of the souls drawn from the vessels, the soul is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity." Later: "If so, one must understand what it means that specifically only the early righteous are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the other souls, which are of BYA, etc. The matter is that the souls of the early righteous mean that the soul actually vested in their body is actual Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body, actually below; as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' that even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous, it is possible that their nature did not change to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc.; see there. By contrast, the generality of other souls of Israel, righteous and intermediate, etc., called souls of BYA, means that although the root of all souls is in Atzilut, this aspect of the soul's root from Atzilut is nevertheless not vested and does not shine within the body at all. Rather, the light remains in the state of Atzilut, solely concealed and encompassing the soul vested in the body; the soul drawn down and vested in the body is only a nefesh, ruach or neshamah of BYA, and not of Atzilut at all, and is therefore called only nefesh, ruach and neshamah of BYA" (Sefaria). The quotation from the Epistle there is in the plural, "שלא נשתנו מהותן" [their nature did not change]. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("References, Glosses and Brief Notes"), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48], the words "It is possible that… not" are annotated: "Mentioned in Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 19c" (file on chabad.org). On the status of the example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the distinction between it and identifying those meant in the Epistle's parentheses, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 964–965 and 968–971; on the distinction between souls born from the union of ZON and "souls of Atzilut itself," see ibid., pp. 976–977.

early tzaddikim, such a level descended into the body itself.

The scope of this source also merits precision. Other souls are not cut off from Atzilut: "the root of all souls is from Atzilut," and this light is present in everyone "in a concealed and encompassing aspect." The difference concerns what is vested in the body and shines within it. Thus what the parentheses say applies to a special case, not to every soul of every person. This is what the words "to the early tzaddikim" teach.

The same expression, "nefesh, ruach, and neshamah … of Atzilut," also appears in Shaar HaGilgulim's description of Adam: "Before Adam sinned, he possessed nefesh, ruach, and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah, and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach, and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet, and Binah of Atzilut."[138] Above the ordinary nefesh, ruach, and

[138]Shaar HaGilgulim, introductions 31–32: the roots of souls and the system included in Adam. These parallels do not explicitly identify the Epistle's "early righteous." Introduction 31: "Know that all the neshamot, ruchot and nefashot in all created beings in this world are included and suspended in Adam"; "Know that Adam's nefesh comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews, totaling 613"; each limb and sinew "has one complete partzuf," and divides into "sparks of souls," up to "600,000"; "King Hezekiah is attached to the head of this partzuf, whereas Rabbi Akiva, Akavya ben Mahalalel and others are attached to the heel of this partzuf" (Sefaria). Introduction 32: "Before Adam sinned, he had nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet and Binah of Atzilut. It has also been explained that all souls were then included in Adam, except the entirely new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all"; "His nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Atzilut, mentioned in the Zohar in Parashat Kedoshim by the name zihara ilaah, did not fall into the kelipot, G-d forbid. Rather, the ruach and neshamah aspects departed from him when he sinned and flew upward. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually depart. It has already been explained in the preceding discourses that Enoch, after attaining his nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah, merited also to receive up to the neshamah aspect of Atzilut that had departed from Adam when he sinned"; "Elisha is from the root of Enoch, called Metatron, which is from the neshamah of Atzilut called Adam's zihara ilaah";

neshamah of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, Adam possessed nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut. We shall return to this description when asking who the early tzaddikim are and what withdrawal means. For now it is enough to see that the term is not incidental: it is a recognized name in the Ari's writings for the soul levels above the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of BYA.

W06-02
Hebrew-source words
11–18

it is possible that their nature did not change to become something separate from Divinity

"אפשר — It is possible": the statement's degree of certainty, a possibility rather than an assertion. "Their nature did not change": "nature" is what a thing is, as distinct from its place, garment, and manner of revelation; "their nature" refers to the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut. "To become something separate from Divinity" defines the change being denied: not every change, but becoming a "separate thing." The wording deliberately returns to the preceding sentence, which said of souls before descent that they "are not included in the category of yesh and an independently separate entity." The possibility is that this status was preserved below as well. Two points thus remain within their limits: descent to this world alone does not prove that their nature changed,

and concerning a soul added to a person through the mystery of ibur: "Then that nefesh of Nadav and Avihu too, which had entered him through the mystery of ibur, departed from him and went away" (Sefaria).

and what is said here about the absence of change is not said of all souls.

Descent: A Change of Place or a Change of Nature?

To understand the question, let us consider the difference between a change of place and a change in the thing itself. A person who moves to another city remains the same person, with the same knowledge and character; another person can change their understanding and habits without leaving the room. Place alone does not tell us what has happened to the thing itself. This example too has a limit, since worlds are not locations in space: when a soul descends from world to world, the question is not how far it traveled, but what happened to its level and manner of revelation. The example teaches only that the word "descended" does not by itself complete the explanation. We must clarify what connection to the source was preserved and what changed in relation to the created beings of the lower system.[134]

In descent, we must distinguish the place in which the soul appears, the garment through which it is revealed,

[134] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–927, in the discussion "Adam, Enoch and the Early Righteous," and pp. 926–928, in the resolution "The Qualification Is Part of the Explanation." For the distinction between the departure of the entire soul and the departure of an addition or an aspect, and for models of ibur that do not prove the mechanism in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 921–922 and 924–926. On Adam as a system of roots, on "head" and "heel" not being a map of nefesh, ruach and neshamah, and on Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see ibid., pp. 955–956 and 961–964. For the Chassidic sources in which the expression "the early righteous" occurs, and in which no closed list of names was found, see ibid., pp. 1014–1017.

and its manner of operation. A change in these is not necessarily a change of nature: even if the soul became vested in a body, or only a radiance from it descended, we must still clarify whether it became an existence separate from its source.[134]

What is the ordinary state from which this is an exception? In the same discourse, Likkutei Torah says of souls drawn from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut: "This means that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, that is, from Atzilut to become an actual aspect of Beriah."[137] In this wording, then, a

[134] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–927, in the discussion "Adam, Enoch and the Early Righteous," and pp. 926–928, in the resolution "The Qualification Is Part of the Explanation." For the distinction between the departure of the entire soul and the departure of an addition or an aspect, and for models of ibur that do not prove the mechanism in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 921–922 and 924–926. On Adam as a system of roots, on "head" and "heel" not being a map of nefesh, ruach and neshamah, and on Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see ibid., pp. 955–956 and 961–964. For the Chassidic sources in which the expression "the early righteous" occurs, and in which no closed list of names was found, see ibid., pp. 1014–1017.

[137] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "עוד ביאור הדברים ע"פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע וגו": "The souls drawn from the union of ZON of Atzilut mean that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, from Atzilut to become actual Beriah. But a soul of Atzilut means actual Divinity, the aspect of Atzilut as it actually is in Atzilut, far, far above creation yesh me-ayin; only they are from the vessels of Atzilut… Of the souls drawn from the vessels, the soul is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity." Later: "If so, one must understand what it means that specifically only the early righteous are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the other souls, which are of BYA, etc. The matter is that the souls of the early righteous mean that the soul actually vested in their body is actual Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body, actually below; as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' that even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous, it is possible that their nature did not change to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc.; see there. By contrast, the generality of other souls of Israel, righteous and intermediate, etc., called souls of BYA, means that although the root of all souls is in Atzilut, this aspect of the soul's root from Atzilut is nevertheless not vested and does not shine within the body at all. Rather, the light remains in the state of Atzilut, solely concealed and encompassing the soul vested in the body; the soul drawn down and vested in the body is only a nefesh, ruach or neshamah of BYA, and not of Atzilut at all, and is therefore called only nefesh, ruach and neshamah of BYA" (Sefaria). The quotation from the Epistle there is in the plural, "שלא נשתנו מהותן" [their nature did not change]. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("References, Glosses and Brief Notes"), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48], the words "It is possible that… not" are annotated: "Mentioned in Likkutei Torah,

soul's birth into the world of Beriah is a coming into being "from ayin to yesh": the soul becomes an existence of Beriah. This explains why the Epistle took care to say "before they descended to BYA." Before descent, the soul is not "included in the category of yesh"; in ordinary descent, it enters the category of a created being.

We can now hear the novel point of the parentheses. "And even also after they descended … to this world": in the early tzaddikim, descent, even as far as a physical body, may not have done what it ordinarily does. According to this possibility, the soul in their body remained a level of Atzilut, "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity," and did not become "something separate from Divinity." Likkutei Torah gives an image for this: the soul drawn from the vessels of Atzilut "is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity."[137] One drop

Shir HaShirim 19c" (file on chabad.org). On the status of the example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the distinction between it and identifying those meant in the Epistle's parentheses, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 964–965 and 968–971; on the distinction between souls born from the union of ZON and "souls of Atzilut itself," see ibid., pp. 976–977.

[137] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "עוד ביאור הדברים ע"פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע וגו": "The souls drawn from the union of ZON of Atzilut mean that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, from Atzilut to become actual Beriah. But a soul of Atzilut means actual Divinity, the aspect of Atzilut as it actually is in Atzilut, far, far above creation yesh me-ayin; only they are from the vessels of Atzilut… Of the souls drawn from the vessels, the soul is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity." Later: "If so, one must understand what it means that specifically only the early righteous are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the other souls, which are of BYA, etc. The matter is that the souls of the early righteous mean that the soul actually vested in their body is actual Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body, actually below; as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' that even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous, it is possible that their nature did not change to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc.; see there. By contrast, the generality of other souls of Israel, righteous and intermediate, etc., called

compared with the vessels, very small in relation to them, yet still of the same aspect. When Likkutei Torah says "an aspect of Divinity" here, it discusses the soul's status, not its power of creation. The Epistle will address the difference between these two questions immediately after the parentheses.

"Possible": What Is Proposed, and What Does the Proposal Rest On?

What exactly is proposed? That the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut, which descended to this world and became vested in the early tzaddikim's bodies, did not become "something separate from Divinity." What does the proposal rest on? First, on the preceding sentence in the Epistle: these souls, as long as they are above, "are not included in the category of yesh." The proposal extends this status beyond the descent. Second, on what is known from the Ari's writings about levels of Atzilut that were vested in a human being, as we saw in Shaar HaGilgulim. Likkutei Torah, for its part, adopts the proposal and builds upon it. The "and

souls of BYA, means that although the root of all souls is in Atzilut, this aspect of the soul's root from Atzilut is nevertheless not vested and does not shine within the body at all. Rather, the light remains in the state of Atzilut, solely concealed and encompassing the soul vested in the body; the soul drawn down and vested in the body is only a nefesh, ruach or neshamah of BYA, and not of Atzilut at all, and is therefore called only nefesh, ruach and neshamah of BYA" (Sefaria). The quotation from the Epistle there is in the plural, "שלא נשתנו מהותן" [their nature did not change]. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("References, Glosses and Brief Notes"), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48], the words "It is possible that... not" are annotated: "Mentioned in Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 19c" (file on chabad.org). On the status of the example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the distinction between it and identifying those meant in the Epistle's parentheses, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 964–965 and 968–971; on the distinction between souls born from the union of ZON and "souls of Atzilut itself," see ibid., pp. 976–977.

therefore” that follows, “and therefore they would withdraw when they wished to sin, before they sinned,” is not additional evidence, but a consequence the Epistle derives from it: if the status was preserved, this is what happens when the desire to sin arises.

Questions remain open: who these tzaddikim are, whether all their soul levels were of this kind, and how their status was preserved in descent. The proposal concerns the early tzaddikim, and Likkutei Torah too, when quoting it and building upon it, retains the word “possible.”[134]

This is a major new point: a soul descends into a world of body, inclination, and choice, yet its connection to its source may be preserved at the level of Atzilut.

W06-03
Hebrew-source words 19–25

and therefore they would withdraw when [the tzaddikim] wished to sin, before they sinned

“ולכן — And therefore”: a consequence follows; withdrawal is explained on the basis of the preceding possibility. “היו מסתלקות — They would withdraw”: the Hebrew is feminine plural, like “nefesh” and “neshamah”; the subject is the nefesh, ruach, and

[134]See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–927, in the discussion “Adam, Enoch and the Early Righteous,” and pp. 926–928, in the resolution “The Qualification Is Part of the Explanation.” For the distinction between the departure of the entire soul and the departure of an addition or an aspect, and for models of ibur that do not prove the mechanism in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 921–922 and 924–926. On Adam as a system of roots, on “head” and “heel” not being a map of nefesh, ruach and neshamah, and on Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see ibid., pp. 955–956 and 961–964. For the Chassidic sources in which the expression “the early righteous” occurs, and in which no closed list of names was found, see ibid., pp. 1014–1017.

neshamah of Atzilut, not the tzaddikim themselves. "Withdraw" means to rise and recede, to cease being vested in the body and shining within it. The word is sometimes also used for a person's passing, but here it is said of the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, and the sentence does not say that the person died. "They would withdraw" describes a regular pattern: this was the nature of these souls. "When they wished to sin": the desire belongs to the person, the tzaddik; "before they sinned": before the deed. The sequence is exact: the desire, immediate withdrawal, and only afterward the deed, if it occurs. The sentence is silent on whether the sin was actually committed; what it establishes is the moment of withdrawal.

What Withdraws, and When?

What Withdraws

We have already seen in the explanation of the words that the subject of "they would withdraw" is "the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut," not "the tzaddikim"; we should therefore not immediately read this as "they would die." What withdraws is the level of Atzilut, from the body in which it had been vested. But is there support for this reading beyond grammar?

The description of Adam in Shaar HaGilgulim shows that this is not mere reasoning. After the sin, it says, his nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut "did not

fall, G-d forbid, into the kelipot; rather, the aspects of ruach and neshamah withdrew from him when he sinned, and soared above. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually withdraw."[138] Adam lived for many years afterward: "And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years" (Genesis 5:5). Withdrawal of levels of Atzilut therefore does not necessarily mean death. It is a transition from a state in which Atzilut is vested in a person and shines within him to one in which it is above him, "hovering over him" or having "soared above," while the person continues to live. The remaining state resembles what Likkutei Torah describes as the ordinary state of most souls: the root

[138]Shaar HaGilgulim, introductions 31–32: the roots of souls and the system included in Adam. These parallels do not explicitly identify the Epistle's "early righteous." Introduction 31: "Know that all the neshamot, ruchot and nefashot in all created beings in this world are included and suspended in Adam"; "Know that Adam's nefesh comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews, totaling 613"; each limb and sinew "has one complete partzuf," and divides into "sparks of souls," up to "600,000"; "King Hezekiah is attached to the head of this partzuf, whereas Rabbi Akiva, Akavya ben Mahalalel and others are attached to the heel of this partzuf" (Sefaria). Introduction 32: "Before Adam sinned, he had nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet and Binah of Atzilut. It has also been explained that all souls were then included in Adam, except the entirely new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all"; "His nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Atzilut, mentioned in the Zohar in Parashat Kedoshim by the name zihara ilaah, did not fall into the kelipot, G-d forbid. Rather, the ruach and neshamah aspects departed from him when he sinned and flew upward. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually depart. It has already been explained in the preceding discourses that Enoch, after attaining his nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah, merited also to receive up to the neshamah aspect of Atzilut that had departed from Adam when he sinned"; "Elisha is from the root of Enoch, called Metatron, which is from the neshamah of Atzilut called Adam's zihara ilaah"; and concerning a soul added to a person through the mystery of ibur: "Then that nefesh of Nadav and Avihu too, which had entered him through the mystery of ibur, departed from him and went away" (Sefaria).

in Atzilut is "in a concealed and encompassing aspect," and the soul vested in the body is from BYA.[137]

The Epistle does not specify whether all the levels of Atzilut withdraw or only some. Shaar HaGilgulim also describes "reincarnation during life": the soul of a tzaddik is added to a person during his lifetime, in what is called "the mystery of ibur,"[139] and sometimes withdraws from him.[138] The Epistle, however, mentions

[137]Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "עוד ביאור הדברים ע"פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע וגו": "The souls drawn from the union of ZON of Atzilut mean that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, from Atzilut to become actual Beriah. But a soul of Atzilut means actual Divinity, the aspect of Atzilut as it actually is in Atzilut, far, far above creation yesh me-ayin; only they are from the vessels of Atzilut... Of the souls drawn from the vessels, the soul is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity." Later: "If so, one must understand what it means that specifically only the early righteous are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the other souls, which are of BYA, etc. The matter is that the souls of the early righteous mean that the soul actually vested in their body is actual Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body, actually below; as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' that even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous, it is possible that their nature did not change to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc.; see there. By contrast, the generality of other souls of Israel, righteous and intermediate, etc., called souls of BYA, means that although the root of all souls is in Atzilut, this aspect of the soul's root from Atzilut is nevertheless not vested and does not shine within the body at all. Rather, the light remains in the state of Atzilut, solely concealed and encompassing the soul vested in the body; the soul drawn down and vested in the body is only a nefesh, ruach or neshamah of BYA, and not of Atzilut at all, and is therefore called only nefesh, ruach and neshamah of BYA" (Sefaria). The quotation from the Epistle there is in the plural, "שלא נשתנו מהותן" [their nature did not change]. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("References, Glosses and Brief Notes"), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48], the words "It is possible that... not" are annotated: "Mentioned in Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 19c" (file on chabad.org). On the status of the example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the distinction between it and identifying those meant in the Epistle's parentheses, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 964–965 and 968–971; on the distinction between souls born from the union of ZON and "souls of Atzilut itself," see ibid., pp. 976–977.

[139]Shaar HaGilgulim, introduction 2: "This matter, which is reincarnation during life, is called by the sages the mystery of ibur, and this is the difference between gilgul and ibur. Sometimes an actual ruach of a righteous person may enter him through ibur, even if it is among the spirits of the early righteous, as far back as the Patriarchs, of blessed memory, even in these latter times of ours" (Sefaria).

[138]Shaar HaGilgulim, introductions 31–32: the roots of souls and the system included in Adam. These parallels do not explicitly identify the Epistle's "early righteous." Introduction 31: "Know that all the neshamot, ruchot and nefashot in all created beings in this world are included and suspended in Adam"; "Know that Adam's nefesh comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews, totaling 613"; each limb and sinew "has one complete partzuf," and divides into "sparks of souls," up to

neither ibur nor an additional soul, so the withdrawal here should not be identified with that account. It says that the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut withdraw; it does not say that the person dies.[134]

When

The question "when" is no less important. Tikkunei Zohar asks a question very close to ours. It first says that if a person whose "soul is by way of Atzilut" sins, his sin reaches as far as the sefirot. Rabbi Elazar asks his father, Rabbi Shimon: "וכי חובא איהו בבר נש דתליא נשמתיה מההוא אתר, וכי אית ליה חובין." That is: can sin occur in a person whose soul is suspended from such a supernal place? Does he have sins? After all, it is

"600,000"; "King Hezekiah is attached to the head of this partzuf, whereas Rabbi Akiva, Akavya ben Mahalalel and others are attached to the heel of this partzuf" (Sefaria). Introduction 32: "Before Adam sinned, he had nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet and Binah of Atzilut. It has also been explained that all souls were then included in Adam, except the entirely new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all"; "His nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Atzilut, mentioned in the Zohar in Parashat Kedoshim by the name zihara ilaah, did not fall into the kelipot, G-d forbid. Rather, the ruach and neshamah aspects departed from him when he sinned and flew upward. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually depart. It has already been explained in the preceding discourses that Enoch, after attaining his nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah, merited also to receive up to the neshamah aspect of Atzilut that had departed from Adam when he sinned"; "Elisha is from the root of Enoch, called Metatron, which is from the neshamah of Atzilut called Adam's zihara ilaah"; and concerning a soul added to a person through the mystery of ibur: "Then that nefesh of Nadav and Avihu too, which had entered him through the mystery of ibur, departed from him and went away" (Sefaria).

[134] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–927, in the discussion "Adam, Enoch and the Early Righteous," and pp. 926–928, in the resolution "The Qualification Is Part of the Explanation." For the distinction between the departure of the entire soul and the departure of an addition or an aspect, and for models of ibur that do not prove the mechanism in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 921–922 and 924–926. On Adam as a system of roots, on "head" and "heel" not being a map of nefesh, ruach and neshamah, and on Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see ibid., pp. 955–956 and 961–964. For the Chassidic sources in which the expression "the early righteous" occurs, and in which no closed list of names was found, see ibid., pp. 1014–1017.

written, “No iniquity shall befall the righteous” (Proverbs 12:21). The answer is “אמר ליה אין,” “He said to him: yes.” Immediately the verse is cited, “Rather, your iniquities have separated you from your G-d” (Isaiah 59:2), followed by the explanation: “מאי מבדילים, אלא דסליק ההיא נשמתא דאצילותא מניה ואתפרש מניה.”[140] What does “separated” mean? That the soul of Atzilut withdraws from the person and becomes separate from him.

We learn two things from this. First, even someone whose soul is from Atzilut can sin; the supernal soul does not remove that possibility. Second, a soul of Atzilut and sin do not dwell together: when there is sin, it withdraws. The Epistle adds a further precision, concerning time. In the early tzaddikim, withdrawal does not wait for the deed: “when they wished to sin, before they sinned.” Already at the moment of desire, before the deed, the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut are no longer there.

The word “and therefore” connects withdrawal with the possibility that these nefesh, ruach, and neshamah did

[140] Tikkunei Zohar, 124a: “If a person’s soul is by way of Atzilut, if he sins, his sin reaches the sefirot, and his punishment is great according to his level. Rabbi Elazar said: Father, can there be sin in a person whose soul is suspended from that place? Can he have sins? Is it not written (Proverbs 12:21), ‘No iniquity shall befall the righteous’? He said to him: Yes; this is what is written (Isaiah 59:2), ‘But your iniquities have separated between you and your G-d.’ What is ‘separated’? That soul of Atzilut ascends from him and separates from him” (Sefaria). The pagination is not uniform across printed editions. The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 1042–1043 and 1047–1049, documents that the passage is on folio 123 in the Mantua edition, while Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on this Epistle cites “Tikkun 70 (124, end of side a)” here. On the fact that the connection between this passage and the Epistle’s parentheses is made by the commentators and is not stated in the Epistle itself, see ibid., pp. 1008–1009.

not become "something separate from Divinity." This may be understood as follows: sin separates a person from his G-d, so a level that is not separate from Divinity withdraws as soon as the person wishes to sin. This is the explanation we propose for the connection between the two parts of the sentence: if their nature did not change, the desire to sin cannot coexist with their presence in the body. What happens at that moment to the other levels of the soul, the Epistle does not say.

What About Free Choice?

A natural question arises here. If the soul within their bodies is from Atzilut, how can they wish to sin? And if they do wish to, does withdrawal leave them unprotected, or conversely, deprive them of choice? The Epistle does not address these questions, and we need not fill the gap with a diagram that was never supplied. What the wording teaches is limited and clear. The desire to sin belongs to the person: "when they wished." The nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut do not participate in it. The Epistle links the presence of the level with the direction of the person's will; it does not describe a supernal level that keeps him from sinning against his will. Spiritual state thus depends on will and Divine service, and is not a permanent title one can bear without them. Tikkunei Zohar too, as we just saw, explicitly says that someone

whose soul is from Atzilut can sin. Choice remains intact; what changes is what rests within a person at the moment of choosing.

One further limit: the sentence describes a special level of soul and what happens to it; it is not a law concerning every sinful thought in every person. Anyone who learns from it that every thought in every person causes their soul to depart has transferred the sentence to a different subject. It teaches the magnitude of the connection between a Divine level and the direction of the will, not the laws governing thoughts.

Who Are "The Early Tzaddikim"?

The Epistle says "to the early tzaddikim," without naming them. Let us first clarify the designation, then examine who might fit it.

In rabbinic usage, "the early ones" generally means people of earlier generations. Thus, for example, the Talmud says: "If the early ones were sons of angels, we are sons of men" (Shabbat 112b). Shaar HaGilgulim also mentions "the spirits of the early tzaddikim, as far back as the Patriarchs," meaning the tzaddikim of earlier generations, as far back as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[139] Tanya, Chapter 2, says that there are "myriads

[139] Shaar HaGilgulim, introduction 2: "This matter, which is reincarnation during life, is called by the sages the mystery of ibur, and this is the difference between gilgul and ibur. Sometimes an actual ruach of a righteous person may enter him through ibur, even if it is among the spirits of

of different levels among souls," and that the souls of the Patriarchs and Moses our teacher are far higher than "the souls of these generations of ours, of the heels of Mashiach, which are literally an aspect of heels in relation to the brain and head."[141] The designation thus points toward lofty souls of earlier generations. But the word alone does not say who is included or down to which generation.

From the word itself, we have moved to sources that supply examples. Three proposals arise in study, and they do not carry equal weight. Let us examine each through the same question: what does the source say, and how close is it to the Epistle's wording?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Here we have an explicit source, not merely a conjecture. In the discourse already examined, Likkutei Torah defines "the souls of the early tzaddikim" by the level of the soul within the body and gives an example: "This means that the soul actually vested in their bodies is the actual aspect of Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body,

the early righteous, as far back as the Patriarchs, of blessed memory, even in these latter times of ours" (Sefaria).

[141]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 2: "Although there are myriads of kinds of different levels among souls, one higher than another without end, such as the great superiority of the souls of the Patriarchs and Moses our teacher, peace be upon them, over the souls of these generations of ours, the heels of Mashiach, which are literally like heels in relation to the brain and head... nevertheless, the root of all nefesh, ruach and neshamah, from the highest of all levels to the lowest of all levels, vested in the bodies of the unlearned and the most light-minded, is drawn from the supernal mind, which is supernal Chochmah, as it were" (Sefaria). On the distinction between the axis of root and level in this chapter and the souls' position after their descent, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 961–962.

literally below." Our sentence from the Epistle is quoted immediately afterward.[137] The Tzemach Tzedek's Derech Mitzvotecha also mentions "the lofty souls, such as the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the like," which are "from the aspect of Atzilut, which is actual Divinity."[142] Here "which is" refers to Atzilut: the Tzemach Tzedek describes the status of the soul's level, not the power of creation. Thus the expression "actual Divinity" does not contradict what we shall hear immediately after the parentheses: "But they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing."

[137] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "עוד ביאור הדברים ע"פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע וגו": "The souls drawn from the union of ZON of Atzilut mean that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, from Atzilut to become actual Beriah. But a soul of Atzilut means actual Divinity, the aspect of Atzilut as it actually is in Atzilut, far, far above creation yesh me-ayin; only they are from the vessels of Atzilut… Of the souls drawn from the vessels, the soul is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity." Later: "If so, one must understand what it means that specifically only the early righteous are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the other souls, which are of BYA, etc. The matter is that the souls of the early righteous mean that the soul actually vested in their body is actual Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body, actually below; as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' that even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous, it is possible that their nature did not change to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc.; see there. By contrast, the generality of other souls of Israel, righteous and intermediate, etc., called souls of BYA, means that although the root of all souls is in Atzilut, this aspect of the soul's root from Atzilut is nevertheless not vested and does not shine within the body at all. Rather, the light remains in the state of Atzilut, solely concealed and encompassing the soul vested in the body; the soul drawn down and vested in the body is only a nefesh, ruach or neshamah of BYA, and not of Atzilut at all, and is therefore called only nefesh, ruach and neshamah of BYA" (Sefaria). The quotation from the Epistle there is in the plural, "שלא נשתנו מהותן" [their nature did not change]. In the Rebbe's Reshimot on Tanya ("References, Glosses and Brief Notes"), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48], the words "It is possible that… not" are annotated: "Mentioned in Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 19c" (file on chabad.org). On the status of the example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the distinction between it and identifying those meant in the Epistle's parentheses, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 964–965 and 968–971; on the distinction between souls born from the union of ZON and "souls of Atzilut itself," see ibid., pp. 976–977.

[142] Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Minnui Melech: "But the higher souls, such as the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the like, are in the category of children… (for they are from Atzilut, which is actual Divinity; see the explanation of these two kinds of souls in mitzvah 42, chapter 2)" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 1016–1017.

Two small expressions teach much here: "such as" and "and the like." Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is an example, not a list. This example also teaches us about the scope of the matter. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai lived in the generation of the Tannaim, very far removed from Adam. Thus a soul of Atzilut vested in a body is not reserved for humanity's first generation. Whether Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is himself included among the Epistle's "early tzaddikim," or merely resembles them, the word "like" does not decide.

Adam. Here the closeness is in wording and subject matter. Shaar HaGilgulim uses the same term, "nefesh, ruach, and neshamah … of Atzilut," and describes the withdrawal of the ruach and neshamah of Atzilut from Adam "when he sinned."[138] It is no wonder that the

[138]Shaar HaGilgulim, introductions 31–32: the roots of souls and the system included in Adam. These parallels do not explicitly identify the Epistle's "early righteous." Introduction 31: "Know that all the neshamot, ruchot and nefashot in all created beings in this world are included and suspended in Adam"; "Know that Adam's nefesh comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews, totaling 613"; each limb and sinew "has one complete partzuf," and divides into "sparks of souls," up to "600,000"; "King Hezekiah is attached to the head of this partzuf, whereas Rabbi Akiva, Akavya ben Mahalalel and others are attached to the heel of this partzuf" (Sefaria). Introduction 32: "Before Adam sinned, he had nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet and Binah of Atzilut. It has also been explained that all souls were then included in Adam, except the entirely new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all"; "His nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Atzilut, mentioned in the Zohar in Parashat Kedoshim by the name zihara ilaah, did not fall into the kelipot, G-d forbid. Rather, the ruach and neshamah aspects departed from him when he sinned and flew upward. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually depart. It has already been explained in the preceding discourses that Enoch, after attaining his nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah, merited also to receive up to the neshamah aspect of Atzilut that had departed from Adam when he sinned"; "Elisha is from the root of Enoch, called Metatron, which is from the neshamah of Atzilut called Adam's zihara ilaah"; and concerning a soul added to a person through the mystery of ibur: "Then that nefesh of Nadav and Avihu too, which had entered him through the mystery of ibur, departed from him and went away" (Sefaria).

student thinks of him first. Nevertheless, the Epistle says "tzaddikim" in the plural and does not mention Adam. There is also a difference in formulation: in Shaar HaGilgulim, withdrawal occurs "when he sinned," whereas the Epistle emphasizes "before they sinned." If we apply the Epistle's language to Adam, we will attribute to him a precision not stated in Shaar HaGilgulim; that would already be our comparison, not the source's statement. Furthermore, Likkutei Torah, in the portion Tzav, cites another discourse to the effect that Adam "was elevated above even Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, to an entirely different degree."[143] It follows that even among souls of Atzilut there are levels very far apart. "The early tzaddikim" does not name a single uniform level.

Enoch. The Torah says of Enoch: "Enoch walked with G-d, and he was no more, for G-d had taken him" (Genesis 5:24). Rashi explains: "He was righteous, but easily inclined to turn back to wickedness; therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, hastened to remove him and cause him to die before his time." The Midrash says: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said: while he is

[143] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, "ביאור מעט על פסוק ואכלתם אכול כו'" [A Brief Explanation of the Verse "And You Shall Eat Plentifully," etc.]: "It is stated in Gilgulim, chapter 19, that before the sin Adam had a neshamah of the neshamah from Atzilut, etc.; see chapter 1 there, and this is the aspect of Atzilut within Atzilut"; later: "This is what is stated in Parashat Bereishit, in the discourse beginning 'הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו,' that Adam was higher even than Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, of an altogether different order, etc. For even the very lofty souls from the union of Abba and Imma of Atzilut, which is the neshamah of Atzilut, stand in relation to Adam's soul as Beriah does to Atzilut itself, as stated above" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, p. 1016.

still righteous, I shall remove him."[144] The resemblance to the parentheses is clear: removal before sin. But the differences are no less important. There the person himself is taken, and Rashi interprets this as death "before his time"; in the Epistle, the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut withdraw, and the sentence does not say that the person dies. The Midrash describes Enoch as "sometimes righteous, sometimes wicked," that is, as someone who had already actually sinned, whereas in the Epistle withdrawal is "before they sinned." On the other hand, Shaar HaGilgulim describes Enoch as someone who "merited to receive even as far as the aspect of neshamah of Atzilut that withdrew from Adam when he sinned."[138] This detail

[144]Rashi on Genesis 5:24: " 'Enoch walked': He was righteous, but easily inclined to return to wickedness. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, hastened to remove him and put him to death before his time. This is why Scripture varies its description of his death, writing that he was no longer in the world to complete his years (Bereishit Rabbah)" (Sefaria). Bereishit Rabbah 25:1: "Rabbi Aivu said: Enoch was a hypocrite, sometimes righteous and sometimes wicked. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: While he is still righteous, I shall remove him"; later the Midrash discusses whether death is stated concerning Enoch (Sefaria). On Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–926 and 955–956.

[138]Shaar HaGilgulim, introductions 31–32: the roots of souls and the system included in Adam. These parallels do not explicitly identify the Epistle's "early righteous." Introduction 31: "Know that all the neshamot, ruchot and nefashot in all created beings in this world are included and suspended in Adam"; "Know that Adam's nefesh comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews, totaling 613"; each limb and sinew "has one complete partzuf," and divides into "sparks of souls," up to "600,000"; "King Hezekiah is attached to the head of this partzuf, whereas Rabbi Akiva, Akavya ben Mahalalel and others are attached to the heel of this partzuf" (Sefaria). Introduction 32: "Before Adam sinned, he had nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet and Binah of Atzilut. It has also been explained that all souls were then included in Adam, except the entirely new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all"; "His nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Atzilut, mentioned in the Zohar in Parashat Kedoshim by the name zihara ilaah, did not fall into the kelipot, G-d forbid. Rather, the ruach and neshamah aspects departed from him when he sinned and flew upward. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually depart. It has already been explained in the preceding discourses that Enoch, after attaining his nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah, merited also to receive up to the neshamah aspect of Atzilut that had departed from Adam when he sinned"; "Elisha is from the

brings him closer to what Likkutei Torah calls “the souls of the early tzaddikim,” a soul of Atzilut vested in a body; but that passage does not discuss withdrawal before sin. Enoch illuminates the idea, but no source identifies him with those under discussion.

What emerges from all this? The three proposals rest on different kinds of sources, so it is useful to distinguish three degrees of connection between a source and our sentence. An explicit example is a source that quotes our sentence or discusses the identical matter and names a person. A proposal based on wording and subject matter is a source that uses the same terms and describes a similar phenomenon without mentioning the Epistle. A parallel to the idea is a story containing a similar idea whose details differ:

root of Enoch, called Metatron, which is from the neshamah of Atzilut called Adam’s zihara ilaah”; and concerning a soul added to a person through the mystery of ibur: “Then that nefesh of Nadav and Avihu too, which had entered him through the mystery of ibur, departed from him and went away” (Sefaria).

Type of connection	What we have	What can be learned	What cannot be learned
Explicit example	Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai" (Likkutei Torah, adjacent to its quotation of our sentence); also "such as the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the like" (Derech Mitzvotecha, without mentioning the Epistle)	That there are souls in which an actual level of Atzilut is vested in the body	That Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai alone is "the early tzaddikim," or that he is certainly one of them
Proposal based on wording and subject matter	Adam: "the aspects of ruach and neshamah withdrew from him when he sinned," while the nefesh of Atzilut "remained with him, hovering over him" (Shaar HaGilgulim)	That the term and phenomenon are known in the Ari's writings	That the Epistle means him specifically
Parallel to the idea	Enoch: "while he is still righteous, I shall remove him" (Midrash); "removed him and caused him to die before his time" (Rashi); "merited to receive even as far as the aspect of neshamah of Atzilut" (Shaar HaGilgulim)	That there is a tradition of removal before sin, and that Enoch attained a neshamah of Atzilut	That withdrawal in the Epistle necessarily means death, or that Enoch is its subject

No list of "the early tzaddikim" intended by the Epistle was found in the sources examined, so their identity

remains open.[134] What is clear is the fundamental distinction: in the early tzaddikim, the soul vested in the body is from Atzilut, whereas “the rest of the generality of the souls of Israel, tzaddikim and beinonim” bear a soul from BYA in their bodies, and their root in Atzilut remains “in a concealed and encompassing aspect” over the soul vested in the body.[137]

[134] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–927, in the discussion “Adam, Enoch and the Early Righteous,” and pp. 926–928, in the resolution “The Qualification Is Part of the Explanation.” For the distinction between the departure of the entire soul and the departure of an addition or an aspect, and for models of ibur that do not prove the mechanism in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 921–922 and 924–926. On Adam as a system of roots, on “head” and “heel” not being a map of nefesh, ruach and neshamah, and on Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see ibid., pp. 955–956 and 961–964. For the Chassidic sources in which the expression “the early righteous” occurs, and in which no closed list of names was found, see ibid., pp. 1014–1017.

[137] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, “עוד ביאור הדברים ע”פ יונתי בחגוי הסלע וגו”: “The souls drawn from the union of ZON of Atzilut mean that the soul is drawn from ayin to yesh, from Atzilut to become actual Beriah. But a soul of Atzilut means actual Divinity, the aspect of Atzilut as it actually is in Atzilut, far, far above creation yesh me-ayin; only they are from the vessels of Atzilut… Of the souls drawn from the vessels, the soul is like a single drop in relation to the actual vessels, and nevertheless it is an aspect of Divinity.” Later: “If so, one must understand what it means that specifically only the early righteous are souls of Atzilut, unlike all the other souls, which are of BYA, etc. The matter is that the souls of the early righteous mean that the soul actually vested in their body is actual Atzilut, like the soul of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who had a soul of Atzilut actually vested in his body, actually below; as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘Ihu vechayohi,’ that even after the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of Atzilut descended into this world to the early righteous, it is possible that their nature did not change to become a thing separate from Divinity, etc.; see there. By contrast, the generality of other souls of Israel, righteous and intermediate, etc., called souls of BYA, means that although the root of all souls is in Atzilut, this aspect of the soul’s root from Atzilut is nevertheless not vested and does not shine within the body at all. Rather, the light remains in the state of Atzilut, solely concealed and encompassing the soul vested in the body; the soul drawn down and vested in the body is only a nefesh, ruach or neshamah of BYA, and not of Atzilut at all, and is therefore called only nefesh, ruach and neshamah of BYA” (Sefaria). The quotation from the Epistle there is in the plural, “שלא נשתנו מהותן” [their nature did not change]. In the Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya (“References, Glosses and Brief Notes”), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48], the words “It is possible that… not” are annotated: “Mentioned in Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 19c” (file on chabad.org). On the status of the example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the distinction between it and identifying those meant in the Epistle’s parentheses, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 964–965 and 968–971; on the distinction between souls born from the union of ZON and “souls of Atzilut itself,” see ibid., pp. 976–977.

Root, Spark, and a Particular Person

The question "Who are the early tzaddikim?" leads to a broader question. We saw that "the root of all souls is from Atzilut," yet a level of Atzilut is vested in the body itself and shines within it only in a special case, such as the early tzaddikim. What, then, is the relationship between a soul's root and the person in whom it is found? The discussion of Adam requires us to address this, because in the Ari's writings Adam is not only one individual. "All the neshamot, ruchot, and nefashot in all created beings in this world are all included in and suspended from Adam."[138] "Neshamot, ruchot, and nefashot" here are the soul levels of all human beings, included in him as their root. The subject is not a single soul before descent, nor the nefesh, ruach, and

[138] Shaar HaGilgulim, introductions 31–32: the roots of souls and the system included in Adam. These parallels do not explicitly identify the Epistle's "early righteous." Introduction 31: "Know that all the neshamot, ruchot and nefashot in all created beings in this world are included and suspended in Adam"; "Know that Adam's nefesh comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews, totaling 613"; each limb and sinew "has one complete partzuf," and divides into "sparks of souls," up to "600,000"; "King Hezekiah is attached to the head of this partzuf, whereas Rabbi Akiva, Akavya ben Mahalalel and others are attached to the heel of this partzuf" (Sefaria). Introduction 32: "Before Adam sinned, he had nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet and Binah of Atzilut. It has also been explained that all souls were then included in Adam, except the entirely new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all"; "His nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Atzilut, mentioned in the Zohar in Parashat Kedoshim by the name zihara ilaah, did not fall into the kelipot, G-d forbid. Rather, the ruach and neshamah aspects departed from him when he sinned and flew upward. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually depart. It has already been explained in the preceding discourses that Enoch, after attaining his nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah, merited also to receive up to the neshamah aspect of Atzilut that had departed from Adam when he sinned"; "Elisha is from the root of Enoch, called Metatron, which is from the neshamah of Atzilut called Adam's zihara ilaah"; and concerning a soul added to a person through the mystery of ibur: "Then that nefesh of Nadav and Avihu too, which had entered him through the mystery of ibur, departed from him and went away" (Sefaria).

neshamah of Atzilut that were vested in Adam himself before the sin. These are two different pictures: the inclusion of all souls within him as a root, and the levels vested in him as an individual person.

How are souls included within Adam? Shaar HaGilgulim describes a system, not a single mass. Adam's nefesh "comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews," 613 roots. Each such root is "one complete partzuf," divided into sparks, "sparks of souls," and sometimes, "through damage," becomes divided into as many as six hundred thousand. Within a single root there is a "head" and a "heel": King Hezekiah "is attached to the head of this partzuf," and Rabbi Akiva and Akavya ben Mahalalel "are attached to the heel of this partzuf." The following introduction also says that not all souls were included in Adam: "except the truly new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all."[138]

[138]Shaar HaGilgulim, introductions 31–32: the roots of souls and the system included in Adam. These parallels do not explicitly identify the Epistle's "early righteous." Introduction 31: "Know that all the neshamot, ruchot and nefashot in all created beings in this world are included and suspended in Adam"; "Know that Adam's nefesh comprises 248 limbs and 365 sinews, totaling 613"; each limb and sinew "has one complete partzuf," and divides into "sparks of souls," up to "600,000"; "King Hezekiah is attached to the head of this partzuf, whereas Rabbi Akiva, Akavya ben Mahalalel and others are attached to the heel of this partzuf" (Sefaria). Introduction 32: "Before Adam sinned, he had nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Yetzirah, Asiyah and Beriah, and above them nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Malchut, Tiferet and Binah of Atzilut. It has also been explained that all souls were then included in Adam, except the entirely new souls, which Adam did not attain and which were not included at all"; "His nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Atzilut, mentioned in the Zohar in Parashat Kedoshim by the name zihara ilaah, did not fall into the kelipot, G-d forbid. Rather, the ruach and neshamah aspects departed from him when he sinned and flew upward. The nefesh of Atzilut remained with him, hovering over him, but did not actually depart. It has already been explained in the preceding discourses that Enoch, after attaining his nefesh, ruach and neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah, merited also to receive up to the neshamah aspect of Atzilut that had departed from Adam when he sinned"; "Elisha is from the

Several distinctions emerge from this description, and we shall keep them separate:

- **Root.** The soul's place in the overall system: in which "limb" of Adam it is attached, and in which partzuf.
- **Spark.** A particular portion within the root. One root contains many sparks, and they are not identical.
- **A particular person.** A spark vested in a body at a particular time, with that person's life and Divine service.
- **The soul's present state.** This too is not determined by the root alone. Shaar HaGilgulim explains that a soul rooted in Atzilut can descend "through damage" as far as the world of Asiyah and emerge from there into this world; and "according to his deeds, he has the ability to be rectified and ascend as far as Atzilut."[145]

Tanya, Chapter 2, describes the same system from another angle. There are "myriads of different levels among souls, one higher than another without end," yet "the root of every nefesh, ruach, and neshamah,

root of Enoch, called Metatron, which is from the neshamah of Atzilut called Adam's zihara ilaah"; and concerning a soul added to a person through the mystery of ibur: "Then that nefesh of Nadav and Avihu too, which had entered him through the mystery of ibur, departed from him and went away" (Sefaria).

[145] Shaar HaGilgulim, introduction 19: "The soul that is from above but descended below because of the blemish, as stated—for example, if it is from the world of Atzilut and through the blemish descended as far as the world of Asiyah, and emerged from there to enter this world in a human body—has the ability, according to its deeds, to be rectified and ascend as far as Atzilut"; and concerning souls generally: "It can ascend from level to level according to its deeds, as far as its actual root" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 997–998.

from the highest of all levels to the lowest of all grades … is drawn from the supernal brain, which is supernal Chochmah, as it were."[141] A shared root does not cancel the differences, and the differences do not sever the connection to the shared root.

We can think of a tree: a fresh leaf and a withered leaf draw from the same root, yet their conditions differ. Similarly, a common root of souls does not indicate the condition of each. In a soul, unlike a leaf, that condition also depends on the person's deeds. A lofty root alone therefore does not tell us what shines in the soul now, or who the Epistle's "early tzaddikim" are.

These distinctions require a twofold caution. First, "head" and "heel" in Shaar HaGilgulim are positions within the structure of a root; in Tanya they are a comparison between generations. They describe relationships of above and below, so they should not be made into a map of physical limbs; nor should nefesh automatically be matched to the heel, ruach to the body, and neshamah to the head. Every such correspondence requires a source.[134] Second, the

[141]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 2: "Although there are myriads of kinds of different levels among souls, one higher than another without end, such as the great superiority of the souls of the Patriarchs and Moses our teacher, peace be upon them, over the souls of these generations of ours, the heels of Mashiach, which are literally like heels in relation to the brain and head… nevertheless, the root of all nefesh, ruach and neshamah, from the highest of all levels to the lowest of all levels, vested in the bodies of the unlearned and the most light-minded, is drawn from the supernal mind, which is supernal Chochmah, as it were" (Sefaria). On the distinction between the axis of root and level in this chapter and the souls' position after their descent, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 961–962.

[134]See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 924–927, in the discussion "Adam, Enoch and the Early Righteous," and pp. 926–928, in the resolution "The Qualification Is Part of the Explanation." For

inclusion of souls in Adam is an inclusion at the level of the root. Adam includes them as a root, apart from "the truly new souls," and each remains the soul of a particular person; their inclusion does not turn all the souls of the generations into one personal soul.

What does all this contribute to the parentheses? It explains how levels of Atzilut can be vested in one person's body but not another's, even though both are attached to Adam and rooted in Atzilut: the root is shared, but the question of what is vested in the body is determined on another plane, that of the spark, the person, and the person's state. This is what the distinctions provide, and also their limit. They illuminate the possibility the Epistle discusses, without saying who the tzaddikim in question are.

An Exception That Does Not Become the Rule

The Epistle allows room for special levels of tzaddikim. Here we must keep a balance on both sides. The exception is real, so it must not be reduced until nothing remains of it. And it is an exception, so it must not be expanded until it cancels the general order. The way to preserve this balance is to attend to the words defining scope: of whom the sentence is said ("to the

the distinction between the departure of the entire soul and the departure of an addition or an aspect, and for models of ibur that do not prove the mechanism in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 921–922 and 924–926. On Adam as a system of roots, on "head" and "heel" not being a map of nefesh, ruach and neshamah, and on Enoch as a parallel rather than an identification, see ibid., pp. 955–956 and 961–964. For the Chassidic sources in which the expression "the early righteous" occurs, and in which no closed list of names was found, see ibid., pp. 1014–1017.

early tzaddikim"), in what state ("after they descended"), and how far the stature it describes extends ("it is possible that their nature did not change"). There is also a condition: the level remains only as long as the person's will does not turn toward sin. Even the highest level is thus presented as connected with human will.

The exception also illuminates the rule. Through it, we see the ordinary order more sharply: the soul's descent into the world of Beriah is a coming into being "from ayin to yesh," and the root in Atzilut remains above the soul vested in the body. It also reveals what determines the difference between the two states. If descent alone were decisive, no exception could exist, for the early tzaddikim too descended to this world. On this possibility, therefore, the deciding factor is the soul's relationship to its source, not the place to which it descended.

Sometimes the reader wants a definite answer from the commentary: precisely who were the early tzaddikim? Which soul is meant? The Epistle does not give such an answer, but even a proposal that remains tentative teaches much: that a soul may preserve a special connection to its source in descending, and that we should not assume that every descent changes every aspect in the same way. The names found in other books can be retained as aids to understanding, each

according to its weight, rather than as a certain key to the author's intention.

"And It Is Reasonable to Say That … Too": From Souls to "Worlds"

The discussion now moves from souls to an entirely different kind of existence. The second part of the parentheses opens with "and it is reasonable to say that … too." The word שגם, "that … too," connects it to the first part: as there, here too something appears on its face to be a separate yesh, and the Epistle proposes that it is not. In the first part, the misleading appearance arose from descent; here it arises from the name. The Zohar describes "almin," worlds, in immense numbers, situated within the skull of Arich Anpin and of Ze'ir Anpin. A reader hearing "worlds" will immediately think of created existences, like the worlds we know, or at least like the palaces studied in the previous chapter. The Epistle stops this conclusion.

"And it is reasonable to say" marks the understanding the Alter Rebbe proposes for the Zohar's words, not an assertion quoted from the Zohar itself.[135] Before reading the words themselves, let us briefly recall two terms the sentence assumes are known. A "partzuf," as we saw at the opening of the chapter, is a complete

[135] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 926–927, in the discussion "Thousands and Myriads of Worlds: Source, Number and Relation." On the distinction between the two passages in the Idrot, the Epistle's summarizing formulation and the question of the dikna, see ibid., pp. 962–964, in the discussion "A Precise Critique of the Worlds in the Gulgalta," and pp. 977–979.

configuration of sefirot; “gulgalta” is the skull, as the name of an aspect within a partzuf. We shall expand on both in the following sections.

W06-04
Hebrew-source words
26–35

and it is reasonable to say that the thousands and myriads of worlds situated within the skull of Arich Anpin and Zeir Anpin, too,

“וקרוב לומר — And it is reasonable to say”: a plausible proposal, not an explicit tradition. “שגם — That … too”: connects the new matter to the preceding one. “The thousands and myriads”: “a thousand” and “a myriad,” ten thousand, express immense multiplicity here, not an exact count; the definite article alludes to a multiplicity known from elsewhere, from the Zohar. “עלמין — Almin”: Aramaic for worlds. “דיתבא — Situated”: literally, “that sit,” that dwell; another wording has דיתבין, as will be explained. “בגולגלתא — Within the skull.” “דא”א וז”א — Of Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin”: names of a spiritual structure, not a description of bodily organs.

Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin: Names of “Partzufim”

To understand the sentence, we need to know at least what these names signify. In the Ari’s writings, the sefirot are not merely a list of ten attributes. A sefirah or group of sefirot is also described as a “partzuf,” a

face: a complete configuration with “head” and “body,” inward and outward dimensions, hidden and revealed powers. “Arich Anpin” means “long countenance” in Aramaic, and “Ze’ir Anpin,” “small countenance.” Concerning the length of the countenance, the Idra Rabba says: “וההוא אתקרי ארך אפים. והאי עתיקא דעתיקין אתקרי אריכא דאנפין. וההוא דלבר אתקרי זעיר אנפין.”[146] That is: “And that is called long-suffering. This Ancient of Ancients is called the Long Countenance. And that which is outside is called the Small Countenance.” What the Idra here calls “Atika de-Atikin” is called “Aricha de-Anpin,” and “that which is outside” is called “Ze’ir Anpin.”

Arich Anpin is the partzuf of Keter, the highest level in Atzilut. Likkutei Torah calls its skull “the outward dimension of Keter,” and its hidden brain, “mocha

[146] Zohar, vol. III, 128b and 292b: levels and worlds in the contexts of Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin; see also Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, “וארשתיך לי.” 128b (Idra Rabba): “The whiteness of the skull of His head extends through four hundred thousand worlds. From the radiance of this whiteness the righteous inherit four hundred worlds in the World to Come”; “In the skull dwell thirteen thousand myriads of worlds, which lift their feet upon it and rest upon it”; “That is called Erech Appayim. This Ancient of Ancients is called Arich Anpin, and the one outside is called Ze’ir Anpin”; “From this skull one white side extends to the skull of Ze’ir Anpin to rectify its head”; “This membrane covers the brain, which is concealed Chochmah” (Wikisource). 292b (Idra Zuta): “Into this skull of Ze’ir Anpin dew drips from the white head”; “Nine thousand myriads of worlds move and rest upon this skull” (Wikisource). Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, “וארשתיך לי לעולם”: “Even their source and root in the world of Atzilut, where He and His vessels are one, which are Divinity and the blessed Ein Sof light, divested of every category, measure and limit, nevertheless, since they are a source for the worlds drawn from them below, there are above potentially so many powers and extensions from which the actual division into worlds will come into being. (In this manner one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘Ihu vechayohi’: ‘It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the skull, etc., are not actual worlds,’ etc. The meaning is that they too are letters which, when drawn down below, will actually bring into being that many worlds.) This is like the letters of speech while they are still potential within one’s wisdom” (Sefaria). On the two passages in the Idrot and the interpretation of the worlds as letters, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 958–959 and 962–964; on the reading of both pages of the Idrot, see ibid., pp. 968–969.

stimaah," "the inward dimension of Keter."[147] Ze'ir Anpin is the partzuf of the six attributes, from Chesed through Yesod: "The vav is the six attributes of ZA."[147] So too later in the Epistle, where "the Torah is in ZA, the vav of the Name Havayah," the letter whose numerical value is six. We already met Ze'ir Anpin in the previous chapter as one of the two participants in the union of "ZON," Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva.

[147]Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, in the discourse opening "להבין ענין הטעם למה שהאתדל"ע הבאה אחר האתעדל"ת": "Nevertheless, the gulgalta of Arich Anpin is the outer dimension of Keter. By the analogy of 'from my flesh I shall perceive,' the skull is only bone and an outer dimension, whereas the mochin within the skull are inward relative to the skull"; "But in the skull's bone there is no revelation of vitality in this manner at all"; "So it is above: the gulgalta of Arich Anpin is the outer dimension of Keter, whereas the mochin are the inner dimension, and mocha setimaah is the inner dimension of Keter"; "Nevertheless, it encompasses and surrounds the mochin, and its root must be higher than the mochin"; "The outer dimension of the encompassing aspect is the skull" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bamidbar, "ביאור על בשעה שהקדימו": "The root of Torah is in mocha setimaah, from which is the root of the hairs of the gulgalta, which are the laws of the Torah (see Etz Chaim, Gate of Arich Anpin, chapter 5). The gulgalta is the outer dimension of Keter, and from there the mitzvot are drawn, from the whiteness between the hairs" (Sefaria). On Ze'ir Anpin: Likkutei Torah, Parashat Naso, discourse beginning "ה' יחתו מריבו": "For the vav is the six attributes of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria); later in the Epistle itself: "The Torah is in Ze'ir Anpin, the vav of the name Havayah." On the gulgalta in its straightforward sense in the Epistle, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 1071–1074.

[147]Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, in the discourse opening "להבין ענין הטעם למה שהאתדל"ע הבאה אחר האתעדל"ת": "Nevertheless, the gulgalta of Arich Anpin is the outer dimension of Keter. By the analogy of 'from my flesh I shall perceive,' the skull is only bone and an outer dimension, whereas the mochin within the skull are inward relative to the skull"; "But in the skull's bone there is no revelation of vitality in this manner at all"; "So it is above: the gulgalta of Arich Anpin is the outer dimension of Keter, whereas the mochin are the inner dimension, and mocha setimaah is the inner dimension of Keter"; "Nevertheless, it encompasses and surrounds the mochin, and its root must be higher than the mochin"; "The outer dimension of the encompassing aspect is the skull" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bamidbar, "ביאור על בשעה שהקדימו": "The root of Torah is in mocha setimaah, from which is the root of the hairs of the gulgalta, which are the laws of the Torah (see Etz Chaim, Gate of Arich Anpin, chapter 5). The gulgalta is the outer dimension of Keter, and from there the mitzvot are drawn, from the whiteness between the hairs" (Sefaria). On Ze'ir Anpin: Likkutei Torah, Parashat Naso, discourse beginning "ה' יחתו מריבו": "For the vav is the six attributes of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria); later in the Epistle itself: "The Torah is in Ze'ir Anpin, the vav of the name Havayah." On the gulgalta in its straightforward sense in the Epistle, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 1071–1074.

The names “face,” “head,” “skull,” and “beard” are taken from the human body and can mislead. Likkutei Torah says this explicitly when explaining a matter of this kind: “Although it is impossible to explain this matter in detail so that it is well understood, for He has no bodily form, etc., G-d forbid, nevertheless, since the Torah has spoken this way by analogy and figure of speech, we are permitted to speak of them, and to understand the analogy and figure of speech in the smallest measure.”[148] The names are analogies, and what they teach is relationships: what is inward and what outward, what encompasses and what is revealed, what is a source and what is drawn down. “Skull” and “beard” too must be read this way, like “hand” or “mouth” in the language of levels: as names for a relationship between aspects. Thus the “worlds” situated in the skull are not small spaces inside a head, but aspects whose position is determined in relation to another level.

The Skull: “The Outward Dimension of Keter”

“Gulgalta” means skull. Likkutei Torah explains the analogy as follows. In a human being, “the skull is only bone and an outward aspect, while the brains within the skull are an inward aspect in relation to the skull”;

[148] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, discourse beginning “צאינה וראינה בנות ציון”: “Although it is impossible to explain this matter in detail so as to understand it thoroughly, for He has no bodily likeness, etc., G-d forbid, nevertheless, since the Torah has spoken thus by way of analogy and figurative expression, we have permission to speak of them, and to understand a mere edge of the analogy and figurative expression” (Sefaria).

the skull itself “has no revelation of vitality” like the brain. Nevertheless, “it encompasses and surrounds the brains, and its root must necessarily be higher than the aspect of the brains.” The skull has two sides. On one hand it is merely outward; intellect is not revealed in it. On the other, it encompasses the brain, and its root is higher, because it is “the outward dimension of the encompassing light.” In the analogue: “The skull of Arich Anpin is the aspect of the outward dimension of Keter, but the mochin are an inward aspect, and mocha stimaah is the inward dimension of Keter.”[147] The Idra Rabba too describes a membrane inside the skull: “והאי קרומא אתחפייא על מוחא דאיהי חכמתא סתימאה,” the membrane covers the brain, which is hidden wisdom.[146]

[147]Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, in the discourse opening “להבין ענין הטעם למה שהאתדל”ע הבאה אחר האתעדל”ת”: “Nevertheless, the gulgalta of Arich Anpin is the outer dimension of Keter. By the analogy of ‘from my flesh I shall perceive,’ the skull is only bone and an outer dimension, whereas the mochin within the skull are inward relative to the skull”; “But in the skull’s bone there is no revelation of vitality in this manner at all”; “So it is above: the gulgalta of Arich Anpin is the outer dimension of Keter, whereas the mochin are the inner dimension, and mocha setimaah is the inner dimension of Keter”; “Nevertheless, it encompasses and surrounds the mochin, and its root must be higher than the mochin”; “The outer dimension of the encompassing aspect is the skull” (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bamidbar, “ביאור על בשעה שהקדימו”: “The root of Torah is in mocha setimaah, from which is the root of the hairs of the gulgalta, which are the laws of the Torah (see Etz Chaim, Gate of Arich Anpin, chapter 5). The gulgalta is the outer dimension of Keter, and from there the mitzvot are drawn, from the whiteness between the hairs” (Sefaria). On Ze’ir Anpin: Likkutei Torah, Parashat Naso, discourse beginning “ה’ יחתו מריבו”: “For the vav is the six attributes of Ze’ir Anpin” (Sefaria); later in the Epistle itself: “The Torah is in Ze’ir Anpin, the vav of the name Havayah.” On the gulgalta in its straightforward sense in the Epistle, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 1071–1074.

[146]Zohar, vol. III, 128b and 292b: levels and worlds in the contexts of Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin; see also Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, “וארשתיך לי.” 128b (Idra Rabba): “The whiteness of the skull of His head extends through four hundred thousand worlds. From the radiance of this whiteness the righteous inherit four hundred worlds in the World to Come”; “In the skull dwell thirteen thousand myriads of worlds, which lift their feet upon it and rest upon it”; “That is called Erech Appayim. This Ancient of Ancients is called Arich Anpin, and the one outside is called Ze’ir Anpin”; “From this skull one white side extends to the skull of Ze’ir Anpin to rectify its head”; “This membrane

What does this mean for our discussion? The Zohar describes a multiplicity of "worlds" situated specifically in the skull; in Arich Anpin this is the outward dimension of Keter, a level at which intellect is not yet revealed. If even intellect is not revealed at this level, it is difficult to interpret its "worlds" as worlds like those we know, or even like the palaces. The Tzemach Tzedek writes of these aspects that precisely because they did not descend through hishtalshelut, "they are infinitely more exalted" than those that descended level after level.[149] The skull of Arich Anpin will also

covers the brain, which is concealed Chochmah" (Wikisource). 292b (Idra Zuta): "Into this skull of Ze'ir Anpin dew drips from the white head"; "Nine thousand myriads of worlds move and rest upon this skull" (Wikisource). Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "וארשתיך לי לעולם": "Even their source and root in the world of Atzilut, where He and His vessels are one, which are Divinity and the blessed Ein Sof light, divested of every category, measure and limit, nevertheless, since they are a source for the worlds drawn from them below, there are above potentially so many powers and extensions from which the actual division into worlds will come into being. (In this manner one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi': 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the skull, etc., are not actual worlds,' etc. The meaning is that they too are letters which, when drawn down below, will actually bring into being that many worlds.) This is like the letters of speech while they are still potential within one's wisdom" (Sefaria). On the two passages in the Idrot and the interpretation of the worlds as letters, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 958–959 and 962–964; on the reading of both pages of the Idrot, see ibid., pp. 968–969.

[149]Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shemot, Parashat Va'era, p. קצט [199]: "On the basis of these two premises one can understand the multitude of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba... and several other numbers: they do not mean actual worlds, but are exceedingly spiritual supernal letters, as explained in the first premise, that there are many aspects of letters, one higher than another. They are called worlds because, if they were to descend and be drawn down through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thirteen thousand worlds would come into being from them"; "If so, are these letters dwelling in the gulgalta diminished in worth because they have not descended through hishtalshelut? On the contrary, they are infinitely more exalted than the letters that descended level after level. Therefore these letters dwelling in the gulgalta are called actual worlds, for they are the very power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds, with a vitality immeasurably more exalted and wondrous than the vitality vested in the worlds of BYA, etc. (Through this one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' as follows: 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin are not actual worlds like the heichalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh,' etc.; end of quotation. The meaning is that a created being brought into being from the letters is a yesh and a separate thing,

appear later in the Epistle: "Although above, in Arich Anpin, the mitzvot are in the skull." There we shall study its meaning in detail.

The Beard: A Path of Drawing Down

"Dikna" means beard. The Idrot describe "tikkunei dikna," arrangements of the hairs of the beard, and the Ari's writings explain them as paths of drawing down: the beard emerges from the head and descends from it. Shaar HaKavanot says that "the thirteen configurations of the beard are the aspect of the ten sefirot below the place of the forehead down to the place of the throat," and that they "emerge and draw sustenance from the ten upper sefirot in the head."[150] The beard is an aspect

whereas the letters themselves are Divinity, only they are called worlds relative to the gulgalta. This means that they are letters that have already been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the fire above that is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the gulgalta, etc. Its statement there that they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin means that the principal coming into being of yesh is from the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, only it is through these letters, etc. This is how it must be understood if we are to say that his words in the aforementioned Iggeret HaKodesh and those in 'ועמדו רגליו' have the same intention. However, it may also be said that there in Iggeret HaKodesh he explains it differently, as being like souls of Atzilut; see there. Nevertheless, both passages agree that they are not a yesh and a separate thing as are the worlds of BYA)" (HebrewBooks, book 31630, file p. 204). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 996–997 and 1047–1049, documents that Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on this Epistle, both in Hebrew and in English translation, also cites this page; for the page's location and wording, see ibid., pp. 1009–1010, 1045–1047 and 1053–1055.

[150] Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei Vayaavor, discourse 5: "Discourse 5: explaining the names of the ten sefirot and their division among the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna"; "The thirteen tikkunim of the dikna are the ten sefirot situated below the forehead down to the throat; these ten sefirot emerge and draw sustenance from the upper ten sefirot in the head"; "Ze'ir Anpin has only nine tikkunim of the dikna. The matter, however, is that the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin shine into the nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin, so that there are thirteen radiances within them, although the tikkunim are only nine"; "Accordingly, these thirteen measures of mercy are not in the tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin, but in the thirteen upper tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin, whose radiance we bring down and draw below into the nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria). Likewise in Derushei Chazarat HaAmidah, discourse 5: "Therefore the tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin were thirteen, those of Ze'ir Anpin nine, and those of Nukva only six, as mentioned in the Idra Rabba and Idra Zuta," in a passage the writer

through which what is in the head is drawn outward and downward. Likkutei Torah states that Torah and mitzvot "are drawn from the beard of Arich Anpin and from the beard of Ze'ir Anpin."[150]

The sources distinguish between the beard of Arich Anpin and that of Ze'ir Anpin. Arich Anpin has thirteen configurations, corresponding to the thirteen attributes of mercy, "The L-rd, the L-rd, a compassionate and gracious G-d." Ze'ir Anpin has nine. Thus Shaar HaKavanot states: "In ZA there are

heard from one of the colleagues, about which he was "somewhat uncertain whether it contains an error" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Parashat Naso, discourse beginning "ה' יחתו מריבו," in parentheses: "There is a difference: in Parashat Ki Tissa thirteen attributes of mercy are mentioned, meaning that the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna are drawn from Arich Anpin to Ze'ir Anpin, while in Parashat Shelach nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin are mentioned" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור הדברים ע"פ שחורה אני ונאוה": " 'You shall rise before the gray-haired': this is the dikna of Arich Anpin. 'And honor the face of the elder': this is the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The intention concerns the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot, which are drawn from the dikna of Arich Anpin and the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 962–964 and 989–990.

[150]Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei Vayaavor, discourse 5: "Discourse 5: explaining the names of the ten sefirot and their division among the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna"; "The thirteen tikkunim of the dikna are the ten sefirot situated below the forehead down to the throat; these ten sefirot emerge and draw sustenance from the upper ten sefirot in the head"; "Ze'ir Anpin has only nine tikkunim of the dikna. The matter, however, is that the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin shine into the nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin, so that there are thirteen radiances within them, although the tikkunim are only nine"; "Accordingly, these thirteen measures of mercy are not in the tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin, but in the thirteen upper tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin, whose radiance we bring down and draw below into the nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria). Likewise in Derushei Chazarat HaAmidah, discourse 5: "Therefore the tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin were thirteen, those of Ze'ir Anpin nine, and those of Nukva only six, as mentioned in the Idra Rabba and Idra Zuta," in a passage the writer heard from one of the colleagues, about which he was "somewhat uncertain whether it contains an error" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Parashat Naso, discourse beginning "ה' יחתו מריבו," in parentheses: "There is a difference: in Parashat Ki Tissa thirteen attributes of mercy are mentioned, meaning that the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna are drawn from Arich Anpin to Ze'ir Anpin, while in Parashat Shelach nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin are mentioned" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור הדברים ע"פ שחורה אני ונאוה": " 'You shall rise before the gray-haired': this is the dikna of Arich Anpin. 'And honor the face of the elder': this is the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The intention concerns the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot, which are drawn from the dikna of Arich Anpin and the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 962–964 and 989–990.

only the nine configurations of the beard; however, the matter is that the thirteen configurations of the beard of Arich Anpin illuminate the nine configurations of the beard of ZA, so that they contain thirteen radiances, while the configurations are only nine." Likkutei Torah likewise says that "the thirteen attributes of mercy" are "the thirteen configurations of the beard," drawn "from Arich Anpin to ZA," as distinct from "the nine configurations of the beard of ZA."[150] The two partzufim are connected: the beard of Ze'ir Anpin receives a radiance from the beard of Arich Anpin.

The Epistle first mentions "the skull of Arich Anpin and ZA," while at the end of the parentheses it says "the skull and beard," without specifying whose beard. Whether Arich Anpin, Ze'ir Anpin, or both are meant

[150] Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei Vayaavor, discourse 5: "Discourse 5: explaining the names of the ten sefirot and their division among the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna"; "The thirteen tikkunim of the dikna are the ten sefirot situated below the forehead down to the throat; these ten sefirot emerge and draw sustenance from the upper ten sefirot in the head"; "Ze'ir Anpin has only nine tikkunim of the dikna. The matter, however, is that the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin shine into the nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin, so that there are thirteen radiances within them, although the tikkunim are only nine"; "Accordingly, these thirteen measures of mercy are not in the tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin, but in the thirteen upper tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin, whose radiance we bring down and draw below into the nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria). Likewise in Derushei Chazarat HaAmidah, discourse 5: "Therefore the tikkunim of the dikna of Arich Anpin were thirteen, those of Ze'ir Anpin nine, and those of Nukva only six, as mentioned in the Idra Rabba and Idra Zuta," in a passage the writer heard from one of the colleagues, about which he was "somewhat uncertain whether it contains an error" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Parashat Naso, discourse beginning "ה' יחתו מריבו," in parentheses: "There is a difference: in Parashat Ki Tissa thirteen attributes of mercy are mentioned, meaning that the thirteen tikkunim of the dikna are drawn from Arich Anpin to Ze'ir Anpin, while in Parashat Shelach nine tikkunim of the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin are mentioned" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור הדברים ע"פ שחורה אני ונאוה": " 'You shall rise before the gray-haired': this is the dikna of Arich Anpin. 'And honor the face of the elder': this is the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin"; "The intention concerns the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot, which are drawn from the dikna of Arich Anpin and the dikna of Ze'ir Anpin" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 962–964 and 989–990.

remains open; the main explanation does not depend on deciding it.[135]

"Thousands and Myriads": Where Does the Number Come From?

The expression "thousands and myriads of worlds" leads to the Idrot in the Zohar. In the Idra Rabba's description of the head of Arich Anpin, it says: "בגולגלתא יתבין תליסר אלפי רבוא עלמין דנטלין עלוי רגלין וסמכין עלוי," in the skull sit thirteen thousand myriads of worlds, which set their feet upon it and lean upon it. On the same folio: "ומהאי גולגלתא נפיק חד עיבר חיור לגולגלתא דזעיר אנפין לתקנא רישיה," from this skull a single white side issues toward the skull of Ze'ir Anpin, to configure his head. In the Idra Zuta's description of Ze'ir Anpin: "בהאי גולגלתא דזעיר אנפין," "in this skull of Ze'ir Anpin," followed by: "תשעה אלפין רבוא עלמין, נטלין וסמכין על האי גולגלתא," nine thousand myriads of worlds rest and lean upon this skull.[146] In the Rebbe's notes on Tanya, the

[135] See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 926–927, in the discussion "Thousands and Myriads of Worlds: Source, Number and Relation." On the distinction between the two passages in the Idrot, the Epistle's summarizing formulation and the question of the dikna, see ibid., pp. 962–964, in the discussion "A Precise Critique of the Worlds in the Gulgalta," and pp. 977–979.

[146] Zohar, vol. III, 128b and 292b: levels and worlds in the contexts of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin; see also Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "וארשתיך לי." 128b (Idra Rabba): "The whiteness of the skull of His head extends through four hundred thousand worlds. From the radiance of this whiteness the righteous inherit four hundred worlds in the World to Come"; "In the skull dwell thirteen thousand myriads of worlds, which lift their feet upon it and rest upon it"; "That is called Erech Appayim. This Ancient of Ancients is called Arich Anpin, and the one outside is called Ze'ir Anpin"; "From this skull one white side extends to the skull of Ze'ir Anpin to rectify its head"; "This membrane covers the brain, which is concealed Chochmah" (Wikisource). 292b (Idra Zuta): "Into this skull of Ze'ir Anpin dew drips from the white head"; "Nine thousand myriads of worlds move and rest upon this skull" (Wikisource). Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "וארשתיך לי לעולם": "Even their source and root in the world of Atzilut, where He and His vessels are one, which are Divinity and the

words “and ZA” in our sentence are annotated “Zohar III, 128b,” that is, a reference to the Idra Rabba.[151]

What follows? First, the expression has a clear source in the Zohar, indeed two passages: thirteen thousand myriads in the skull of Arich Anpin, and nine thousand myriads in the skull of Ze’ir Anpin. Second, the Epistle does not copy the Zohar word for word. It says “thousands and myriads” without an exact number, joining the two partzufim in one sentence. This is the Alter Rebbe’s summary formulation, not a quotation.[135] The combination is understandable: already in the Zohar itself, the skull of Ze’ir Anpin receives from that of Arich Anpin. Third, the Zohar offers an image: the worlds “set … their feet and lean upon it,” resting upon and supported by the skull. We can hear dependence

blessed Ein Sof light, divested of every category, measure and limit, nevertheless, since they are a source for the worlds drawn from them below, there are above potentially so many powers and extensions from which the actual division into worlds will come into being. (In this manner one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘Ihu vechayohi’: ‘It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the skull, etc., are not actual worlds,’ etc. The meaning is that they too are letters which, when drawn down below, will actually bring into being that many worlds.) This is like the letters of speech while they are still potential within one’s wisdom” (Sefaria). On the two passages in the Idrot and the interpretation of the worlds as letters, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 958–959 and 962–964; on the reading of both pages of the Idrot, see ibid., pp. 968–969.

[151]The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya (“References, Glosses and Brief Notes”), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘דיתבא’: should read דיתבין,” with the editors’ note: “Likewise in the correction list”; and there: “ ‘And Ze’ir Anpin’: Zohar III, 128b” (file on chabad.org). The Kehot text on Sefaria reads דיתבין (Sefaria); the Wikisource text reads “עלמין דיתבא בגולגלתא דא”א וז”א.” The sentence as quoted in Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, “וארשתיך לי לעולם,” reads “עלמין דיתבין בגלגלתא”; in Or HaTorah, Shemot, p. קצט [199], “עלמין דיתבין בגולגלתא דא”א וז”א” [worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin]. On the Alter Rebbe’s summarizing formulation in contrast to the Zohar’s wording, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 962–964 and 977–979.

[135]See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 926–927, in the discussion “Thousands and Myriads of Worlds: Source, Number and Relation.” On the distinction between the two passages in the Idrot, the Epistle’s summarizing formulation and the question of the dikna, see ibid., pp. 962–964, in the discussion “A Precise Critique of the Worlds in the Gulgalta,” and pp. 977–979.

in this image: these "worlds" exist as supported by the level in which they are situated, not as an existence standing on its own.

One caution about numbers: a large number attracts the student toward connecting it with other large numbers, but each has its own context. The 288 sparks, רפ"ח ניצוצין, mentioned in the Ari's writings belong to the subject of the shattering of the vessels. "Four hundred thousand worlds," according to the same folio in the Idra, are the worlds through which the whiteness of the skull spreads. "Four hundred worlds" are the worlds the tzaddikim inherit in the World to Come.[146] The Epistle's "thousands and myriads" follow the passages in the Idrot we just examined, not these. Many numbers of "worlds" appear in the Idrot, in different contexts; the Tzemach Tzedek writes of "the

[146] Zohar, vol. III, 128b and 292b: levels and worlds in the contexts of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin; see also Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "וארשתיך לי." 128b (Idra Rabba): "The whiteness of the skull of His head extends through four hundred thousand worlds. From the radiance of this whiteness the righteous inherit four hundred worlds in the World to Come"; "In the skull dwell thirteen thousand myriads of worlds, which lift their feet upon it and rest upon it"; "That is called Erech Appayim. This Ancient of Ancients is called Arich Anpin, and the one outside is called Ze'ir Anpin"; "From this skull one white side extends to the skull of Ze'ir Anpin to rectify its head"; "This membrane covers the brain, which is concealed Chochmah" (Wikisource). 292b (Idra Zuta): "Into this skull of Ze'ir Anpin dew drips from the white head"; "Nine thousand myriads of worlds move and rest upon this skull" (Wikisource). Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "וארשתיך לי לעולם": "Even their source and root in the world of Atzilut, where He and His vessels are one, which are Divinity and the blessed Ein Sof light, divested of every category, measure and limit, nevertheless, since they are a source for the worlds drawn from them below, there are above potentially so many powers and extensions from which the actual division into worlds will come into being. (In this manner one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi': 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the skull, etc., are not actual worlds,' etc. The meaning is that they too are letters which, when drawn down below, will actually bring into being that many worlds.) This is like the letters of speech while they are still potential within one's wisdom" (Sefaria). On the two passages in the Idrot and the interpretation of the worlds as letters, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 958–959 and 962–964; on the reading of both pages of the Idrot, see ibid., pp. 968–969.

multiplicity of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba" and of "several further numbers that do not mean actual worlds."[149] The mere appearance of a large number is therefore no evidence of identity between two matters, and no calculations should be added here that the sources do not make. The important question here is these worlds' status, more than their number.

[149]Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shemot, Parashat Va'era, p. קצט [199]: "On the basis of these two premises one can understand the multitude of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba... and several other numbers: they do not mean actual worlds, but are exceedingly spiritual supernal letters, as explained in the first premise, that there are many aspects of letters, one higher than another. They are called worlds because, if they were to descend and be drawn down through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thirteen thousand worlds would come into being from them"; "If so, are these letters dwelling in the gulgalta diminished in worth because they have not descended through hishtalshelut? On the contrary, they are infinitely more exalted than the letters that descended level after level. Therefore these letters dwelling in the gulgalta are called actual worlds, for they are the very power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds, with a vitality immeasurably more exalted and wondrous than the vitality vested in the worlds of BYA, etc. (Through this one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' as follows: 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin are not actual worlds like the heichalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh,' etc.; end of quotation. The meaning is that a created being brought into being from the letters is a yesh and a separate thing, whereas the letters themselves are Divinity, only they are called worlds relative to the gulgalta. This means that they are letters that have already been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the fire above that is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the gulgalta, etc. Its statement there that they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin means that the principal coming into being of yesh is from the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, only it is through these letters, etc. This is how it must be understood if we are to say that his words in the aforementioned Iggeret HaKodesh and those in 'ועמדו רגליו' have the same intention. However, it may also be said that there in Iggeret HaKodesh he explains it differently, as being like souls of Atzilut; see there. Nevertheless, both passages agree that they are not a yesh and a separate thing as are the worlds of BYA)" (HebrewBooks, book 31630, file p. 204). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 996–997 and 1047–1049, documents that Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on this Epistle, both in Hebrew and in English translation, also cites this page; for the page's location and wording, see ibid., pp. 1009–1010, 1045–1047 and 1053–1055.

“דיתבא” or “דיתבין”?

This section concerns the textual form of the word. On a first reading, you may proceed to the next section and return here on a second reading.

The wording before us reads דיתבא. The Kehot edition on Sefaria, and quotations of the sentence in Likkutei Torah and Or HaTorah, read דיתבין. The Rebbe’s notes state: “דיתבא: should read דיתבין,” with an editors’ note: “So too in the list of corrections.”[151] יתבין is a plural form in Aramaic, matching עלמין, “worlds,” which is plural; the Zohar too has יתבין. We shall therefore read דיתבא as דיתבין, “that sit,” while leaving the singular wording quoted here as it stands.

W06-05
Hebrew-source words
36–43

are not actual worlds akin to the heikhalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh

“אינן — Are not”: negation. “Actual worlds”: worlds in the full sense. “Akin to the palaces of Atzilut”: defines the sense being denied, the sense of the palaces of Atzilut, which we learned in the preceding chapter were created from the vessels’ outward dimension and, together with the angels’ bodies, are “an aspect of yesh.” “And an aspect of yesh”: explains the point of

[151]The Rebbe’s Reshimot on Tanya (“References, Glosses and Brief Notes”), Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. מח [48]: “ ‘דיתבא’: should read דיתבין,” with the editors’ note: “Likewise in the correction list”; and there: “ ‘And Ze’ir Anpin’: Zohar III, 128b” (file on chabad.org). The Kehot text on Sefaria reads דיתבין (Sefaria); the Wikisource text reads “עלמין דיתבא בגולגלתא דא”א וז”א.” The sentence as quoted in Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, “וארשתיך לי לעולם,” reads “עלמין דיתבין בגלגלתא”; in Or HaTorah, Shemot, p. קצט [199], “עלמין דיתבין בגולגלתא דא”א וז”א” [worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin]. On the Alter Rebbe’s summarizing formulation in contrast to the Zohar’s wording, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 962–964 and 977–979.

comparison, the status of yesh. This does not deny every meaning of the word "worlds"; the end of the parentheses will clarify in what sense they are so called.

What Exactly Is Denied?

To understand the negation, let us recall what was said of the palaces. "From the outward dimension of the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, which are Divinity, were created the palaces of Atzilut, in which the aspect of the igulim of the ten sefirot becomes vested"; together with the angels' bodies they are "an aspect of yesh … which are not in a state of complete nullification like an effect in relation to its cause." Three properties characterize the palaces: they "were created"; they are an existence of "yesh"; and they lack the complete nullification of an effect to its cause.

The negation "are not actual worlds akin to the palaces … and an aspect of yesh" is directed at these properties, particularly "an aspect of yesh." To see its scope, let us check what remains intact afterward. Multiplicity remains: "thousands and myriads" remain thousands and myriads. Distinction and definition also remain, since without them it would be impossible to give them a name. Only the next step is denied: inferring from multiplicity and definition that we have separate created beings before us, like the palaces. A

multiplicity of names and numbers does not prove separate yeshut.[135]

These are the levels mentioned so far:

What	The Epistle's wording	Status
Vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut	"Which are Divinity"	Divinity, united with the light
Palaces and bodies of the angels of Atzilut	"Were created"; "which are an aspect of yesh"	Created yesh, even though in Atzilut
Angelic souls from the union of kisses, and human souls before descent	"Are not included in the category of yesh and an independently separate entity; rather, they are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction"	Not yesh; "a likeness of" Divinity
Nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut in the early tzaddikim, after descent	"It is possible that their nature did not change to become something separate from Divinity"	A possibility: they did not become separate
"The thousands and myriads of worlds" in the skull	"Are not actual worlds akin to the palaces … but are akin to the souls of the angels"	A plausible proposal: not yesh; akin to angelic souls

The last two rows are the content of the parentheses. Both join the third row, not the second: in status they stand alongside angelic souls, not the palaces. The table's "Status" column reminds us of something else: these two rows are stated in the language of "possible"

[135]See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 926–927, in the discussion "Thousands and Myriads of Worlds: Source, Number and Relation." On the distinction between the two passages in the Idrot, the Epistle's summarizing formulation and the question of the dikna, see ibid., pp. 962–964, in the discussion "A Precise Critique of the Worlds in the Gulgalta," and pp. 977–979.

and “reasonable to say,” so their standing in the table is that of a proposal.

W06-06
Hebrew-source words
44–50

but are akin to the souls of the angels that emerged from the union of neshikin

“אלא — But”: presents the positive alternative. “Akin to”: likeness, not identity; it does not say that the worlds are angelic souls. “The souls of the angels”: the souls, not the bodies. The bodies of the angels of Atzilut were counted with the palaces as “an aspect of yesh,” and their souls were excluded from this category in the preceding sentence. “That emerged from the union of neshikin”: repeats the preceding sentence word for word; “neshikin,” kisses, names a supernal spiritual union, “a supernal spiritual union called kisses,” in the wording of Etz Chaim.

What Does the Comparison to Angelic Souls Teach?

The positive comparison, “but are akin to the souls of the angels that emerged from the union of kisses,” returns us to the table’s third row. What does it add to the negation?

First, status. Of these angelic souls it has already been said that they “are not included in the category of yesh and an independently separate entity; rather, they are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction.” With the caution of “akin to,” the

comparison transfers this status to the worlds in the skull. This is the heart of the matter: what is called "worlds" stands, in status, on the side of the souls rather than the palaces.

Second, multiplicity without separation. The angels are many, and each is a defined aspect with its own name and function. Nevertheless, their souls are said not to be a separate yesh. The argument thus proceeds in two steps: if multiplicity and definition do not constitute a separate yesh in angelic souls, there is no difficulty in saying the same of "thousands and myriads" of numerous, defined aspects. This is our proposal for understanding the point of likeness; the Epistle itself does not specify what it is.

Third, a spiritual source without descent into a body. Etz Chaim says of the difference between angelic and human souls: "Angelic souls come only from a supernal spiritual union called kisses, and therefore have no need to become vested in a body; human souls, however, come from the lower bodily union and therefore need to become vested in a body in this world."[152] Angelic souls exemplify a supernal spiritual product that does not descend into a body.

[152] Etz Chaim, Gate 39, discourse 4: "Know that from all the ten unions mentioned above, which are three lower ones and seven spiritual ones of kisses, two aspects emerge: the souls of the lower beings and the souls of the angels"; "The explanation accords with the foregoing, for the souls of angels come only from the upper spiritual union called kisses, and therefore need not vest themselves in a body. But human souls come from the lower bodily union, and therefore must vest themselves in a body in this world"; "Know that there are human souls that also come from the union of kisses, as stated, except that for angels' souls the union of kisses alone sufficed, and they did not need to emerge again through a lower bodily union; whereas the souls of the lower

Here lies the limit of the example. We cannot learn from it that the union of kisses belongs to angels alone. The same passage in Etz Chaim explicitly states: "Know that there are souls of human beings that also come from the aspect of the union of kisses," except that human souls must emerge again through the lower union as well.[152] The Epistle chose angelic souls as an example, as it did in the preceding sentence, and the example teaches status; it does not establish a law about who emerges from the union of kisses.

Why angelic souls specifically, rather than human souls? The Epistle does not say. As our own explanation, we may suggest that human souls were mentioned in the preceding sentence with the condition "before they descended," and the first part of the parentheses dealt precisely with their descent. Angelic souls are a simpler example of what is not yesh and does not descend into a body. In one approach the Tzemach Tzedek proposes for understanding the

beings, although they emerge from kisses, had to pass again through the aforementioned lower bodily union" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 955–956 and 964–965.

[152] Etz Chaim, Gate 39, discourse 4: "Know that from all the ten unions mentioned above, which are three lower ones and seven spiritual ones of kisses, two aspects emerge: the souls of the lower beings and the souls of the angels"; "The explanation accords with the foregoing, for the souls of angels come only from the upper spiritual union called kisses, and therefore need not vest themselves in a body. But human souls come from the lower bodily union, and therefore must vest themselves in a body in this world"; "Know that there are human souls that also come from the union of kisses, as stated, except that for angels' souls the union of kisses alone sufficed, and they did not need to emerge again through a lower bodily union; whereas the souls of the lower beings, although they emerge from kisses, had to pass again through the aforementioned lower bodily union" (Sefaria). See the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 955–956 and 964–965.

sentence, he describes the worlds in the skull as “along the lines of souls of Atzilut,” like souls in Atzilut.[149]

W06-07
Hebrew-source words
51–56

and are called worlds relative to the aspect of the skull and beard.)

“ונקראו — And are called”: explains the name, rather than describing a new coming into being. “Worlds”: the name the Zohar gave them. “לגבי — Relative to”: in relation to, with respect to; this is the sentence’s key word. “The aspect of the skull and beard”: in relation to the aspect of the skull and beard; “beard” is not explicitly assigned here to either of the two partzufim.

[149]Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shemot, Parashat Va’era, p. קצט [199]: “On the basis of these two premises one can understand the multitude of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba… and several other numbers: they do not mean actual worlds, but are exceedingly spiritual supernal letters, as explained in the first premise, that there are many aspects of letters, one higher than another. They are called worlds because, if they were to descend and be drawn down through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thirteen thousand worlds would come into being from them”; “If so, are these letters dwelling in the gulgalta diminished in worth because they have not descended through hishtalshelut? On the contrary, they are infinitely more exalted than the letters that descended level after level. Therefore these letters dwelling in the gulgalta are called actual worlds, for they are the very power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds, with a vitality immeasurably more exalted and wondrous than the vitality vested in the worlds of BYA, etc. (Through this one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘Ihu vechayohi,’ as follows: ‘It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin are not actual worlds like the heichalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh,’ etc.; end of quotation. The meaning is that a created being brought into being from the letters is a yesh and a separate thing, whereas the letters themselves are Divinity, only they are called worlds relative to the gulgalta. This means that they are letters that have already been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the fire above that is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the gulgalta, etc. Its statement there that they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin means that the principal coming into being of yesh is from the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, only it is through these letters, etc. This is how it must be understood if we are to say that his words in the aforementioned Iggeret HaKodesh and those in ‘ועמדו רגליו’ have the same intention. However, it may also be said that there in Iggeret HaKodesh he explains it differently, as being like souls of Atzilut; see there. Nevertheless, both passages agree that they are not a yesh and a separate thing as are the worlds of BYA)” (HebrewBooks, book 31630, file p. 204). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 996–997 and 1047–1049, documents that Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on this Epistle, both in Hebrew and in English translation, also cites this page; for the page’s location and wording, see ibid., pp. 1009–1010, 1045–1047 and 1053–1055.

“)”: here the parentheses close, with a relative and cautious explanation. The next word, “but,” returns to the main course.

“Relative To”: A Name Used Relationally

If they are not actual worlds, why are they called worlds? The Epistle answers in one word: “relative to,” that is, in relation to. The name is used in relation to a particular level, the skull and beard. The logic is this: the same aspect can appear differently when compared with different levels. What is not a separate yesh in its own status can, relative to a higher root, be called a world, that is, an aspect already containing definition and multiplicity. To understand such a name, one must know in relation to what it is used.

Chassidic works quoting the Epistle explain this explicitly. In Likkutei Torah, in the discourse “וארשתיך לי לעולם” (“I Will Betroth You to Me Forever”), it says that the source of the worlds is in Atzilut, “where He and His vessels are one,” yet “since they are the source of the aspect of the worlds drawn from them below, there are above, in potential, so many powers and drawings down from which actual division into worlds will come into being.” Our sentence is quoted immediately afterward: “Along these lines may be understood what is written in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘Ihu ve-chayohi’: ‘and it is reasonable to say

that the thousands and myriads of worlds situated in the skull, etc., are not actual worlds, etc.' This means that they too are aspects of letters which, when drawn down below, will give rise to that many worlds in actual reality." The analogy given there is "like the letters of speech while still in the potential of one's wisdom."[146]

The Tzemach Tzedek elaborates further in Or HaTorah. First he says of "the multiplicity of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba" that they are not "actual worlds, but aspects of supernal, exceedingly spiritual letters"; "they are called worlds because, if they were to descend successively and be drawn below through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thirteen thousand worlds would come into being from them." He even says that they

[146]Zohar, vol. III, 128b and 292b: levels and worlds in the contexts of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin; see also Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "וארשתיך לי." 128b (Idra Rabba): "The whiteness of the skull of His head extends through four hundred thousand worlds. From the radiance of this whiteness the righteous inherit four hundred worlds in the World to Come"; "In the skull dwell thirteen thousand myriads of worlds, which lift their feet upon it and rest upon it"; "That is called Erech Appayim. This Ancient of Ancients is called Arich Anpin, and the one outside is called Ze'ir Anpin"; "From this skull one white side extends to the skull of Ze'ir Anpin to rectify its head"; "This membrane covers the brain, which is concealed Chochmah" (Wikisource). 292b (Idra Zuta): "Into this skull of Ze'ir Anpin dew drips from the white head"; "Nine thousand myriads of worlds move and rest upon this skull" (Wikisource). Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "וארשתיך לי לעולם": "Even their source and root in the world of Atzilut, where He and His vessels are one, which are Divinity and the blessed Ein Sof light, divested of every category, measure and limit, nevertheless, since they are a source for the worlds drawn from them below, there are above potentially so many powers and extensions from which the actual division into worlds will come into being. (In this manner one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi': 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the skull, etc., are not actual worlds,' etc. The meaning is that they too are letters which, when drawn down below, will actually bring into being that many worlds.) This is like the letters of speech while they are still potential within one's wisdom" (Sefaria). On the two passages in the Idrot and the interpretation of the worlds as letters, see the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 958–959 and 962–964; on the reading of both pages of the Idrot, see ibid., pp. 968–969.

are called “actual worlds because they themselves are the power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds.” He then quotes our sentence and explains that this does not contradict the Epistle: “For the created being that comes into being from the letters is yesh and a separate entity, whereas the letters themselves are an aspect of Divinity, except that they are called worlds relative to the skull. This means that they are aspects of letters already drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the aspect of fire above, which is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the aspect of the skull, etc.”[149]

[149]Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shemot, Parashat Va’era, p. קצט [199]: “On the basis of these two premises one can understand the multitude of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba… and several other numbers: they do not mean actual worlds, but are exceedingly spiritual supernal letters, as explained in the first premise, that there are many aspects of letters, one higher than another. They are called worlds because, if they were to descend and be drawn down through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thirteen thousand worlds would come into being from them”; “If so, are these letters dwelling in the gulgalta diminished in worth because they have not descended through hishtalshelut? On the contrary, they are infinitely more exalted than the letters that descended level after level. Therefore these letters dwelling in the gulgalta are called actual worlds, for they are the very power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds, with a vitality immeasurably more exalted and wondrous than the vitality vested in the worlds of BYA, etc. (Through this one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘Ihu vechayohi,’ as follows: ‘It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze’ir Anpin are not actual worlds like the heichalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh,’ etc.; end of quotation. The meaning is that a created being brought into being from the letters is a yesh and a separate thing, whereas the letters themselves are Divinity, only they are called worlds relative to the gulgalta. This means that they are letters that have already been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the fire above that is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the gulgalta, etc. Its statement there that they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin means that the principal coming into being of yesh is from the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, only it is through these letters, etc. This is how it must be understood if we are to say that his words in the aforementioned Iggeret HaKodesh and those in ‘ועמדו רגליו’ have the same intention. However, it may also be said that there in Iggeret HaKodesh he explains it differently, as being like souls of Atzilut; see there. Nevertheless, both passages agree that they are not a yesh and a separate thing as are the worlds of BYA)” (HebrewBooks, book 31630, file p. 204). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 996–997 and 1047–1049, documents that Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on

We can now say what "relative to" means. The aspects situated in the skull have already "been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds"; the power and vitality of worlds are already present within them. "Unlike the aspect of the skull," the Tzemach Tzedek adds: the skull itself does not stand at this level. Relative to the skull, they are already the beginning of worlds, and can therefore be called "worlds." Relative to the worlds themselves, those created as "yesh and a separate entity," they are not worlds at all: "the letters themselves are an aspect of Divinity." The same thing is called a "world" relative to the level above it, yet is not a world in its own status.

Likkutei Torah brings this closer through an analogy: "the letters of speech while still in the potential of one's wisdom." Before someone speaks, the words are already prepared within the person, with differences between them, but they are not yet a sound heard by someone else. This helps us understand defined multiplicity that is not yet separate from its source. The analogue concerns "supernal, exceedingly spiritual letters," and Or HaTorah emphasizes that "there are several aspects of letters, one higher than another."[149]

this Epistle, both in Hebrew and in English translation, also cites this page; for the page's location and wording, see ibid., pp. 1009–1010, 1045–1047 and 1053–1055.

[149]Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shemot, Parashat Va'era, p. קצט [199]: "On the basis of these two premises one can understand the multitude of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba... and several other numbers: they do not mean actual worlds, but are exceedingly spiritual supernal letters, as explained in the first premise, that there are many aspects of letters, one higher than another. They are called worlds because, if they were to descend and be drawn down through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thir-

The Tzemach Tzedek's analogy also teaches something. "Fire above" is a "source and root for physical fire." It is not the fire burning before us, yet it is called fire because fire comes from it. So too the "worlds" in the skull: they are named after the worlds whose power is already within them, not because they themselves are created worlds.

The Tzemach Tzedek does not confine himself to one approach. At the end of his discussion, he writes that one can also say "that there, in Iggeret HaKodesh, he explained it differently, that they are along the lines of souls of Atzilut," and concludes: "Nevertheless, both passages are consistent in that they are not an aspect of

teen thousand worlds would come into being from them"; "If so, are these letters dwelling in the gulgalta diminished in worth because they have not descended through hishtalshelut? On the contrary, they are infinitely more exalted than the letters that descended level after level. Therefore these letters dwelling in the gulgalta are called actual worlds, for they are the very power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds, with a vitality immeasurably more exalted and wondrous than the vitality vested in the worlds of BYA, etc. (Through this one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' as follows: 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin are not actual worlds like the heichalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh,' etc.; end of quotation. The meaning is that a created being brought into being from the letters is a yesh and a separate thing, whereas the letters themselves are Divinity, only they are called worlds relative to the gulgalta. This means that they are letters that have already been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the fire above that is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the gulgalta, etc. Its statement there that they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin means that the principal coming into being of yesh is from the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, only it is through these letters, etc. This is how it must be understood if we are to say that his words in the aforementioned Iggeret HaKodesh and those in 'ועמדו רגליו' have the same intention. However, it may also be said that there in Iggeret HaKodesh he explains it differently, as being like souls of Atzilut; see there. Nevertheless, both passages agree that they are not a yesh and a separate thing as are the worlds of BYA)" (HebrewBooks, book 31630, file p. 204). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 996–997 and 1047–1049, documents that Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on this Epistle, both in Hebrew and in English translation, also cites this page; for the page's location and wording, see ibid., pp. 1009–1010, 1045–1047 and 1053–1055.

yesh and a separate entity like the worlds of BYA."[149] This is how to study a proposal: several explanations of the details can be suggested, while clearly preserving what they all share. Here the common point is status: not yesh and a separate entity.

This also directly continues the question with which the Epistle opened, "He and His lights are one; He and His vessels are one in them": how to describe distinctions and multiplicity without losing unity. The answer the parentheses teach is that words such as "world," "inward dimension," and "outward

[149] Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shemot, Parashat Va'era, p. קצט [199]: "On the basis of these two premises one can understand the multitude of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba... and several other numbers: they do not mean actual worlds, but are exceedingly spiritual supernal letters, as explained in the first premise, that there are many aspects of letters, one higher than another. They are called worlds because, if they were to descend and be drawn down through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thirteen thousand worlds would come into being from them"; "If so, are these letters dwelling in the gulgalta diminished in worth because they have not descended through hishtalshelut? On the contrary, they are infinitely more exalted than the letters that descended level after level. Therefore these letters dwelling in the gulgalta are called actual worlds, for they are the very power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds, with a vitality immeasurably more exalted and wondrous than the vitality vested in the worlds of BYA, etc. (Through this one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' as follows: 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin are not actual worlds like the heichalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh,' etc.; end of quotation. The meaning is that a created being brought into being from the letters is a yesh and a separate thing, whereas the letters themselves are Divinity, only they are called worlds relative to the gulgalta. This means that they are letters that have already been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the fire above that is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the gulgalta, etc. Its statement there that they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin means that the principal coming into being of yesh is from the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, only it is through these letters, etc. This is how it must be understood if we are to say that his words in the aforementioned Iggeret HaKodesh and those in 'ועמדו רגליו' have the same intention. However, it may also be said that there in Iggeret HaKodesh he explains it differently, as being like souls of Atzilut; see there. Nevertheless, both passages agree that they are not a yesh and a separate thing as are the worlds of BYA)" (HebrewBooks, book 31630, file p. 204). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 996–997 and 1047–1049, documents that Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on this Epistle, both in Hebrew and in English translation, also cites this page; for the page's location and wording, see ibid., pp. 1009–1010, 1045–1047 and 1053–1055.

dimension" are relational words. They say something only when we know in relation to what they are used; whoever attaches them to a thing without context misses their essential meaning.

What the Parentheses Added

After both parts of the parentheses, we can see their contribution to the argument. They taught three distinctions. Descent to this world alone does not establish that the soul changed in its nature. The name "world" alone does not establish that we have a separate yesh before us. And multiplicity can coexist with a connection to unity. All three distinctions derive from one principle recurring in both parts: status is determined by the relationship to the source.

But these distinctions concern status, not power. They grant neither the souls nor the aspects in the skull the power of creation. Immediately after the parentheses, the Epistle will restore this boundary with full force: "But they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing." Precisely the subtle distinctions we have learned will make it possible to understand this while preserving the souls' stature. Something that is not separate from Divinity is still not, by that fact alone, a source of creation.

Interestingly, in one approach he proposes, the Tzemach Tzedek applies the sentence after the

parentheses to the aspects in the skull as well: "And what is written there, that they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing, means that the essential coming into being of yesh is from the aspect of Ein Sof, blessed be He, who encompasses all worlds, except that it is through these letters, etc."[149] That is, even these exalted aspects are not the source of creation, but the path through which it passes. On this approach, the "but" is said of the aspects in the skull too, not only of the souls before the parentheses.

[149]Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shemot, Parashat Va'era, p. קצט [199]: "On the basis of these two premises one can understand the multitude of worlds mentioned in the Idra Rabba... and several other numbers: they do not mean actual worlds, but are exceedingly spiritual supernal letters, as explained in the first premise, that there are many aspects of letters, one higher than another. They are called worlds because, if they were to descend and be drawn down through the chain of levels, level after level, until they became material so as to be vested in Asiyah, thirteen thousand worlds would come into being from them"; "If so, are these letters dwelling in the gulgalta diminished in worth because they have not descended through hishtalshelut? On the contrary, they are infinitely more exalted than the letters that descended level after level. Therefore these letters dwelling in the gulgalta are called actual worlds, for they are the very power and vitality of thirteen thousand actual worlds, with a vitality immeasurably more exalted and wondrous than the vitality vested in the worlds of BYA, etc. (Through this one may understand what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' as follows: 'It is reasonable to say that even the thousands and myriads of worlds dwelling in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin are not actual worlds like the heichalot of Atzilut and an aspect of yesh,' etc.; end of quotation. The meaning is that a created being brought into being from the letters is a yesh and a separate thing, whereas the letters themselves are Divinity, only they are called worlds relative to the gulgalta. This means that they are letters that have already been drawn forth to become a source and root for the coming into being of worlds, like the fire above that is a source and root for physical fire, unlike the gulgalta, etc. Its statement there that they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin means that the principal coming into being of yesh is from the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, only it is through these letters, etc. This is how it must be understood if we are to say that his words in the aforementioned Iggeret HaKodesh and those in 'ועמדו רגליו' have the same intention. However, it may also be said that there in Iggeret HaKodesh he explains it differently, as being like souls of Atzilut; see there. Nevertheless, both passages agree that they are not a yesh and a separate thing as are the worlds of BYA)" (HebrewBooks, book 31630, file p. 204). The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 996–997 and 1047–1049, documents that Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on this Epistle, both in Hebrew and in English translation, also cites this page; for the page's location and wording, see ibid., pp. 1009–1010, 1045–1047 and 1053–1055.

What Remains Open

Before the summary, it is worth also recording what the parentheses leave open, so that the student knows what is established and what is not yet:

- **Precisely who "the early tzaddikim" are.** There is an explicit example, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai; a proposal, Adam; and a parallel, Enoch. There is no list.
- **Precisely what changes in ordinary descent, and what is preserved in the early tzaddikim.** The Epistle describes states, not the mechanism through which a soul becomes "yesh" in descending.
- **What remains in the person when the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut withdraw.** In Adam, according to Shaar HaGilgulim, the ruach and neshamah of Atzilut withdrew, while the nefesh of Atzilut remained "hovering over him"; the Epistle gives no details concerning the early tzaddikim.
- **Which "beard" is mentioned at the end of the parentheses.** That of Arich Anpin, Ze'ir Anpin, or both.
- **The precise relationship between the Epistle's summary formulation and the two passages in the Idrot.** The sources are clear; the combination is the Alter Rebbe's.
- **Whether the "but" is also said of the aspects in the skull.** The Tzemach Tzedek proposes an approach

in which it is, and mentions another approach to understanding the sentence as well.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified

- **The placement of the parentheses.** They stand between "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity" and "but they are not actual Divinity." They expand the intermediate level studied in Chapter 5 without raising it above its boundary.
- **The first part: the early tzaddikim.** It is "possible" that the nature of their nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut did not change even after descending to this world, and therefore they would withdraw "before they sinned" when they wished to sin. The subject of "withdraw" is the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, not the person. The desire to sin belongs to the person, and choice remains in his hands.
- **Root and spark.** A shared root, a spark, a particular person, and the soul's present state are four planes. Distinguishing them explains how the exception is possible, without identifying the people concerned.
- **The second part: the worlds.** It is "reasonable to say" that the "worlds" in the skull of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin are not yesh like the palaces, but "akin to the souls of the angels." They are called worlds "relative to" the skull and beard, meaning in relation to them. Chassidic works explain this through the analogy of letters still in potential.

- **The shared principle.** In both parts, status is determined by the relationship to the source, not by place or name.
- **The degree of certainty.** "Possible," "reasonable to say," and "akin to" are part of the content. Every faithful explanation must preserve them.

The chapter has thus taught how to read an aside that expands without changing the rule: in the language of "possible" and "reasonable to say," it proposes that the level of "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity" is broader than it first appeared, and also applies to souls that descended to this world and to aspects called worlds. At the same time, it leaves this level below the boundary the Epistle is about to establish.

Toward "But"

The parentheses have closed, and the main argument returns. The question it brings has now become sharper. If the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut of the early tzaddikim are not "something separate from Divinity" even in this world, it is easy to infer that they also have the power to create. The "but" blocks this inference: a status that is not separate yesh is not the power of creation. What do they lack? Neither the height of the level nor their place of existence. The two words "emerged and became separated," and the

question of to whom the power of creation belongs, will answer this; that will be the subject of the next chapter.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter's parentheses may be the best place in Part One to practice one habit: preserving both a source's content and its degree of certainty. A tool summarizing a text tends to smooth away the "possible," supply names the source did not name, and turn an analogy into a description. The following exercises target these points.

Exercise 1: Preserving "Possible" and "Reasonable to Say"

What to ask. Add the seven units of the parentheses to the conversation, from "And even also after they descended" to "and are called worlds relative to the aspect of the skull and beard," and request a brief explanation of each.

What to check. Read the response and ask three questions. Were "possible," "reasonable to say," and "akin to" preserved, or did the explanation turn them into assertions? Were "the early tzaddikim" identified with certainty, for example as Adam or Enoch? And did "they would withdraw" become "they would die"? If you find any of these, ask the tool to correct it, and compare the correction with "What Does a

Qualification Add to an Explanation?" and its definitions of the three expressions.

Limit of the conclusion. A convincing explanation does not turn the Epistle's "possible" into certainty.

Exercise 2: Who Are the Early Tzaddikim?

What to ask. "Who are 'the early tzaddikim' in Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 20? On what source does each answer rest?"

What to check. Classify each name the tool proposes according to the three degrees of connection in the table under "Who Are 'The Early Tzaddikim'?": an explicit example, a proposal based on wording and subject matter, or a parallel to the idea. Check whether the cited source exists and whether it mentions our sentence. Pay particular attention to "like" in Likkutei Torah: it presents Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as an example.

Limit of the conclusion. Even if all the sources the tool supplies are correct, we do not have a closed list. An answer concluding "The early tzaddikim are …" goes beyond what the sources teach; the question remains open.

Exercise 3: Worlds That Are Not Worlds

What to ask. "What are 'the thousands and myriads of worlds situated in the skull of Arich Anpin and ZA,' and

why are they called worlds if they ‘are not actual worlds’?”

What to check. Check three things. Did the tool distinguish the negation (“akin to the palaces … and an aspect of yesh”) from the positive comparison (“akin to the souls of the angels”)? Did it explain “relative to” as a relationship? And did it read “skull” and “beard” as names of aspects, or picture a physical head? Sources from the Idrot, Likkutei Torah, and Or HaTorah can be compared with the sections “Thousands and Myriads” and “Relative To.”

Limit of the conclusion. The analogy of letters in Likkutei Torah and Or HaTorah explains the possibility of multiplicity without separation. It does not say that all “worlds” in every work of Kabbalah are letters in the same sense. The Epistle itself says “reasonable to say,” so even the best explanation remains an explanation of a proposal.

Exercise 4: Where the Parentheses End

What to ask. Ask the tool to write the Epistle’s sentence without the parentheses and explain what connects to what.

What to check. The sentence should pass from “a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction” directly to “but they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing.” Check

whether the tool understands that the “but” returns to the souls before the parentheses. Also check whether it applies the “but” to the aspects in the skull, and whether it presents this as the Epistle’s own statement or as one approach of the Tzemach Tzedek (see “What the Parentheses Added”).

Limit of the conclusion. The structure of the sentence shows the main line of argument. It does not determine whether the “but” also applies to the “worlds”; this is an open question, with a proposal from the Tzemach Tzedek.

Part Two — The Source of the Power of Bringing into Being and Its Modes of Revelation

Chapters 7–10

In Part One we asked how limited vessels can be Divinity, and saw that the status of vessels, souls, and palaces is determined by their relationship to the source. Part Two opens from the distinction at the end of Chapter 6 between the status of exalted souls and the power of creation. Its subject is the power to create something from nothing: to whom it belongs, and through what paths it is revealed.

Throughout this part we shall distinguish two questions: what is the source of the power, and through what path and at what level is it revealed? To the first question the Epistle gives one answer throughout: the Creator alone. To the second, it answers with many names: light, kav, and vessels; Malchut and letters; gestation and birth. These names describe paths through which the power appears, without adding anyone else who possesses it. Someone who confuses the two questions will err in one of two directions: either making the vessels, Malchut, or souls possessors of power alongside the Creator, or erasing them from the explanation in the name of unity. Although these chapters do not explain every stage of the operation, the distinction between the source of the power and its mode of revelation will accompany the book until it reaches the power of growth in the earth.

Chapter 7 lays the foundation: "He alone" has the power to create something from nothing, and the vessels of Atzilut, in which Or Ein Sof is united, are the path through which finite beings are created. Chapter 8 asks exactly where the transition to separate yesh takes place, and answers: in Malchut of Atzilut and the letters issuing from it; there we shall also encounter the formula "their beginning is embedded in their end." Chapter 9 describes the same transition through the image of gestation and birth. Chapter 10 applies

what we have learned to a question close to human life: why the practical mitzvot, whose place in the order of revelation is last, are in their root "the essence and root of the Torah."

The discussion of Malchut, letters, and gestation and birth requires patience. We shall encounter many names from the language of Kabbalah, each explained in its place. Knowing the names, however, does not yet mean knowing the mechanism: with each sentence, we shall ask what its subject is, which level it discusses, and exactly what it adds. Even when the commentary moves to the root of Torah and mitzvot, we shall need to distinguish root, place of revelation, and purpose, and avoid assuming that superiority in one respect cancels superiority in another.

These habits—asking who the subject of the sentence is, separating the source's wording from the explanation, and saying what each analogy teaches and where it stops—are also the habits the book proposes for working with a study partner, whether a person or an AI tool. Here too, therefore, each chapter will close with exercises for working with AI tools, anchored in that chapter's particular obstacles (for their structure, see "How a Chapter Is Structured" in the Reading Map). The full discussion of working and checking methods appears in "Studying Further."

Chapter 7 | He Alone: Essence, Light, Kav, and Vessels

What We Already Know

The passage before us completes a sentence begun in Part One. In preparation, let us recall four things:

- **The vessels of Atzilut.** Atzilut is the highest world in the order of worlds; Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, abbreviated BYA, are the three worlds below it. The opening of the Epistle established that the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut "are Divinity, to create something from nothing like Ein Sof, and not merely in the aspect of successive derivation through cause and effect": their operation is not merely the passage of influence from level to level.
- **"Something from nothing."** The coming into being of an existence that does not emerge from a prior existence. This does not mean it has no source: it has a Creator, but no preceding material or cause whose existence it continues.
- **The exalted souls.** Angelic souls that emerged from the union of kisses, and human souls that emerged from the union of ZON of Atzilut, "are not included in the category of yesh and a separate entity" as long as they have not descended to BYA; they are "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity."

- **The remaining question.** If these souls are not a separate yesh, do they also have the power to create something from nothing? The chapter before us answers this question.

What Is Still Lacking Even in the Most Exalted Existence?

A person may know much, understand deeply, and bring about changes in another's life. Nevertheless, that person received life and the power to think and act. Great stature does not make someone the source of their own existence. This distinction will help us understand "He alone"; we shall learn the manner of creation itself from the Epistle.

Here the Epistle carries out a complete argument in one long sentence, in four steps:

1. **A boundary.** The exalted souls we discussed "are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing."
2. **A reason.** They have already emerged and become separated from the vessels in which the kav from Or Ein Sof is vested.
3. **The source of the power.** From this reason, the Epistle rises to the source: the light is akin to the Luminary, and the Luminary is the nature and Essence of the Emanator, whose existence is from

His Essence. Therefore He alone can create something from nothing and absolute nonbeing.

4. **A return to the limited world.** How created beings with limit and measure come into being: Or Ein Sof vests itself in the vessels of Atzilut and unites with them, and in and through them created beings are created, particularly through their investment in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.

At the opening of this part, we distinguished the source of the power from its mode of revelation. In this chapter, the distinction sharpens into two questions; it is worth reading the whole chapter through them without confusing them. First: where does the created being's very existence come from? Second: why is the created being a particular thing, with measure and limit, this rather than another? To the first, the Epistle answers "He alone." To the second, it answers with the vessels.

"He alone" does not make the vessels unnecessary, and the vessels do not create by their own power. They explain how a world with many particulars comes into being from Divine unity.[153]

[153] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1091–1094, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification," and pp. 1095–1098, in "Resolving the Issue: The Source of the Power and the Order of Its Operation." "He alone" refers to the Emanator; the power originates in Him, and the light united with the vessels operates in them and through them. Both presenting the vessels as independent partners and denying their role are rejected there. See also ibid., pp. 1089–1091: "Without any other cause or reason" is read within its sentence and does not negate the order of vesting.

The "But" After the Parentheses: Where Does the Sentence Return?

The chapter's first sentence is the end of a long sentence. It began in Chapter 5 and was interrupted by long parentheses in Chapter 6. To know what it is discussing, we must join its parts. Joined together, it reads: "But the souls of the angels that emerged from the union of kisses, and likewise the soul of man that emerged from the union of ZON of Atzilut, before they descended to BYA, are not included in the category of yesh and an independently separate entity; rather, they are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction … (And even also after they descended … and are called worlds relative to the aspect of the skull and beard)—but they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing."[154]

Who are "they" in "they are not"? The Hebrew אינן is feminine plural, referring back to the subject of the larger sentence: the souls. The parentheses discussed a subsidiary matter, the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of Atzilut that descended to the early tzaddikim and the "worlds" in the skull. When they close, "but" returns us to the main sentence and adds a qualification: the souls

[154] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20: the complete sentence from "But the souls of the angels" through "Yet they are not actual Divinity to create yesh me-ayin," including the intervening parentheses (above, chapters 5–6). On the distinction between the three assertions—separation from the vessels, the status of a yesh and a separate thing, and the ability to create yesh me-ayin—and the fact that it has not been proven that "yet" introduces a new stage applying only after descent, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1220–1222.

are “a likeness of an aspect of Divinity,” but are not “actual Divinity, to create something from nothing.”

The word “but” appears twice in this sentence, marking a boundary in a different direction each time. The first, “but the souls of the angels,” distinguished the souls from the palaces and angels’ bodies, which are “an aspect of yesh,” thus raising them above separate created beings. The second, “but they are not,” sets an upper boundary: although not a separate yesh, they are not Divinity in the sense of having the power to create. The result is an intermediate position: the souls stand above created yesh and below the vessels that are “Divinity, to create something from nothing.”

Of whom is the qualification said? The grammatical subject is the souls “before they descended to BYA,” that is, souls at their highest level. The reason immediately given, “since they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels,” applies to them, on the plain reading, already upon emerging from the union in Atzilut, before any descent. There is therefore no need to read “but” as opening a new stage dealing only with souls after descent. The boundary is stated of the highest level, and consequently also applies to the levels below it.

What about the possibility raised in the parentheses, that in the early tzaddikim their nature did not change in descent? That too adds no power of creation to the

souls. It teaches only that their pre-descent status may have been preserved. Of that very status it is now said that they are not "actual Divinity, to create."

Three statements emerge, each of which must be held separately:

1. The souls emerged and became separated from the vessels.
2. They are not included in "yesh and a separate entity."
3. They do not have the power to create something from nothing.

Someone who conflates the first with the second will think that emergence from the vessels made them a separate yesh. Someone who conflates the second with the third will think that everything not a separate yesh can already create. The Epistle states all three together, without deriving one from another.

Great Stature, Yet Still No Power to Create

After everything we have learned about the souls' stature, "but they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing" may sound like a sharp turn. Let us recall what was said of them: they are not a separate yesh in the sense in which the angels' bodies and palaces are described, and in certain tzaddikim even descent may not have changed their nature. Nevertheless, none of this permits the inference that

they can create. Stature and the power to create are two separate questions.

This distinction also touches the student's heart. We usually measure stature on a single scale: the holier and more exalted something is, the more powers we attribute to it. The Epistle does not measure this way. To know whether something has the power to create, it is not enough to ask how high its level is; one must ask how it relates to the source of the power and whether it is united with it.

Closeness to the source and nullification toward it do not make the recipient the source of coming into being. The soul, however lofty, receives its existence; the Creator does not receive His existence from another.

The word "actual" marks this difference. To understand it, let us return to the Epistle's opening, where the vessels of Atzilut were described: "The intention, however, is to say that they are Divinity, to create something from nothing like Ein Sof, and not merely in the aspect of successive derivation through cause and effect." When the Epistle calls the vessels "Divinity," it means something specific: that in them, as in Ein Sof, there is the power to create something from nothing. The souls are called "a likeness of" Divinity: they resemble Divinity in their nullification and closeness, albeit "under immense contraction." But they are not "actual Divinity, to create." "Actual" stands against "a

likeness of," and "to create" determines the matter in which the comparison is made.

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1–7

"But they are not actual Divinity, capable of creating something from nothing,"

"אך — But": a limiting word; returns from the parentheses to the main sentence and sets a boundary to its comparison. "אינן — They are not": the souls, the angelic souls and the soul of man mentioned before the parentheses. "אלקות — Divinity": Divinity in the sense defined at the Epistle's opening, the power to create something from nothing like Ein Sof. "ממש — Actual": truly and fully; stands against the earlier "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity." "לברוא — To create": specifies the matter in which the negation is stated. This is not a general statement about the souls' status, but about the power to create. "יש מאין — Something from nothing": an existence coming into being without emerging from a prior existence; a term studied in previous chapters and further explained in the continuation of the sentence itself. The negation does not make the souls a separate yesh like the palaces; the distinctions of the preceding sentence remain in force.

“Since They Have Already Emerged and Become Separated”: From What Did the Souls Emerge?

The reason the Epistle gives comprises several concepts, which should be distinguished before reading it as a whole. There is the Emanator, blessed be He: this is how the Epistle names the Creator as the One from whom Atzilut was emanated, the source of everything. There is Or Ein Sof, the light drawn from Him. There is “the kav,” a particular drawing down of Or Ein Sof. There are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, in which the kav is vested. And there are the souls, which emerged from the vessels. These five names are not five designations for one thing, nor are they five things separate from one another. Our sentence teaches the relationships among them.

What is “the kav”? Etz Chaim describes how, before the emanated beings were emanated, Or Ein Sof filled everything. When it arose in His will to create, “He contracted Himself,” leaving an empty place, a “void.” He then drew from Himself a single straight line into the void. The upper end of the line is drawn from Ein Sof Himself and touches Him, and through it Or Ein Sof is drawn and spreads downward. The line is thin so that the light reaches the emanated beings “in measure and bound”; hence the sefirot are called “middot,” measures. It is further explained there that the vessels

came into being after the light withdrew; afterward the light returned and was drawn into them through the kav "in measure and weight," according to what they could bear without being nullified.[155] As with all the book's images, no physical space should be pictured here: "place," "void," and "line" describe an order of revelation, light appearing not all at once but in measure and gradation, rather than a shape in space.

We can now understand the expression "the kav from Or Ein Sof." The kav is not another light, nor is it a created being produced from the light. It is Or Ein Sof itself, drawn in the manner of a line: in measure, order, and gradation. Hence later in the sentence the Epistle simply calls it "Or Ein Sof": "Or Ein Sof became vested in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut." In other words, the kav is the revelation of Or Ein Sof within the vessels.[156]

Let us now read the words themselves. "Emerged" is the same verb used to describe the souls before the parentheses: "that emerged from the union of kisses," "that emerged from the union of ZON of Atzilut." The souls were drawn from the inward dimension of the vessels, as we shall shortly see from Likkutei Torah, and when they emerged from the union they also

[155] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branches 2–3; Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: the Ein Sof light, tzimtzum and drawing down.

[156] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, the lesson for 7 Tishrei: "Their nefesh, ruach and neshamah" is explained there as "of the sefirot"; the kav is explained as a revelation of the Ein Sof light; and the words "preceding this yesh" are explained as a preceding cause related to this yesh. See above, chapter 5.

emerged from the vessels. “Already” teaches that this does not wait for descent to BYA: already upon emerging from the union in Atzilut, before any descent, they are not within the vessels. “And became separated” adds that they are no longer part of the system in which the kav is vested.

Care is needed here, because “separate” recurs in the Epistle in several senses. “Yesh and a separate entity” describes the status of a created being that, in its own perception, stands independently. “Something separate from Divinity,” in the parentheses, describes a change of nature. “Became separated from the vessels,” in our sentence, describes emergence from the vessels. One expression’s meaning must not be imposed on another. The evidence comes from the Epistle itself: the same souls are said both to be “not included in the category of yesh and a separate entity” and to have “become separated from the vessels.” Thus separation from the vessels does not make them a separate yesh, and certainly does not mean they have become separate from Divinity.

Why is emergence from the vessels decisive? Because the power of creation does not depend on how high the level is. It depends on the kav, vested in the vessels and united with them. The souls have emerged from this system. They receive from it and may preserve an exalted connection with their source, but are not part

of the union in which the power of creation operates. Thus even their great stature does not give them the power to create.

These points are explained in Likkutei Torah, in the discourse "ושמתי כדכד שמשותיך" ("I Will Make Your Windows of Kadkod") in the portion Re'eh. It quotes our Epistle's wording, "that they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav is vested," and learns from it that although the souls were drawn from the inward dimension of the vessels, they do not contain the revelation of the kav from Or Ein Sof. ("The inward dimension of the vessels" is the vessels' inner aspect. Opposite it is "the outward dimension of the vessels," from which, as we learned in Chapter 5, the palaces of Atzilut and angels' bodies were created.) This is not so in the vessels, in which the kav shines, and in which "He and His lights and His vessels are one." The distinction concerns the revelation of the kav: in the vessels it shines openly, while in the souls there is no such revelation. The source does not determine the degree of its radiance in the souls or say that their connection to the light has ceased.[157]

[157] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Re'eh, discourse beginning "ושמתי כדכד שמשותיך," section 2: quotes Iggeret HaKodesh, "They have already emerged and separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot in which the kav from the Ein Sof light is vested," and concludes: "Although the souls were drawn from the inner dimension of the vessels, nevertheless the kav from the Ein Sof light is not revealed within them, unlike the vessels, within which the kav shines, and He and His lights and His vessels are one." Ibid., section 4: "In Atzilut too there are vessels, but there in Atzilut He and His vessels are one, so that the vessels too are in the state of unity, unlike Beriah, where 'from there it divides.' "

One more word in the sentence calls for careful reading. "שבהן — In which": within them, that is, in the vessels of the ten sefirot. A careful reader will notice that the Hebrew word is feminine although "vessels" is masculine, and will ask whether it might refer to "sefirot." There is no need to infer this. In this very passage, the Alter Rebbe writes of the vessels "and unites within them" (בתוכן) and "to create in and through them" (בהן ועל ידן), also using feminine forms; already at the Epistle's opening: "For the vessels are (הן) in the aspect of limit and finitude." Context is decisive here, not grammar alone: the subject is the vessels of the sefirot, in which the kav is vested.

What about "their nefesh, ruach, and neshamah"? The preceding sentence said that the vessels of Atzilut are "in an aspect of limitation through contraction of the Ein Sof light, which is the kav vested in their nefesh, ruach, and neshamah." It is easy to read "their" as referring to the souls, and then ask: if the kav is also vested in the souls, why do only the vessels create? As we learned in Chapter 5, the reading suited to the context is the nefesh, ruach, and neshamah of the sefirot themselves. This is also how Lessons in Tanya explains it.[156] The denial of the souls' power of creation

On the fact that the source concerns revelation of the kav and does not establish a measure, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1137–1138 and 1208–1209.

[156] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, the lesson for 7 Tishrei: "Their nefesh, ruach and neshamah" is explained there as "of the sefirot"; the kav is explained as a revelation of the Ein Sof light; and the words "preceding this yesh" are explained as a preceding cause related to this yesh. See above, chapter 5.

is explicit here, even without asserting that they contain no radiance whatsoever.

What remains open is something else: precisely what the positive content of "a likeness of Divinity" is in the souls after their emergence, and whether one can speak of a certain measure of the kav within them. The Epistle specifies no such measure, and wording not stated must not be attributed to it or to the Alter Rebbe.[158]

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8–18

"since they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav from the light of Ein Sof is enclothed."

The sentence gives a reason why the souls are not "actual Divinity, to create," and that reason rests on one word: "emerged." Let us go through the words. "מאחר — Since": because. "שכבר — They have already": already upon emerging, not at a later stage; at the moment of emergence they are already no longer within the vessels. "יצאו — Emerged": the same verb used to describe their emergence from the union. "ונפרדו — And became separated": they are no longer within the system. Here is the important precision: "became separated from the vessels" does not necessarily mean "became separated from Divinity,"

[158] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1093–1095, in "Correcting 'Their Nefesh, Ruach and Neshamah': Even a Question's Premise Can Fall"; and pp. 1118–1122 and 1207–1208: the distinction between the kav's presence and its measure, and what the words "emerged and separated" explicitly negate.

and this distinction must be preserved. “מהכלים די”ס — From the vessels of the ten sefirot”: that is, of Atzilut, as will be specified later in the sentence. “שבהן — In which”: within them, in the vessels; the same feminine form recurs in the passage in “within them” (בתוכן) and “in and through them” (בהן ועל ידן). “מלובש — Enclothed”: present and active within them, as in a garment. “הקו — The kav”: the straight, measured drawing down of light we learned about from Etz Chaim. “מאור א”ס — From the light of Ein Sof”: the kav is not another light, but Or Ein Sof drawn in the manner of a line. The conclusion: the reason concerns emergence from the system in which the power of creation operates, not a claim that every Divine connection has been lost.

“For the Light Is Akin to the Luminary”: Four Occurrences of “Hu”

We learned that the power of creation is connected with the kav vested in the vessels. The next question follows naturally: what is special about this kav, through which it bears such power? The Epistle answers: the kav is light, and “the light is akin to the Luminary.” To understand the answer, we must slowly read a sentence in which the Hebrew word הוא, hu, appears four times:

“For the light is [hu] akin to the Luminary, which is [hu] the nature and Essence of the Emanator, blessed be He,

whose existence is [hu] from His Essence and who is not an effect of any cause that preceded Him, G-d forbid; therefore He [hu] alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing …"

The word hu appears four times here, not always with the same function. Sometimes it is a "copula," a word connecting subject and predicate, like hu in the Hebrew sentence "David is a teacher"; sometimes it is a pronoun pointing to someone specific.

- **The first hu**, "the light is akin to the Luminary," is a copula: the light is akin to the Luminary.
- **The second hu**, "which is the nature and Essence of the Emanator," explains who the Luminary is: the Luminary that the light resembles is the nature and Essence of the Emanator.
- **The third hu**, "whose existence is from His Essence," is again a copula, within a sentence describing the Emanator: His existence is from His Essence.
- **The fourth hu**, "therefore He alone," is the Emanator Himself, blessed be He.

The decisive hu is the second. To what does it refer, the "Luminary" or the "light"? In other words, does the Epistle say that the Luminary is the Essence, or that the light itself is the Essence? The answer: the Luminary. Three reasons establish this:

- **Proximity.** "The Luminary" is the adjacent noun.

- **"Akin to."** The Epistle took care to say "akin to": similar, not identical. If it immediately went on to say that the light itself is the Essence, "akin to" would lose its meaning.
- **The continuation.** The sentence goes on to describe the One "whose existence is from His Essence and who is not an effect of any cause." Such a description does not suit the light, whose very character is that it is drawn from its source. It suits only the Emanator Himself.

This is also how the Tzemach Tzedek read it. Quoting the Epistle, he writes: "For the light is a likeness of the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the Emanator, blessed be He, who alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing." In the same passage, he adds that the kav itself is only "a mere radiance" from Or Ein Sof. Someone writing this does not identify the kav with the Essence.[159]

Two errors to guard against emerge from this reading, opposite to one another.

The first error is **identification**: saying that the kav is the Essence, or that light and Luminary are two names

[159] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27. The Tzemach Tzedek quotes the Epistle there: "The light is a likeness of the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, who alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin." He adds that the kav "is only a mere radiance of the Ein Sof light," "a thin line that is only a small radiance" relative to the encompassing light. In his account, the principal coming into being of yesh is through the radiance of sovev kol almin, which gives "power and strength to the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut together with the kav within them." See below, chapter 13.

for one thing. The Epistle does not say this; it says "akin to."

The second error is **distance**: saying that the light merely "looks like" its source, like a photograph resembling the person photographed. This too is incorrect. At the beginning of Tanya, Chapter 48, the light and vitality spreading from Him, blessed be He, are described as "united with His nature and Essence, blessed be He, in the ultimate unity." The Tzemach Tzedek writes that the light is a likeness of the Luminary "in the aspect of actual Ein Sof": the light too is infinite, like its source.[160] The likeness, then, is not outward. The light is united with its source and bears its character, but is not the source itself.[161]

An analogy supplied by the Epistle itself at its opening helps here: "like the sun's radiance within the sun." The radiance, the rays of light, is not the body of the sun. Nevertheless, within the sun it is not something separate from it: it is nullified to it and reveals it. Within the sun, the radiance is not an existence separate from the sun, even though it is not the body of the sun itself.

[160] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 3: "Ihu refers to the essence of the Ein Sof light, and garmohi are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut in which He, blessed be He, unites and vests Himself; the light is a likeness of the Luminary, in the aspect of actual Ein Sof." There follows the analogy of a king giving a gift sometimes with his right hand and sometimes with his left. See Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48, at its beginning: the light and vitality extending from Him "and united with His blessed nature and Essence in the ultimate unity."

[161] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1094–1097, in the discussion "Akin to the Luminary: Why the Kav Does Not Become the Essence."

Where does the analogy stop? The sun and its radiance are both created beings, and their relationship is measured in place and distance. In the analogue there is neither place nor distance, and the Luminary is not a body. The analogy teaches only the form of the relationship: a revelation connected with its source, neither identical to it nor separate from it.

What does all this contribute to our question? It explains the vessels' power through a chain of three links: the kav vested in the vessels is light; the light is akin to the Luminary; and the Luminary is the Emanator, whose power is to create something from nothing. The power operates in the vessels through light that does not lose its connection with its source.

There are two relationships here: the connection between light and Luminary explains why the light bears the power of creation; the union between light and vessels explains how the power operates in finite creation. The Epistle says that the light is "akin to the Luminary," and later that it "unites within them," within the vessels.[162]

Is the Kav the Essence of Ein Sof?

No. The kav is a drawing down of Or Ein Sof in an order that makes worlds and levels possible. It is not an entity separate from Divinity, but neither should the

[162] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1093–1094, in "Light–Vessels Unity Is Not Light–Luminary Unity," and pp. 1222–1225: the light–Luminary relation and the light–vessels unity are connected in the argument, but they are not the same syntactic relation.

distinction between light and Luminary be erased. Etz Chaim describes the upper end of the kav as "drawn from Ein Sof Himself and touching Him." Touching is connection, not identity. The Tzemach Tzedek emphasizes that relative to the boundless encompassing light, the kav is only "a small radiance." (In the language of Chassidut, "encompassing light" is light that is not drawn in measure like the kav and does not vest itself in vessels according to their capacity. Later in the Epistle we shall encounter a related name, "sovev kol almin," encompassing all worlds.)[155][159]

What about the measure and contraction within the kav? Do they prove that the kav is created? No. We have already learned that limitation and separation are not the same: a vessel of Atzilut is defined, yet it is Divinity. The kav is contracted relative to the light before the tzimtzum, and at the same time it is a supernal source for all the levels receiving from it.

This gives us a rule for reading. When encountering "Ein Sof," one must clarify what it refers to: the unlimited source, the light drawn from it, or light that appears "without limit" relative to a particular

[155] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branches 2–3; Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: the Ein Sof light, tzimtzum and drawing down.

[159] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27. The Tzemach Tzedek quotes the Epistle there: "The light is a likeness of the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, who alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin." He adds that the kav "is only a mere radiance of the Ein Sof light," "a thin line that is only a small radiance" relative to the encompassing light. In his account, the principal coming into being of yesh is through the radiance of sovev kol almin, which gives "power and strength to the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut together with the kav within them." See below, chapter 13.

recipient. One should not leap from "limited" to "created," just as one should not leap from "Divine" to the conclusion that there is no distinction whatever between light and Luminary.[161]

Is the Light an Additional Existence Alongside the Creator?

This too is not so. "Akin to the Luminary" does not posit another essence alongside the Creator. The light is connected with its source and reveals it, and "akin to" preserves this relationship without canceling it. The kav too, though described in measure and order, does not thereby become a separate yesh. The distinction worth remembering: measure describes a manner of revelation, while separation describes a created being's status. These are two different things.

Thus unity and distinction remain together: the Creator is one, and light and vessels add no creators. Here is a summary of what we learned about each term:

Term	What the Epistle says of it	What must not be inferred
The Emanator, "the Luminary"	His nature and Essence; "His existence is from His Essence"; "He alone" has the power to create something from nothing	That He created Himself, or that a cause preceded Him

[161] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1094–1097, in the discussion "Akin to the Luminary: Why the Kav Does Not Become the Essence."

Term	What the Epistle says of it	What must not be inferred
The light, Or Ein Sof	"Akin to the Luminary"; vests itself in the vessels and unites within them	That it is the Essence itself, or an independent source of power
The kav	Or Ein Sof drawn in measure and order; vested in the vessels	That it is created because limited, or identical with the Essence
The vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut	Divinity; the light is united with them; in and through them finite beings are created	That they create by their own power
The souls that emerged from the vessels	A likeness of Divinity; not a separate yesh; not actual Divinity, to create	That they create, or became a separate yesh because they became separated from the vessels

W07-03
Hebrew-source words 19–28

"For the light is of the nature of the luminary, which is the nature and essence of the Emanator, blessed be He,"

This sentence explains what is special about the kav within the vessels, and contains one distinction on which everything else depends: the light resembles its source but is not the source. Let us go through the words. "ש — For": because. "האור — The light": the kav, which is Or Ein Sof. "הוא — Is": a connecting word, "the light is …" "כעין — Of the nature of": akin to. This is the likeness of a revelation united with its source, not an equals sign. "המאור — The luminary": the source of light. "הוא מהותו ועצמותו — Which is the nature and

Essence”: refers to the Luminary; the source that the light resembles is His nature and Essence. “של המאציל — Of the Emanator”: of the Creator, who emanates Atzilut. “ב”ה — Blessed be He.” Now, why does the distinction matter? If we erase the difference between light and Essence, we will not understand why the light subsequently needs to unite with the vessels. If we turn the likeness into something merely outward, we will not understand why the vessels in which the light is vested are “Divinity, to create.”

“Whose Existence Is from His Essence”: The One Who Does Not Receive His Existence

Let us begin with what is familiar: everything we know receives its existence from something else. A human being did not invent their own soul, body, or ability to think. A tree receives from the earth, water, and the power of life within it. Even a new idea rests on an intellect that already exists. Even something very stable, a mountain or a sun, does not explain its existence from itself. Of each, one can ask: where does it come from, and on what does it depend?

Of the Holy One, blessed be He, it is said that “His existence is from His Essence,” and there the question “Where does He come from?” does not apply. This does not mean that He made Himself at some earlier stage. Self-creation is wholly unintelligible: to act, the

maker must already exist; to be the result of the act, he must not yet exist. The meaning is simpler and deeper: His very existence is not received. No cause, material, law, or power precedes Him upon which He relies. So too Rambam writes at the beginning of his work: "All existent beings … exist only from the truth of His existence"; "all existent beings need Him, and He, blessed be He, needs neither them nor any one of them."[163]

The Epistle adds: "and who is not an effect of any cause that preceded Him." First let us define the terms: an "ilah" is a cause, and an "alul" is the result of a cause. What does "that preceded Him" mean? Not only precedence in time. A cause operating at the very same moment precedes its effect in the order of dependence, since the effect depends on it. The Epistle denies every such precedence. "ח"ו," "G-d forbid," excludes the opposite thought: one must not imagine that He depends on anything.

It is important to remember of whom all this is said: the Emanator Himself, "His nature and Essence." The description must not be mechanically transferred to every link in the chain. The light is "akin to the Luminary," that is, drawn from Him. The kav is "from Or Ein Sof." The vessels are "the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut," that which is emanated. Of none of these is it said that "its existence is from its essence."

[163] Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, chapter 1, laws 1–3.

Precisely for this reason, the Epistle must explain how the power of creation operates in the vessels. The answer is not that they have self-derived existence. The answer is that the light within them is the light of the One whose existence is from His Essence, and that this light is united with them.

Here we can sense the difference between making and creating. A person makes a table from wood, arranges letters into an essay, or builds a machine from parts. These actions contain wisdom and innovation, but all rest on materials, powers, and orders of existence given to that person. Even an original idea is not the creation of the intellectual faculty from nothing. The example shows the limit of human ability, and no more: one who is not the source of one's own existence cannot establish existence from nothing. It does not explain how the Creator creates.

What about the created being itself? It often feels that it stands by its own power. But such a feeling is not "existence from its own essence." The created being depends on the Creator at every moment, as we learned in Chapter 3: "before Him," before G-d, the created being is "accounted as naught." The novel point is precisely this: the Creator, whose existence is not received from another, is the One who can bring into being an existence that appears to itself as yesh. The explanation does not identify the created being with

the Creator; it explains where the ability to create it comes from.

W07-04
Hebrew-source words
29–38

“whose existence is from His own essence, and who is not an effect of any cause that preceded Him, G-d forbid.”

This sentence describes the Emanator, not every link in the chain of light, and is the foundation of the power of creation about to be attributed to the Emanator alone. “שמציאותו — Whose existence”: the existence of the Emanator. “הוא מעצמותו — Is from His own essence”: derives from His Essence, rather than being received from another source. This is not a claim that He created Himself. “ואינו עלול — And who is not an effect”: not the result of anything. “מאיזה עילה — Of any cause”: of any cause whatever, without exception. “שקדמה לו — That preceded Him”: precedence of dependence, not only of time. “ח”ו — G-d forbid”: an absolute rejection of that attribution.

“And Therefore He Alone”: Creation from Nothing and Absolute Nonbeing

“And therefore” connects two statements: the Emanator is not an effect of a cause, and therefore He alone can create something from nothing and absolute nonbeing. But why does one follow from the other? To answer, we must return to what was said at the beginning of the Epistle.

At the Epistle's opening, the Alter Rebbe distinguished two kinds of relationship. The first is "successive derivation through cause and effect": when something is drawn from its cause, "the effect is encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence before it, like the sun's radiance within the sun." The effect knows and apprehends something of its cause, "and even in their nature and essence there is not so great a difference, except that one is a cause and the other an effect." The second is the relationship between created yesh and the power bringing it into being; there, "they are utterly incommensurate, not of the same kind, nor even partly so." Hence the name: "and therefore it is called specifically something from nothing."[164]

The difference between an effect and something from nothing is a difference of kind, not quantity. There is not one scale on which the effect is a little nullified and the created being greatly nullified. An effect is a continuation of its cause, and the two have "commensurability," a shared measure. Something from nothing is a new existence with no such commensurability with the power bringing it into being.

[164]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, at its beginning (above, chapters 2–3): "In hishtalshelut the alul is encompassed by the ilah and nullified in its existence to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun"; "In their nature and essence too there is no such great difference, except that this is a cause and that an effect"; in contrast to the created yesh: "Nor is there any commensurability whatsoever between the two, not any of it nor any portion of it... Therefore it is called specifically yesh me-ayin." On the fact that the distinction is between kinds ("commensurate" versus "incommensurate") rather than degrees on one scale, and that it does not suffice to say "there is no independent factor," see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1104–1106.

Our world contains no example of creation of something from nothing: everything we see is made from something already present. The Epistle therefore explains it negatively, distinguishing it from an effect drawn from and nullified to its cause.

We can now understand "and therefore" in three steps. First, one who receives existence acts within what one has received: transmitting, arranging, changing, and revealing, while the results remain commensurate with what was present within oneself. Second, One who does not receive His existence from a cause is not limited to results that continue His own existence. Third, therefore only He can establish an existence that is not a continuation of any prior existence. This is how we explain the connection indicated by "and therefore," without claiming to have apprehended how the Divine ability operates.[153]

The words "and from truly absolute nonbeing" prevent a common mistake: thinking that creation from nothing is making something out of a "material" called "nothing," as though there were an empty space from which matter was extracted. "Nothing" means that there was nothing, neither material nor a prior nature, of which the created being is a continuation. "Truly

[153] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1091–1094, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification," and pp. 1095–1098, in "Resolving the Issue: The Source of the Power and the Order of Its Operation." "He alone" refers to the Emanator; the power originates in Him, and the light united with the vessels operates in them and through them. Both presenting the vessels as independent partners and denying their role are rejected there. See also ibid., pp. 1089–1091: "Without any other cause or reason" is read within its sentence and does not negate the order of vesting.

absolute nonbeing" reinforces this: not "almost nothing," nor something subtle and hidden, but utter nonbeing.

"He alone" excludes every additional independent source of creation. It does not exclude the vessels about to be mentioned. The vessels are not another source, since they have no power of their own. "By His power and ability" emphasizes that the power is His, and that His ability does not rest on anything preceding it.

W07-05
Hebrew-source words 39–49

"And therefore He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and from truly absolute nonbeing,"

"לברוא — To create": creation in its precise sense. The remaining words were explained above, and the sentence as a whole excludes two readings: that creation is a change in the form of a prior existence, and that it is the extraction of matter from an empty space.

"Without Any Other Cause or Reason Preceding This Existent Being"

These words complete the definition of "from nothing," and each is precise.

"Without any" extends the negation all the way: not one cause, nor even part of a cause. "Cause and

reason," עילה וסיבה, are two names for a prior factor; the Epistle states both so that no opening remains.

The most important word here is "other." The Epistle does not say that created yesh has no Creator, or no cause at all. It has a Creator: He alone. It says that no other cause, besides Him, preceded it. Someone omitting "other" may understand that the world arose by itself, the exact opposite of the sentence's intention.

"Preceding this existent being" confines the negation to the created existence itself. Lessons in Tanya explains the words as a cause that precedes this existent being and is related to it.[156] That is: before this yesh there is no other existence, commensurate with it, of which it is a continuation.

Two distinctions follow. First, the absence of prior material must not be confused with absence of dependence. Created yesh does not rest on prior material, but depends on the Creator entirely and always.

Second, it is not enough to say "it has no independent factor." An ordinary effect too is not independent of the Creator, yet it is an effect rather than something from nothing. Two things must be said together. One: this yesh is not the development of a prior nature through

[156] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, the lesson for 7 Tishrei: "Their nefesh, ruach and neshamah" is explained there as "of the sefirot"; the kav is explained as a revelation of the Ein Sof light; and the words "preceding this yesh" are explained as a preceding cause related to this yesh. See above, chapter 5.

cause and effect. Two: the power that brings it newly into being is not an additional power separate from the Creator. It is the Creator's power, operating in the vessels united with His light.[164]

Still, these words must be read within their sentence. They describe the power of the One whose existence is from His Essence, and do not deny every order in creation. The evidence: the Epistle goes on to say that creation takes place "in and through them," through the vessels. The vessels are not "another cause or reason," because they do not stand opposite the Creator as another factor possessing its own power, and the light is united with them. The source remains one even when it operates through a path that it itself established.[153]

The distinction between cause and effect and something from nothing will recur many times. We shall already meet it in the next chapter: Malchut is called "alma de-itgalya," the revealed world, "because

[164]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, at its beginning (above, chapters 2–3): "In hishtalshelut the alul is encompassed by the ilah and nullified in its existence to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun"; "In their nature and essence too there is no such great difference, except that this is a cause and that an effect"; in contrast to the created yesh: "Nor is there any commensurability whatsoever between the two, not any of it nor any portion of it… Therefore it is called specifically yesh me-ayin." On the fact that the distinction is between kinds ("commensurate" versus "incommensurate") rather than degrees on one scale, and that it does not suffice to say "there is no independent factor," see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1104–1106.

[153]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1091–1094, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification," and pp. 1095–1098, in "Resolving the Issue: The Source of the Power and the Order of Its Operation." "He alone" refers to the Emanator; the power originates in Him, and the light united with the vessels operates in them and through them. Both presenting the vessels as independent partners and denying their role are rejected there. See also ibid., pp. 1089–1091: "Without any other cause or reason" is read within its sentence and does not negate the order of vesting.

in it is revealed the power of Or Ein Sof to create something from nothing, not through cause and effect."

W07-06
Hebrew-source words 50–57

"without any other cause or reason preceding this existent being."

"קודמת — Preceding": in the order of dependence, not only in time. The other words were explained above. The sentence thus completes the definition of "from nothing": no commensurate cause precedes the yesh whose nature it continues, as an effect continues its cause.

Two Questions: That There Be "Yesh," and That It Be "This Yesh"

The Epistle now returns to the limited world and asks a new question. We already know that the power of Ein Sof can bring existence into being. But why does each created being have a particular measure: this a tree and that a stone, this Chesed and that judgment, this one world and that another? These are two different questions. The first asks where existence itself comes from; the second, where definition comes from. The first has already been answered: "He alone." The second is now answered by the sentence opening with "and in order that."

Here too the language is precise: "And in order that this existent being, created by the power of Ein Sof,

should possess limit and measure." This yesh is created "by the power of Ein Sof"; the source of creation does not change when the discussion turns to explaining limitation. There is not one who creates existence and another who gives limitation. The same power, the power of Ein Sof, brings a finite being into existence. The only question is through what order it does so.

To understand the importance of this order, let us ask what would happen without it. In Tanya, Chapter 48, the Alter Rebbe writes that if the worlds descended successively from Or Ein Sof without contractions, merely from level to level through cause and effect, "this world would not have been created at all as it now is, in the aspect of limit and finitude." Etz Chaim says that the kav is thin "so that the light drawn to the emanated beings should be in measure and bound," and therefore the sefirot are called "middot," measures. The conclusion: limitation is not a defect in creation, but part of its intention, and it comes into being through a particular order: tzimtzum, kav, vessels.[155]

Why "vessels" specifically? Because a vessel is what defines. Already at the Epistle's opening it was said: "For the vessels are in the aspect of limit and finitude." Chochmah is not Chesed, and Chesed is not Gevurah; each vessel gives the light a particular mode of

[155] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branches 2–3; Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: the Ein Sof light, tzimtzum and drawing down.

revelation. Thus the vessels are suited to explain particular created beings. They add not "existence" but definition: measure, division, and multiplicity.

Does the Creator Need Vessels in Order to Create Limitation?

No. The Epistle describes an order: for created beings to have measure, Or Ein Sof vests itself in the vessels and unites with them. From this order, we learn the vessels' function. But we must not learn from it that the Holy One, blessed be He, is supposedly unable to bring limitation into being without the assistance of another factor, as though His ability were limited to this order.

Avodat HaKodesh by Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbai, one of the works of Kabbalah predating the Ari, states: Ein Sof is perfection without deficiency; if one says that He has power in the unlimited but no power in the limited, "you diminish His perfection." One must therefore say that He has power "in limitation from the unlimited," and the first limitation found from Him is the sefirot. These statements do not appear in the Epistle itself, but clarify that the power to bring limitation into being expresses perfection. In the Epistle, we learn how this power operates in the order it describes, through the vessels.[165]

[165] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1089–1091 and 1094–1095 (a described order is not a limitation on Divine ability), and pp. 1114–1118 and 1138–1140 (according to the Epistle, creatures possessing finitude and multiplicity come into being through vessels; the opposite claim, that the Essence creates finite creatures without any role for a vessel, is not made there). The idea that Ein

Here a familiar analogy can actually mislead: a craftsman making something with tools. The craftsman depends on external tools, made by others and possessing properties of their own. The vessels of Atzilut are not like this. They are not a foreign power whose assistance the Creator needs; they are Divinity, united with His light. Thus the analogy teaches only that there is a "means," and stops precisely at the question of dependence. Our task is to understand the order transmitted to us while preserving the foundation of unity at the Epistle's opening.

W07-07
Hebrew-source words
58–67

"And in order that this existent being, created by the power of Ein Sof, should possess limit and measure,"

"וכדי — And in order that": and so that; opens an additional question and the purpose served by the answer. "שיהיה — Should be": should come into being and exist. "היש הזה — This existent being": the same yesh discussed above; not "yesh" in general, but the particular created being. "הנברא בכח הא"ס — Created by the power of Ein Sof": the source of creation remains what was established, the power of Ein Sof. "בעל גבול ומדה — Possess limit and measure": possessing definition and a particular measure. The conclusion: explaining limitation does not require replacing the source of creation.

Sof has power also in finitude: Avodat HaKodesh by Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbai, part I, chapter 8. This is Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbai's wording.

“Became Vested … and Unites Within Them in the Ultimate Unity”

“Or Ein Sof became vested in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut”: the light operates through the vessels and is revealed according to their measure. The Epistle immediately adds “and unites within them in the ultimate unity,” because light and vessels are not separate like a body and a garment; it unites with them in complete union.

Why specifically “of Atzilut”? Because this complete union is the distinguishing mark of Atzilut. At the Epistle’s opening, it was said of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, their lights and vessels, “that they are all Divinity, unlike in BYA.” Likkutei Torah explains similarly: in Atzilut too there is an aspect of vessels, “except that there in Atzilut, He and His vessels are one, for the vessels too are in an aspect of unity, unlike in Beriah, from where it separates.” In Atzilut, the vessels themselves are united with the light; in Beriah, in its words, “from there it separates.”[157]

[157] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Re’eh, discourse beginning “ושמתי כדכד שמשותיך,” section 2: quotes Iggeret HaKodesh, “They have already emerged and separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot in which the kav from the Ein Sof light is vested,” and concludes: “Although the souls were drawn from the inner dimension of the vessels, nevertheless the kav from the Ein Sof light is not revealed within them, unlike the vessels, within which the kav shines, and He and His lights and His vessels are one.” Ibid., section 4: “In Atzilut too there are vessels, but there in Atzilut He and His vessels are one, so that the vessels too are in the state of unity, unlike Beriah, where ‘from there it divides.’ ” On the fact that the source concerns revelation of the kav and does not establish a measure, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1137–1138 and 1208–1209.

This unity rules out three mistaken pictures. The first is of two independent powers, light and vessel, joining one another from outside. The second is of light turning into matter in order to become vested. The third is of a vessel creating by its own power. What remains is an explanation of limitation that does not relinquish the infinite source: definition comes from the vessels, power comes from Ein Sof, and they are united.

W07-08
source words
68–77

“the light of Ein Sof became enclothed in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and unites within them in the ultimate unity,”

“Became enclothed” means that it acts through the vessels, as through a garment. “The light of Ein Sof” is the kav mentioned earlier, “the kav from the light of Ein Sof.” “In the vessels of the ten sefirot” means the vessels of the ten sefirot. “Of Atzilut” means of the world of Atzilut, where the vessels are Divinity. “And unites” means becomes one; these are not two independent powers joining from outside. “Within them” (בתוכן) means within the vessels, again using a feminine Hebrew form. “In the ultimate unity” means complete unity, beyond which there is none in the context under discussion. Two conclusions follow: the light does not turn into matter, and the vessel does not create by its own power.

“To the Point That He and His Vessels Are One, to Create in Them and Through Them”: Unity That Does Not Eliminate the Vessels

“To the point” indicates how far the unity extends: to the point that “He and His vessels are one.” With these words, the Epistle comes full circle. It opened with them, “He and His lights are one; He and His vessels are one in them,” and asked about them: “We must understand thoroughly how Ein Sof is one with His vessels, which are the kelim, when the vessels are characterized by limit and finitude.” Now, after the entire discussion, it returns to them as an answer. As we learned in Chapter 1, גרמוהי, “His vessels,” is not interpreted here as physical bones, but as the Epistle itself explains: “His vessels are the kelim.”

What does חד, “one,” mean? The Epistle itself defined it at the outset: “Rather, the intention is to say that they are Divinity, to create something from nothing like Ein Sof.” The unity of which it speaks is defined from the beginning in terms of the power to create. So too here: “He and His vessels are one, to create in them and through them.” Unity and action are stated in the same breath.

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, addresses this point in an addition to the explanation in Lessons in Tanya on the opening of the

Epistle. He explains that we should not say that Ein Sof and the vessels are "one thing" in the sense of simple identity. They unite "with regard to the action": an action that can be performed only by Ein Sof, or by that which unites with Ein Sof. This action is performed by Ein Sof, in the vessels and through them. The Rebbe connects this to the Alter Rebbe's own wording, "that they are Divinity … to create."[166]

In this Epistle, unity is explained through the act of creation. The vessels are "characterized by limit and finitude," and thus are not identical with the Essence; nevertheless, they are united with the light "in the ultimate unity." This is their Divinity here: one action of one Creator, performed "in them and through them."

"In them and through them": what is the difference between "in them" and "through them"? "In them" means inside the vessels: the power is present and acts within them. "Through them" means by their agency: the vessels are the means by which the created being receives its definition. The two expressions may be understood as two aspects of a single action: the power's presence within the vessels and the vessels' role in shaping the result. This is our proposed reading; the source does not spell it out. One thing is certain: we must not impose two separate acts of

[166] Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, the lesson for 4 Tishrei: "Addition by the Rebbe" on the words "However, the intention is to say that they are Divinity to create yesh me-ayin." See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1106–1107.

creation upon the double expression, one "in them" and another "through them."

We already encountered the Tzemach Tzedek's analogy of the king, from Derech Mitzvotecha, in Chapter 1; here it illustrates this relationship from the perspective of action. A king gives a gift, sometimes with his right hand and sometimes with his left. The hands differ, yet we say, "The king gave": the hand is a vessel through which he gives, and the king is one. Where does the analogy stop? The king's hands are parts of his body, and the king himself is a created being. In the analogue there is no body and there are no limbs, and the light's unity with the vessels is deeper than any relationship between a person and his limbs. The analogy teaches just one thing: a single action of a single giver can pass through distinct means without those means becoming givers.[160]

Two opposite explanations are thus rejected. One makes the vessels independent partners in the act of creation. The other denies their role on the grounds that Divine exclusivity eliminates every ordered process. The phrase "in them and through them"

[160] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 3: "Ihu refers to the essence of the Ein Sof light, and garmohi are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut in which He, blessed be He, unites and vests Himself; the light is a likeness of the Luminary, in the aspect of actual Ein Sof." There follows the analogy of a king giving a gift sometimes with his right hand and sometimes with his left. See Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48, at its beginning: the light and vitality extending from Him "and united with His blessed nature and Essence in the ultimate unity."

requires us to retain their role, while unity requires us not to turn that role into a separate authority.[153]

W07-09
source words
78–89

“to the point that He and His vessels are one, to create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude,”

“To the point” means to such a degree that; it shows how far unity extends. “That He and His vessels are one” returns to the opening of the Epistle and brings the question full circle. “To create”: the unity is stated in relation to the act of creation. “In them and through them” means within the vessels and by their agency: two aspects of one action, not two acts of creation. “Creatures” means created beings. “Possessing limit and finitude” means possessing definition and an endpoint; תכלית here means an end, as at the opening, rather than a purpose. In brief: unity is explained in terms of the creative power acting through a limited vessel.

[153] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1091–1094, in “Mapping the Question and Its Clarification,” and pp. 1095–1098, in “Resolving the Issue: The Source of the Power and the Order of Its Operation.” “He alone” refers to the Emanator; the power originates in Him, and the light united with the vessels operates in them and through them. Both presenting the vessels as independent partners and denying their role are rejected there. See also ibid., pp. 1089–1091: “Without any other cause or reason” is read within its sentence and does not negate the order of vesting.

"And Particularly Through Their Enclothement in BYA": From Atzilut to Particular Created Beings

The sentence's final words lead us to the next stage.

"And particularly" means especially. The word does not say that creation through the vessels begins only in BYA. We already learned in Chapter 5 that within Atzilut itself the palaces of Atzilut and the bodies of the angels, "which are in the category of yesh," were created from the outer dimension of the vessels. It says that numerous, limited created beings, such as those we know, become manifest especially when the vessels are vested in the worlds below Atzilut. "And particularly" therefore adds a realization of limitation and separation; it does not say that there was no limitation at all in Atzilut.

"Their enclothement" means when the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut become vested; these are the same vessels of which it was said "in them and through them." "In BYA" means in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah.

Here we must recall a distinction from Chapter 4: the word "vessels" is used for two different things. One is the source-vessels of Atzilut, particularly the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. They descend and become vested in the lower world, becoming its "neshamah," its source

of vitality, while remaining Divinity. The other is the lower world's own vessels, "the beginning and first emergence of created yesh," which receive that vitality. The vesting neither turns the vessels of Atzilut into created beings nor turns the receiving vessels into Atzilut.

Later in the Epistle this will be described in detail. "And the radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut pierced the parsa with them, and shines in them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself." (Parsa, a screen, is the kabbalistic term for the boundary separating the world of Atzilut from the worlds below it.) "And also, from the light of Ein Sof that surrounds and encompasses the four worlds of ABYA equally, there shines toward the inner kav, through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and in shining within the vessels it gives them power and strength to create yesh me'ayin." From this the Epistle will conclude: "And since creation is through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the aspect of multiplicity and division and limitation and finitude."[167]

[167] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later: "The radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut pierced the parsa with them and shines in them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself" (below, chapter 11); "Also from the Ein Sof light, which surrounds and encompasses the four worlds of ABYA equally, there shines toward the inner kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA; by shining within the vessels it gives them power and strength to create yesh me-ayin. Since creation is through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the category of multiplicity, division, limit and finitude" (below, chapter 13). For the two meanings of "vessels"—the source vessels of Atzilut and the receiving vessels of the lower world—see above, chapter 4.

This raises questions that the present chapter does not resolve. Which "vessel" is mentioned in each of these sentences: the source-vessel that becomes vested, or the lower world's own receiving vessel? In what sense is it said, "just as in Atzilut itself"? We will discuss these questions in their proper places, according to the context of each sentence, rather than settling them here by applying a single designation to all the vessels in BYA. For now, what our sentence says is sufficient: the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut in BYA is the particular means by which specific, limited created beings become manifest.

W07-10
source words
90–93

"and particularly through their enclothement in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah."

"And particularly" means especially; it points to the way limitation and multiplicity become manifest in greater detail, without excluding the creation already mentioned in Atzilut from the outer dimension of the vessels. "Through" means by means of. "Their enclothement" means the vesting of the vessels of Atzilut; they do not thereby become the lower worlds' own vessels. "In BYA" means in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. This sentence concludes the answer and prepares the discussion of Malchut's special role.

Returning to the Wording: A Continuous Reading

We can now read the entire passage continuously, hearing in each phrase what we have learned. The quotations are the Epistle's wording; what comes between them is our reading.

"But they are not actual Divinity, capable of creating something from nothing": the souls, which are "a likeness of the aspect of Divinity" and are not a separate yesh, are not "actual Divinity" in the sense defined at the Epistle's opening, namely the power to create something from nothing. "Since they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav from the light of Ein Sof is enclothed": already upon their emergence from the union in Atzilut, they are outside the vessels in which the kav is vested, the light of Ein Sof drawn forth with measure and order. "Separated from the vessels" does not mean "separated from Divinity."

"For the light is of the nature of the luminary, which is the nature and essence of the Emanator, blessed be He": the kav is light, and the light resembles its source and is united with it, but is not the source itself. "Whose existence is from His own essence, and who is not an effect of any cause that preceded Him, G-d forbid": He does not receive His existence from anything, and no cause precedes Him, either in time or

in the order of dependence. “And therefore He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and from truly absolute nonbeing, without any other cause or reason preceding this existent being”: He whose existence is not received can establish an existence that is not the continuation of any preceding existence. The created yesh has a Creator, but it has no “other” cause preceding it.

“And in order that this existent being, created by the power of Ein Sof, should possess limit and measure”: the creative power remains the same power, and the new question is how the created being acquires definition. “The light of Ein Sof became enclothed in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and unites within them in the ultimate unity, to the point that He and His vessels are one, to create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude”: the power comes from the light of Ein Sof, definition and limitation come from the vessels, and they are united in the act of creation. The vessels neither create by their own power nor disappear from the explanation. “And particularly through their enclothement in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah”: the multiplicity and limitation of particular created beings become manifest especially when the vessels of Atzilut are vested in the worlds below Atzilut.

“He Alone” Within the Multiplicity of Levels

If the Creator alone creates, why must we speak of light, kav and vessels? The answer is the distinction that has accompanied us throughout the chapter: the source of the power is one matter, and its manner of operation is another. The vessels do not acquire an independent power alongside the Creator, nor do they disappear from the explanation, since without them the words “in them and through them” would remain unexplained. For the same reason, even a very lofty soul does not become an independent source of creation by virtue of its stature. In this way “He alone” is preserved amid the entire multiplicity of levels in the Epistle.

To Whom Does One Pray in a World of Sefirot?

The multiplicity of names, light and kav, vessels and sefirot, Chochmah and Chesed and Malchut, may evoke a picture of independent higher powers, each ruling its own domain. The Epistle rejects such a picture at its root. The sefirot are not authorities alongside G-d. The language of lights and vessels describes revelation and governance within Divine unity, and this question has a practical consequence: to whom one directs prayer.

The Tzemach Tzedek answers this in Derech Mitzvotecha. The names the kabbalists assigned to the attributes, such as אל in Chesed and אלקים in Gevurah, “do not refer to the sefirah itself.” The sefirah is a

Divine power emanated from Him, and is not the Divine Essence; the names refer to the Creator Himself when He shines through His attribute of Chesed or His attribute of Gevurah. He therefore cites the Sages' words, "To Him and not to His attributes": one must not pray to the attributes themselves, even as intermediaries that might arouse mercy before Him. Prayer is always directed to the Creator.[168]

The multiplicity of names describes modes of revelation and governance, while prayer addresses the Holy One, blessed be He, alone. The material cited here is the Tzemach Tzedek's explanation, in Derech Mitzvotecha, of the principle in the Epistle. Questions concerning prayer formulations, intentions and angels as emissaries require study of the sources that address them.[169]

Knowing the distinctions, then, is meant to prevent a multiplicity of authorities, not produce it. The depth of the explanation brings the heart back to "He alone," to the unity with which the Epistle opened.[169]

[168]Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapters 2–3 (the names do not designate "the sefirah itself," but the Creator Himself as He shines through His attributes; the analogy of a king giving with his right hand and with his left), and chapters 7–8 ("To Him, not to His attributes"; prayer is always directed to the Cause of causes). The discussion here concerns the unity of the source of influence; the particulars of prayer texts and their intentions are discussed in their respective sources.

[169]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1095–1097, in the discussion "Divinity in the Sefirot and Prayer: The Limits of the Practical Investigation."

[169]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1095–1097, in the discussion "Divinity in the Sefirot and Prayer: The Limits of the Practical Investigation."

Summary

The chapter answered the question with which it began. Lofty souls, even when they are not a separate yesh, are not "actual Divinity, capable of creating something from nothing," because they have already emerged from the vessels in which the kav is vested. The power to create something from nothing belongs to the Emanator alone, whose existence is from His own essence and who is not an effect of a cause. The vessels of Atzilut, in which the light of Ein Sof becomes vested and united, do not possess power alongside Him; they are the means through which created beings possessing limit and finitude are created.

These are the concepts we have learned and the relationships between them:

- **The Emanator:** His existence is from His own essence, and He is not an effect of a cause. He alone therefore has the power to create something from nothing and absolute nonbeing.
- **The light:** akin to the luminary, united with its source and bearing its infinite character, but not the source itself.
- **The kav:** the light of Ein Sof drawn forth with measure and order. It is limited, and it is not created.

- **The vessels of Atzilut:** the light becomes vested and united in them in the ultimate unity, and in them and through them limited created beings are created.
- **The vesting of the vessels in BYA:** the particular means through which specific, limited created beings become manifest.
- **The souls:** they have emerged from the vessels. They are a likeness of Divinity and are not a separate yesh, but they are not actual Divinity capable of creating.

This picture, too, is not the end of the discussion. Later in the Epistle it will become clear that the radiance of sovev kol almin, the light that does not become vested in the worlds according to their measure, also shines toward the kav through the vessels and gives them "power and strength to create yesh me'ayin." The Tzemach Tzedek even emphasizes that in relation to the encompassing light the kav is "a mere radiance," and that the principal coming into being of yesh is through the radiance of sovev.[159] Our chapter does not settle every detail of the mechanism. It establishes the foundation: the power to create something from nothing belongs to the Creator alone, and the vessels

[159] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27. The Tzemach Tzedek quotes the Epistle there: "The light is a likeness of the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, who alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin." He adds that the kav "is only a mere radiance of the Ein Sof light," "a thin line that is only a small radiance" relative to the encompassing light. In his account, the principal coming into being of yesh is through the radiance of sovev kol almin, which gives "power and strength to the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut together with the kav within them." See below, chapter 13.

united with His light are the means through which He establishes limited created beings.

Having studied the chapter, the reader can distinguish four terms that are easily confused: the Emanator's Essence, the light of Ein Sof, the kav and the vessels. The reader knows that "separated from the vessels" does not mean "separated from Divinity," and that creation "without any other cause or reason" is not creation without a Creator.

Two questions remain open. The first already arose in Chapter 5: what, precisely, is the positive content of "a likeness of Divinity" in souls that have emerged from the vessels, and do they possess any measure of the kav? The Epistle does not say. The second will be discussed in its proper place, later in the Epistle: which "vessel" is mentioned in each sentence concerning the vessels in BYA, the source-vessel that becomes vested or the lower world's own receiving vessel, and in what sense is it said, "just as in Atzilut itself"?

From Here to Malchut

This chapter established who creates, and the means through which limited created beings are created. It left a question to which it merely alluded: if the creative power acts in all ten vessels, where exactly, in which sefirah, does the transition to "a yesh and an entirely separate thing" take place? The next sentence

of the Epistle, “However, it is known,” answers this question, and with it we will open the next chapter.

Studying the Chapter with Artificial Intelligence Tools

In this chapter it is easy to confuse words and terms: “separate” in several senses; essence, light, kav and vessels; and “something from nothing,” mistakenly turned into “without any cause.” An answer from an artificial intelligence tool is a proposal to be checked, not a source.

Exercise 1: “Separate” in Several Senses

What to ask. Request a list of places in the Epistle where the word “separate” appears (“a yesh and a separate thing,” “a thing separate from Divinity,” “separated from the vessels”), with each sentence’s subject and the meaning of the word in that sentence.

What to check. Open the Epistle and locate each quotation in its context. Delete from the list any quotation that cannot be found there. Record as a proposal any explanation that is not grounded in the sentence’s wording.

The limit of the conclusion. An accurate list shows that the word has several meanings. It does not prove the positive status of the souls after they have emerged from the vessels. If the artificial intelligence tool

concludes from the list that "separated from the vessels" means "separated from Divinity," that is its own conclusion, and the Epistle's wording itself does not accord with it: these same souls are described as "a likeness of the aspect of Divinity" and "not in the category of a yesh and a separate thing."[170]

Exercise 2: Four Terms That Must Not Be Confused

What to ask. Request a one-sentence definition of each term: the Emanator's Essence, the light of Ein Sof, kav and vessels. Ask how they relate to one another in our passage.

What to check. Two common mistakes are identifying the kav with the Essence and making the light an additional existence alongside the Creator. Check each definition against the sections "Is the Kav the Essence of Ein Sof?" and "Is the Light an Additional Existence Alongside the Creator?" and against the sources they cite.

The limit of the conclusion. An orderly definition supplied by an artificial intelligence tool is a reformulation, not a source. The precise wording is determined by the sources, and some details, such as

[170] On learning with a study partner, whether a person or an artificial-intelligence tool, and on checking a quotation in its context, see "Studying Further—Research Tools and Artificial Intelligence," in the sections "Learning with an Available Study Partner: Where to Begin," "How to Check That a Source Is Genuine," and "A Few More Habits of a Learner" (especially "Distinguishing a Quotation, an Explanation and a Hypothesis").

the place of sovev kol almin, will be explained only later in the Epistle.

Exercise 3: "Something from Nothing" in Plain Language

What to ask. Request a plain-language rendering of the sentence, "And therefore He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and from truly absolute nonbeing, without any other cause or reason preceding this existent being."

What to check. Check whether "other" has been omitted, and whether "something from nothing" has become "without any cause" or "without a source." According to the chapter, the created yesh has a Creator and has no "other" cause preceding it.

The limit of the conclusion. Make corrections according to the Epistle's wording. The chapter does not explain precisely how something comes into being from nothing, and a formulation proposed by an artificial intelligence tool must not supply the missing explanation.

Chapter 8 | Malchut, Letters and Keter from Below Upward

What We Already Know

As we approach the discussion of Malchut, let us recall four things we have already learned:

- **The source of the power.** The power to create something from nothing belongs to the Creator alone, "whose existence is from His own essence" (Chapter 7).
- **The manner of revelation.** The light of Ein Sof becomes vested and united in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and in them and through them limited created beings are created. The vessels do not possess power alongside the Creator, and they must not be removed from the explanation (Chapter 7).
- **The ten sefirot.** Malchut is the last. In the enumeration that includes Keter, Keter is the highest; later we will also examine the enumeration in which Daat is counted in its place. At the Epistle's opening it is said that the vessels "are Divinity, to create something from nothing like Ein Sof, and not merely by way of a chainlike descent of cause and effect." According to the Epistle, what the Ramak and the Zohar wrote about "cause and effect"

concerns the chainlike descent of the sefirot from one another.

- **The partzufim.** Groups of sefirot are given names drawn from human life: Ze'ir Anpin is the partzuf of the emotional attributes, and Nukva is Malchut, which receives from it.

This gives rise to the question the chapter answers: among the ten sefirot, where exactly does the transition to "a yesh and an entirely separate thing" become manifest?

Chapter 7's answer raises three new questions:

- **Are all the vessels equal?** There are ten vessels of Atzilut. Do all of them stand in the same relationship to the emergence of the created being?
- **Where does multiplicity come from?** Created beings are numerous and different from one another. How does such multiplicity emerge from a source that is "utterly one and unique"?
- **Where is the boundary?** The words "and particularly through their enclothement in BYA" point to a transition from Atzilut to Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. Where precisely does the boundary run, and what becomes manifest there?

The passage before us, 124 Hebrew-source words in twelve units, answers the three questions in four steps:

1. **Where.** The transition to separate yesh takes place in Malchut of Atzilut: "the principal coming into

being of a yesh and an entirely separate thing" is from it, "which becomes Atik of Beriah." The reason given by the Epistle is: "for there is no king without a people, etc."

2. **Where multiplicity comes from.** Created beings are numerous and differentiated because they come "through the multiplicity of letters issuing from Malchut, the mouth of the Lord." The letters are divided among the five articulatory organs of the mouth, and these derive "from the five gevurot of Nukva," that is, from Nukva's five powers of restraint.
3. **The name.** Hence Malchut's name, alma de-itgalya, "the revealed world": in it is revealed the power of the light of Ein Sof to create something from nothing, not through cause and effect. In this it differs from the first nine sefirot, which "were emanated through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, and the Ein Sof light is vested in Chochmah alone."
4. **The explanation.** The question arises: how does the last sefirah, specifically, bear so lofty a power? The answer is, "their beginning is embedded in their end." Keter, the intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated beings, contains "the lowest aspect of Ein Sof," and is therefore called "the crown of kingship." For the same reason, Malchut of Atzilut too is called "Keter" from below upward.

Each step answers a different question: the first answers "where," the second "how multiplicity comes about," the third gives this a name, and the fourth explains why this does not contradict the order of levels. Along the way we will encounter many words from kabbalistic terminology. We will first explain each in its own right, and then return to the sentence in which it appears.[171]

Four Questions for Reading

This passage contains many terms that are easily confused. To find our bearings, we will ask four questions about each sentence:

- **What is the source of the ability?** Throughout the passage there is one answer: the power of Ein Sof. No sefirah, letter or gevurah adds a power of its own.
- **Through what means and at what level is the ability revealed?** Here Malchut, the letters, the articulatory organs and the gevurot enter the discussion.
- **Toward whom?** Toward created beings that experience themselves as yesh, distinct and numerous.

[171] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1227–1231: the opening of the issue "Malchut and Letters: Unity of the Source and Multiplicity of Created Beings" and "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification." Three distinctions on which this chapter is built are presented there: Malchut is not "a new and independent source"; the letters are not "merely an analogy," and one need not see them and the vessels as "two competing systems"; the formula "their beginning is embedded in their end" applies in the Epistle in three places that must not be interchanged.

- **From which side are we looking?** From above downward, in the order of the levels' chainlike descent, or from below upward, from the recipient's perspective? This question will be decisive at the end of the passage.

The first two questions will accompany the entire discussion: the creative power belongs to Ein Sof, while Malchut and the letters are the means through which it is revealed.

On the Images

The passage uses images drawn from human life: king and people, mouth, breath and letters, a crown upon the head, beginning and end. They describe relationships of source and drawing down, giver and recipient, inner and outer dimensions. We will explain each image in its place, distinguishing the relationship it teaches from its human details.

"However, It Is Known": A Principal Locus, Not a Partner

W08-01
source words
1–9

> **"However, it is known that the principal coming into being of a yesh and an entirely separate thing"**

However: אמנם here means "indeed, and yet." The word does not retract what was said earlier; it adds a qualification. Until now the discussion concerned the

creative power in all ten vessels; from this point it will explain in which of them the principal coming into being of separate yesh is revealed.

It is known means "the matter is known." The Epistle presents the statement as a familiar principle in Kabbalah, rather than an innovation of its own.

That the principal means "that the main aspect of…." עיקר denotes the focal point: the place where the thing principally happens and becomes manifest. It does not mean "only." The word neither excludes the participation of the levels above Malchut nor makes Malchut a source of power.

Coming into being means "formation": the transition from ayin to yesh. This is the Epistle's regular term for the act of creation.

The yesh is created reality, which has an existence of its own in its own eyes and in the eyes of other created beings. Yesh is not necessarily matter. The evidence is that the Epistle called the vessels and lights of the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah "the beginning of created yesh," and also said of the bodies of the angels in Atzilut, which contain no physicality, "that they are in the category of yesh."

And an entirely separate thing means "and a thing standing completely on its own." The expression does not add a second created being to "the yesh"; it explains which kind of yesh is meant. What does

"entirely" add? The context suggests an answer. We have already encountered yesh in Atzilut itself, the palaces and the bodies of the angels, "which are not utterly nullified as an effect is in relation to its cause." "Entirely" apparently distinguishes that yesh from a yesh whose separateness is complete. This is a reading suggested by the sequence of the discussion, not an explicit definition in the Epistle.[172]

What the Word "However" Adds

The previous chapter emphasized "He alone": only He whose existence is from His own essence can create something from nothing, and the vessels are united with Him "to the point that He and His vessels are one." From this the reader might draw a hasty conclusion: if the power of Ein Sof shines in all ten vessels, there is no longer any difference between one sefirah and another with regard to creation, and no point in asking where it takes place.

"However" teaches that this conclusion is premature. The creative power is one, but within the order of revelation there is a particular place where it "goes outward" to a created being that stands on its own. This step does not change the answer to "Who creates?" It answers a different question: "Where, and

[172] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1234–1235, questions 89–92: what "a yesh and an entirely separate thing" adds beyond the heichalot and angelic bodies already called "an aspect of yesh"; and whether the earlier yesh is yesh "in terms of finitude/form/relative separation." This distinction is marked there as a hypothesis requiring an explicit source.

at which level, does the transition to separate yesh take place?" There are therefore not two sources here, the power of Ein Sof on one side and Malchut as an additional creator on the other. If that were so, the Epistle would contradict what it wrote a few lines earlier: "And therefore He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and from truly absolute nonbeing."[173]

"Principal": A Focal Point, Not a Second Source

"The principal coming into being is from Malchut" means that the transition from Divinity to separate yesh takes place and becomes manifest principally at the level of Malchut. The source of the ability is in Ein Sof; in Malchut this ability is revealed toward created beings.[174]

A simple question sharpens the distinction: what would be missing if there were no Malchut? Not "power," since the power is not its own. What would be missing is the manner in which the power reaches a distinct, defined and multiple created existence. That manner is the subject of the entire passage.

[173] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the paragraph preceding the passage: "For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, whose existence is of His own Essence and who is not an effect of any cause preceding Him, G-d forbid. Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness."

[174] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1232–1233, in "Resolving the Issue: Malchut Is Not a Competing Source": the concept of Malchut "does not… create another power alongside Ein Sof, but clarifies a role within the order of revelation"; on Atik of Beriah: "The end of one order becomes a higher source relative to another order. This does not mean that all Beriah turns into Atzilut or that the names of the levels cease to distinguish."

“A Yesh and an Entirely Separate Thing”: Status and Relationship

What does “entirely separate” mean? A convenient answer is, “The created being merely seems separate to itself,” but that is too brief. The Epistle itself defined the concept at its opening, and we will return there.[175]

There it distinguished two perspectives. From the perspective of the Holy One’s knowledge, “from above downward,” the created yesh “is accounted as naught before Him”: it is nullified in its existence in relation to the power bringing it into being, “like the sun’s radiance within the sun.” But “in knowledge from below upward,” that is, from the created being’s perspective, “the created yesh is an entirely separate thing.” The Epistle gives two reasons for this.

The first reason concerns knowledge: “the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all.” An effect knows its cause to some extent and is therefore nullified to it. A created being does not apprehend at all the power bringing it into being and therefore is not nullified to it in its own experience: one who apprehends nothing of one’s source cannot feel nullified to it.

[175] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, at the beginning, from “Yesh me-ayin is called creation in the Holy Tongue” through “Therefore it is called specifically yesh me-ayin.” There also is the comparison with “the commensurability of the alul with the ilah, for the alul knows and apprehends some apprehension of its ilah and is nullified to it through this knowledge and apprehension.”

The second reason concerns nature, and here lies the principal innovation. Even "in their nature and essence," the created being and the power bringing it into being are utterly incommensurate. The difference between cause and effect is relatively small, "only that this is a cause and that an effect." But the difference "between the nature of the created yesh and the nature of the power and light flowing into it" is immeasurable. Hence the term: "And therefore it is specifically called something from nothing."

Three points follow:

- **Not merely a feeling.** "Entirely separate" also describes a relationship of nature: the created being is utterly incommensurate with its source. The expression therefore cannot be replaced by a psychological statement such as "it seems to it."
- **Not independence.** The same Epistle says that from the perspective of the Holy One's knowledge, the created being is nullified in its existence. "Separate" does not mean "self-subsisting": the created being is separate in terms of relationship and apprehension, and at every moment depends entirely on the power bringing it into being.
- **Not physicality.** Spiritual created beings too are called yesh. The question is not what something is made of, but its status: is it nullified to its source as

an effect to its cause, or does it stand on its own as yesh?

In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe distinguishes between human action and the making of heaven and earth: a person changes the form of existing matter, "something from something," whereas creation is "something from nothing."[176] Thus, as we will see later, a created being must be brought into existence at every moment. It is "entirely separate" in relationship and apprehension, yet has not a single moment of existence without the power bringing it into being.

One question remains open: what inner link connects that which is still "a likeness of the aspect of Divinity," such as the souls of Atzilut before their descent, with an "entirely separate" yesh? Here the Epistle identifies the location of the transition and its result, but does not detail all its stages.[177]

[176] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 2: "Once a vessel has emerged from the smith, the vessel no longer needs the smith's hands... The great difference between human work and contrivance, which is yesh mi-yesh... and the making of heaven and earth, which is yesh me-ayin."

[177] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1242–1244: "The Epistle establishes the source and the result, but does not supply the entire inner link of the transition here." See also vol. I, pp. 62–64, in the list of questions that remain unresolved: "What is the inner link between a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction and a wholly separate yesh?"

“From Malchut of Atzilut, Which Becomes Atik of Beriah”: The End That Becomes a Head

W08-02
source words
10–21

“is from Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah, for there is no king without a people, etc.”

Is: הוא refers to “the principal coming into being of yesh.” The sentence says that this principal emergence comes from Malchut of Atzilut.

From Malchut: ’ממל is short for ממלכות. The mem at the beginning of the word means “from”: coming into being proceeds from Malchut.

Of Atzilut: דאצילות means “of Atzilut”; in Aramaic, a dalet at the beginning of a word means “of.” That is, the tenth and last sefirah of the world of Atzilut.

Which becomes: שנעשה, a masculine form, means here שנעשית, the feminine form, “which becomes”: it takes on a different role. The Epistle uses the masculine verb, as it also does at the end of the passage: “Malchut of Atzilut is called [נקרא] Keter.” Such language concerning Malchut is found in other Chassidic works as well.[178]

[178] Masculine usage with reference to Malchut also occurs in other sources: Torah Or, Parashat Vayera, discourse beginning פתח אליהו: “For Malchut of Atzilut becomes [נעשה, masculine] Keter for Beriah”; Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Minnui Melech, chapter 3: “Malchut of Atzilut that becomes [שנעשה, masculine] Atik for Beriah.” In Likkutei Torah, Chukkat, “ביאור ענין עלי באר,” both forms occur in the same passage: “שנעשית עתיק לבריאה” [that becomes Atik for Beriah, feminine] and “נעשה כתר לבריאה” [becomes Keter for Beriah, masculine].

Atik: literally "removed," distant. This is the name of the highest and most concealed aspect at the "head" of a world. We will explain it more fully immediately below.

Of Beriah means "of the world of Beriah." This is the first world after Atzilut, in which separate yesh begins.

For means "because…." The word introduces a reason.

There is no king without a people means that no king exists without a people. This is a familiar saying, which the Epistle uses as a reason.

Etc.: וכו' means "and so forth." The Epistle abbreviates, relying on the reader's familiarity with the saying. It neither identifies its source nor cites its continuation.

The End of One System and the Head of Another

To understand "Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah," let us first picture a "world" in kabbalistic language. Each world is a system of ten sefirot. It has a "head," the aspect of Keter, and an "end," the aspect of Malchut. The writings of the Arizal establish a principle: the end of a higher world becomes the head of the world below it. In the words of Etz Chaim: "Malchut within Malchut in the world of Atzilut, which becomes vested in the head of Beriah … is the aspect of Atik of the world of Beriah."[179] Similarly, the Alter

[179] Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Gate of the Discourses on ABYA), chapter 1. There Keter is said to be "not part of that world, but like the king's crown, which is above his head and not part of his head; therefore it is not included in the sefirah count, and Daat is counted in its place"; the reason for needing "an intermediate level between the Emanator and the emanated" is given there; the

Rebbe wrote in Torah Or: "Now, in all the worlds of ABYA there is an intermediary aspect of Keter. For Malchut of Atzilut becomes Keter of Beriah, and Malchut of Beriah [becomes] Keter of Yetzirah."[180]

The first lesson: "low" and "high" are relative terms. What comes last in the order of Atzilut is the highest in relation to Beriah. It therefore makes no sense to ask, "Is Malchut low?" without adding, "In relation to which system?" This principle will accompany us to the chapter's end, and return later in the discussion of the mitzvot and the power revealed at the bottom of Asiyah.

The second lesson concerns Malchut's role: when it becomes vested in Beriah, it becomes its head, illuminating and giving it life. Likkutei Torah, the collection of the Alter Rebbe's discourses on the weekly Torah portions, describes Binah of Atzilut descending into Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah "through first becoming vested in Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah," and Malchut as "the intermediary that draws the light of Ein Sof, blessed be

two aspects of Keter are "the very lowest aspect of all the aspects of Ein Sof" and "the highest level of all... the emanated entities, containing the root of all the emanated entities": "These two aspects are called Atik and Arich Anpin, and both are called Keter." There also is the discussion of "Malchut within Malchut in the world of Atzilut, vested in the head of Beriah, which is Keter, called Arich Anpin." Likkutei Torah cites this matter as "Etz Chaim, Gate 41, chapter 3"; the division into gates and chapters is not uniform in all editions. On Atik as Keter's inner aspect, see Etz Chaim, Gate 47 (Gate of the Order of ABYA), chapter 4: "The seven lower [sefirot] of Atik vest themselves within Arich Anpin."

[180]Torah Or, Parashat Vayera, discourse beginning פתח אליהו: "This is 'You are one, but not in a numerical count,' for it is not counted among the ten sefirot (referring to supernal Keter, the intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated)... For Chochmah's coming into being from Keter is from actual ayin, unlike the order of hishtalshelut, which is the coming into being of yesh mi-yesh, etc." Later: "In all the worlds of ABYA there is the aspect of Keter as intermediary..."

He, from Atzilut into Beriah."[181] Torah Or says that it "connects Atzilut with Beriah, although Atzilut and Beriah are two opposites," and that this power comes to it "because their end is embedded in their beginning, and its root is in the aspect of Keter."[182]

We will understand the last sentence only at the end of the passage, when we reach "their beginning is embedded in their end." Already, however, we can see that the Epistle is not jumping from subject to subject: the beginning and end of the passage discuss the same connection.

Three Terms That Must Not Be Interchanged: Keter, Atik and "Root"

In explanations of the passage one sometimes hears three words used as though they were synonyms: Malchut of Atzilut becomes "Keter" of Beriah, "Atik" of Beriah, or an "inner root" of Beriah. They are not identical, however, and should be distinguished.

Keter is the general name for the head of a system. It stands above the system more than it forms part of it. Etz Chaim says that Keter "is not included in that

[181]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Chukkat, "ביאור ענין עלי באר" (on the discourse beginning אז ישיר ישראל). It cites Sefer HaBahir, "There are ten sefirot from above downward and from below upward," and Etz Chaim, the end of the Gate of MAN and MAD, "In the ten sefirot of returning light, Malchut is Keter"; there also, on Binah of Atzilut descending "through first vesting itself in Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik for Beriah," and on "Malchut of Beriah becoming Atik and a flowing source for Yetzirah."

[182]Torah Or, Parashat Bereishit, discourse beginning צאינה וראינה. At the end of the passage there: "Its root is in Keter, which is the lowest aspect of the Emanator; therefore it has the ability to connect Atzilut with BYA."

world, but resembles the king's crown, which is above his head and is not part of his head." It is therefore sometimes not counted among the ten sefirot, with Daat counted in its place, "and nevertheless, at times we count it among the ten sefirot."[179]

Atik is a more precise term. According to the writings of the Arizal, Keter itself has two aspects. Its inner, higher aspect is called Atik, while the aspect that is the root of all the sefirot of that world is called Arich Anpin, "and both are called Keter."[179] The name Atik indicates distance. Derech Mitzvotecha, by the Tzemach Tzedek, the Alter Rebbe's grandson, says that the aspect of Atik is "that which is above intellect, from the expression 'He who removes mountains' (Job 9:5), for it is removed

[179]Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Gate of the Discourses on ABYA), chapter 1. There Keter is said to be "not part of that world, but like the king's crown, which is above his head and not part of his head; therefore it is not included in the sefirah count, and Daat is counted in its place"; the reason for needing "an intermediate level between the Emanator and the emanated" is given there; the two aspects of Keter are "the very lowest aspect of all the aspects of Ein Sof" and "the highest level of all... the emanated entities, containing the root of all the emanated entities": "These two aspects are called Atik and Arich Anpin, and both are called Keter." There also is the discussion of "Malchut within Malchut in the world of Atzilut, vested in the head of Beriah, which is Keter, called Arich Anpin." Likkutei Torah cites this matter as "Etz Chaim, Gate 41, chapter 3"; the division into gates and chapters is not uniform in all editions. On Atik as Keter's inner aspect, see Etz Chaim, Gate 47 (Gate of the Order of ABYA), chapter 4: "The seven lower [sefirot] of Atik vest themselves within Arich Anpin."

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and separate from the apprehension of the created beings in the three worlds of BYA, but encompasses them."[183] Likkutei Torah says: "Atik of Beriah is the sovev of Beriah," meaning an aspect that encompasses the world of Beriah, above what becomes vested within it.[184] Thus, when the Epistle writes "Atik of Beriah" rather than simply "Keter of Beriah," it points to the most concealed aspect at the head of the new world.

Root does not appear in our passage; it is an image used in explanations, not a term the Epistle uses for this matter. (Elsewhere in the Epistle the word appears, spelled שרש rather than שורש, in connection with the drop, Torah and the mitzvot.) The image is appropriate when it teaches that Beriah receives its beginning from Malchut of Atzilut. But the expression "inner root" may mislead, because "inner" here says two opposite things: within the structure of Keter, Atik is indeed the inner aspect; in relation to the created beings of Beriah, however, it is encompassing, above their apprehension. It is therefore preferable to say "a higher, concealed root."

[183] Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Minnui Melech, chapter 3. It adds that for souls of Atzilut, "called siblings of ZON," this is not an encompassing and concealed aspect; an encompassing aspect from a higher level rests upon them.

[184] Likkutei Torah, Discourses for Yom Kippur, "ביאור מעט ע"פ שבת שבתון": "The fact that Malchut of Atzilut pierces the screen between Atzilut and Beriah and becomes Atik for Beriah… for Atik of Beriah is the sovev of Beriah, above the memale kol almin within Beriah" (ממכ"ע means memale kol almin). There, citing Etz Chaim: "The point of Malchut of Atzilut that pierced the screen and descended to become Atik for Beriah certainly no longer has commensurability with Atzilut."

The three terms emphasize different aspects of the transition: Keter, the role as head; Atik, the concealed aspect at the head; and "root," the relationship to the recipient. The Epistle itself uses "Atik of Beriah" at the beginning of the passage and "Keter from below upward" at its end; we have explained Atik with the aid of other sources.[185]

"For There Is No King Without a People": Kingship Is a Relationship to Others

Why specifically from Malchut? The Epistle answers with a saying: "There is no king without a people." A king is not called a king by virtue of his wisdom or power. A person can be wise and wealthy even in solitude, but a king alone is not a king. Kingship is, by definition, a relationship to those who accept it. The aspect of Malchut is therefore the aspect that turns toward "others," and from it emerges an existence capable of standing before the king as a "people."

What is a "people"? The line before us does not explain, but the Alter Rebbe explained the same saying in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah: "The meaning of am, 'people,' is from omemut, dimness: things that are separate, alien and distant from the king's stature. For even if he had very many sons, the term kingship

[185] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1237–1243, in the examination "Malchut of Atzilut, Atik of Beriah and Alma De-Itgalya": the Alter Rebbe writes "etc." and does not name a source for the saying; "Atik of Beriah" should be explained according to "its local role: the starting point and root of the world of Beriah," without extending it "to the entire general structure of the partzufim of Atik"; its precise meaning beyond this remains open. See ibid., pp. 1251–1253, in the Epistle's glossary.

would not apply to them; nor even to princes alone, but specifically 'in a multitude of people' is 'the king's glory.' "[186] This explanation of the same saying helps us understand our line. It explains why "separate yesh" and "kingship" go together: in relation to those who are close, sons and princes, the term kingship does not apply in its fullest sense; kingship becomes manifest specifically toward those who are distant and distinct.

Likkutei Torah adds a second aspect: created beings become a "people" through the king's own exaltedness. "Because he is high and exalted above them, they become an am, from omemut, alien and separate things," "as in the analogy of a king sitting upon his throne, as a result of which everyone trembles and recoils before him and becomes lowly before him."[187] According to this, distinctness is not a ready-made fact the king finds before him. It derives from the exaltedness of kingship itself. This is an additional reason why separate yesh emerges specifically from Malchut.

The saying itself is known from books that predate the Epistle. Rabbeinu Bachya, for example, cites it in connection with Rosh Hashanah: "For that day is the beginning of His works, since there is no king without

[186]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7; "In a multitude of people is the king's glory": Proverbs 14:28. In Torah Or, Parashat Shemot, discourse beginning הבאים ישרש: " 'There is no king without a people,' am deriving from omemut [dimness], which is the aspect of yesh and separateness, to come to be in the aspect of nullification and ayin."
[187]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Balak, discourse beginning מי מנה עפר יעקב.

a people."[188] But the Epistle writes "etc." and does not say from which source it took the saying or what it understands its continuation to be. A particular source therefore must not be attributed to it.[185]

The Limits of the Analogy: A Mortal King and He with Whom Nothing Is Commensurate

The analogy from human kingship teaches one aspect, but stops short in two respects.

The first respect: need. A mortal king needs his people; without them he lacks something and has no kingship. The Holy One, blessed be He, lacks nothing and does not depend on created beings. What, then, does "there is no king without a people" mean in His case? The saying describes the revelation of kingship, not His Essence: for His kingship to be revealed, there must be those who accept it. The Alter Rebbe therefore wrote that "the purpose of the creation of the world is the revelation of His kingship."[186] This is a freely chosen purpose, not the fulfillment of a deficiency.

[188] Rabbeinu Bachya, Genesis 38:30. This is an example of an early use of the saying, not a source cited by the Epistle.

[185] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1237–1243, in the examination "Malchut of Atzilut, Atik of Beriah and Alma De-Itgalya": the Alter Rebbe writes "etc." and does not name a source for the saying; "Atik of Beriah" should be explained according to "its local role: the starting point and root of the world of Beriah," without extending it "to the entire general structure of the partzufim of Atik"; its precise meaning beyond this remains open. See ibid., pp. 1251–1253, in the Epistle's glossary.

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The second respect: proximity. The people of a mortal king are human beings like himself. Likkutei Torah says that the people "are termed His people, for they are people like him and bear some proportion to him … whereas in relation to the Holy One, blessed be He, nothing is commensurate with Him."[189] In the analogy there is a proportion between king and people, even when the distance is great. In the analogue there is no commensurability at all, the same utter incommensurability we encountered in the definition of "entirely separate."

What remains of the analogy after these two qualifications? Its structure. Kingship is a relationship toward one who stands as an "other," and this relationship becomes fully manifest when the others accept it willingly. Torah Or says, "One is called a king only through willing acceptance," and therefore "the principal element of kingship is the crown with which they crown him."[190] We will encounter the crown again at the end of the passage.

[189] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Nitzavim, discourse beginning שוש אשיש.

[190] Torah Or, Parashat Bereishit, explanation of the discourse beginning כי כאשר השמים החדשים: "They willingly accepted His kingship upon themselves… for one is called king only by consent. This is the meaning of the crown of kingship: the principal element of kingship is the crown with which they crown him, and Keter means the aspect of will. This is 'their beginning is embedded in their end': the drawing down of Malchut is from Keter, which is will, etc."

From "How Was It Created?" to "For What Was It Created?"

The reason "there is no king without a people" at first looks like a passing remark, but it anticipates the Epistle's conclusion. A few lines after our passage, the Epistle states this explicitly: the power of Ein Sof creates something from nothing, "and not through cause and effect, in which the effect would be encompassed by its cause and nullified in its existence. Rather, the yesh is to be a thing separate from Divinity, so that the Emanator, blessed be He, will be King over all the separate beings, through their fulfilling His commandments that He will command them."[191]

Separateness, then, is neither a malfunction nor an "optical illusion" that need only be removed. It is the manner in which created beings were created so that they could be a "people": beings capable of receiving and fulfilling a command. Their sense of separateness is not the source of their existence, since they are brought into being at every moment by the Creator's power. It is part of the mode of existence within which they were given their service. The question "How is yesh created?" therefore leads to "For what purpose was yesh created?" The spiritual structure we are

[191] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later, in the discussion of the root of the mitzvot: " 'Their beginning is embedded in their end' is the power of the blessed Ein Sof to create yesh me-ayin rather than through cause and effect... so that the blessed Emanator may be King over all separate beings through their fulfilling His mitzvot, which He commands them; the end of the deed is first in thought."

studying is not a picture remote from human life; it prepares an understanding of human Divine service.[192]

We will return to this when we study the superiority of practical mitzvot. For now let us remember one thing: the relationship to a "people," to those who can receive a command, begins in Malchut. As long as we speak only of inward powers, such a relationship does not yet exist.

"And Also the Multiplicity and Differentiation of the Created Beings": A New Question

W08-03
source words
22–31

"And also the multiplicity and differentiation of the created beings, which were created by the power of Ein Sof, utterly one and unique,"

And also means "furthermore." Until now the discussion concerned the very fact that the created being is a "separate yesh." "And also" introduces a second subject and a new question.

The multiplicity of the created beings means the fact that created beings are numerous.

And their differentiation: והתחלקותן means והתחלקותם, "and their differentiation": each created being differs from another in kind and characteristics. "Multiplicity" answers "how many," while "differentiation" answers

[192]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1231–1233, in the discussion "Malchut, Letters and Five Gevurot: One Source and Many Products."

"what distinguishes them": each is "this" and not "another." These are two aspects of one question, not two levels.

Which were created means "which were created" from nothing. The word reminds us that all the differences among created beings are brought into being and do not exist of themselves.

By the power of Ein Sof means by the power of the Infinite. This is the source of the ability, the same source as in the preceding sentence.

Utterly one and unique: יחיד, "unique," means one with no second. מיוחד, "one," means one in Himself, not composed of parts. בתכלית, "utterly," means completely, without any qualification. The expression sharpens the difficulty: if the source is completely one, where does multiplicity come from?

Two Different Questions

We should distinguish the two questions the passage answers.

The first question: how does "a yesh and an entirely separate thing" come into being at all? This question would arise even if only one being were created. The answer: from Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah.

The second question: how do numerous, different created beings come into being from a source that is

“utterly one and unique”? Multiplicity itself gives rise to this question, so even someone who has fully understood the first answer still asks it.

The word “and also” marks the transition from the first question to the second. A similar pair of words already appeared in the previous chapter: “creatures possessing limit and finitude”; later in the Epistle all four words will appear together: created beings are “in the aspect of multiplicity and division and limitation and finitude.” There is no need to see each word as a separate level. The expressions serve to emphasize; they must not be used to construct a system of four aspects that the Epistle did not enumerate.[193]

“Utterly One and Unique”: What We Must Not Picture

When we say, “Many arise from one source,” it is easy to picture something incorrectly: a loaf cut into slices, or white light split by a prism into colors. In both images, the multiplicity was already present within the source as parts, and the action merely separated them. It is precisely this picture that the words “utterly one and unique” rule out.

Sefer Yetzirah already warns against this when enumerating the ten sefirot: “For the Master is unique

[193] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1252–1256, in the answer concerning “multiplicity, division, limit and finitude”: “There may be two pairs; ‘תכלית’ means finitude until shown otherwise; no four invented levels”; “A technical four-stage distinction has not been proven.”

and has no second, and before one, what do you count?"[194] Multiplicity is not parts of the source, and the source is not to be counted.

Where, then, does multiplicity come from? Likkutei Torah offers an intermediate step. The multiplicity of the worlds and the differences among created beings "are drawn and imparted from the combinations of the letters of G-d's word that brings them into being from ayin to yesh." In their source in Atzilut, where "He and His vessels are one," there already exist "in potential so many powers and extensions that from them the actual differentiation of the worlds will come into being," "as in the analogy of the letters of speech while they are still in the potential of a person's wisdom."[195]

The analogy is simple: a wise person can say a great many things, but as long as they remain within the potential of his wisdom, they are not divided into letters and sentences. Differentiation takes place when the ideas are expressed outwardly. This is the answer the Epistle now gives: multiplicity comes about through letters.

[194]Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 1, mishnah 7, in the standard text. In the Gra's text: "Ten sefirot belimah: their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end..." In both versions the order is "their end in their beginning and their beginning in their end." Our Epistle quotes only "their beginning is embedded in their end," while Iggeret HaKodesh, section 31, reads "their beginning is embedded in their end and their end in their beginning."

[195]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bamidbar, discourse beginning וארשתיך לי לעולם. Later in the same discourse: "When they emerge from potential to actual, from concealment to revelation in the mouth, the breath of speech separates the voice and divides the letters... The root of this breath is from the breath of His blessed mouth." See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1244–1246.

“Through the Multiplicity of Letters … the Mouth of the Lord, and by the Breath of His Mouth”

W08-04
source words
32–43

“are through the multiplicity of letters issuing from Malchut, the mouth of the Lord, ‘and by the breath of His mouth all their host.’ ”

Are: הוא means here “the multiplicity and differentiation are….” The word returns to the sentence’s subject, the multiplicity and differentiation of created beings, and introduces the answer to how they come about.

Through: ע”י means על ידי, “by means of.”

The multiplicity of letters means many letters and many combinations of them.

Issuing: היוצאין means היוצאות, “issuing”: from inside outward, like speech emerging from the mouth.

From Malchut: ממל’ means ממלכות. This is the same Malchut in which the principal coming into being of separate yesh takes place.

The mouth of the Lord means “G-d’s mouth,” a designation of Malchut. Tikkunei HaZohar says, “Malchut is the mouth; we call it the Oral Torah.”[196] “Mouth” here names a function, not an organ.

[196]Tikkunei HaZohar, Introduction (“Patach Eliyahu”), folio 17a: “Malchut is the mouth; we call it the Oral Torah”; “Supernal Keter is the crown of Malchut, and of it is said, ‘Declaring the end from the beginning’ ” (Isaiah 46:10).

And by the breath of His mouth all their host comes from the verse in Psalms, "By the word of G-d the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host."[197] "The breath of His mouth" is the breath that carries speech; "their host" means the hosts of heaven, the many created beings within them. The verse thus connects the multiplicity of created beings with Divine speech.

What a "Letter" Means Here

Let us begin with the analogy, human speech. As long as a person's thought remains in his heart, his companion does not know what he wishes to say. When he speaks, he addresses a recipient, and the words come one after another. They distinguish one matter from another, and the other person thereby receives defined content. The speaker remains one person, but the content emerges in many letters and many combinations. This is the aspect the analogy teaches: one source, differentiated expression.

What is a "letter" in the analogue? The Alter Rebbe defines this in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah. When the Holy One's attributes come to act upon created beings, "this revelation and extension of this action are called an utterance and a combination of letters, for no action can possibly extend from His holy attributes

[197]Psalms 33:6.

without combinations called letters."[198] Further on: "All vitality and powers drawn from His holy attributes to the lower beings, to create them from ayin into yesh and to give them life and sustain them, are called holy letters."[198]

Hence the definition: a letter is a particular, defined extension of vitality, determining what will come into being. The example given there is that light was created from the attribute of Chesed through the utterance "Let there be light." Water too was created from the attribute of Chesed; nevertheless, from the power in the utterance "Let there be light," light was created, not water, "because powers were vested in them in different combinations, indicating the coming into being of water."[198] The attribute is one, the combination differs, and therefore the created being differs. This is the answer to the question of multiplicity in miniature.

In the following chapter, the Alter Rebbe adds three levels. First, the letter: "Each letter is an extension of a particular, individual vitality and power." Second, the word: when letters combine into a word, an additional "higher power and general vitality" is drawn down, joining them. Third, the order: "Every letter that comes first in a combination is predominant and is the

[198]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 11.
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principal element in this creation."[199] In this way an immense multiplicity emerges from twenty-two letters without an additional source being introduced.

Why are these extensions specifically called "letters"? The answer: "They are called letters not in relation to the created beings, but in relation to His blessed attributes."[198] In a person, letters are an outer garment for the feeling and intellect in the heart. So too, these extensions are "letters" in relation to the higher attributes they express. In relation to created beings, however, they are incomparably higher than any created wisdom.

The Name Is the Vitality

It follows that letters are not names attached to things after they have been created. In our language, we call an object already lying before us a "stone," and the name changes nothing in it. Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah says the opposite. The name אבן, "stone," does not appear in the ten utterances in the Torah; "nevertheless, vitality is drawn to the stone through combinations and substitutions of letters … until, through chainlike descent from the ten utterances, the

[199]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 12: letters, combinations and the multiplicity of created beings. Created beings are differentiated "through changes in combinations, substitutions and permutations"; "Each letter is the drawing down of a particular, distinct vitality and power," and when letters combine into a word, "the drawing down of a higher power and a general vitality"; "Each letter that comes first in a combination predominates and is the principal element in this creation."

[198]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 11.

combination of the name אבן is drawn from them, and it is the stone's vitality." The name by which a created being is called in the Holy Tongue "is a vessel for the vitality contracted within the letters of this name."[200] The name is not a label; it is the vitality itself.

More than this: the letters do not act once and disappear. "If the letters were to depart for an instant, G-d forbid, and return to their source, all the heavens would become absolute nothingness and nonbeing."[200] This, then, is not an analogy about an utterance made only during the six days of Creation. It is the constant vitality of every created being, now as well.

Why "Speech," and Why "Mouth"?

Why use the language of "speech" at all? Likkutei Torah answers: "Although He has no bodily form … nevertheless, the Torah speaks in human language, calling the revelation of His light toward created beings 'speech.' "[201] "Speech," then, is a name for the revelation of light toward created beings. In the same place: "The letters of speech are, by way of analogy, separate bodies, each standing alone," that is, each on its own, as an analogy.[201] In thought, things are included within one another; in speech, each letter and

[200]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 1.

[200]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 1.

[201]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bechukkotai, discourse beginning אם בחקותי תלכו. It continues there: "From this utterance no other utterance will ever come into being."

[201]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bechukkotai, discourse beginning אם בחקותי תלכו. It continues there: "From this utterance no other utterance will ever come into being."

each word stand on their own. This is the aspect needed here: created beings are distinct from one another.

Hence too the name "mouth" for Malchut: the mouth is where what is within turns outward and divides into defined letters. Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah says of the extensions through which the "revealed worlds" live: "They are called utterances, the word of G-d and the breath of His mouth, like the letters of human speech, by way of analogy, which reveal to listeners what was hidden and concealed in the speaker's heart."[198] Malchut is the level at which one "speaks" to someone who is other. It therefore answers both questions at once: the question of "separate yesh" and the question of multiplicity.

"By the Breath of His Mouth": An Undifferentiated Voice and Distinct Letters

Human speech has two stages. First is "the breath rising from the heart," one undifferentiated voice; it then "divides among the five articulatory organs of the mouth" and becomes letters.[202] So too in Likkutei Torah: "The breath of speech separates the voice and divides the letters," and "the root of this breath is from the breath of His blessed mouth."[195] One breath, many

[198] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 11.

[202] Tanya, Iggeret HaTeshuvah, chapter 4.

[195] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bamidbar, discourse beginning וארשתיך לי לעולם. Later in the same discourse: "When they emerge from potential to actual, from concealment to revelation in the

letters. The Epistle therefore cites the verse "and by the breath of His mouth all their host": it shows a multiplicity emerging from one extension without the source being divided.

In Torah Or and Likkutei Torah, this verse also serves another distinction, between the source of the angels and the source of the souls. The angels were created from "the letters of speech," "as it is written, 'and by the breath of His mouth all their host,' " whereas the souls of Israel "were taken from the letters of His thought."[203] We will reach this in the next chapter, in the creation of souls. Here it is enough that the verse describes a great multiplicity, "all their host," emerging from "the breath of His mouth."

What the Analogy Does Not Say

The analogy of speech illuminates one aspect: definition and differentiation. It stops short in three respects, which must not be transferred to the analogue.

No physical mouth. There is no air, no sound waves and no organs of speech here. In fact, even in a person the articulatory organs do not create the letters. Torah

mouth, the breath of speech separates the voice and divides the letters… The root of this breath is from the breath of His blessed mouth." See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1244–1246.

[203] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Re'eh, discourse beginning ושמתי כדכד: "The source of their coming into being is supernal speech, as it is written, 'And by the breath of His mouth, all their hosts.' But the souls were taken from the letters of His blessed thought." In Torah Or, Parashat Vayeshev, discourse beginning כה אמר ה' צבאות אם בדרכי תלך: "Angels are from the letters of speech, as it is written, 'And by the breath of His mouth, all their hosts'; Israel arose in thought, being from the letters of thought." See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1246–1251.

Or explains that "the articulatory organs, the instruments of pronunciation, do not resemble a harp," whose sound comes from its movement; on the contrary, "the letters move the tongue … and the letters in themselves are rooted in the soul itself."[204] Even in the analogy, the mouth is the site of differentiation, not the source of the content.

No listener who already exists. Among us, the listener exists before the speaker addresses him, and remains after the speaker falls silent. Here the "listener" comes into being from the speech itself and does not exist for even a moment without it. Human speech does not create its listener from nothing.

The letters are constant vitality. Unlike a label, or code executed by an existing machine, the letters in the Epistle are the vitality of the created being itself at every moment. Here too the distinction in the analogy of the craftsman is helpful: "Once a vessel has emerged from the craftsman's hands, it no longer needs the craftsman's hands,"[176] whereas a created being always depends on the power bringing it into being.

[204]Torah Or, Parashat Mikketz, discourse beginning נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה.

[176]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 2: "Once a vessel has emerged from the smith, the vessel no longer needs the smith's hands… The great difference between human work and contrivance, which is yesh mi-yesh… and the making of heaven and earth, which is yesh me-ayin."

Letters and Vessels: Two Names, Not Two Creators

The previous chapter explained the limitation of created beings through vessels; now multiplicity is explained through letters. Are these two competing explanations? No, but two opposite mistakes should be recognized here.

The first mistake is to think that the letters create by their own power. This contradicts the words "which were created by the power of Ein Sof." The second is to think that multiplicity is explained "only through vessels," while letters are a verbal ornament. That erases what the Epistle explicitly emphasizes here, and what it will return to later: "and particularly through the letters, as above."[205]

The Alter Rebbe himself connects the two in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, in parentheses: "The aspect of contraction and concealment of vitality is called vessels, and the vitality itself is called light … and the vessels are the very letters, whose root is the five letters מנצפ"ך, which are the five gevurot that divide and separate breath and voice among the five articulatory organs of the mouth, bringing the twenty-two letters

[205] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later: "Since creation is through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the category of multiplicity, division, limit and finitude, particularly through the letters, as stated above." On the two rejected readings, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1231–1232, in "Letters and the Power of Creation"; on "particularly" not requiring an additional entity after the vessels, and on the inadmissibility of asserting "that every letter is an independent vessel, or that every vessel is one letter," see ibid., pp. 1255–1256.

into being."[206] According to this, "vessel" and "letter" are not two systems side by side. "Vessel" describes the aspect of contraction in terms of measure and concealment, while "letter" describes the same aspect in terms of differentiation and combination. The power is one, and the results are many.[192]

But we must not take this further than warranted. The sentence in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah speaks of "vessels" in the general sense of contraction and concealment. Our Epistle does not detail the technical relationship between particular letters and the vessels of the ten sefirot; therefore, we must not say that each letter is one vessel, or that each vessel is one letter. It is enough to know that the two terms describe the same manner of limited revelation, and that neither is a creator.

"And the Five Articulatory Organs of the Mouth Derive from the Five Gevurot of Nukva"

W08-05
source words
44–49

"And the five articulatory organs of the mouth derive from the five gevurot of Nukva."

[206]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 4. The sentence concerning "vessels" and "letters" occurs at the end of the chapter, in parentheses, and concludes: "The root of the five gevurot is butzina de-kardunita, which is the supernal Gevurah of Atik Yomin; the root of the chassadim is likewise Chesed of Atik Yomin."

[192]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1231–1233, in the discussion "Malchut, Letters and Five Gevurot: One Source and Many Products."

And the five: וה' means "and the five." The letter he here denotes the number five.

Articulatory organs of the mouth: a motza is a place of emergence. The articulatory organs are the five places where the voice emerges as letters: throat, palate, tongue, teeth and lips.

Are: הן, the feminine "they," means here הם, the masculine "they." The sentence identifies: at their root, the articulatory organs are the gevurot.

From the five gevurot: מה"ג expands to מה' גבורות, "from the five gevurot." Here too the letter he means five. What the gevurot are, and how they relate to the letters, will be explained immediately below.

Of Nukva: דנוק' expands to דנוקבא, "of Nukva." Nukva is Aramaic for "female." In kabbalistic language it designates the partzuf of Malchut, the aspect that receives from what is above it and gives it form. A partzuf, we recall, is a complete structure of sefirot functioning as a single unit (see the glossary). Nukva receives from Ze'ir Anpin, the partzuf of the emotional attributes; we encountered both in Chapter 5.

The Five Places

The five places are familiar from Sefer Yetzirah. It describes the twenty-two letters as "engraved in voice, hewn in breath, fixed in the mouth in five places," and divides them into five groups: אחה"ע, בומ"ף, גיכ"ק,

דטלנ"ת, זסשר"ץ. In the Gra's version, each group is assigned to an organ: "אחה"ע in the throat, גיכ"ק in the palate, דטלנ"ת in the tongue, זסשר"ץ in the teeth, בומ"ף in the lips"; in other versions the order and descriptions differ.[207] Tanya too mentions the familiar beginning: "It divides among the five articulatory organs of the mouth: אחה"ע from the throat, etc."[202]

The division teaches how one voice becomes different letters. The Epistle and the sources we have cited do not assign each group of letters to a particular gevurah.

Gevurah: A Power That Limits So That Something Particular Can Exist

For many people, the word gevurot evokes judgment and punishment. Here something else is meant. In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe defines the attribute of Gevurah as "the attribute of contraction and restraint of the spreading of vitality from His greatness, preventing it from descending and becoming revealed to the created beings … except through concealment of the face, with the vitality hidden in the body of the created being, as though the body of the created being were a thing on its own." In his words: "These are the very gevurot of the Holy One,

[207]Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 2, mishnah 3, in the standard text; the Mantua edition adds other descriptions of each group's location. In the Gra's text: "He engraved them in voice, hewed them in breath, fixed them in the mouth in five places…" See ibid., mishnah 5: "Thus every creature and every utterance emerges from one name."

[202]Tanya, Iggeret HaTeshuvah, chapter 4.

blessed be He, who is all-powerful: to contract the vitality and spirituality imparted from the breath of His mouth and to conceal it, so that the body of the created being will not be nullified in its existence."[206]

This is a positive definition. Gevurah is the power by virtue of which a particular created being can exist, "a thing on its own," rather than be absorbed into the light. It too is a Divine power: "No created intellect can apprehend the nature of the contraction and concealment," just as no intellect apprehends creation from nothing.[206]

What role do the gevurot play in speech? Likkutei Torah explains that the five gevurot are "the source of the differentiation of the letters, for the voice emerging from the breath of the heart is an undifferentiated voice, and it divides into letters through the five articulatory organs of the mouth."[208] Without limitation there is no letter, and without a letter there is no word. Limitation here is not a descent from the good, but part of the world's emergence as it was intended to be. Without a particular measure, this specific thing would

[206]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 4. The sentence concerning "vessels" and "letters" occurs at the end of the chapter, in parentheses, and concludes: "The root of the five gevurot is butzina de-kardunita, which is the supernal Gevurah of Atik Yomin; the root of the chassadim is likewise Chesed of Atik Yomin."

[206]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 4. The sentence concerning "vessels" and "letters" occurs at the end of the chapter, in parentheses, and concludes: "The root of the five gevurot is butzina de-kardunita, which is the supernal Gevurah of Atik Yomin; the root of the chassadim is likewise Chesed of Atik Yomin."

[208]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Chukkat, discourse beginning ויקחו אליך פרה אדומה.

not stand before us; there would instead be a general flow leaving no place for something defined.

To understand how limitation permits a particular expression, think of a teacher teaching a child: he chooses words and conveys the ideas in a form the child can receive. Without that selection and contraction, the abundance would not become an explanation. The example makes the role of limitation more accessible; the details of the gevurot themselves are to be learned from the sources.

"Of Nukva": The Gevurot in the Recipient

Why "the gevurot of Nukva"? The Epistle does not explain, but the expression rests on an explicit principle in the writings of the Arizal. Etz Chaim says: "All the worlds were created through the twenty-two letters in Malchut … and it also contains the five letters מנצפ"ך, which are the five gevurot issuing from ZA to it … and corresponding to them are the five articulatory organs of the mouth…. Thus the root of the five articulatory organs is formed from the five gevurot of מנצפ"ך, and then all twenty-two letters emerge from the five articulatory organs."[209] In simple terms: the five gevurot are given to Malchut from Ze'ir Anpin; within it they become the root of the five articulatory organs;

[209] Etz Chaim, Gate 5 (Gate of Taamim, Nekudot, Tagin and Otiyot), chapter 3. On "five aspects of contraction on the recipient's side" as an explanation rather than the Epistle's wording, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1242–1243.

and from the articulatory organs all twenty-two letters emerge.

The two parts of the sentence thus connect. Malchut, Nukva, receives the power of limitation and brings forth the letters from it. That same Malchut, as we have learned, becomes Atik of Beriah. A single aspect thus explains both separate yesh and its multiplicity.

The details of these matters, what מנצפ"ך means, precisely how the gevurot are given, and what form each letter receives, belong to the extensive discussions of Kabbalah and are not required here. One point does matter for us: in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe adds that the root of these five gevurot is "the supernal Gevurah of Atik Yomin."[206] In other words, the power of limitation operating at the end of the order, in Malchut, has its root at the beginning of the order. We will return to this connection between end and beginning at the end of the passage.

[206] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 4. The sentence concerning "vessels" and "letters" occurs at the end of the chapter, in parentheses, and concludes: "The root of the five gevurot is butzina de-kardunita, which is the supernal Gevurah of Atik Yomin; the root of the chassadim is likewise Chesed of Atik Yomin."

“And Therefore It Is Called ‘The Revealed World’ ”

W08-06
source words
50–60

“And therefore it is called ‘the revealed world,’ for in it is revealed the power of the Ein Sof light”

And therefore means “for this reason”: because separate yesh and its multiplicity come into being in Malchut, as stated thus far.

It is called means Malchut is called.

Alma de-itgalya is Aramaic for “the world that is revealed,” the world of revelation. The name is taken from the Zohar; its counterpart is alma de-itkasya, “the concealed world.”

For means “because….” The Epistle itself explains the name.

In it means in Malchut.

Is revealed means appears and acts openly. It does not mean “visible to the eye,” nor “apprehended by the intellect”; we will clarify the difference immediately below.

Power means the ability to act. Not the nature of the light or the Emanator’s Essence, but what they can do.

Of the Ein Sof light means of the light of Ein Sof. The sentence continues in the next unit: “to create something from nothing.”

What Is Revealed, to Whom, and in What Sense?

What precisely "is revealed" in Malchut? A beginning reader might understand alma de-itgalya as "the visible world," the world before us. Three answers are conceivable: the light itself is revealed, the power to create is revealed, or created reality is revealed. The Epistle does not leave the matter open, but chooses the second: what is revealed is "the power of the Ein Sof light to create something from nothing."[210]

This is the same power the Epistle has already said belongs to the Creator "alone." Toward whom is it revealed? Toward created beings: it acts within them, and they exist by its power.

In what sense is the power "revealed"? Not in the sense of apprehension. At the beginning of the Epistle it is said that in knowledge from below, "the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all." "Revealed" here therefore means that the power acts and establishes a result, not that the created being understands it. These are two different dimensions: the revelation of power in action, and apprehension of the source.[211]

One can see a power's result without apprehending its nature, just as a wise act attests to wisdom even for

[210] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1235–1236, questions 101–103: whether alma de-itgalya is revelation of the light, of the power of creation, or of created existence, and whether the contrast to alma de-itkasya is "only in relation to how the power is revealed."

[211] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1231–1232: "This does not mean that the created being necessarily apprehends the nature of its source. The revelation of the power of bringing into being in operation and the apprehension of the source are different axes."

someone who does not understand its depth. In the Epistle, the power is revealed in the very existence of the created being, yet its nature is not apprehended by it. For this reason, alma de-itgalya does not contradict what we have learned about "something from nothing" and knowledge from below.

On the other hand, this revelation must not be diminished as though it were "merely" an outward action. In every created being, even the smallest, a power is revealed that exists in no created being and no chainlike descent: to bring into being from nothing. The Tzemach Tzedek explains this sentence in Derech Mitzvotecha: "Since the coming into being of BYA, which are in the category of yesh and separateness, is through Malchut of Atzilut, the word of G-d, this power and ability of the all-powerful light of Ein Sof, blessed be He, are therefore revealed in it; unlike the nine sefirot above Malchut, in which this power is not revealed, since they descended by way of cause and effect."[212] The result is surprising: the highest ability is revealed specifically in the last sefirah. The passage will still have to explain this surprise.

[212]Derech Mitzvotecha (by the Tzemach Tzedek), Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 26, explaining our passage ("This is what our master, of blessed memory, said: the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, etc."). The abbreviations there: עו"ע, ilah and alul; כ"ע, supernal Keter; א"ח, returning light. Later in the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek distinguishes between the juncture at Malchut of Atzilut, "the end of all the levels of Atzilut," and the juncture at Asiyah, "the actual end of all the worlds," where a radiance from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon is revealed, "and it is a more wondrous radiance."

Alma De-Itkasya and Alma De-Itgalya

The name alma de-itgalya forms a pair, and its counterpart helps us understand it. The Alter Rebbe wrote: "Leah and Rachel are the letters of thought and the letters of speech, which are alma de-itkasya and alma de-itgalya."[213] Thought is a "concealed world": it is within, and another person does not know it. Speech is a "revealed world": it turns outward toward the listener. The worlds themselves are similarly described in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah: "concealed worlds" live from hidden extensions, "like the letters of thought," and "revealed worlds" live from extensions called "utterances, the word of G-d and the breath of His mouth."[198]

We learn three things from this pair. First, "revealed" is relative: revealed in relation to thought, not in the sense that everyone sees the nature of the thing. Second, Malchut is called "the world of revelation" for the same reason that it is called "mouth": in it things emerge toward another. Third, the Epistle gives this general pair a particular content: what is revealed in Malchut is the power of creation from nothing.

[213]Torah Or, Parashat Vayetze, discourse beginning וללבן שתי בנות. There: "For thought vests itself within speech, and speech was revealed."
[198]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 11.

“Not by Means of Cause and Effect. But the First Nine Sefirot…”

W08-07
source words
61–71

“to create something from nothing, not by means of cause and effect. But the first nine sefirot”

To create explains which power is revealed: the creative power.

Something from nothing means “a thing from nothing”: an existence that previously did not exist in any form. In the Epistle’s wording at its opening: “And something from nothing is called beriah in the Holy Tongue.”

Not by means of cause and effect means not through a cause and what results from it. Ilah is the cause, and alul is what is caused by it. These words exclude that manner of emergence as an explanation of creation.

But marks a contrast: what will now be said of the nine sefirot differs from what was said of Malchut.

The first nine sefirot means the nine sefirot that precede Malchut in the order of ten.

W08-08
source words
72–81

“were emanated through a chainlike descent of cause and effect, and the Ein Sof light is vested in Chochmah alone.”

Were emanated means “emerged through emanation”: a Divine level coming into being from a Divine source.

This differs from "were created," because the emanated entity remains Divinity.

Through a chainlike descent means like a chain: each level is drawn from the level preceding it, link after link.

Cause and effect means a cause and what results from it, as above.

And the Ein Sof light means "and the light of the Infinite."

Is vested means becomes vested: it rests within the level and acts through it.

In Chochmah means in the sefirah of Chochmah, the first in the order of Atzilut after Keter.

Alone means "only." An important question hinges on this word, and we will address it separately later in the chapter.

Two Ways of "Emerging from a Source"

There are two ways a thing can come from its source, and the Epistle distinguishes between them here. We encountered both at its opening:

Cause and effect. In such a chain, "the effect is encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence before it, like the sun's radiance within the sun."[214] The effect knows and apprehends something

[214] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, at the beginning: "What the Ramak wrote about the chainlike descent of cause and effect, as likewise in the holy Zohar, Parashat Bereishit, refers to the descent of the sefirot within the sefirot themselves (in the aspect of the vessels)... In hishtalshelut the alul is

of its cause, and the distance between them in nature is not great: "only that this is a cause and that an effect."[175] The continuity may be made more accessible by thinking of a conclusion deriving from premises: its rationale is present in the premises from which it derives. In the analogue, the relationship is deeper: the effect is "nullified in its existence" to its cause.

Something from nothing. Here the created being and the power bringing it into being are utterly incommensurate, and the created being does not apprehend the power at all. Such an ability belongs only to Him "whose existence is from His own essence, and who is not an effect of any cause that preceded Him."[173] There is no true analogy for it in our world, since everything a person does is "something from something," a change of form in existing matter.[176] The Epistle therefore teaches it by negation: not like an effect from its cause.

encompassed by the ilah and nullified in its existence to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun, as written in the Ramak's Pardes."

[175]Iggeret HaKodesh 20, at the beginning, from "Yesh me-ayin is called creation in the Holy Tongue" through "Therefore it is called specifically yesh me-ayin." There also is the comparison with "the commensurability of the alul with the ilah, for the alul knows and apprehends some apprehension of its ilah and is nullified to it through this knowledge and apprehension."

[173]Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the paragraph preceding the passage: "For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, whose existence is of His own Essence and who is not an effect of any cause preceding Him, G-d forbid. Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness."

[176]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 2: "Once a vessel has emerged from the smith, the vessel no longer needs the smith's hands... The great difference between human work and contrivance, which is yesh mi-yesh... and the making of heaven and earth, which is yesh me-ayin."

Here we must return to the opening of the Epistle. There it said that the vessels "are Divinity, to create something from nothing like Ein Sof, and not merely by way of a chainlike descent of cause and effect." What the Ramak (Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, whose words were discussed in the first part) and the Zohar wrote about cause and effect concerns "the chainlike descent of the sefirot within the sefirot themselves (in the aspect of the vessels)."[214] The sentence before us agrees precisely with this. The nine sefirot "were emanated through a chainlike descent of cause and effect": this is how they emerge from one another and are ordered successively. The coming into being of separate yesh, however, is of a different kind. There are two separate questions here: how the sefirot come from one another, and how separate yesh comes from Divinity. The first is answered by "emanation" through cause and effect; the second by "creation," something from nothing, which is revealed in Malchut.

Do the Nine Sefirot Not Participate in Creation?

One might mistakenly draw three conclusions from this sentence about the nine sefirot: that they have no part in creation, that they are not Divinity, or that they stand independently. All three are wrong:

[214] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, at the beginning: "What the Ramak wrote about the chainlike descent of cause and effect, as likewise in the holy Zohar, Parashat Bereishit, refers to the descent of the sefirot within the sefirot themselves (in the aspect of the vessels)... In hishtalshelut the alul is encompassed by the ilah and nullified in its existence to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun, as written in the Ramak's Pardes."

They participate. The Epistle said that the light of Ein Sof becomes vested "in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut … to create in them and through them": in all ten, not in one.

They are Divinity. "Cause and effect" describes the order in which they emerge from one another; it does not lower them from the level of Divinity. The vessels themselves "are Divinity."

They are not independent. The opposite is true: in the mode of cause and effect, the effect is entirely nullified to its cause, and thus the sefirot specifically exemplify nullification.

What does the sentence say? It distinguishes participation from revelation. The power to create acts through all the levels, but "the revelation of this power," in the Tzemach Tzedek's words, is not in the first nine.[212] The source of the power shines through several levels, each described according to its role: Chochmah, in which the light is first vested, and Malchut, from which comes the principal emergence of separate yesh. The difference between the nine sefirot and Malchut concerns the revelation of the power; it

[212] Derech Mitzvotecha (by the Tzemach Tzedek), Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 26, explaining our passage ("This is what our master, of blessed memory, said: the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, etc."). The abbreviations there: עו"ע, ilah and alul; כ"ע, supernal Keter; א"ח, returning light. Later in the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek distinguishes between the juncture at Malchut of Atzilut, "the end of all the levels of Atzilut," and the juncture at Asiyah, "the actual end of all the worlds," where a radiance from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon is revealed, "and it is a more wondrous radiance."

does not restrict to one vessel what was said earlier of all ten vessels.[192]

Nor does Malchut itself become created because a created being comes into being from it. When a Divine level becomes manifest from a Divine level, as the sefirot do from one another, there is still no created yesh. In Malchut, the transition from Atzilut to Beriah is emphasized: from the order in which levels are drawn from one another to the emergence of a recipient that experiences itself as yesh.

Which Nine?

The Epistle does not say which nine sefirot these are. The question is not simple, since Kabbalah has two ways of counting ten sefirot: from Keter to Malchut, or from Chochmah to Malchut, with Daat counted in place of Keter. Etz Chaim says that Keter "is not included in the enumeration of the sefirot; in its place is counted Daat, mentioned in Sefer Yetzirah, and nevertheless, at times we count it among the ten sefirot."[179]

[192] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1231–1233, in the discussion "Malchut, Letters and Five Gevurot: One Source and Many Products."

[179] Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Gate of the Discourses on ABYA), chapter 1. There Keter is said to be "not part of that world, but like the king's crown, which is above his head and not part of his head; therefore it is not included in the sefirah count, and Daat is counted in its place"; the reason for needing "an intermediate level between the Emanator and the emanated" is given there; the two aspects of Keter are "the very lowest aspect of all the aspects of Ein Sof" and "the highest level of all… the emanated entities, containing the root of all the emanated entities": "These two aspects are called Atik and Arich Anpin, and both are called Keter." There also is the discussion of "Malchut within Malchut in the world of Atzilut, vested in the head of Beriah, which is Keter, called Arich Anpin." Likkutei Torah cites this matter as "Etz Chaim, Gate 41, chapter 3"; the division into gates and chapters is not uniform in all editions. On Atik as Keter's inner aspect, see Etz Chaim, Gate 47 (Gate of the Order of ABYA), chapter 4: "The seven lower [sefirot] of Atik vest themselves within Arich Anpin."

In our passage, Keter stands separately as "an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated beings." Torah Or too says that Keter "is not counted among the ten sefirot," "for the coming into being of Chochmah from Keter is from actual ayin, and not according to the order of chainlike descent."[180] The Tzemach Tzedek writes that "specifically from Chochmah onward, the sefirot descended by way of cause and effect, but Chochmah itself is found from ayin."[212] From these sources we may infer that the chain of cause and effect begins with Chochmah. But the Epistle itself does not explicitly identify the nine it counts, so the question remains open. It is not essential for understanding the passage: clearly, the discussion concerns the sefirot preceding Malchut, in which a chain is described.[215]

[180]Torah Or, Parashat Vayera, discourse beginning פתח אליהו: "This is 'You are one, but not in a numerical count,' for it is not counted among the ten sefirot (referring to supernal Keter, the intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated)... For Chochmah's coming into being from Keter is from actual ayin, unlike the order of hishtalshelut, which is the coming into being of yesh mi-yesh, etc." Later: "In all the worlds of ABYA there is the aspect of Keter as intermediary..."

[212]Derech Mitzvotecha (by the Tzemach Tzedek), Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 26, explaining our passage ("This is what our master, of blessed memory, said: the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, etc."). The abbreviations there: עו"ע, ilah and alul; כ"ע, supernal Keter; א"ח, returning light. Later in the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek distinguishes between the juncture at Malchut of Atzilut, "the end of all the levels of Atzilut," and the juncture at Asiyah, "the actual end of all the worlds," where a radiance from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon is revealed, "and it is a more wondrous radiance."

[215]Research Book, vol. I, pp. 12–15, in the examination "The Nine Sefirot, Chochmah, Keter and Malchut": the Epistle "does not list the nine sefirot by name here"; " 'Alone' does not say that the other sefirot have no Divine light at all," but identifies Chochmah "as the place where the Ein Sof light is vested in a foundational and direct manner"; Keter is not "an intermediary that is a third independent entity." Ibid., pp. 50–53: explicitly connecting the other sefirot "from Chochmah" is an inference, not the wording of the sentence.

"Vested in Chochmah Alone": What Does "Alone" Do?

A difficulty arises here. In the previous chapter we learned that "the light of Ein Sof became enclothed in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and unites within them," in all the vessels. Now it says that it "is vested in Chochmah alone." Is this a contradiction?

No, and there are explicit sources for this. In Tanya, in the gloss to Chapter 35, the Alter Rebbe cites "what is written in Etz Chaim, that the light of Ein Sof, blessed be He, does not unite even in the world of Atzilut except by first becoming vested in the sefirah of Chochmah." In the name of "my teacher," his master the Maggid of Mezritch, he gives the reason: "Because Ein Sof, blessed be He, is the true One, He alone is, and there is none besides Him, and this is the level of Chochmah."[216]

Chapter 18 of Tanya speaks of "Chochmah of Atzilut, in which the actual light of Ein Sof, blessed be He, shines, as it is written, 'G-d founded the earth with wisdom,' and 'You made them all with wisdom.' " The reason is that Chochmah is "כ"ח מ"ה, the power of 'what,' that which is not apprehended or understood … and therefore the light of Ein Sof, blessed be He, whom no thought can grasp at all, becomes vested in it." From there, "together with the light of Ein Sof, blessed be He,

[216] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 35, in the gloss.

vested within it, it extends throughout all the aspects of the entire soul to give it life."[217]

The Tzemach Tzedek, in his explanation of our passage, states this explicitly: "And although the radiance of the kav, the light of Ein Sof, is vested through Chochmah in all nine sefirot…."[212]

According to these sources, the light of Ein Sof is first vested in Chochmah alone, and through it shines in all nine sefirot. This is how "alone" may be understood: it indicates the beginning of the vesting, while the light unites with all the vessels.[215]

We may draw on the description of Chochmah within the soul in Chapter 18 of Tanya: an idea appears as a flash, then develops into understanding, emotion and action. All are nourished by the initial flash. The example helps us understand how the light shines through Chochmah into the other levels; in Atzilut the subject is an order of relationship, not stages in time.

[217]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 18. The verses: Proverbs 3:19; Psalms 104:24.

[212]Derech Mitzvotecha (by the Tzemach Tzedek), Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 26, explaining our passage ("This is what our master, of blessed memory, said: the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, etc."). The abbreviations there: עו"ע, ilah and alul; כ"ע, supernal Keter; א"ח, returning light. Later in the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek distinguishes between the juncture at Malchut of Atzilut, "the end of all the levels of Atzilut," and the juncture at Asiyah, "the actual end of all the worlds," where a radiance from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon is revealed, "and it is a more wondrous radiance."

[215]Research Book, vol. I, pp. 12–15, in the examination "The Nine Sefirot, Chochmah, Keter and Malchut": the Epistle "does not list the nine sefirot by name here"; " 'Alone' does not say that the other sefirot have no Divine light at all," but identifies Chochmah "as the place where the Ein Sof light is vested in a foundational and direct manner"; Keter is not "an intermediary that is a third independent entity." Ibid., pp. 50–53: explicitly connecting the other sefirot "from Chochmah" is an inference, not the wording of the sentence.

Why the Sentence Appears Precisely Here

We still need to understand why the sentence "and the Ein Sof light is vested in Chochmah alone" appears precisely here. It raises a difficulty: if the light of Ein Sof is vested directly in Chochmah, at the head of the order, its power to create something from nothing ought to be revealed there. Yet the Epistle says the opposite: this power is revealed specifically in Malchut, at the end. How is this possible?

The answer follows immediately: "And this is the meaning of 'their beginning is embedded in their end.' " The Tzemach Tzedek explains it as follows. Chochmah itself does not come from Keter by way of cause and effect: "Chochmah itself is found from ayin, and not through a chainlike descent of cause and effect … and it comes into being from ayin into yesh through the mediation of supernal Keter, for Keter is an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated beings." Only "from Chochmah onward" is there a chain of cause and effect extending to Malchut. "This power and ability that shines from Ein Sof, blessed be He, in supernal Keter, to bring Chochmah into being from ayin into yesh, is revealed in Malchut of Atzilut to bring BYA into being from ayin into yesh, and this is 'their beginning is embedded in their end.' "[212]

[212] Derech Mitzvotecha (by the Tzemach Tzedek), Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 26, explaining our passage ("This is what our master, of blessed memory, said: the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, etc."). The abbrevia-

Let us arrange this in three stages. At the beginning of the order, in the transition from Keter to Chochmah, there is a relationship of "from ayin." In the middle, from Chochmah to Malchut, there is a chain. At the end, in the transition from Malchut to Beriah, a relationship of "from ayin" is again revealed: the same power that acted at the beginning now acts toward separate yesh. The sentence about "Chochmah alone" sharpens the difficulty, and the next sentence answers it.

"And This Is the Meaning of 'Their Beginning Is Embedded in Their End' "

W08-09
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82–92

"And this is the meaning of 'their beginning is embedded in their end,' for Keter is an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated beings,"

And this is the meaning of: וז"ש expands to וזה שכתוב, "and this is what is written." The Epistle cites wording from an early source and interprets it.

Embedded means fixed in place, like a stake driven into the ground. The thing is not placed beside the other, but fixed within it.

Their beginning: תחלתן means תחילתן, the beginning of the sefirot.

tions there: עו"ע, ilah and alul; כ"ע, supernal Keter; א"ח, returning light. Later in the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek distinguishes between the juncture at Malchut of Atzilut, "the end of all the levels of Atzilut," and the juncture at Asiyah, "the actual end of all the worlds," where a radiance from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon is revealed, "and it is a more wondrous radiance."

In their end means at their end, in the last sefirah.

For means "because…." The Epistle explains the formula through Keter.

Keter is the head of the system of sefirot, standing above them; in kabbalistic language it "resembles the king's crown, which is above his head."

Is an intermediary means "is an intermediate level," connecting two sides.

Between the Emanator means between Him who emanates the sefirot, Ein Sof, blessed be He.

And the emanated beings means and the sefirot emanated from Him.

The Formula in Sefer Yetzirah

The Epistle takes the expression from Sefer Yetzirah, from its first chapter, which discusses the ten sefirot.[218] In the usual version there: "Ten sefirot of belimah: their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end, like a flame bound to a coal; for the Master is unique and has no second, and before one, what do you count?"[194]

The sentence in Sefer Yetzirah says three things. First, the ten sefirot are not a straight line with disconnected

[218] Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 1: ten sefirot belimah.

[194] Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 1, mishnah 7, in the standard text. In the Gra's text: "Ten sefirot belimah: their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end…" In both versions the order is "their end in their beginning and their beginning in their end." Our Epistle quotes only "their beginning is embedded in their end," while Iggeret HaKodesh, section 31, reads "their beginning is embedded in their end and their end in their beginning."

ends; they form a closed system whose end and beginning are connected. Second, the image is "a flame bound to a coal": the flame moves and branches into many tongues, yet remains attached to one coal. Third, the connection is stated together with the unity of the source, "the Master is unique and has no second": the multiplicity of the sefirot does not impair unity.

The Epistle cites only the second half, "their beginning is embedded in their end," because that is what it needs here: the beginning is present in the end. In another epistle in Tanya, the Alter Rebbe cites both halves, "their beginning is embedded in their end and their end in their beginning," and explains that all the drawing of vitality and influence from higher to lower proceeds in this way, "and in the writings of the Arizal it is called direct light and returning light, as it is written, 'and the living creatures run and return.' "[219] There is descent from beginning to end, and there is return from end to beginning. Likkutei Torah says: "The principal revelation of their beginning is specifically in their end, whereas in a higher place this revelation is not seen."[220]

[219]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 31. Its wording: "It is widely known that all the drawing down of vitality and influence from higher levels to levels below them is as stated in Sefer Yetzirah: 'Their beginning is embedded in their end and their end in their beginning'..." "The chayot ran and returned": Ezekiel 1:14; compare Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 1, mishnah 8.

[220]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Re'eh, discourse beginning ושמתי כדכד (the second discourse). In Likkutei Torah, Parashat Shelach, discourse beginning והיה לכם לציצית: "Just as He, blessed be He, is infinite, so His operations have no end, for at every aspect of which an end may be said, a beginning may likewise be said."

"Their beginning is embedded in their end" describes a relationship in which the beginning is present in the end, and sometimes is revealed there more than in its own place. It does not follow that the last is superior in every respect to what preceded it.

Three Applications in the Epistle: Compare, Do Not Conflate

"Their beginning is embedded in their end" appears three times in the Epistle. Each time, the formula applies to a different "beginning" and a different "end":

1. **Here**, in the order of the sefirot: the beginning is Keter, the end is Malchut, and what is revealed in Malchut is the power to create something from nothing.
2. **A little later**, when the Epistle addresses the purpose of creation and the mitzvot: " 'Their beginning is embedded in their end' is the power of Ein Sof, blessed be He, to create yesh me'ayin … so that the Emanator, blessed be He, will be King over all the separate beings through their fulfilling His commandments … and the end of the deed is first in thought."[191] Here the beginning is the intention, and the end is the separate beings' performance of mitzvot.

[191] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later, in the discussion of the root of the mitzvot: " 'Their beginning is embedded in their end' is the power of the blessed Ein Sof to create yesh me-ayin rather than through cause and effect… so that the blessed Emanator may be King over all separate beings through their fulfilling His mitzvot, which He commands them; the end of the deed is first in thought."

3. **Much later**, when the Epistle discusses the endpoint of the kav from the light of Ein Sof, which shines from below upward "in the aspect of returning light," and the power revealed in earth. There it will say again: "And Malchut of Atzilut is the aspect of Keter from below upward, and their beginning is embedded in their end."[221] Here the beginning is the beginning of the kav, and the end is its conclusion.

When the same formula recurs in three places, comparison is natural. But the three relationships must not be collapsed into one. Each time we must ask: what is the beginning here, what is the end, and what is revealed through their connection?[222] The Tzemach Tzedek himself distinguishes two such junctions. In Malchut of Atzilut, the radiance of Ein Sof "in supernal Keter, the beginning of Atzilut," is revealed. In Asiyah, "the very end of all the worlds," a higher radiance is revealed, from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon.[212] ("Adam Kadmon" is the name for the

[221] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later, in the discussion of the power in earth: "Also the kav from the Ein Sof light, which ends at the end of the feet of Adam Kadmon, shines from below upward as returning light, just as that which is vested in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and ZON of Atzilut shines as returning light from Malchut of Atzilut…"

[222] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1231–1232, in "Three Applications of Embedding": "Keter–Malchut, the purpose of mitzvot, and the returning radiance in earth." "A shared formula invites comparison; it does not authorize identifying all the relations." Ibid., pp. 1227–1229: "Each time, one must identify the beginning, the end, and the relation connecting them."

[212] Derech Mitzvotecha (by the Tzemach Tzedek), Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 26, explaining our passage ("This is what our master, of blessed memory, said: the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, etc."). The abbreviations there: עו"ע, ilah and alul; כ"ע, supernal Keter; א"ח, returning light. Later in the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek distinguishes between the juncture at Malchut of Atzilut, "the end of all the levels

totality of the first lights drawn through the kav, preceding all the worlds; we will discuss it more fully in Chapter 12.) The formula is one, but the "beginnings" differ. This chapter concerns only the first junction.

"Keter Is an Intermediary Between the Emanator and the Emanated Beings"

Why is an intermediary needed at all? Because Emanator and emanated being are utterly incommensurate, and without a connecting link it is unclear how one could shine into the other. Etz Chaim answers in these terms: "There must necessarily be an intermediate level between the Emanator and the emanated being, for the distance between them is like the distance between heaven and earth. How could this shine into that, and how could this create that, when they are two extremes, unless something stood between them as an intermediary and connected them, an aspect close to the Emanator and close to the emanated being?"[179] It is important to be precise about

of Atzilut," and the juncture at Asiyah, "the actual end of all the worlds," where a radiance from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon is revealed, "and it is a more wondrous radiance."

[179]Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Gate of the Discourses on ABYA), chapter 1. There Keter is said to be "not part of that world, but like the king's crown, which is above his head and not part of his head; therefore it is not included in the sefirah count, and Daat is counted in its place"; the reason for needing "an intermediate level between the Emanator and the emanated" is given there; the two aspects of Keter are "the very lowest aspect of all the aspects of Ein Sof" and "the highest level of all... the emanated entities, containing the root of all the emanated entities": "These two aspects are called Atik and Arich Anpin, and both are called Keter." There also is the discussion of "Malchut within Malchut in the world of Atzilut, vested in the head of Beriah, which is Keter, called Arich Anpin." Likkutei Torah cites this matter as "Etz Chaim, Gate 41, chapter 3"; the division into gates and chapters is not uniform in all editions. On Atik as Keter's inner aspect, see Etz Chaim, Gate 47 (Gate of the Order of ABYA), chapter 4: "The seven lower [sefirot] of Atik vest themselves within Arich Anpin."

what an intermediary is. It is neither a separating "wall" nor a third entity standing independently. It is a level that touches both sides.

In Tanya itself, in Iggeret HaKodesh 17, Keter is also described this way: "It is called Keter, from the word koteret, a crown, and it is an intermediary aspect connecting the radiance of the Emanator, Ein Sof, blessed be He, to the emanated beings."[223] A koteret is what surrounds something from above. Keter is therefore not one of the head's organs; it encompasses the head.

What does Keter contain "from both sides"? Likkutei Torah details this: "The intermediary contains the lowest aspect of the Emanator, which is the aspect of Atik Yomin, and it also contains the root of the emanated beings, which is the aspect of Arich Anpin."[224] That is, Keter has two aspects. The higher one, Atik Yomin, is connected with the Emanator. The second, Arich Anpin, is the root of the sefirot. This is the same division we encountered when studying "Atik of Beriah." Likkutei Torah also mentions there that the kabbalists disagreed over whether Keter is counted among the ten sefirot, and that "the Arizal decided …

[223]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 17. Its wording: " 'Crown' is the aspect of encompassing and surrounding, and is called keter, from koteret…"

[224]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Nitzavim, "ביאור ע"פ כי כארץ." There also: "It is known that Malchut of Ein Sof becomes Keter for the emanated entities"; "So it is in Malchut of Ein Sof… likewise one may understand Malchut of Ein Sof, which becomes Keter for Atzilut." The matter of "ani and ayin" [אני and אין] is cited there in the name of Etz Chaim regarding "Malchut of Adam Kadmon," which becomes Keter for Atzilut.

that it is an intermediary aspect between the Emanator and the emanated beings."[225]

An example and its limit (our proposal). Consider a person's will. It is not simply another faculty alongside intellect and emotion; it stands above them, and they all act according to it: a person thinks about what he wants to think about. Will thus touches both the person himself and his faculties, and for this reason Keter is called "will" in Chassidut.[190] Here the example stops: human will is itself a faculty of a created soul, whereas Keter connects Ein Sof with the emanated beings, between whom there is no commensurability at all.

"And It Contains the Lowest Aspect of Ein Sof. Therefore It Is Called the Crown of Kingship"

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93–102

"and it contains the lowest aspect of Ein Sof. Therefore it is called the crown of kingship,"

And it contains means "and within it," within Keter, there is.

[225]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bechukkotai, "ביאור אם בחקותי." There: the dispute "whether Keter is counted among the ten sefirot or is not included, as cited in Pardes, Gate 3," and the Ari's resolution: "It contains something of the lower aspect within Ein Sof, which is Atik Yomin; this aspect emanated its second aspect, which is the root of all ten emanated sefirot… and is called Arich Anpin. These two aspects together are called Keter."

[190]Torah Or, Parashat Bereishit, explanation of the discourse beginning כי כאשר השמים החדשים: "They willingly accepted His kingship upon themselves… for one is called king only by consent. This is the meaning of the crown of kingship: the principal element of kingship is the crown with which they crown him, and Keter means the aspect of will. This is 'their beginning is embedded in their end': the drawing down of Malchut is from Keter, which is will, etc."

The last aspect means the lowest aspect. What "lowest" means in that which has no end will be clarified immediately below.

Of Ein Sof means "of the Infinite."

Therefore means "for this reason."

It is called means Keter is called.

The crown of kingship means "a crown of Malchut." The next sentence will give two reasons for this name.

"The Lowest Aspect of Ein Sof": Four Steps Toward Understanding

This is the most difficult expression in the passage, and we will proceed carefully.

The first step: what is not meant. "The lowest aspect" is not an "edge" of Ein Sof, a "lower part" of it or its "last floor"; that which has no end has no edge. Etz Chaim itself warns against this mistake. It calls this aspect "the lowest and lowliest of all the aspects of Ein Sof, as though we were to say, by way of analogy, that it is the aspect of Malchut within Malchut, although it is not so, for there is no form or sefirah there at all, G-d forbid; we speak this way only to accommodate the ear."[179] The name Malchut is borrowed here to make

[179] Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Gate of the Discourses on ABYA), chapter 1. There Keter is said to be "not part of that world, but like the king's crown, which is above his head and not part of his head; therefore it is not included in the sefirah count, and Daat is counted in its place"; the reason for needing "an intermediate level between the Emanator and the emanated" is given there; the two aspects of Keter are "the very lowest aspect of all the aspects of Ein Sof" and "the highest level of all... the emanated entities, containing the root of all the emanated entities": "These two aspects are called Atik and Arich Anpin, and both are called Keter." There also is the discussion of

thought possible for us. It does not mean that there are sefirot in Ein Sof.

The second step: last in relation to what? "Last" is the aspect turned toward revelation, toward what will follow it. Thus in Likkutei Torah: "The entire source of extension and revelation is only from the aspect of Malchut of Ein Sof; but in the Essence of Ein Sof, even this is inapplicable … only from the aspect of Malchut of Ein Sof, which, although it is the light of Ein Sof, is nevertheless an aspect of which it can be said that worlds can descend from it."[226] Let us be precise about two points. First, "Malchut of Ein Sof" is still "the light of Ein Sof," not the Essence. Second, its distinguishing feature is that "worlds can descend" from it, whereas this cannot be said of the Essence. Elsewhere it is said to be "the aspect of a name alone," and that change "does not apply at all" to Ein Sof Himself, "for I, G-d, have not changed."[227]

The third step: what does "it contains" mean? We have already seen that Keter is an intermediary touching both sides. Its side close to the Emanator is precisely "the lowest aspect of Ein Sof." Thus in Likkutei Torah: "It contains the lowest aspect of the

"Malchut within Malchut in the world of Atzilut, vested in the head of Beriah, which is Keter, called Arich Anpin." Likkutei Torah cites this matter as "Etz Chaim, Gate 41, chapter 3"; the division into gates and chapters is not uniform in all editions. On Atik as Keter's inner aspect, see Etz Chaim, Gate 47 (Gate of the Order of ABYA), chapter 4: "The seven lower [sefirot] of Atik vest themselves within Arich Anpin."

[226] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור הדברים ע"פ שחורה אני ונאוה."

[227] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Va'etchannan, discourse beginning ואהבת את הוי' אלקיך.

Emanator, which is the aspect of Malchut of Ein Sof … and this aspect is called Atik; and it contains the root of the emanated beings … and is called Arich Anpin."[224] Atik within Keter, then, is where "Malchut of Ein Sof" turns toward the emanated beings.

The fourth step: the name. This gives rise to the name "the crown of kingship," already familiar from Tikkunei HaZohar: "Supernal Keter is the crown of kingship, and of it it is said, 'Declaring the end from the beginning.' "[196] The verse from Isaiah, "Declaring the end from the beginning," already connects beginning with end: Keter, which is the beginning, "declares" the end.

"For Only a King Has a Crown, and Also Because…"

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103–116

"for only a king has a crown, and also because the lowest aspect of Ein Sof is Malchut of Ein Sof."

For introduces the first reason.

Only a king has a crown means that a crown belongs only to a king. A crown is a sign of kingship.

[224]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Nitzavim, "ביאור ע"פ כי כארץ." There also: "It is known that Malchut of Ein Sof becomes Keter for the emanated entities"; "So it is in Malchut of Ein Sof… likewise one may understand Malchut of Ein Sof, which becomes Keter for Atzilut." The matter of "ani and ayin" [אנ and אין] is cited there in the name of Etz Chaim regarding "Malchut of Adam Kadmon," which becomes Keter for Atzilut.

[196]Tikkunei HaZohar, Introduction ("Patach Eliyahu"), folio 17a: "Malchut is the mouth; we call it the Oral Torah"; "Supernal Keter is the crown of Malchut, and of it is said, 'Declaring the end from the beginning' " (Isaiah 46:10).

And also because means "and also for the reason that…." This is a second reason, in its own right.

The lowest aspect of Ein Sof means "the last aspect of the Infinite."

Is Malchut of Ein Sof means it is the kingship of the Infinite.

Two Reasons, Each in Its Own Right

The Epistle gives two reasons for the name "the crown of kingship," separating them with "and also because." It is worth preserving the distinction, since each reason says something different.

The first reason: the crown belongs to the king. This reason follows from the concept itself: a crown does not exist for its own sake, but for kingship. Thus supernal Keter too, the head of all the sefirot, exists for Malchut, that is, for the revelation of kingship among created beings. Torah Or says: "One is called a king only through willing acceptance, and this is the meaning of the crown of kingship: the principal element of kingship is the crown with which they crown him, and Keter is the aspect of will. This is 'their beginning is embedded in their end,' for the drawing forth of Malchut is from Keter, which is will."[190]

[190]Torah Or, Parashat Bereishit, explanation of the discourse beginning כי באשר השמים החדשים: "They willingly accepted His kingship upon themselves… for one is called king only by consent. This is the meaning of the crown of kingship: the principal element of kingship is the crown with which they crown him, and Keter means the aspect of will. This is 'their beginning is embedded in their end': the drawing down of Malchut is from Keter, which is will, etc."

According to this, the first reason concerns direction and purpose: the beginning is directed toward the end. The Epistle will return to this thought later, in the words "and the end of the deed is first in thought."[191]

The second reason: it contains Malchut. This reason follows from its content. The lowest aspect of Ein Sof is called "Malchut of Ein Sof," and it is present in Keter. Keter is therefore called "the crown of kingship" for two reasons: it exists for the Malchut below it, and it contains a "Malchut" above it.

Together the two reasons complement one another. According to the first, the beginning turns toward the end. According to the second, the beginning is itself the end of what lies above it. In both cases, at every junction, end and beginning are bound together. This is the meaning of "their beginning is embedded in their end" in our passage: Keter, the beginning of the sefirot, carries "Malchut" within it, and Malchut, their end, will immediately be called "Keter."[192]

Four Uses of "Malchut" in the Passage

The word Malchut is used in the passage in four senses:

[191] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later, in the discussion of the root of the mitzvot: " 'Their beginning is embedded in their end' is the power of the blessed Ein Sof to create yesh me-ayin rather than through cause and effect... so that the blessed Emanator may be King over all separate beings through their fulfilling His mitzvot, which He commands them; the end of the deed is first in thought."

[192] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1231–1233, in the discussion "Malchut, Letters and Five Gevurot: One Source and Many Products."

Name	What it is	Where
Malchut of Ein Sof	The lowest aspect of Ein Sof; a borrowed designation, “to accommodate the ear”	Before Atzilut; present in Keter, in the aspect of Atik
The crown of kingship	The name of Keter, for the two reasons	The head of the sefirot
Malchut of Atzilut	The tenth sefirah of the world of Atzilut, its end	The end of Atzilut; from it come the principal emergence of yesh and the letters
Malchut of Atzilut as “Keter from below upward”	The same sefirah in its role as head of the following world, “Atik of Beriah”	The head of Beriah, viewed in the relationship from below

Notice: the first and third rows of the table are not the same level. “Malchut of Ein Sof” is “in the Emanator,” whereas “Malchut of Atzilut” is a sefirah among the emanated beings. Their shared name teaches a similar role at two different junctions: at each, the last aspect of the higher becomes the head of the lower. It does not teach that the two are one thing. The Epistle’s wording, “and therefore **also**,” likewise says “just as … so too.” This is a parallel, not an identification.[228]

[228] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1235–1237, questions 111–116: the difference between Keter as intermediary “between the Emanator and the emanated” and Malchut as intermediary between Atzilut and Beriah; whether “the crown of Malchut” is so called “because of Malchut’s source, or whether Malchut is called Keter because of its ascent”; and the difference between Malchut in the order from above downward and Malchut as Keter in the order from below upward.

“And Therefore Malchut of Atzilut, Too, Is Called Keter from Below Upward”

W08-12
source words
117–124

“And therefore Malchut of Atzilut, too, is called Keter from below upward.”

And therefore means “for this reason.” The conclusion follows from the two reasons just given for the name “the crown of kingship.”

Too: just as the lowest aspect of Ein Sof becomes Keter for the emanated beings.

Malchut of Atzilut: המל’ דאצי’ means המלכות דאצילות.

Is called: נקרא means נקראת, again using a masculine Hebrew form as at the beginning of the passage.

Keter here means the “head” of a system.

From below upward means from lower to higher: as the matter appears from the world below Malchut.

Two Orders of Enumeration

“From below upward” is not merely a figurative expression; it has a defined place in the doctrine of the sefirot. Likkutei Torah says: “It is stated in Sefer HaBahir that there are ten sefirot from above downward and from below upward … and in Etz Chaim, at the end of the Gate of Mayin Nukvin and Mayin Duchrin, that these are the ten sefirot of direct light and the ten sefirot of returning light, and that in

the ten sefirot of returning light, Malchut is Keter."[181] Everything depends on the direction of counting. From above downward, Malchut is tenth. From below upward, it is first, that is, "Keter."

The word "too" connects the sentence with what preceded it. The lowest aspect of Ein Sof is the head of the emanated beings; so too, the last aspect of Atzilut is the head of the following world, Beriah. The passage thus returns to its beginning, to "from Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah." What was stated at the opening as a fact is now given its underlying principle.

Likkutei Torah describes such a junction, Keter containing Malchut of Ein Sof, from both sides: "Insofar as it is a recipient ... this is the aspect of Malchut, the end of all levels, etc., and so it is in Malchut of Ein Sof. And insofar as it imparts and is the head of the emanated beings...." Toward what is above it, it is an end that receives; toward what is below it, it is a head that imparts. Etz Chaim is further cited there: "The aspect of ani is called Malchut ... and it is called the aspect of ayin when it becomes Keter."[224] אני, ani,

[181]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Chukkat, "ביאור ענין עלי באר" (on the discourse beginning אז ישיר ישראל). It cites Sefer HaBahir, "There are ten sefirot from above downward and from below upward," and Etz Chaim, the end of the Gate of MAN and MAD, "In the ten sefirot of returning light, Malchut is Keter"; there also, on Binah of Atzilut descending "through first vesting itself in Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik for Beriah," and on "Malchut of Beriah becoming Atik and a flowing source for Yetzirah."

[224]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Nitzavim, "ביאור ע"פ כי כארץ." There also: "It is known that Malchut of Ein Sof becomes Keter for the emanated entities"; "So it is in Malchut of Ein Sof... likewise one may understand Malchut of Ein Sof, which becomes Keter for Atzilut." The matter of "ani and

"I," and אין, ayin, "nothing," consist of the same Hebrew letters. When the aspect is the receiving end, it is ani; when it becomes a concealed, encompassing head for the world below it, it is ayin.

What Changes When the Perspective Reverses, and What Does Not

When we say "from below upward," three things change:

- **The name according to the role.** The same aspect is called Malchut in the descending order, and Keter in the ascending relationship.
- **The relationship between the systems.** What concludes one system is the head of the next.
- **The proper question.** Not "Where is it on the ladder?" but "What is revealed through it toward created beings?"

Several things do not change:

- Malchut does not move in space or "rise" in rank.
- Atzilut does not become Beriah, and Beriah does not become Atzilut. This does not mean that Beriah becomes Atzilut or that the distinction between the levels disappears.[174]

ayin" [אנ and אין] is cited there in the name of Etz Chaim regarding "Malchut of Adam Kadmon," which becomes Keter for Atzilut.

[174]Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1232–1233, in "Resolving the Issue: Malchut Is Not a Competing Source": the concept of Malchut "does not… create another power alongside Ein Sof, but clarifies a role within the order of revelation"; on Atik of Beriah: "The end of one order becomes a higher source relative to another order. This does not mean that all Beriah turns into Atzilut or that the names of the levels cease to distinguish."

- Malchut of Atzilut does not become Malchut of Ein Sof.
- The source of the power has not moved from place to place. It remains the power of Ein Sof.

Why does the end specifically receive the name of a head? The Tzemach Tzedek adds a reason. In Malchut, he writes, "there is an additional and more wondrous radiance, because there is the conclusion of the radiance of the kav, and then it shines from below upward in the aspect of returning light. Therefore Malchut of Atzilut is called Keter from below upward, because their beginning is embedded specifically in their end: at the conclusion of the radiance of the kav, it shines as returning light, after the manner of its radiance in supernal Keter."[212] To illustrate, he cites the sun's warmth: the air near the ground is warmer than the air in between, "because at the conclusion of the radiance upon the earth, returning light is produced from below upward." The analogy from nature shows only one thing: at the end of the radiance, more can be revealed than appears along the way. It does not explain how something is created from nothing.

[212] Derech Mitzvotecha (by the Tzemach Tzedek), Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 26, explaining our passage ("This is what our master, of blessed memory, said: the principal coming into being of yesh and a wholly separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut, etc."). The abbreviations there: עו"ע, ilah and alul; כ"ע, supernal Keter; א"ח, returning light. Later in the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek distinguishes between the juncture at Malchut of Atzilut, "the end of all the levels of Atzilut," and the juncture at Asiyah, "the actual end of all the worlds," where a radiance from the beginning of the kav in Adam Kadmon is revealed, "and it is a more wondrous radiance."

The Epistle will return to “Keter from below upward” and “returning light” when it reaches the power revealed in earth, and the subject will be explained more fully there. In this chapter, the relationship between Malchut and Keter is sufficient for us.

The End That Reveals the Beginning: Three Examples and Their Limits

Three examples from human life will help make the connection between beginning and end more accessible:

The house. A person plans a house in order to live in it. The drawings, calculations and work precede the completed house, but the intention to live in it is present from the outset. This helps us understand the first reason, “only a king has a crown”: the beginning is directed toward the end.

The teacher. A teacher begins with the desire that the student should understand independently. He goes through many stages with him, until finally the student says a short sentence in his own words. The sentence comes at the end, but the independent understanding revealed in it is what motivated the teacher from the start. This example too illuminates intention. It does not say that every final detail is superior to everything preceding it.

The idea and the words. A person understands an idea inwardly, then clothes it in words. For him, the words conclude an inner process. For the listener, they open the way to understanding. The idea is one; what changes is the side from which one looks. This is the closest example to "Keter from below upward": the same aspect is an end from one side and a head from the other. Here too there is a limit: the listener existed before the words were spoken, whereas the world below Malchut comes into being from it.

The examples help us sense the connection, but they are not the explanation. The explanation is what we have learned from the sources: Keter is an intermediary containing "Malchut of Ein Sof"; Keter exists for Malchut; therefore Malchut, the end of Atzilut, is "Keter" for Beriah, and within it the power that acted at the beginning is revealed.

Returning to the Wording: A Continuous Reading

We can now read the entire passage continuously, hearing in each word what we have learned.

"However, it is known": it has already become clear that creative power belongs to the Creator alone, and that it acts in all ten vessels; now we must specify where the transition is revealed. "That the principal coming into being of a yesh and an entirely separate

thing": "principal" denotes the focal point, not a second source; "entirely separate" in status and apprehension, not in independence. "Is from Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah": the end of Atzilut becomes the higher, concealed aspect at the head of Beriah. "For there is no king without a people, etc.": kingship turns toward a "people," toward those who are distant and distinct and can accept His kingship; for this purpose separate yesh was created.

"And also the multiplicity and differentiation of the created beings, which were created by the power of Ein Sof, utterly one and unique": this is a new question, and it does not impair the unity of the source. "Are through the multiplicity of letters issuing from Malchut, the mouth of the Lord, 'and by the breath of His mouth all their host' ": defined extensions of vitality issue from Malchut like speech from a mouth, bringing every created being into being and giving it life at every moment. The breath is one, and the letters are many. "And the five articulatory organs of the mouth derive from the five gevurot of Nukva": the undifferentiated voice divides into letters through the power of limitation, that is, through the five gevurot in the receiving Malchut.

"And therefore it is called 'the revealed world,' for in it is revealed the power of the Ein Sof light to create something from nothing, not by means of cause and

effect": in Malchut, the power to create something from nothing is actualized, a power found in no chain. "But the first nine sefirot were emanated through a chainlike descent of cause and effect": the sefirot emerge from one another as an effect from its cause; they are Divinity, they participate in creation, and they are not independent. "And the Ein Sof light is vested in Chochmah alone": directly in Chochmah, and through it in all the others. If so, the question arises: why is the creative power revealed specifically at the end?

"And this is the meaning of 'their beginning is embedded in their end' ": this is the answer: the beginning is embedded in the end. "For Keter is an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated beings, and it contains the lowest aspect of Ein Sof": at the head of the sefirot stands an intermediary, containing aspects of both the Emanator and the emanated beings. "Therefore it is called the crown of kingship, for only a king has a crown": the first reason, the beginning is directed toward Malchut. "And also because the lowest aspect of Ein Sof is Malchut of Ein Sof": the second reason, the beginning itself carries a "Malchut" above it. "And therefore Malchut of Atzilut, too, is called Keter from below upward": just as the end of the higher is a head for the emanated beings, so the end of Atzilut is a head for Beriah, and within it, toward

separate yesh, the same power that acted at the beginning is revealed.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

The Epistle's wording	What it teaches	What must not be inferred from it
"The principal coming into being of a yesh and an entirely separate thing"	The focal point of the transition to yesh that is separate in status and apprehension	That Malchut is an additional creator; that separate means independent; that yesh means matter
"From Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah"	The end of Atzilut becomes the higher, concealed aspect at the head of Beriah	That Atzilut becomes Beriah; that Atik, Keter and "root" are synonyms
"For there is no king without a people, etc."	Kingship is a relationship to others; separateness was created for the revelation of kingship and the fulfillment of mitzvot	That the Creator lacks something or is dependent; that the Epistle identifies a particular source here
"The multiplicity and differentiation of the created beings … utterly one and unique"	A second question: how many different beings arise from one source	That the source divides into parts
"Through the multiplicity of letters … the mouth of the Lord, 'and by the breath of His mouth all their host' "	Letters are defined extensions of vitality, constantly bringing the created being into being and giving it life	A physical mouth; labels; code; letters creating by their own power

The Epistle's wording	What it teaches	What must not be inferred from it
"And the five articulatory organs of the mouth derive from the five gevurot of Nukva"	Limitation divides one voice into letters; the gevurot are the power of contraction in Malchut	Gevurah as punishment; a correspondence between a group of letters and a particular gevurah
" 'The revealed world' … to create something from nothing, not by means of cause and effect"	In Malchut, the power to create something from nothing is revealed in action	Apprehension of the nature of the thing; "the world visible to the eye"
"The first nine sefirot were emanated through a chainlike descent of cause and effect"	The order in which the sefirot emerge from one another differs from the creation of yesh	That they are not Divinity, do not participate, or stand independently
"And the Ein Sof light is vested in Chochmah alone"	Direct and initial vesting in Chochmah, and through it in all the sefirot	That there is no light in the other sefirot
"Their beginning is embedded in their end, for Keter is an intermediary…"	The beginning is present and revealed in the end; Keter connects the Emanator and the emanated beings	A slogan about "the importance of the result"; conflating the three applications; an intermediary as a third entity
"The lowest aspect of Ein Sof … Malchut of Ein Sof … the crown of kingship"	The aspect of the light of Ein Sof turned toward revelation, within Keter; and two reasons for the name	An edge or part of Ein Sof; identity with Malchut of Atzilut
"Keter from below upward"	In the ascending order Malchut comes first; the end of one system is the head of the next	Movement in space; erasure of the distinctions between levels

What should one know by the chapter's end? Above all, how to distinguish the source of the ability from the manner in which it is revealed. Someone who makes that distinction will neither say "Malchut creates" nor remove Malchut from the explanation. The reader also knows that "entirely separate" is a relationship of apprehension and nature, not independence; that the letters are not labels attached to things after their creation, but their vitality; that Gevurah is a power that makes something particular possible; that "alone" means "directly," not "only there"; and that Keter and Malchut are bound together at every junction. Whenever the formula "their beginning is embedded in their end" appears, the reader will ask: what is the beginning here, what is the end, and what is revealed between them?

Five questions remain open:

- **The inner link.** The Epistle establishes where the transition takes place (in Malchut of Atzilut) and what its result is (entirely separate yesh). It does not detail here precisely how the transition from "a likeness of the aspect of Divinity" to "a yesh and an entirely separate thing" takes place.[177]
- **Which nine.** The Epistle does not enumerate the nine sefirot. According to the sources we cited, the

[177] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1242–1244: "The Epistle establishes the source and the result, but does not supply the entire inner link of the transition here." See also vol. I, pp. 62–64, in the list of questions that remain unresolved: "What is the inner link between a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction and a wholly separate yesh?"

chain of cause and effect begins in Chochmah. But whether Keter is counted here, or Daat is counted in its place, is not explicitly stated.

- **Atik of Beriah.** The sources we cited explain the role and the name. This aspect's full place in the order of the partzufim of Beriah is a broader subject.
- **Letters and vessels.** Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah says, "And the vessels are the very letters." The precise technical relationship between particular letters and particular vessels in our Epistle has not been explained.
- **The source of the saying.** Which source the Alter Rebbe intended in "there is no king without a people, etc.," and what continuation the "etc." alludes to.[229]

From Here to Birth

The chapter taught that in Malchut a power is revealed whose root is higher than Malchut. The next question is how the power reaches it, and how it becomes revealed when created beings appear. The Epistle continues: "And all the more so, since the creation of souls from it, to become an existent, separate thing on its own in the world of Beriah, is called birth." Birth is not a new analogy replacing the previous one. It is another way to understand the same encounter: a

[229] Research Book: on the source of the saying and "Atik of Beriah," vol. II, pp. 1239–1243; on "the first nine sefirot" and "Chochmah alone," vol. I, pp. 51–53; on the relation between letters and vessels, vol. II, pp. 1255–1256.

higher source initially present in concealment, and a receiving level from which a distinct existence emerges. The Epistle will immediately connect birth to Atik: "like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which depends on Atika," the splitting of the Sea of Reeds that depends on Atik.[230]

Two things from this chapter will help us there. The first is the example of the idea and the words: it showed that Malchut can be the end of one order and the head of the next without the lower world becoming the higher. The second is the multiplicity of letters: this is not a multiplicity of independent sources, but the manner in which content reaches a recipient in defined forms. With these two points we can consider birth, that is, how something previously included within its source later appears as a distinct existence.

Studying the Chapter with Artificial Intelligence Tools

This chapter contains a sentence whose subject is easy to reverse, three terms that look synonymous, and two questions the Epistle does not explicitly resolve: the source of the saying "there is no king without a people," and which nine sefirot are counted.

[230] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1234–1235: "This is the bridge to the analogy of birth. The level that brings created beings into revelation bears within it a power whose root is above it."

Exercise 1: Who Creates?

What to ask. Supply the sentence "However, it is known that the principal coming into being of a yesh and an entirely separate thing is from Malchut of Atzilut…" and ask: according to this sentence, who creates the separate yesh?

What to check. Check whether the answer distinguishes the source of the ability, the power of Ein Sof, from the site of revelation, Malchut. An answer saying "Malchut creates" has turned a means of revelation into a possessor of power. An answer saying "everything is Ein Sof, and Malchut is not important here" has erased what the sentence came to teach.

The limit of the conclusion. The sentence establishes where the transition takes place and what its result is. Precisely how the transition takes place is not detailed here; an answer confidently describing it adds to the Epistle.

Exercise 2: Atik, Keter and Root

What to ask. Ask about the difference between Atik, Keter and "root" in the passage, and request the sentence in which each term appears.

What to check. Artificial intelligence tools tend to present the three terms as synonyms. Compare the answer with the section "Three Terms That Must Not Be Interchanged: Keter, Atik and 'Root.' " Check one

further point: “root” does not appear in our passage, so an answer supplying a sentence from the passage for it has invented that sentence.

The limit of the conclusion. Even if the answer correctly distinguishes the three terms, it does not prove precisely where the aspect of “Atik of Beriah” stands in the order of Beriah’s partzufim. The chapter does not determine this, and an answer that does so requires an explicit source.

Exercise 3: The Source of the Saying

What to ask. Ask from which source the saying “there is no king without a people” is taken, and what continuation the “etc.” in the Epistle alludes to.

What to check. An artificial intelligence tool may confidently identify a particular source. Open every proposed source and check that the saying actually appears there. We saw that Rabbeinu Bachya cites it, but the Epistle does not say where it took it from.

The limit of the conclusion. Finding an earlier use of the saying does not tell us which source the Alter Rebbe intended. The question remains open.

Exercise 4: Which Nine?

What to ask. Supply the sentence “But the first nine sefirot were emanated through a chainlike descent of cause and effect,” and request the arguments for each

possibility: that Keter is counted among the nine, or that Daat is counted in its place. Ask for the source of each argument.

What to check. Open each source (Etz Chaim, Torah Or and Derech Mitzvotecha, which we cited in the discussion) and check two things: that the quoted wording actually appears there, and that it addresses the same question rather than a neighboring one.

The limit of the conclusion. If no source explicitly says which nine the Epistle counts, record that as the finding. A confidently written answer, or agreement among several such tools, does not replace an explicit source.[231]

Chapter 9 | Gestation and Birth: The Revelation of the Power of Ein Sof in a Separate Existence

What We Already Know

This chapter continues the previous one. In preparation, let us recall three points:

[231] The sources for "Which Nine?" were cited above in the section "Which Nine?" (Etz Chaim; Torah Or; Derech Mitzvotecha). On comparing the answers of several tools without deciding by majority vote, and deciding when to stop and record that a question remains open, see "Studying Further," in "A Few More Habits of a Learner" ("Using Another Tool without Deciding by Majority Vote"; "Knowing When to Stop").

- **The site of the transition.** The principal coming into being of separate yesh is from Malchut of Atzilut, "which becomes Atik of Beriah": the end of Atzilut becomes the higher, concealed aspect at the head of Beriah (Chapter 8).
- **The power in the end.** In Malchut "is revealed the power of the Ein Sof light to create something from nothing, not by means of cause and effect," because "their beginning is embedded in their end" (Chapter 8).
- **From where the souls emerged.** Human souls emerged "from the union of ZON of Atzilut," that is, from the joining of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva, and as long as they have not descended into BYA they are not "a yesh and a separate thing" (the first part and Chapter 7).

This chapter adds an image: it describes the transition from Malchut to created souls as gestation and birth.

From Inclusion to Revelation

Birth is a real change, but not a beginning from zero. The child is not formed at the moment it is seen outside; an entire process of growth preceded that. What changes at birth is the mode of existence: what was included and concealed now appears before us. The Epistle uses this analogy to explain how souls

appear in the world of Beriah, and what higher power acts in their emergence.[232]

The analogy makes the difference between inclusion in a source and emergence as a distinct existence more accessible, but does not by itself resolve the entire question of the transition between them.

First we will learn the names of the participants. In Kabbalah and Chassidut, groups of sefirot, the partzufim, are given the names of family members to describe relationships of imparting, receiving and growth. We have already encountered some of the names; here we gather them in one place:

- **Abba and Imma:** names for the aspects of Chochmah and Binah. In Chochmah the first point of intellect arises; in Binah it develops in breadth and depth, like a seed that the mother nurtures until it becomes a complete child. Thus the Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya of Chochmah and Binah in the soul: "They are the 'father' and 'mother' that give birth to love of G-d and awe and fear of Him."[233]

[232] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1261–1263, in "Birth and Union: From Concealment to Separate Creation."

[233] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 3: "The intellect in the intellectual soul, which conceives every matter, is called Chochmah... When it brings its power into actuality, contemplating with its intellect so as to understand a matter thoroughly and in depth, from some idea of wisdom conceived in its intellect, it is called Binah. These are the 'father' and 'mother' that give birth to love of G-d, fear of Him, and dread of Him." The subject there is the soul's faculties; in Kabbalistic terminology the supernal Chochmah and Binah are called Abba and Imma for the same reason.

- **Ze'ir Anpin**, abbreviated ZA: the partzuf of the emotional attributes, the six sefirot from Chesed through Yesod, which are the "offspring" of intellect.
- **Nukva:** the aspect of Malchut, which receives from ZA; within it the thing undergoes gestation and is born. ZON, זו"נ, abbreviates Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva together.
- **Union:** a joining of giver and recipient from which a new influence is drawn, such as the uniting and imparting of Ze'ir Anpin within Nukva. This too names a relationship, not a bodily act.
- **Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin:** two names for the sefirah of Keter, above Abba and Imma: Arich Anpin is the root of all the sefirot of the world, and Atik Yomin is the inner, concealed aspect of Keter, connected with the Emanator Himself.[234]

The words are taken from human life to make relationships more accessible. We are not speaking of bodies or a family in heaven. At each stage we will clarify which relationship the analogy teaches.

We will keep two questions in mind throughout the chapter: from whom is the influence received close to the recipient, and what is its higher source? An answer to the first does not settle the second. The Epistle

[234] Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Gate of the Discourses on ABYA), chapter 1: Keter contains "the very lowest aspect of all the aspects of Ein Sof," and "the highest level of everything among the emanated entities, containing the root of all the emanated entities"; "These two aspects are called Atik and Arich Anpin, and both are called Keter." See above, chapter 8. The division of Etz Chaim into gates and chapters is not uniform in all editions; the numbers here and below follow the continuous order of the gates.

therefore ascends from Abba and Imma to Arich Anpin and Atik, and higher, to Ein Sof. This list is not a collection of names to memorize. It teaches that the immediate source is not an independent source of the power of birth: what appears below bears an extension whose source is above it.[232]

The passage mentions seven months, and later "nine or seven months of gestation." The relationship between these periods requires clarification, and we will return to it in the section "Seven, and Nine or Seven." For now we will study the main course of the argument: in the growth and emergence of a defined existence, a power of infinite origin is revealed.[235]

We will study the passage sentence by sentence, asking simple questions about each. What is born, who gives birth, where, and through which power? Who grows, and within whom? What is the "drop," and what is its root? What does the statement that "the actual Ein Sof light" is revealed through gestation and birth mean? At the end of the chapter we will see how all this prepares the next passage of the Epistle, concerning the place of Torah and the mitzvot.[236]

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[232] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1261–1263, in "Birth and Union: From Concealment to Separate Creation."

[235] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1262–1263, in "Seven and Nine: A Close Source Is Not an Exact Quotation."

[236] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1257–1261, in the opening of "Gestation and Birth: What Is Revealed in the Emergence into Beriah?" and in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification": "Birth is described as being from Malchut, but the power of birth does not begin in it"; "Gestation is not empty waiting."

“And All the More So, Since the Creation of Souls from It”

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“And all the more so, since the creation of souls from it, to become an existent, separate thing on its own”

“And all the more so” means “furthermore”: the sentence adds a reason and an example to what preceded it. “Since” means “for.” “The creation of souls” means their coming into being as created beings. “From it” means from Malchut of Atzilut, the subject of the previous sentence. “To become an existent, separate thing” means so that there should be an existence standing on its own, distinct from Divinity. בפ”ע, “on its own,” expands to בפני עצמה, in the feminine, as printed in the expanded text of the Epistle: each soul becomes an existence of its own.[237] The sentence concerns the stage at which the souls become separate yesh.

“And All the More So”: A Further Reason for Malchut’s Stature

“And all the more so” can be understood only if we remember the preceding sentence: “And therefore Malchut of Atzilut, too, is called Keter from below

[237] Thus in the vocalized, abbreviation-expanded Kehot text of the Epistle: “To become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right”; “like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds”; “through higher lights”; “from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin”; “until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot”; “through gestation and birth.” The expansion is the editors’ work and accords with the sequence of sentences.

upward." There we learned that Malchut, the last sefirah in Atzilut, is "Keter," a head, for the world of Beriah. "And all the more so" adds: furthermore, the souls themselves are created from it. That is, Malchut is not only the head of the next world in the order of levels; it is also the source from which created beings emerge into their existence. This is the straightforward reading of the sequence. Yet the Epistle does not explicitly say precisely what "and all the more so" refers to, and it can also be heard as reinforcing the entire preceding discussion: that in Malchut the power to create something from nothing is revealed.[238]

"An Existent, Separate Thing on Its Own": Not the Beginning of the Soul's Entire Existence

Birth is not the beginning of the soul's existence; it is the beginning of a new mode of existence. In Chapter 5 we already learned that souls, before descending into Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, "are not in the category of 'yesh' and a separate thing on their own, but are a likeness of the aspect of Divinity through an immense contraction."[239] That is, the soul already exists in Atzilut, but is not yet "separate yesh." The Epistle now

[238] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text: "Therefore Malchut of Atzilut too is called Keter from below upward. All the more so, since the creation of souls is from it..." In the Epistle this is a single continuous passage; this book places the boundary between chapters 8 and 9 here for purposes of study.

[239] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text: "But the souls of angels that emerged from the union of kisses, and likewise human souls that emerged from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut before descending to Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah, are not in the category of yesh and a separate thing in their own right, but are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction." See above, chapter 5.

describes the stage at which it becomes such: “the creation of souls from it, to become an existent, separate thing on its own in the world of Beriah.”

What is the new mode of existence? Let us define two terms. Yesh is an existence standing as an existence, not entirely nullified within its source. A “separate thing” is what is distinct from its source in status and experience; it does not mean independent. The words “an existent, separate thing on its own” therefore describe something new: the soul is no longer merely included within its source, but appears as a created being. This does not mean that it can exist without Divine power. On the contrary, precisely this new emergence requires the power of Ein Sof. This is worth keeping in mind throughout the chapter: the more the Epistle emphasizes separateness, the more deeply it explains the power sustaining it.

From the Letters of Thought to Created Yesh

There appears to be a contradiction here. Chassidut distinguishes the source of the angels from the source of the souls. Of the angels it says, “the source of their coming into being is from the aspect of supernal speech, as it is written, ‘and by the breath of His mouth all their host,’ ” whereas of the souls it says, “But the souls were taken from the letters of His blessed

thought."[240] Yet the Epistle says that the creation of souls is "from it," from Malchut. Are these two contradictory answers? No, because they answer two different questions. "The letters of thought" answers the question of the soul's root.[241] "From it" answers the question of the means through which the soul becomes a separate created being.

Likkutei Torah says this explicitly in the discourse "הים ראה וינוס" ("The Sea Saw and Fled") for the seventh day of Passover. The discourse describes two stages. The first concerns "the six hundred thousand souls of Israel drawn from the six hundred thousand letters of thought" (ס"ר means shishim ribo, six hundred thousand root-souls, corresponding to the letters of the Torah), "and then they are the aspect of actual Divinity, for in Atzilut He and His lights and His vessels are one." At the second stage: "In order for the soul to come into being as yesh, to be a created being … this is through His blessed attribute of Malchut … which is called a garment that conceals and hides until the

[240] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Re'eh, discourse beginning ושמתי כדכד: "The souls of Israel arose in thought, meaning that they are unlike the angels, the hosts above and below, whose coming into being has its source in supernal speech, as it is written, 'And by the breath of His mouth, all their hosts.' But the souls were taken from the letters of His blessed thought, and they are the 600,000 letters in the Torah, which correspond to the 600,000 souls."

[241] In Torah Or, Parashat Mishpatim, discourse beginning ואלה המשפטים, "thought" is also connected with the world of Beriah itself: "The three worlds of BYA are the three aspects of thought, speech and action, for Israel arose in thought. Even the souls called the seed of beasts are of the aspect of thought, which is the world of Beriah. By contrast, angels are drawn from the word of G-d and the breath of His mouth, etc., which is the aspect of Yetzirah." "Thought" there names the world of Beriah within an order of three worlds; this is a different axis from the "letters of thought" in Atzilut. One should not infer from it that there are no angels in the world of Beriah; Tanya, chapter 52, mentions "the souls and angels in Beriah."

aspect of yesh can exist." Hence the conclusion: "Therefore the soul is in the aspect of gestation within Malchut." The soul's root is in thought; it becomes yesh through Malchut, through gestation within it. A parenthetical reference there points to our Epistle: "As is written in Iggeret HaKodesh, in the discourse beginning 'He and His lights,' " its opening words.[242] It also cautions that "even what is called 'letters of thought' is entirely to accommodate the ear": this is an analogy intended to bring the matter within reach of our minds, "for it is written, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts.' "

Tanya too says that "the souls of Israel arose in thought," with the analogy: "Just as the son is drawn from the father's brain, so, as it were, the soul of every Jew was drawn from His blessed thought and wisdom."[243] A little later the Epistle itself will say that "the basis and root of the drop" from which Nukva becomes pregnant "is from the mochin of Abba and Imma," that is, from intellect, from Chochmah and Binah. In summary: the root is in intellect and thought, while gestation and birth are in Malchut. Both are stated together, and neither cancels the other.

[242] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. The parenthetical reference there is "(as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi')"; our Epistle opens with "Ihu vechayohi chad, ihu vegarmohi chad behon." Further there: "For this is a great principle: Malchut is what causes there to be an aspect of yesh."

[243] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 2.

“Is Called Birth”

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“in the world of Beriah, is called birth, like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which depends on Atika.”

“In the world of Beriah” tells us where separateness appears: in the first world below Atzilut. “Is called birth” means that this transition is called “birth”; it is a name and analogy for the revelation of something previously concealed. “Like the splitting” means like a cleaving. י”ס here abbreviates Yam Suf, the Sea of Reeds, not the ten sefirot; the expanded text prints ים־סוף.[237] דבעתיקא תליא is Aramaic for “which depends on Atika”: the splitting of the sea depends on Atik. The comparison to the splitting of the sea points to a revelation whose source is a higher power.

What the Analogy of Birth Conveys

Until now we have studied the creative power revealed in Malchut. The Epistle now asks us to follow the moment of transition itself: how does what is included within a source become a distinct existence? The image it chooses is birth. We should first consider the analogy itself, and only then return to the analogue.

[237] Thus in the vocalized, abbreviation-expanded Kehot text of the Epistle: “To become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right”; “like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds”; “through higher lights”; “from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin”; “until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot”; “through gestation and birth.” The expansion is the editors’ work and accords with the sequence of sentences.

The Alter Rebbe describes the fetus in Torah Or as follows: "The fetus, while in its mother's womb, is not a nature in its own right, but eats what its mother eats, etc.; only after birth does it become a yesh in its own right, until it can later speak to another."[244] Four elements can be found in this brief description. We will understand each as a description of what is present, not merely of what is lacking:

Inclusion. The fetus lives within its mother, who is the place of its life. It "is not a nature in its own right," not on its own. Not because it does not exist, but because its existence is included within hers.

Growth. Gestation is not empty waiting. The fetus "eats what its mother eats," and is thus built up; everything it receives passes through her.

Concealment. What is being built within is not seen outside. One knows there is a fetus, but the fetus itself is concealed.

Revelation. At birth it "becomes a yesh in its own right": the child stands as an existence of its own, "until it can later speak to another," that is, address someone else. The difference is not merely a change of place; it is a new mode of existence.

[244]Torah Or, Parashat Vayeshev, discourse beginning והנה אנחנו מאלמים. The context is the difference between one who is nullified to his cause and one who can impart to another; afterward the image is applied to the refinements ascending "in the state of gestation in Yesod of Nukva." The image explains the analogy of birth; it does not discuss the creation of souls from Malchut there.

In Likkutei Torah this analogy is applied to souls: "The souls were initially included in the aspect of gestation in Atzilut, and afterward are drawn forth through birth in BYA … and then they become limited beings." Further there: "This aspect of limitation occurs at the birth of the souls in BYA. Unlike in the aspect of gestation in Atzilut, where He and His lights and His vessels are one, for there the light of Ein Sof shines."[245] According to this, gestation is inclusion within Atzilut, where the soul is united with the light. Birth is emergence into Beriah, where the soul becomes a defined created being, "possessing limitation."

Four Questions: What Is Born, Who Gives Birth, Where, and Through Which Power?

What is born? At this stage, the souls. Later in the passage they will be joined by the angels, and at its end by the palaces as well.

Who gives birth? Malchut; this is the meaning of "from it." In Tanya this aspect is called Imma Tataah, the lower mother, and also "the mother of the children": "From this source, the souls of Atzilut were emanated and the souls of Beriah were created."[246]

[245] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור ענין שחורה אני ונאוה." It refers there to the discourse "הים ראה וינוס" in Parashat Tzav. There also: "These souls in the state of gestation are called the daughters of Jerusalem; because they are in the state of gestation within Malchut, they are called daughters."

[246] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 52: "This source is what is called alma de-itgalya, Matronita, the lower mother, and Shechinah… for this source is the beginning of the revelation of the Ein Sof light"; "Therefore it is called 'the mother of the children,' by way of analogy, and 'the congregation of Israel,' for from this source the souls of Atzilut were emanated and the souls of Beriah were

Later in the Epistle it will be called Nukva, the one that "receives and becomes pregnant."

Where? "In the world of Beriah." There the soul becomes "an existent, separate thing on its own."

Through which power? Through the power of Ein Sof. The Epistle already said of the Emanator: "He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and from truly absolute nonbeing."[247] Later in our passage it will ascend from the root of the drop to Abba and Imma, Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin, "and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof."

The Epistle brings the two answers together here: birth is from Nukva into the world of Beriah, and the power enabling the emergence of yesh is rooted in Ein Sof. The level that gives birth reveals a higher root previously concealed within it.[232]

We have already encountered a similar distinction regarding the vessels. A defined vessel is not an independent source of creation, yet has a precise role in the emergence of the created being. So too here, in both directions. When we say "Ein Sof," we do not cancel the order of gestation and birth, but explain the

created, etc." In Likkutei Torah, Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס: "It is therefore called the lower mother, Matronita... the mother of the children, as stated in Sefer Shel Beinonim in the name of the Zohar" (שש"ב means Sefer Shel Beinonim, the book of Tanya).

[247] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text: "For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator... Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh." See above, chapter 7.

[232] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1261–1263, in "Birth and Union: From Concealment to Separate Creation."

root of the power acting within it. When we say "Malchut," we do not turn it into a separate power, but identify the aspect in which separate emergence is realized.

Stages Along the Way: "Brothers and Companions," "Daughters of Jerusalem," "You Created It"

The Epistle describes the transition in one sentence. In Likkutei Torah, in the explanation of the verse "I am black and comely, daughters of Jerusalem," the course is detailed in three stages:

"Now, while the souls are above, they are called brothers and companions of ZA, and afterward they are drawn through the union of ZON to undergo gestation within Malchut of Atzilut … and then they are called daughters of Jerusalem, for when the soul stands there, it is in the ultimate unity and nullification within the light of Ein Sof that precedes the parsa." It continues: "This is the aspect of 'the soul You placed within me is pure,' that is, while it is in Atzilut … and afterward, 'You created it,' namely when the soul descends into Beriah. It is known that between Atzilut and Beriah there is a parsa … so that the aspect of a created being can exist."[248]

[248] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור הדברים ע"פ שחורה אני ונאוה." There: "Just as Malchut has two aspects—the first, its being in Atzilut; the second, its dwelling in the Holy of Holies of BYA and becoming Atik of Beriah… so the souls drawn from the inner dimension of the vessels of Malchut likewise have two aspects in this manner." The "explanations" in Likkutei Torah are expansions on the Alter Rebbe's discourses, and some are not in his exact wording.

"Brothers and companions of ZA." At their root, the souls are the "brothers" of Ze'ir Anpin, that is, of the higher emotional attributes. Brothers are children of the same parents: both the attributes and the souls are rooted in the higher intellect, in Abba and Imma. In the writings of the Arizal, the souls "that emerge through the union of Abba and Imma" are said to be "called brothers and companions of ZON," and in Likkutei Torah this name is explicitly connected with "the souls of Israel arose in thought."[249] This is the "thought" in which the souls "arose."

"Daughters of Jerusalem." At the second stage, "through the union of ZON," the souls are drawn into "gestation within Malchut of Atzilut." There too they remain "in the ultimate unity and nullification within the light of Ein Sof." Of this soul we say every morning, "It is pure."

"You created it." At the third stage, the soul descends into Beriah and passes through the parsa, the screen separating Atzilut from Beriah. Only then does it become a "created being."

[249] Etz Chaim, Gate 39 (Gate of MAN and MAD), discourse 5: "We shall also explain the aspect of the begetting of souls that emerge through the union of Abba and Imma, which souls are called siblings and companions of ZON." It describes the drop's path from the eighth mazal in the dikna of Arich Anpin: "From there they are drawn to the six extremities of Abba... from there to the six extremities of Imma..." as far as Yesod of Ze'ir Anpin; it states: "Although this light of this drop descends from level to level... it does not thicken or vest itself at all, and its radiance is as great below as above." The context there is the birth of souls from the union of Abba and Imma, not the birth from Nukva in the Epistle. In Likkutei Torah, Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס: "The matter is that the souls of Israel arose in thought, and then they are called siblings and companions of the Holy One, blessed be He."

In the same place it is explained that Malchut itself has two aspects: its presence in Atzilut, and its dwelling in the Holy of Holies of Beriah, where it "becomes Atik of Beriah." Likewise, the souls drawn from it have two aspects.[248] Our Epistle condenses this entire course into one sentence: "the creation of souls from it, to become an existent, separate thing on its own in the world of Beriah, is called birth." The parsa too will be mentioned in the Epistle, but only later, in the description of the radiance of the kav in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. The fact that the term appears there does not prove that it fully explains every detail of the birth of souls here.[250]

"Like the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds, Which Depends on Atika"

We will clarify what connects birth with the splitting of the sea, and what the dependence on Atika adds.

Two questions arise here: why is birth compared specifically to the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, and

[248] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור הדברים ע"פ שחורה אני ונאוה." There: "Just as Malchut has two aspects—the first, its being in Atzilut; the second, its dwelling in the Holy of Holies of BYA and becoming Atik of Beriah… so the souls drawn from the inner dimension of the vessels of Malchut likewise have two aspects in this manner." The "explanations" in Likkutei Torah are expansions on the Alter Rebbe's discourses, and some are not in his exact wording.

[250] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1265–1266, continuing "Resolving the Issue: Birth Reveals a Root Not Visible at Its Beginning": on the parsa, "Its appearance does not prove that it is the complete explanation of every detail of the birth of a soul discussed here. The connection must be shown; a shared name does not suffice"; on the conclusion, "The power of Ein Sof is revealed specifically in the appearance of an entity that does not remain included in its source as it had been. From here the Epistle turns to action." The parsa in the Epistle: "The radiance of the kav of the Ein Sof light vested in Atzilut as far as the parsa, and the radiance of the kav… pierced the parsa with them" (see below, chapter 11).

what does "which depends on Atika" mean? We will begin with the source of the wording in the Zohar, then see how the Arizal and the Alter Rebbe used it.

The Source of the Wording: The Zohar on "Why Do You Cry Out to Me?"

The children of Israel stand at the sea's edge, with the Egyptians pursuing them. The Holy One, blessed be He, says to Moses, "Why do you cry out to Me?" The Zohar focuses on the word "to Me," and cites Sifra DiTzeniuta: "אלי, דייקא, בעתיקא תליא כלא. ביה שעתא אתגלי עתיקא קדישא, ואשתכח רעוא בכלהו עלמין עלאין." In a free translation: "To Me," specifically; everything depends on Atika. At that moment Atika Kadisha was revealed, and favor was present in all the higher worlds.

The Zohar continues: "קשיא קמי קודשא בריך הוא כלא, כקריעת ים סוף," "Everything is difficult before the Holy One, blessed be He, like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds." It appears to refer to matters the Sages described as difficult "like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds," such as "pairing them is as difficult as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds" and "a person's sustenance is as difficult as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds." What is the reason? "בגין דקריעת ים סוף בעתיקא תלייא," because the splitting of the Sea of Reeds depends on Atika. "Difficult" here does not mean difficulty of effort, since nothing is difficult for the Holy One, blessed be He. The Zohar itself gives the reason:

the matter depends on Atika. That is, it does not come from the ordinary order of imparting, but from a level above it.

Immediately afterward, in the same discussion, the Zohar brings an analogy of a doe: "וכד בעיא לאולדא, היא סתימא מכל סטרין." When she needs to give birth, she is closed on every side, until her womb is opened, "and she gives birth at once."[251] Already in the Zohar, then, the splitting of the sea and the opening of the womb stand side by side.

In the Writings of the Arizal: Opening the Womb on the Seventh Day of Passover

The Arizal interprets these matters in the discourse for the seventh day of Passover. The "doe" is Nukva, Malchut, and she gives birth on the seventh day of Passover. "This is the mystery of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds: it is the womb of Nukva." In the words of Shaar HaKavanot: "Through this you will understand the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which was split on this day, for it is the splitting of the doe's womb."

Why does it "depend on Atika"? According to the Arizal, Ze'ir Anpin at that time is still "in the aspect of smallness." By itself it cannot effect the union that opens the womb, "except through a radiance drawn to

[251] Zohar, Parashat Beshalach, on the verse "Why do you cry out to Me?" (Exodus 14:15), and the nearby analogy of the doe. The Sages' statements: "Matching them is as difficult as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds" (Sotah 2a); "A person's sustenance is as difficult as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds" (Pesachim 118a).

it from Atika Kadisha." Further: "But the other radiances now drawn to it from Abba and Imma do not have the power to arouse it to this union, and therefore the matter depends on Atika." In Pri Etz Chaim, on the same matter: "Unless supernal Atika, with its great power, shines into it, into ZA … but the other lights of Abba and Imma cannot accomplish this … therefore the matter depends on it."[252] The conclusion: birth requires a power not present in the ordinary influence of Abba and Imma, and therefore depends on a level above them.

In Likkutei Torah: The Covering Sea and the Power Above Chainlike Descent

The Alter Rebbe, in the discourse "הים ראה וינוס" ("The Sea Saw and Fled") already mentioned, explains the analogy itself. He begins with the sea: "Malchut is therefore called 'sea' … for everything that exists on dry land exists in the sea, except that it is not visible to the eye, because the waters of the sea cover it." So too above. The letters that give life to all the worlds are present in Atzilut, "and the sea, which is Malchut, covers them, so that they are not revealed to the created beings that come into being from them." Why is the covering needed? Because if the letters were

[252] Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei HaPesach, discourse 12; Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Festival of Matzot, chapter 8. "From Atika Kadisha, which is Arich Anpin": thus in Shaar HaKavvanot; in Pri Etz Chaim: "As is known, Ze'ir Anpin clothes the Netzach, Hod and Yesod of Atika." These are the sources' formulations; one must not infer from them a complete identity between the names in every context.

revealed, created beings would be nullified within their source, “like the nullification of the sun’s radiance within the luminary itself,” and there would be no possibility “for the existence of a soul or angel, which are in the category of separate beings.”

There is a subtlety here that is easy to miss. Malchut, as “sea,” is what covers, and its covering is what allows created beings to be yesh. Yet birth, the soul’s emergence “from concealment into revelation,” is like the sea’s splitting. For this, says the Alter Rebbe, “an extension and radiance into the attribute of Malchut from above chainlike descent are required.” Let us first define two terms. Hishtalshelut, “chainlike descent,” is the graded order in which each level is drawn from the one above it, just as intellect is drawn into the emotional attributes and thought into speech. Sovev is the light encompassing all worlds equally, not measured according to their levels. Now the reason: “For according to the chainlike descent from intellect to emotional attributes, down to thought into speech, an extension from the aspect of ayin into the aspect of yesh is impossible except through the revelation of the radiance of sovev, which encompasses ABYA, all of which are equal before it.” Finally: “For the sea that covers and conceals exists only in the aspect of chainlike descent, but through the revelation of a radiance above chainlike descent, He turned sea into

dry land.... This is what the Zohar says: 'Why do you cry out to Me?' The matter depends on Atika, from which the power for birth is drawn."[253]

What the Comparison Teaches, and What It Does Not

The comparison teaches two things.

Covering and revelation. What is in the sea exists but is covered, and when the sea splits it becomes visible. So too the child: it exists and develops in the womb, and is revealed at birth. So too the soul: it is included and concealed within Malchut, and at birth emerges into revelation as a created being.

Dependence on a power above the order. The sea was not split through the power of the ordinary order of nature. So too birth does not come from graded influence alone; it requires "a radiance ... from above chainlike descent," or in the Zohar's language, "it depends on Atika."

How does a soul that was "a likeness of the aspect of Divinity" become "a yesh and a separate thing"? The Epistle identifies the site of the transition, Malchut; its name, birth; and the root of its power, Atik, and above it up to Ein Sof. It does not detail the transition itself.[232]

[253] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. There the verse "G-d drove back the sea with a strong east wind" (Exodus 14:21) is also interpreted as referring to the revelation of the radiance of sovev, "through which the Sea of Reeds was split."

[232] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1261–1263, in "Birth and Union: From Concealment to Separate Creation."

Perhaps this is connected with the very definition of something from nothing: since it is not a chain of cause and effect, it may not be possible to describe it as a series of stages. This question remains for further study.[254]

Three Uses of "Atik"

In the neighboring passages of the Epistle, the name Atik appears three times, each in a different context. Anyone who does not distinguish them will confuse three different levels, so we will separate them:

"Atik of Beriah." This appears in the passage studied in the previous chapter: "The principal coming into being of yesh … is from Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah." It refers to Malchut of Atzilut, which, upon descending, becomes the higher, concealed aspect at the head of the world of Beriah. In Likkutei Torah: "Atik of Beriah is the sovev of Beriah," meaning an aspect encompassing the world of Beriah and standing above what becomes vested within it.

"It depends on Atika." This appears in our passage, in the Zohar's wording concerning the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. It refers to Atik of Atzilut, "Atika Kadisha." The Arizal interprets this as a radiance from Atika given to Ze'ir Anpin, and Shaar HaKavanot even

[254] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1269–1270: "No primary statement detailing the inner link itself was found in the body of the Epistle"; pp. 1274–1276, in the examination "Cause and Effect versus Yesh Me-Ayin": "It may be that its omission is itself part of the point, since yesh me-ayin means, in itself, a coming into being without gradation. We record that we did not find it, and no more."

says “from Atika Kadisha, which is Arich Anpin.” The Alter Rebbe interprets it as “the revelation of the radiance of sovev, which encompasses ABYA.”

“And Atik Yomin,” וע”י. This appears immediately afterward: “It is drawn to Abba and Imma from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin.” Here Atik Yomin is one of the stages in the list of the drop’s roots. It is the inner aspect of Keter of Atzilut, from which an extension is drawn to Abba and Imma “in every union.”

What do all three have in common? Each designates an aspect standing above the order vested within a particular world, connected with what lies above it. What distinguishes them? Their location and role. “Atik of Beriah” is the head of Beriah. “Atika” in the splitting of the sea is a higher power in Atzilut that makes birth possible. “Atik Yomin” in the list is a link in the chain of extension to Abba and Imma. All the meanings of the name therefore must not be transferred automatically from one place to another.[255]

[255] “Atik of Beriah”: Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the preceding passage (above, chapter 8); Likkutei Torah, Discourses for Yom Kippur, “ביאור מעט ע”פ שבת שבתון”: “The fact that Malchut of Atzilut pierces the screen between Atzilut and Beriah and becomes Atik for Beriah… for Atik of Beriah is the sovev of Beriah.” “It depends on Atika”: see the Zohar, Shaar HaKavvanot and Likkutei Torah passages above. See also the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1544–1546, in the Epistle’s glossary (in English), under “Atik Yomin / Be-Atika Talya”: the two usages are distinguished there, and it states that the identity of “Atik of Beriah” with the complete partzuf of Atik Yomin is not established by the Epistle’s wording.

“And Also the Entire Growth of the Souls Throughout the Seven Months”

W09-03
source words
21–31

“And also the entire growth of the souls throughout the seven months from the union of Shemini Atzeret”

“And also” adds the growth preceding birth: not only the moment of emergence has a name, but also the period preceding it. כל, “all,” appears twice to encompass both the process and its duration: all the growth, and all seven months. ז׳ means seven. “From the union of Shemini Atzeret” means from the union, that is, the uniting and imparting of Ze’ir Anpin within Nukva, on the festival of Shemini Atzeret. This chronological order is connected with the festivals of the year; the endpoint will come later in the sentence.

W09-04
source words
32–42

“until the seventh day of Passover is like the growth of ZON in the womb of Imma Ila‘ah,”

The endpoint is the seventh day of Passover, the day of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, when birth occurs. “Is like” introduces a comparison: the growth of the souls resembles another growth. ZON means Ze’ir Anpin and Nukva. Imma Ilaah is the supernal mother, the aspect of Binah. “In the womb” is an analogy for inclusion and growth in concealment. Notice that the two sides of the comparison are not the same entity: the souls grow in

Nukva, while Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva grow in Imma Ilaah.

From Shemini Atzeret: "Who Causes the Rain to Fall"

On Shemini Atzeret we begin mentioning in prayer, "Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall," and the Arizal teaches that this has an inner reason: "On the day of Shemini Atzeret, the union of Rachel takes place during the repetition of Musaf; therefore we then say, 'Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall,' for then rain descends, since then occur the union and the descent of the seminal drop … and this union continues until the seventh day of Passover." Rachel here is a designation of Nukva, that is, Malchut.

There he also explains the connection between the "drop" and "rain": "The entire drop is initially called light at its root, then water in the womb of Nukva, and this is the mystery of 'Who causes the rain to fall' on this day. Afterward it becomes a firmament, when the child is completed, as is written in the Zohar, Parashat Terumah." Here are three names for three states. "Light": while the drop is still at its root. "Water": when it is imparted to Nukva and begins to take shape within her. "Firmament": when the child is completed and has acquired form. The name Atzeret is also explained there: Nukva "receives the supernal seed … and is

called Atzeret, retaining the seed," that is, holding and preserving what she has received.[256]

The closest source to the Epistle's wording is the Alter Rebbe's statement in the discourse "הים ראה וינוס" ("The Sea Saw and Fled"): "Therefore the soul is in the aspect of gestation within Malchut, for on Shemini Atzeret, when we say 'Who causes the rain to fall,' the souls are drawn into the womb of Nukva and remain there for seven months, until the seventh day of Passover, the time of birth."[257] All three elements are present here: Shemini Atzeret, seven months and the seventh day of Passover.

Until the Seventh Day of Passover: The Day of Birth

On the day of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, what was covered emerges into revelation; it is therefore the day of birth. "Now, on the seventh day of Passover is the birth of the souls," writes the Alter Rebbe in the same

[256] Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Lulav, chapter 8; similarly in Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei Chag HaSukkot, discourse 9: "Know that this gestation period extends from Shemini Atzeret until the seventh day of Passover, when the offspring formed in this gestation is born through the mystery of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which is the time when Rachel gives birth." "Light, water, firmament": according to the Zohar, Parashat Terumah. Pri Etz Chaim there counts "all six winter months until the seventh day of Passover, she is pregnant from this union," whereas the Epistle and Likkutei Torah say "seven months." We found no source discussing the difference. One may mention the Sages' statement that "one who gives birth at seven months gives birth in incomplete months" (Niddah 38b), meaning that a seven-month birth does not require seven complete months; Etz Chaim, Gate 28, chapter 3, cites this regarding a seven-month gestation. However, none of the sources before us applies it to the interval from Shemini Atzeret to the seventh day of Passover, so this is only an observation.

[257] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. The wording "It is explained in Pri Etz Chaim" is the Alter Rebbe's reference to Pri Etz Chaim; in Pri Etz Chaim itself, in the text examined, the wording is "in those births that are the mystery of souls."

discourse. Already at its opening he mentions "the seventh day of Passover, on which the sea was split, and it is explained in Pri Etz Chaim that this too is the matter of the birth of the souls, and this is 'the children of Israel walked on dry land within the sea.' "[257]

What follows birth? Likkutei Torah, in the explanation of "ואהיה אצלו אמון" ("And I Was Beside Him as a Nursling"), answers: "This is the meaning of the forty-four days of the Counting of the Omer from the seventh day of Passover until Shavuot, for the seventh day of Passover is the birth of the souls, and after birth comes the aspect of nursing, the growth of the emotional attributes."[258] מ"ד means forty-four, the days remaining in the count from the seventh day of Passover; שש"פ abbreviates "the seventh day of Passover." After birth comes the period of "nursing," in which the child grows from milk, and the days of the Counting of the Omer between the seventh day of Passover and Shavuot are this period.

The festivals are thus connected: gestation begins on Shemini Atzeret, and birth comes on the seventh day of Passover. This is the extent of the Epistle's description. From the source we cited in Likkutei Torah, we learned that the days of nursing and growth follow, until

[257] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. The wording "It is explained in Pri Etz Chaim" is the Alter Rebbe's reference to Pri Etz Chaim; in Pri Etz Chaim itself, in the text examined, the wording is "in those births that are the mystery of souls."

[258] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bamidbar, "ביאור ע"פ ואהיה אצלו אמון." There also: "On the seventh day of Passover, which is the birth of souls in Beriah, where the external forces can draw sustenance." The Epistle itself does not mention the Counting of the Omer.

Shavuot. The writings of the Arizal also contain other descriptions of the length of gestation: from the Seder night until the seventh day of Passover, and also "the six winter months." We will return to these differences later.[259]

Who Grows, and Within Whom?

This sentence is worth reading slowly. Its first part concerns the growth of the souls. Within whom do they grow? In this part the Epistle does not say so explicitly. But three indications teach that they grow within Nukva, Malchut: "from it" at the passage's beginning, and "receives and becomes pregnant" and "Nukva gives birth" later on. So too the Alter Rebbe says: "The souls are drawn into the womb of Nukva and remain there for seven months."

[259] Etz Chaim, Gate 19 (Gate of Lights, Sparks and Vessels) and Gate 28 (Gate of Gestations), chapter 4; Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Festival of Matzot, chapter 8; Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei HaPesach, discourse 12. The contexts differ, so the various gestation periods must not be identified indiscriminately. The Ari's writings contain two descriptions of the gestation leading to birth on the seventh day of Passover: from the union of Shemini Atzeret (Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Lulav, chapter 8; Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei Chag HaSukkot, discourse 9), and from the union on the first night of Passover (Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Festival of Matzot, chapter 8; Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei HaPesach, discourse 12). Shaar HaKavvanot there states: "See the discourse on the day of Isru Chag of Sukkot, for it is explained there in another manner." One must also distinguish evidence for a subject from the precise wording. The Ari's writings examined contain "in those births that are the mystery of souls" (Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Festival of Matzot, chapter 8), "in the souls born from the union of gadlut" (Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei HaPesach, discourse 12), and "הולדת הנשמות" [the begetting of souls] in another context (Etz Chaim, Gate 39, discourse 5). The exact expression "לידת הנשמות" [the birth of souls] occurs in Likkutei Torah (Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס; Bamidbar, explanation of ואהיה אצלו אמון), as does "בלידת הנשמות" [at the birth of souls] (Shir HaShirim, explanation of שחורה אני ונאוה). The exact expression was not found in the passages [of the Ari's writings] examined; this is not proof that it does not occur elsewhere in the literature.

From what do they grow? The Alter Rebbe offers an analogy: "For the nature of a child to come into being from the drop, there must be a delay and a stay of seven months in the womb of Nukva, during which, by eating and drinking what its mother eats and drinks, vitality is drawn into it, until it makes it into a yesh." The analogue: "So too the soul of Atzilut, which is in the aspect of ayin, in order to come into being as yesh, does so by remaining in the womb of Nukva and staying there seven months, eating and drinking, etc., as supernal lights are drawn there."[257] The soul's "food" during gestation is therefore "supernal lights," drawn into Malchut from what is above it. The Epistle will immediately detail where they come from.

The second part of the sentence compares this to the growth of ZON in Imma Ilaah. We have already seen that the souls and ZON are not the same recipient, so in each of the two pictures we will clarify three things: who is undergoing gestation, what is the source of the influence upon them, and what revelation will follow. The Epistle compares structures of imparting, not a single timetable; we will return to the question of the numbers below, in the section "Seven, and Nine or Seven."[235]

[257] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. The wording "It is explained in Pri Etz Chaim" is the Alter Rebbe's reference to Pri Etz Chaim; in Pri Etz Chaim itself, in the text examined, the wording is "in those births that are the mystery of souls."

[235] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1262–1263, in "Seven and Nine: A Close Source Is Not an Exact Quotation."

“Like the Growth of ZON in the Womb of Imma Ilaah”

W09-05
source words
43–53

“which is through supernal lights from Imma Ila‘ah and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof,”

“Which is,” according to proximity, refers to the growth of ZON just mentioned. Since this growth serves as an analogy for the growth of the souls, what is said about it also applies to them by comparison. ע”י here means “through,” as printed in the expanded text.[237] The lights come from Imma Ilaah and from levels above it, up to Ein Sof. “From higher and higher” prevents us from stopping at the immediate source alone. This is not a list of independent creators, but a description of the order of extension.

W09-06
source words
54–61

“which is vested in her throughout all nine or seven months of gestation.”

“Which is vested” means dwelling within something and acting from within, like a soul vested in a body. המתלבש is masculine singular, and thus appears to refer to what was mentioned immediately before it: the light from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof. “In her” means in Imma Ilaah, according to the sentence’s sequence.

[237] Thus in the vocalized, abbreviation-expanded Kehot text of the Epistle: “To become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right”; “like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds”; “through higher lights”; “from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin”; “until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot”; “through gestation and birth.” The expansion is the editors’ work and accords with the sequence of sentences.

ט’ או ז’ means “nine or seven”; “months of birth” means the months of pregnancy leading to birth. The Epistle mentions two possibilities here. Later we will compare them with the seven months mentioned earlier and with the parallel passage in Derech Mitzvotecha.

Imma Ilaah and Imma Tataah

The Epistle compares two gestations: that of the souls in Nukva, Malchut, and that of Ze’ir Anpin and Nukva in Binah, Imma Ilaah. The names themselves teach the relationship between them. In Tanya, Malchut is called Imma Tataah, the lower mother, and Likkutei Torah says of it: “It is therefore called Imma Tataah, Matronita … the mother of the children.”[246] There are thus two “mothers.” Binah is the supernal mother, in which the emotional attributes themselves undergo gestation. Malchut is the lower mother, in which the souls undergo gestation. Just as the attributes grew in the supernal mother, so the souls grow in the lower mother.

What Gestation in Imma Ilaah Accomplishes

To understand the comparison, we need to know what “the growth of ZON in the womb of Imma Ilaah” accomplishes. Etz Chaim, in the “Gate of Gestations,”

[246]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 52: “This source is what is called alma de-itgalya, Matronita, the lower mother, and Shechinah… for this source is the beginning of the revelation of the Ein Sof light”; “Therefore it is called ‘the mother of the children,’ by way of analogy, and ‘the congregation of Israel,’ for from this source the souls of Atzilut were emanated and the souls of Beriah were created, etc.” In Likkutei Torah, Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס: “It is therefore called the lower mother, Matronita… the mother of the children, as stated in Sefer Shel Beinonim in the name of the Zohar” (סש”ב means Sefer Shel Beinonim, the book of Tanya).

explains why Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva required gestation. Initially, in the world of Tohu, the sefirot were separate from one another, each on its own, and could not receive the lights. To rectify them, "they must be raised and brought into the womb of Imma, and there, in the mystery of the days of gestation, they will unite, become bound together and join in complete unity, and afterward emerge at the time of birth as one partzuf, unified in all its details." Of Nukva too it says, "It was necessary that she too be with them during gestation." The full sequence also appears there: first gestation, "and afterward it was born and had a period of nursing; then it grew and had a second gestation for the sake of its mochin."[260]

Gestation, then, is a time of unification and construction: what was scattered is bound into one form within a higher source, emerging at birth as a complete structure. Now the comparison is clear. The souls too, during their gestation in Malchut, are built from the supernal lights drawn into them, until they can emerge as defined created beings.

"Which Is Vested in Her": What Is Vested, and Within Whom?

The sentence is long, so let us break it down: "the growth of ZON in the womb of Imma Ilaah, which is through supernal lights from Imma Ilaah, and from

[260] Etz Chaim, Gate 28 (Gate of Gestations), chapter 1.

higher and higher, up to Ein Sof, which is vested in her throughout all nine or seven months of gestation." It has three parts. Growth takes place "through lights." The lights come from Imma Ilaah and from what is above it. What is vested "in her," in Imma Ilaah, throughout gestation is what comes "from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof." According to this, Imma Ilaah is not the ultimate source of growth. It is the "womb," the place where growth occurs, and within it is vested a power whose source is above it.

In Derech Mitzvotecha, by the Tzemach Tzedek, the Alter Rebbe's grandson, a related discussion appears in different wording: "It is explained in Etz Chaim that at every period of gestation, nursing and mochin, supernal lights are drawn from above to Nukva, from Imma Ilaah and from the aspect of Atik Yomin, and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof, becoming vested in Nukva throughout all nine or seven months of gestation; specifically through this the souls grow in the womb of Nukva, and similarly ZA grows in the womb of Imma."[261] There the lights are "vested," המתלבשים, in the plural, "in Nukva"; the numbers "nine or seven" are applied to the growth of the souls within

[261] Derech Mitzvotecha by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 46: the analogy of the drop, gestation and growth, and the drawing down of higher powers in the growth of souls in Nukva's womb. The chapter opens with Tohu and Tikkun; the seed and drop analogies, and the material cited in the name of Etz Chaim, appear later: "It is explained in Etz Chaim that at every period of gestation, nursing and mochin, higher lights are drawn from above to Nukva, from supernal Imma, from Atik Yomin, and from ever higher levels up to Ein Sof, vesting themselves in Nukva throughout the nine or seven months of gestation. Specifically through this the souls grow in Nukva's womb; likewise Ze'ir Anpin grows in Imma's womb, etc."

Nukva, and "similarly" to the growth of ZA in Imma. In the Epistle, according to the word order, "nine or seven months of gestation" is stated within the analogical side, the growth of ZON in Imma Ilaah.

Both versions describe radiances from above up to Ein Sof, becoming vested in the place of gestation. The difference concerns who is undergoing gestation and the level in which it occurs.

Seven, and Nine or Seven

On a first study, it is enough to remember what is needed to understand the Epistle: gestation describes inclusion, development and preparation within the source; birth describes emergence into a mode of distinct existence. The following comparison of periods is intended for readers wishing to study more deeply, and can be revisited on a second reading.

The passage has two counts of months. The growth of the souls is described as "throughout the seven months from the union of Shemini Atzeret until the seventh day of Passover." In the comparison to the growth of ZON in Imma Ilaah, it says "throughout all nine or seven months of gestation." It is natural to seek a single calculation that accounts for both. But first we must ask what develops in each sentence. The growth of the souls and the growth of ZON in the womb of Imma are not necessarily the same growth. Even when

both are called “gestation,” the participants differ, so it is not certain that the periods indicate precisely the same order.[235]

What can be said? First, both possibilities are familiar from the Sages’ discussions of physical birth: some women “give birth at nine months,” and some “give birth at seven.”[262] The “or” in the Epistle thus suits the analogy itself, since gestation can last nine months or seven.

Second, the writings of the Arizal contain several chronological orders for supernal gestation, and in each place the numbers serve a different distinction. Here are three examples. In one gate of Etz Chaim: “The lights remain in the mystery of gestation only seven months … the sparks are completed after nine months, and the vessels are completed after twelve months; therefore you find three gestations in the world, periods of seven, nine and twelve.” Elsewhere, a seven-month gestation relates to the inclusion of

[235]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1262–1263, in “Seven and Nine: A Close Source Is Not an Exact Quotation.”

[262]Niddah 38b: “Mar Zutra said: Even according to the opinion that one who gives birth at nine months does not give birth in incomplete months, one who gives birth at seven months does give birth in incomplete months.” Etz Chaim, Gate 19 (Gate of Lights, Sparks and Vessels), chapter 1; ibid., Gate of General Principles, chapter 3 (“The Mystery of Gestation and Nursing”): “Know that there are three gestations: the first, a gestation of seven months; the second, of nine months; the third, of twelve months”; ibid., Gate 28 (Gate of Gestations), chapter 4. In the same gate, chapter 3, a seven-month gestation is linked to “the seven lower sefirot of Atik vested within the seven tikkunim of the gulgalta of the head of Arich Anpin”; it states: “Therefore the Sages said that anyone giving birth at seven months gives birth in incomplete months… From this inner dimension of the mochin of ZON too, the souls of the righteous were drawn forth and formed.” The connection there between seven months, Atik and souls is of interest to our subject, but the Epistle does not mention it.

"NeHY of Arich Anpin," that is, Netzach, Hod and Yesod of Arich Anpin; a nine-month gestation relates to Ze'ir Anpin, "three within three," three sefirot included within three; and Nukva "was not completed until the full twelve months had elapsed." In the Gate of Gestations: "This nine-month gestation is for the outer dimension of ZA, and will give birth to the aspect of worlds; but the seven-month gestation is for the inner dimension of ZA, which gives birth to the aspect of souls." Yet the last source also says: "I have written what I found here in reversed form." That is, the writer testifies that he found an order here opposite to what appears elsewhere and copied it as he found it.[262]

According to the last version, seven months relate to the inner dimension and souls, and nine to the outer dimension and worlds. If so, one can understand why the Epistle says "seven months" of the growth of souls and "nine or seven" of the growth of ZON, which includes both aspects. This is a possible key, but not a resolution, for three reasons. The Epistle does not

[262] Niddah 38b: "Mar Zutra said: Even according to the opinion that one who gives birth at nine months does not give birth in incomplete months, one who gives birth at seven months does give birth in incomplete months." Etz Chaim, Gate 19 (Gate of Lights, Sparks and Vessels), chapter 1; ibid., Gate of General Principles, chapter 3 ("The Mystery of Gestation and Nursing"): "Know that there are three gestations: the first, a gestation of seven months; the second, of nine months; the third, of twelve months"; ibid., Gate 28 (Gate of Gestations), chapter 4. In the same gate, chapter 3, a seven-month gestation is linked to "the seven lower sefirot of Atik vested within the seven tikkunim of the gulgalta of the head of Arich Anpin"; it states: "Therefore the Sages said that anyone giving birth at seven months gives birth in incomplete months... From this inner dimension of the mochin of ZON too, the souls of the righteous were drawn forth and formed." The connection there between seven months, Atik and souls is of interest to our subject, but the Epistle does not mention it.

mention it. The Arizal himself gives several orders, one of which is marked there as “reversed.” And in another gate, the seven and nine refer to lights and sparks, not souls and worlds. It is therefore right to preserve the Epistle’s wording as it stands, “nine or seven,” and take from it the main point: gestation is a period of growth in concealment, and its length depends on what is being built within it.

There is also a proposal to connect the count of months with the description of the gestation and childbirth of Adam and Eve before and after the sin.[263] In the sources examined, however, no connection to the Epistle’s wording was found, nor does this approach explain the difference between seven and “nine or seven.”

One further caution. The connection between the seventh day of Passover and birth rests on parallel passages concerning the opening of the womb and the revelation of what was hidden; it brings the analogy of birth closer to the splitting of the Sea of Reeds and its dependence on Atik. But a source discussing birth in general, or a count of months, does not necessarily discuss the birth of souls. In each source, therefore,

[263] Sanhedrin 38b, in the account of the hours of the first day, before the sin: “In the eighth, two ascended the bed and four descended.” See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1262–1263: “The description of Adam and Eve before the sin likewise does not demonstrably resolve the Epistle’s periods. A gap that remains after good sources deserves documentation, not filling with another number.”

first ask who is being born: the same number in two books does not yet mean the same subject.[235]

The details of the time and system receive their meaning from the discourse in which they appear. Comparing them can deepen understanding, but does not cancel the fundamental distinction between the two situations.

“And So It Is in the Creation of Souls and Angels”

W09-07
source words
62–68

“And so it is in the creation of souls and angels into the world of Beriah.”

“And so” means “and thus”: the structure described, growth in concealment followed by birth, applies to the analogue as well. “In the creation of souls and angels into the world of Beriah” means when they are created and emerge into the world of Beriah. Adding the “angels” broadens the example, but does not erase the differences between them and the souls. We will immediately see what they share and what distinguishes them.

[235]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1262–1263, in “Seven and Nine: A Close Source Is Not an Exact Quotation.”

Souls and Angels: The Same Structure, Different Roots

The passage began only with "the creation of souls"; here the angels are added. Do souls and angels come from the same source and in the same way? Not necessarily. In Chapter 5 we learned the difference between them: "the souls of the angels that emerged from the 'union of kisses,' and likewise human souls that emerged from the union of ZA and Nukva of Atzilut."[239] "Kisses" and "union" are two analogies for two modes of imparting. Etz Chaim says, "For the angels are made from kisses, and human beings from complete union," and that in kisses "there is no drop of mochin" drawn as in union.[264] Likkutei Torah says: "The souls are drawn from the inner dimension of the vessels, and the angels from the outer dimension of the vessels."[265] Elsewhere, as we have seen, the angels come from "supernal speech," and the souls from "the letters of His thought."

[239] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text: "But the souls of angels that emerged from the union of kisses, and likewise human souls that emerged from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut before descending to Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah, are not in the category of yesh and a separate thing in their own right, but are a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction." See above, chapter 5.

[264] Etz Chaim, Gate 40 (Gate of Inner and Outer Dimensions), discourse 10: "Angels are made from kisses and human beings from complete union, for kisses are the cleaving of the outer vessels... Nevertheless, no drop of mochin of the inner vessels is drawn there." In the same gate, the union of the inner dimension is also called "kisses, spirit to spirit"; the terminology is used there in more than one way.

[265] Likkutei Torah, Discourses for Yom Kippur, "ביאור מעט ע"פ שבת שבתון." There: "Nevertheless, the vessels of Atzilut are actual Divinity, and are called 'He and His vessels are one.' "

What do they share? Both pass from inclusion in Atzilut to distinct emergence in the world of Beriah, and both emerge through Malchut. Tanya says that the Shechinah, Malchut of Atzilut, "becomes vested in the Holy of Holies of Beriah … and through their vesting in Malchut of Beriah, the souls and angels in Beriah were created."[266] "And so" teaches that the structure is one: a concealed higher source, growth in concealment, and emergence into revelation. But a shared structure does not make the participants identical: as we have seen, souls and angels have different roots and different modes of imparting.[232]

"And Also the Entire Basis and Root of the Drop"

W09-08
source words
69–79

"And also, the entire basis and root of the drop that she receives and with which she becomes pregnant from Ze'ir Anpin is from the mochin of Abba and Imma."

"And also" returns to an earlier stage: the source of the drop itself. "Basis and root" means the basis and root, as distinct from the immediate channel. "The drop that she receives and with which she becomes pregnant from Ze'ir Anpin" means the drop Nukva receives from

[266]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 52: "It vests itself in the Holy of Holies of Beriah, which is Chochmah–Binah–Daat of Beriah; through their vesting in Malchut of Beriah, the souls and angels in Beriah were created"; there also: "So that the souls and angels, which possess limit and finitude, can receive influence."

[232]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1261–1263, in "Birth and Union: From Concealment to Separate Creation."

Ze'ir Anpin and from which she becomes pregnant. Nukva is not named here, but she is the recipient and the one who becomes pregnant, while "from ZA" identifies the immediate giver. "From the mochin of Abba and Imma" means from the intellectual faculties of Abba and Imma, that is, the higher intellect, Chochmah and Binah. "Drop" here is not bodily matter.

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80–90

"And in every union it is drawn to Abba and Imma from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin, and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof,"

"In every union" means not once, but each time there is an imparting. "It is drawn to Abba and Imma" means an extension is drawn to Abba and Imma. מא"א means "from Arich Anpin." וע"י here means "and Atik Yomin," not "and through," because it is listed among the source-levels; the expanded text likewise prints "from 'Arich Anpin' and 'Atik Yomin.' "[237] The same abbreviation appears in the passage three times: twice meaning "through," in "through supernal lights" and "through gestation and birth," and once meaning "Atik Yomin," here. Hence an important principle: expand abbreviations according to the sentence, not an automatic dictionary. The extension does not stop at

[237] Thus in the vocalized, abbreviation-expanded Kehot text of the Epistle: "To become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right"; "like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds"; "through higher lights"; "from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin"; "until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot"; "through gestation and birth." The expansion is the editors' work and accords with the sequence of sentences.

these; it continues “from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof.”

What a “Drop” Means Here

The drop teaches that visible size is one matter and included powers another: a small point of origin can initiate an entire process of development. In Derech Mitzvotecha, the analogy is explained as follows. The child has רמ”ח limbs, 248, “and comes into being from the drop, which is only one aspect; yet in truth all the details of the 248 limbs were concealed within the drop.” Why? “Because the drop is drawn from the father’s brain, where the 248 powers of the soul are included.” During gestation, “through being in the mother’s womb,” the powers emerge “from concealment into revelation.”[261] The Epistle uses this image to describe an influence containing powers whose source is far higher than what the recipient initially sees in it.

In the analogue, the drop is the influence Nukva receives from Ze’ir Anpin, from which she “becomes pregnant.” It is not a drop of matter, but the beginning of an influence bearing within it everything that will be

[261] Derech Mitzvotecha by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 46: the analogy of the drop, gestation and growth, and the drawing down of higher powers in the growth of souls in Nukva’s womb. The chapter opens with Tohu and Tikkun; the seed and drop analogies, and the material cited in the name of Etz Chaim, appear later: “It is explained in Etz Chaim that at every period of gestation, nursing and mochin, higher lights are drawn from above to Nukva, from supernal Imma, from Atik Yomin, and from ever higher levels up to Ein Sof, vesting themselves in Nukva throughout the nine or seven months of gestation. Specifically through this the souls grow in Nukva’s womb; likewise Ze’ir Anpin grows in Imma’s womb, etc.”

built from it. We saw three of its levels in the writings of the Arizal: at its root it is "light," in Nukva it is "water," and when the child is completed it is "firmament."[256] Two aspects must be held together here. On one hand, the drop is not an independent existence detached from its source: its root is in the mochin, and the extension of power comes from very high above. On the other hand, inclusion within the source is not yet the separate emergence that will be revealed at birth. It is therefore not enough to say, "Everything was already there." We must distinguish presence in potential and concealment from emergence in a new status.

"From the Mochin of Abba and Imma"

Mochin are the powers of apprehension and direction that illuminate the emotional attributes. In the physical analogy, "the drop is drawn from the father's brain." In the analogue, the influence of Ze'ir Anpin, that is, of the emotional attributes, is rooted in the mochin of Abba and Imma, in Chochmah and Binah. This is what we learned from Tanya at the beginning of the chapter:

[256] Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Lulav, chapter 8; similarly in Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei Chag HaSukkot, discourse 9: "Know that this gestation period extends from Shemini Atzeret until the seventh day of Passover, when the offspring formed in this gestation is born through the mystery of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which is the time when Rachel gives birth." "Light, water, firmament": according to the Zohar, Parashat Terumah. Pri Etz Chaim there counts "all six winter months until the seventh day of Passover, she is pregnant from this union," whereas the Epistle and Likkutei Torah say "seven months." We found no source discussing the difference. One may mention the Sages' statement that "one who gives birth at seven months gives birth in incomplete months" (Niddah 38b), meaning that a seven-month birth does not require seven complete months; Etz Chaim, Gate 28, chapter 3, cites this regarding a seven-month gestation. However, none of the sources before us applies it to the interval from Shemini Atzeret to the seventh day of Passover, so this is only an observation.

Chochmah and Binah are the "father" and "mother" that "give birth" to the emotional attributes. An example: an act a person performs now may carry within it a thought and will that preceded it. Thus, in the language of the analogy, the influence coming from the attributes bears a power whose source is above them. The limit: in a person, the thought and act are his own, whereas here the subject is a chain of levels, each receiving from what is above it.

This brings us full circle to something we raised at the chapter's beginning. The souls "arose in thought," and their root is in "the letters of thought." The drop from which they come into being is rooted "in the mochin of Abba and Imma," in intellect. The root is in thought, while gestation and birth are in Malchut.

"From Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin"

Abba and Imma are not the end of the path: "In every union it is drawn to Abba and Imma from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin." Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin are the two aspects of the sefirah of Keter, above intellect. Arich Anpin is the root of all the sefirot. Atik Yomin is an even more inward, concealed aspect, connected with the Emanator Himself.[234] Chassidut makes them

[234] Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Gate of the Discourses on ABYA), chapter 1: Keter contains "the very lowest aspect of all the aspects of Ein Sof," and "the highest level of everything among the emanated entities, containing the root of all the emanated entities"; "These two aspects are called Atik and Arich Anpin, and both are called Keter." See above, chapter 8. The division of Etz Chaim into gates and chapters is not uniform in all editions; the numbers here and below follow the continuous order of the gates.

more accessible through two powers in the soul above intellect. Likkutei Torah says that "the aspect of Atika" is "supernal delight," "the inner dimension of will," whereas "the will called Gulgulta," an aspect of Arich Anpin, "clothes and conceals it."[267] An example: a person wants something, and within the will there is a delight because of which he wants it. The will is more revealed, while the delight is inward and concealed within it. This is an aid to understanding, not a complete definition of the levels.

Why "in every union"? Because the root is not given once and left with the recipient as a possession. In each act of imparting, the extension is drawn anew from above. Thus, in every gestation and every birth, what is revealed below carries the entire chain within it.

Following the Drop Up to Its Root

Let us summarize the path from below upward. Nukva receives the drop from Ze'ir Anpin; in the language of the analogy, this is the starting point of the child's development. Ze'ir Anpin receives from the mochin of Abba and Imma. Influence is drawn to Abba and Imma from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin, and higher and higher, up to Ein Sof. The names are many, but the line of thought is simple: every level receives from a source

[267] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Bamidbar, "ביאור ע"פ ואהיה אצלו אמון": "So the aspect of Atika, supernal delight, is the inner dimension of the will in the mitzvot, except that the will, called gulgalta, clothes and conceals it." On the mitzvot in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin, see below, chapter 10.

higher than itself, and no station along the way becomes an independent source of creative power.

The writings of the Arizal also describe, in another context, the path of the drop from Arich Anpin, through Abba and Imma, to Ze'ir Anpin.[249] The Epistle draws on this familiar structure to show how high the root of the influence is.

In Derech Mitzvotecha, in "The Root of the Mitzvah of Prayer," the analogy of the drop, the growth of the child, the drawing of the higher powers and the growth of the souls in the womb of Nukva are explained together. The parallel helps us see that the many names belong to one process. The recipient is gradually built up, while powers rooted above its revealed level are drawn into it. When birth arrives, what was hidden in the preparatory stages appears in a new action.[261]

[249] Etz Chaim, Gate 39 (Gate of MAN and MAD), discourse 5: "We shall also explain the aspect of the begetting of souls that emerge through the union of Abba and Imma, which souls are called siblings and companions of ZON." It describes the drop's path from the eighth mazal in the dikna of Arich Anpin: "From there they are drawn to the six extremities of Abba… from there to the six extremities of Imma…" as far as Yesod of Ze'ir Anpin; it states: "Although this light of this drop descends from level to level… it does not thicken or vest itself at all, and its radiance is as great below as above." The context there is the birth of souls from the union of Abba and Imma, not the birth from Nukva in the Epistle. In Likkutei Torah, Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס: "The matter is that the souls of Israel arose in thought, and then they are called siblings and companions of the Holy One, blessed be He."

[261] Derech Mitzvotecha by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 46: the analogy of the drop, gestation and growth, and the drawing down of higher powers in the growth of souls in Nukva's womb. The chapter opens with Tohu and Tikkun; the seed and drop analogies, and the material cited in the name of Etz Chaim, appear later: "It is explained in Etz Chaim that at every period of gestation, nursing and mochin, higher lights are drawn from above to Nukva, from supernal Imma, from Atik Yomin, and from ever higher levels up to Ein Sof, vesting themselves in Nukva throughout the nine or seven months of gestation. Specifically through this the souls grow in Nukva's womb; likewise Ze'ir Anpin grows in Imma's womb, etc."

“Except That Everything Is Concealed Within the Mochin Until Nukva Gives Birth”

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“except that everything is concealed within the mochin until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels, and palaces into the world of Beriah.”

“Except” qualifies: the power has already been drawn, but is concealed in the mochin. “Everything” means the entire chain enumerated, up to Ein Sof. “Concealed within the mochin” means hidden within intellect and not yet discernible in the result. “Until” marks the moment when the mode of revelation changes. לידת הנוק׳ expands to לידת הנוקבא, “Nukva’s giving birth,” as printed in the expanded text: “until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels, and palaces.”[237] In the straightforward meaning, Nukva is the one giving birth: she gives birth to the souls, angels and palaces into the world of Beriah. These three groups of created beings return us to the earlier discussion of the beginning of yesh.

[237] Thus in the vocalized, abbreviation-expanded Kehot text of the Epistle: “To become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right”; “like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds”; “through higher lights”; “from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin”; “until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot”; “through gestation and birth.” The expansion is the editors’ work and accords with the sequence of sentences.

Who Gives Birth?

The expression לידת הנוק' הנשמות can be read in two ways. In the straightforward reading, Nukva is the one giving birth, and the souls, angels and palaces are those born. In another reading, it concerns the birth of Nukva herself, and the souls along with her. The first reading fits the text better, for four reasons:

There is no conjunctive vav. If Nukva were one of those born, we would expect "Nukva and the souls," הנוקבא והנשמות. The text says לידת הנוק' הנשמות, "Nukva's giving birth to the souls," as one says לידת האם את בנה, "the mother's giving birth to her son."

She is the one who becomes pregnant. In the same sentence, Nukva is the one "who receives and becomes pregnant from ZA," and the one who becomes pregnant is the one who gives birth.

This is also the wording of the sources. Pri Etz Chaim says of Nukva: "And on the day of her childbirth, she gives birth to it." Shaar HaKavanot says of the seventh day of Passover: "In the mystery of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which is the time of Rachel's childbirth," with Rachel designating Nukva. In both places, "her childbirth" and "Rachel's childbirth" mean the birth

she gives.[268] In Tanya, Malchut is "the mother of the children," and in Likkutei Torah the souls remain "in the womb of Nukva."

"Into the world of Beriah." Those born come into the world of Beriah, and the sentence enumerates them one by one: souls, angels and palaces.

Nevertheless, the other reading is not impossible in principle. Nukva herself also undergoes gestation, as we saw in the Gate of Gestations, and Malchut of Atzilut becomes "Atik of Beriah." But in the sentence's straightforward meaning this reading is weak, and there is no need for it. We therefore understand: Nukva gives birth.[269]

Souls, Angels and Palaces

The passage broadens the list of those born in stages. At its beginning, "the creation of souls"; then, "the creation of souls and angels"; and at its end, "Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels, and palaces." The question arises: what are the palaces?

A heichal is a palace, a place where a king dwells. In kabbalistic language, the palaces are the aspects in

[268] Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the Festival of Matzot, chapter 8: "The day of her giving birth, when she gives birth to it, is the seventh day of Passover"; Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei Chag HaSukkot, discourse 9: "Through the mystery of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which is the time when Rachel gives birth"; Shaar HaKavvanot, Derushei HaPesach, discourse 12, concerning the doe: "At the time she gives birth, a serpent presents itself to her."

[269] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1265–1267, in the list "Research Questions on the Issue": whether "the birth of Nukva" means "Malchut giving birth, or Nukva herself being born/built together with the souls"; and whether the sequence souls, angels and heichalot "is an order of importance, an order of inner/outer dimensions, or merely an order of appearance in the wording."

which the lights dwell and become vested, like a house for its inhabitants. In Chapter 5 we learned: "And likewise in Atzilut, from the outer dimension of the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, which are Divinity, the palaces of Atzilut were created, in which the aspect of the igulim of the ten sefirot becomes vested, and also the bodies of the angels of Atzilut, which are in the category of yesh."[270] In Tanya, as we have seen, the Shechinah becomes vested "in the Holy of Holies of Beriah," where the souls and angels are created. Hence the distinction: the palaces are the world's structure, in which the light dwells and created beings live; the souls and angels are the created beings living within it.

According to this, Malchut gives birth not only to individual created beings, but to an entire world, in its content and its structure. The paragraph ends with souls, angels and palaces born into Beriah, thus establishing the scope of what Malchut gives birth to. But no rigid rule that each union gives birth to only one kind may be inferred from this.[232]

Why are they listed specifically in this order: souls, angels, palaces? One may hear an order from inner to outer. The souls come from the inner dimension of the vessels, the angels from their outer dimension, and the palaces, the structure in which the lights dwell, are the

[270] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text. See above, chapter 5.

[232] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1261–1263, in "Birth and Union: From Concealment to Separate Creation."

most external. But this is our hypothesis, not an explicit statement. It may also be an order of importance, or simply an order of phrasing. The Epistle does not decide, and we leave the question open.[269]

What Was Concealed, and What Is Revealed at Birth?

"Except that everything is concealed within the mochin until Nukva gives birth." The power of Ein Sof does not begin to be present at the moment of birth. The Epistle has already described the drawing of the drop from higher roots: Abba and Imma, Arich and Atik, up to Ein Sof. But what was included and concealed is revealed at birth in a new action: the emergence of a distinct existence. The place where the result becomes visible is not necessarily the place where its power begins; precisely what appears at the end reveals a power previously hidden.

At birth, the manner of emergence changes. During gestation, the child's existence is included within its mother and does not function as an independent existence; at birth it appears outside her. In the analogue, a soul that was included within its source in Atzilut becomes a distinct existence in the world of

[269] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1265–1267, in the list "Research Questions on the Issue": whether "the birth of Nukva" means "Malchut giving birth, or Nukva herself being born/built together with the souls"; and whether the sequence souls, angels and heichalot "is an order of importance, an order of inner/outer dimensions, or merely an order of appearance in the wording."

Beriah. Birth therefore is not merely a descent in level. It is also a transition from inclusion within the source to the mode of existence of a created being.

One might think of the difference between an ability a person possesses and an act in which it is expressed. But the analogy is very limited: in a person, the ability itself is created, and he acts upon matter that already exists, whereas the analogue concerns the power to create something from nothing. The comparison is useful for only one thing: distinguishing the presence of the power from its emergence in a result. The Tzemach Tzedek too, in Derech Mitzvotecha, emphasizes that the emergence "from concealment into revelation … from the drop into a child" is "a great change, from one nature into another actual nature." The nature of the human body is "very greatly and immensely superior to the nature of the drop," even though the drop concealed all its limbs within it.[261]

[261] Derech Mitzvotecha by the Tzemach Tzedek, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 46: the analogy of the drop, gestation and growth, and the drawing down of higher powers in the growth of souls in Nukva's womb. The chapter opens with Tohu and Tikkun; the seed and drop analogies, and the material cited in the name of Etz Chaim, appear later: "It is explained in Etz Chaim that at every period of gestation, nursing and mochin, higher lights are drawn from above to Nukva, from supernal Imma, from Atik Yomin, and from ever higher levels up to Ein Sof, vesting themselves in Nukva throughout the nine or seven months of gestation. Specifically through this the souls grow in Nukva's womb; likewise Ze'ir Anpin grows in Imma's womb, etc."

“It Follows That This Is a Revelation of the Actual Ein Sof Light”

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“It follows that this is a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light through gestation and birth.”

“It follows” introduces a conclusion from all that has been said, while “this is” sums up the entire process. “Revelation” means the actualization of what was concealed. Or Ein Sof means the light of Ein Sof. Mamash, “actual,” means truly, not figuratively; that is, the subject is not merely a finite spiritual power. ע”י returns here to its meaning “through”: gestation and birth are the means through which the light of Ein Sof is revealed. The sentence does not establish that the soul being born becomes the Essence of Ein Sof, or that the created being apprehends it.

What “Revelation” Means Here

We can now hear the conclusion, “It follows that this is a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light,” precisely. It does not say that the souls, angels and palaces have become Ein Sof. They are defined created beings, called in Tanya “possessing limit and finitude.”[266] What is revealed is the power of Ein Sof, in the act of

[266]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 52: “It vests itself in the Holy of Holies of Beriah, which is Chochmah–Binah–Daat of Beriah; through their vesting in Malchut of Beriah, the souls and angels in Beriah were created”; there also: “So that the souls and angels, which possess limit and finitude, can receive influence.”

bringing into being, through gestation and birth. The innovation is that precisely the emergence of something distinct reveals a power that ordinary chainlike descent cannot provide.[232]

What exactly is revealed? The power to create something from nothing. The Epistle already said of the Emanator that "He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and from truly absolute nonbeing."[247] This power exists in no created being and no chain of cause and effect; it belongs only to Ein Sof. In the previous chapter we learned that it is revealed in Malchut: "And therefore it is called 'the revealed world,' for in it is revealed the power of the Ein Sof light to create something from nothing." Here the Epistle shows where it becomes revealed in action: in the soul, the angel and the palace, when they emerge as a distinct existence. Whoever contemplates a created being standing as yesh sees in it what only Ein Sof can do. In the words of the Alter Rebbe that we saw, by way of chainlike descent "an extension from the aspect of ayin into the aspect of yesh is impossible except through the revelation of the radiance of

[232] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1261–1263, in "Birth and Union: From Concealment to Separate Creation."

[247] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text: "For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator… Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh." See above, chapter 7.

sovev."[253] Birth is therefore revelation in the sense of actual emergence: the power hidden within the mochin emerges and is seen in the result.

"Actual": What Is Said and What Is Not

The word mamash, "actual," has already appeared earlier in the Epistle, in a highly instructive context. Of souls and angels in Atzilut that have already emerged from the vessels, it said: "But they are not actual Divinity, capable of creating something from nothing, since they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav from the light of Ein Sof is enclothed."[271] There "actual Divinity" is measured by the ability "to create something from nothing." If so, "a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light" in our passage may be heard in the same way: at birth, the power that exists only in "actual Divinity," the power to create something from nothing, is revealed. This reading arises from the Epistle's own wording, but it is important to remember that the Epistle does not explicitly define the word mamash here.

What does mamash not say? It does not say that the soul being born is the Essence of Ein Sof. The soul,

[253] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. There the verse "G-d drove back the sea with a strong east wind" (Exodus 14:21) is also interpreted as referring to the revelation of the radiance of sovev, "through which the Sea of Reeds was split."

[271] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text. See above, chapter 7. The word "mamash" [actual/literally] also occurs in the Epistle in "actual absolute nothingness," "just as in Atzilut itself," and "which is actual Divinity."

angel and palace are limited created beings. Mamash describes the power being revealed, not the nature of the created being.

Nor does it say that before birth there was no revelation whatsoever. Of gestation in Atzilut, Likkutei Torah says: "There He and His lights and His vessels are one, for there the light of Ein Sof shines."[245] In Atzilut, the light of Ein Sof shines and the souls are united with it. The Epistle's sentence therefore must not be turned into a claim that there was no revelation of the light of Ein Sof in Atzilut. The Epistle speaks of a particular kind of revelation: through gestation and birth, when a separate existence is actualized.[272] In brief: in Atzilut, it is a revelation of light within Divinity; at birth, it is a revelation of Ein Sof's power to create separate yesh.

Does "Garment" Resolve the Question of the Transition from Divinity to Creation?

In Likkutei Torah, as we saw, Malchut is called a "garment": it "is called a garment that conceals and hides until the aspect of yesh can exist."[242] This word

[245] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור ענין שחורה אני ונאוה." It refers there to the discourse "הים וינוס ראה" in Parashat Tzav. There also: "These souls in the state of gestation are called the daughters of Jerusalem; because they are in the state of gestation within Malchut, they are called daughters."

[272] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1272–1273, at the study station "Gestation and Birth: How the Coming into Being of Souls Is Described," in the paragraph "Revelation of the Actual Ein Sof Light": "One must not replace this sentence with the claim that there was no revelation of the Ein Sof light at all in Atzilut. The Epistle is discussing a particular mode of revelation"; there also: the word mamash "does not provide a precise philosophical definition of the word here."

[242] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. The parenthetical reference there is "(as stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi')"; our Epistle opens with "Ihu

explains part of the transition. A garment explains how a soul becomes manifest through a level that receives it, and explains the concealment: for a created being to exist, the light must be covered. But the word does not explain the entire transition. If before its descent the soul is not separate yesh, we still need to clarify what changed when it became a soul in the world of Beriah. We will therefore hold both sides together: the source and root are not erased, yet its mode of existence after birth differs from its mode of inclusion beforehand.

What the Analogy Teaches, and What It Does Not

The analogy helps us hear both aspects of "a yesh and a separate thing." The child who is born does not cease to be connected to its parents, yet there is real meaning to its standing before us as a creature in its own right. Separateness likewise describes the created being's manner of emergence and existence. It does not mean that it has no source or does not need vitality at every moment.

Here, however, the analogy stops. In the analogue, the connection to the source is far deeper than the connection of a child to its parents, because the created being's very existence is sustained by the power bringing it into being. Birth therefore must not

vechayohi chad, ihu vegarmohi chad behon." Further there: "For this is a great principle: Malchut is what causes there to be an aspect of yesh."

be read as liberation from Divinity. On the contrary, the emergence of separate yesh becomes here a site for the revelation of the power of Ein Sof. This is why the picture of a baby emerging into the world can serve so lofty a discussion. It brings closer the question of the relationship between inclusion within a source and distinct emergence, while requiring us to remember what the analogue adds beyond it.

An example from study makes the distinction between inclusion and revelation more accessible. Sometimes a teacher gives a student a short sentence that contains many distinctions in potential. The student does not yet see them. Over time, he learns to unfold the content and reveal what was included in the starting point. The limit: in this example, what develops is intellectual content, whereas the Epistle concerns the emergence of a created existence. The example therefore illuminates inclusion and growth, but does not by itself explain creation itself.

Let us summarize in a table what passes from the analogy into the analogue, and what does not:

In the analogy	What passes into the analogue	What does not pass over
The fetus “eats what its mother eats”	The soul is included within Malchut and receives “supernal lights” through it	That there is a physical body, food or womb here

In the analogy	What passes into the analogue	What does not pass over
The drop contains all the limbs in concealment	The initial influence contains in potential everything that will be revealed	That everything is already revealed and defined at the beginning
The drop "is drawn from the father's brain"	The root of the influence is in the mochin, and above them up to Ein Sof	That the immediate father is an independent source of life
At birth the child "becomes a yesh in its own right"	The soul emerges into the world of Beriah as a defined created being	That what is born becomes detached from its source and can exist without it
The sea covers, and when it splits what is within is revealed	Malchut conceals, and at birth the hidden emerges into revelation	That the splitting of the sea and birth are the same event
The splitting of the sea "depends on Atika"	Birth requires a power above chainlike descent	A step-by-step description of the transition from Divinity to yesh
"Nine or seven months of gestation"	Gestation has a duration, a time of construction in concealment	A medical calculation of days, or one timetable for all systems
Nursing follows birth	After the seventh day of Passover come the days of the Omer, days of nursing	That the Epistle itself discusses the Omer

A Continuous Reading

We can now read the entire passage continuously, hearing in each word what we have learned.

“And all the more so, since the creation of souls from it”: furthermore, the souls are created from Malchut; it is not only “Keter” for the following world. “To become an existent, separate thing on its own in the world of Beriah”: not the beginning of their existence, but the beginning of their existence as created beings, each distinct and standing on its own. “Is called birth”: emergence from inclusion into revelation. “Like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which depends on Atika”: like the sea that splits and reveals what it covered, through a power above the ordinary order.

“And also the entire growth of the souls throughout the seven months from the union of Shemini Atzeret until the seventh day of Passover”: before birth there is gestation. The souls grow in Malchut from the day of “Who causes the rain to fall” until the day of the sea’s splitting. “Is like the growth of ZON in the womb of Imma Ilaah”: just as the emotional attributes themselves were built within Binah, the supernal mother. “Which is through supernal lights from Imma Ilaah and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof, which is vested in her throughout all nine or seven months of gestation”: growth comes from supernal lights, and within them a power whose source reaches up to Ein Sof, throughout gestation, nine months or seven. “And so it is in the creation of souls and angels into the world

of Beriah": the same structure applies to souls and angels, although their roots differ.

"And also, the entire basis and root of the drop that she receives and with which she becomes pregnant from Ze'ir Anpin is from the mochin of Abba and Imma": the influence Malchut receives from the emotional attributes is rooted in intellect, in Chochmah and Binah. "And in every union it is drawn to Abba and Imma from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin, and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof": intellect itself receives anew each time from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin, and from what is above them up to Ein Sof. "Except that everything is concealed within the mochin until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels, and palaces into the world of Beriah": all this is concealed until Nukva gives birth to an entire world, with its created beings and structures. "It follows that this is a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light through gestation and birth": what is revealed at the end is the power present only in Ein Sof, to bring forth separate yesh.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

The Epistle's wording	What it teaches	What must not be inferred from it
"And all the more so, since the creation of souls from it"	A further reason for Malchut's stature: from it the souls emerge as created beings	That Malchut is the source of the power
"To become an existent, separate thing on its own in the world of Beriah"	The beginning of a new mode of existence, as a created being	That this is the beginning of the soul's entire existence; that separate means independent
"Is called birth"	A transition from inclusion and growth in concealment to distinct emergence	A bodily process
"Like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which depends on Atika"	Covering and revelation; dependence on a power above chainlike descent	A complete description of the inner link; identity between the three uses of Atik
"Throughout the seven months from the union of Shemini Atzeret until the seventh day of Passover"	The souls grow in Malchut from "Who causes the rain to fall" until the day of the sea's splitting	A medical calculation of days
"Like the growth of ZON in the womb of Imma Ilaah"	A comparison between gestation in the lower mother and gestation in the supernal mother	That the souls and ZON are the same participants

The Epistle's wording	What it teaches	What must not be inferred from it
"Which is vested in her throughout all nine or seven months of gestation"	A power whose source reaches up to Ein Sof is vested in the place of gestation throughout its duration	A decision between seven and nine; a solution through the story of Adam and Eve
"And so it is in the creation of souls and angels"	One structure for souls and angels	One root for both
"The basis and root of the drop … from the mochin of Abba and Imma"	The root of the influence is in intellect; "they arose in thought"	A physical drop
"From Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin, and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof"	No station is an independent source; ע"י means Atik Yomin	That the partzufim are creators; that ע"י means "through"
"Except that everything is concealed within the mochin until Nukva gives birth…"	The power is present in concealment and is revealed at birth; Nukva gives birth to an entire world	That the power begins at birth
"A revelation of the actual Ein Sof light through gestation and birth"	Ein Sof's power to create separate yesh is revealed in the result	That the created being is the Essence; that there was previously no revelation in Atzilut

What do we take forward from the chapter? Whenever birth appears in the language of Chassidut, ask four questions: who gives birth, who is born, where, and through which power? Distinguish the site of revelation, Malchut, from the source of the ability, Ein Sof. Remember that the root is in thought and birth is

in Malchut, with no contradiction between them. Know that mamash, "actual," refers to the power being revealed, not the nature of the created being.

The chapter leaves these questions open:

- **The inner link.** As in Chapter 8: the Epistle gives the site of the transition, its name and the root of the power, but does not describe step by step how a soul that was "a likeness of the aspect of Divinity" becomes "a yesh and a separate thing." "It depends on Atika" teaches the source of the power, not its manner of operation.[254]
- **Seven and nine.** Why does the Epistle say "seven months" for the souls and "nine or seven" for ZON? We cited a possible key from Etz Chaim, but the Arizal gives several orders and the Epistle does not decide. The difference between the "six months" in Pri Etz Chaim and the "seven months" in the Epistle has not been fully clarified either.
- **The order of those born.** Why souls, angels and palaces, and in that order? We proposed an order from inner to outer, but this is a hypothesis.
- **Birth within Atzilut?** In the Rebbe's discourse beginning "וירד" ("And He Descended") from 5727, section ד [4], a distinction is drawn between the birth of souls from Malchut and their descent into

[254] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1269–1270: "No primary statement detailing the inner link itself was found in the body of the Epistle"; pp. 1274–1276, in the examination "Cause and Effect versus Yesh Me-Ayin": "It may be that its omission is itself part of the point, since yesh me-ayin means, in itself, a coming into being without gradation. We record that we did not find it, and no more."

Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. According to the discourse, a soul within Malchut of Atzilut also has two aspects, gestation and birth, and even after birth the souls are still in Atzilut. The discourse connects this to the Epistle's wording that the souls of Atzilut "have already emerged and become separated from the vessels." In our Epistle, by contrast, the name "birth" is used for the creation of souls "to become an existent, separate thing on its own in the world of Beriah." The discourse may be distinguishing stages that the Epistle includes in a single word, as we saw in the three stages in Likkutei Torah. In what sense the soul born in Atzilut is already a distinct offspring, and in what sense it is not yet "a yesh and a separate thing," must be studied from the discourse in its entirety.[273]

- **Another reading of "Nukva's birth."** The reading according to which Nukva herself is born together with the souls is weak in the sentence's straightforward meaning, but has not been shown to be impossible.

From Birth to Torah and Mitzvot

The next passage of the Epistle opens with the words "And through this it will be understood why the mitzvot

[273] The Rebbe's discourse beginning וירד הוי' על הר סיני, the second day of Shavuot 5727, section 4 (an unreviewed transcript). See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1564–1565, which states that this cannot be reconciled "merely by repeating the word 'birth' " and that "this is a focused inquiry, not a necessary contradiction."

are in Malchut … and Torah in Ze'ir Anpin." What leads from birth to Torah and mitzvot? There are three connections.

The first connection is "their beginning is embedded in their end." In the previous chapter we learned that the beginning is embedded in the end: in Malchut, the end of the sefirot, a power whose source is at the beginning is revealed. In this chapter we saw the formula at work. Birth is from Malchut, from the end, and specifically there "the actual Ein Sof light" is revealed, the power whose source is above all levels. Later in the next passage the Epistle will return to the formula and explain its purpose: the power of Ein Sof creates something from nothing so that yesh will be a thing separate from Divinity, and the Creator will be King over all the separate beings through their fulfillment of His commandments. We will read its precise wording there.[274] This is why souls are born as separate created beings: so that there will be someone to fulfill the mitzvot.

The transition is therefore natural. If specifically the level at which a separate thing emerges reveals so lofty a power, we can begin to understand why an act in physical matter touches a root higher than what is visibly apparent in it. From here the Epistle turns toward action: the purpose of the drawing down is not

[274] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the expanded text. See below, chapter 10.

only a lofty spiritual state, but a world in which created beings fulfill the Creator's commandments.[250]

The second connection is the difference between angels and souls, which Likkutei Torah raises at precisely this point. The angels "that are drawn from the aspect of G-d's word … have no increase or addition at all … and therefore have no procreation, etc.; unlike the souls of Israel, which specifically draw the light of Ein Sof, blessed be He, downward continually, through practical mitzvot that they perform with increase and addition."[275] The souls were born from Malchut through the power of Ein Sof, and through practical mitzvot they draw the light of Ein Sof further, downward. The timetable we studied also leads there: after the seventh day of Passover come the days of the Omer, and at their end, on Shavuot, the Torah was given. At the end of the discourse "הים ראה וינוס" ("The Sea Saw and Fled"), the Counting of the Omer is called "the aspect of an awakening from below," itaruta

[250] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1265–1266, continuing "Resolving the Issue: Birth Reveals a Root Not Visible at Its Beginning": on the parsa, "Its appearance does not prove that it is the complete explanation of every detail of the birth of a soul discussed here. The connection must be shown; a shared name does not suffice"; on the conclusion, "The power of Ein Sof is revealed specifically in the appearance of an entity that does not remain included in its source as it had been. From here the Epistle turns to action." The parsa in the Epistle: "The radiance of the kav of the Ein Sof light vested in Atzilut as far as the parsa, and the radiance of the kav… pierced the parsa with them" (see below, chapter 11).

[275] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, discourse beginning ששים המה מלכות.

deletata, “and through this there was afterward, on Shavuot, the face-to-face Giving of the Torah.”[257]

The third connection is the analogy of the seed. In Derech Mitzvotecha, “The Root of the Mitzvah of Prayer,” Chapter 46, the analogy of the drop and fetus joins the vegetative power, the periods of gestation and the higher root revealed in growth. This combination helps us understand why the Epistle moves from birth to Torah and mitzvot, and later to earth. In all these cases, something small and defined carries a possibility not apparent at first glance: a seed planted in the ground, “which is included in the vegetative power of the earth,” from which a whole tree emerges.[276]

The parallel in the Tzemach Tzedek’s explanation helps us ask of the seed, the fetus and the mitzvah: what is revealed, what is present in potential, and what awakens the revelation? These questions connect the parts of the Epistle, although each concerns a different action.[276]

[257]Likkutei Torah, Parashat Tzav, discourse beginning הים ראה וינוס. The wording “It is explained in Pri Etz Chaim” is the Alter Rebbe’s reference to Pri Etz Chaim; in Pri Etz Chaim itself, in the text examined, the wording is “in those births that are the mystery of souls.”

[276]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1263–1264, in “Derech Mitzvotecha 46: The Opening Does Not Prove Absence Later On.”

[276]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1263–1264, in “Derech Mitzvotecha 46: The Opening Does Not Prove Absence Later On.”

Studying the Chapter with Artificial Intelligence Tools

The Epistle's passage in this chapter is dense with abbreviations and numbers, contains an analogy of gestation and birth, and includes one word, mamash, "actual," that is easily attached to the wrong subject. At each of these points, an artificial intelligence tool may answer too confidently: expand an abbreviation according to its usual usage, reconcile numbers with a calculation lacking a source, transfer bodily details from the analogy to the analogue, or attach a word to the nearest subject. The following four exercises test precisely these points. The first and fourth return to a principle already formulated in the introduction, in the example of א"ח in Likkutei Torah: the test of context comes before the expansion of a familiar abbreviation. Here it is tested on ע"י, and in the same way on mamash: both are interpreted according to the sentence's subject, not according to the familiar meaning.

Exercise 1: Abbreviations

What to ask. Supply the passage in its exact wording and request the expansion of all its abbreviations, particularly ע"י, which appears three times.

What to check. Compare the expansions with the expanded text of the Epistle[237] and with the chapter's explanation: in one of the three occurrences, ע"י means Atik Yomin, not "through." Where the expansion is wrong, ask what caused the mistake: the abbreviation's usual meaning, or insufficient attention to the sentence's subject.

The limit of the conclusion. Correct expansion of the three occurrences of ע"י does not establish the other expansions in the same answer. Each abbreviation is checked separately, according to its sentence and the printed text, not an abbreviation dictionary.[277]

Exercise 2: Seven and Nine

What to ask. Ask why the Epistle says "seven months" for the souls and "nine or seven months of gestation" for ZON, and request sources for every answer.

What to check. Open the sources and check whether the writer himself supplies an indication that changes the weight of the quotation, such as "I have written what I found here in reversed form." Check also

[237] Thus in the vocalized, abbreviation-expanded Kehot text of the Epistle: "To become a yesh and a separate thing in its own right"; "like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds"; "through higher lights"; "from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin"; "until Nukva gives birth to the souls, angels and heichalot"; "through gestation and birth." The expansion is the editors' work and accords with the sequence of sentences.

[277] On abbreviations expanded in a digital text and the need to check all spellings, see "Case Studies," case 6; on the division of the months of gestation in Etz Chaim, Gate 28, and the marking "בחילוף" [in reversed order], see ibid., case 7. On checking a source suggested by a tool, see "Studying Further," in "How to Check That a Source Is Genuine."

whether the answer "reconciles" the discrepancy through a calculation lacking a source.

The limit of the conclusion. The chapter offered a possible key, and the Epistle does not decide. Even after such checking, the question remains open unless a source resolving it is found.

Exercise 3: The Limits of the Birth Analogy

What to ask. Request a list of what the analogy of gestation and birth teaches, and what must not be inferred from it.

What to check. Compare the list with the section "What the Analogy Teaches, and What It Does Not." Watch for biological or medical details that have entered the explanation: the analogy teaches relationships of growth in concealment and emergence, not a bodily process.

The limit of the conclusion. A good list helps one remember the analogy's limits. It proves nothing about the analogue: for example, it does not say how long spiritual gestation "lasts," or explain how the soul becomes separate yesh.

Exercise 4: What Does Mamash Mean?

What to ask. Supply the sentence "It follows that this is a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light through

gestation and birth," and ask: according to this sentence, what becomes "the actual Ein Sof light"?

What to check. The trap is to read mamash as describing the soul being born, as though it were the Essence of Ein Sof. According to the chapter, mamash describes the power being revealed, the power to create something from nothing, while the soul remains a created being "possessing limitation." Check also whether the answer says there was no revelation at all in Atzilut, contrary to the wording "for there the light of Ein Sof shines."

The limit of the conclusion. Even an answer correctly identifying that the word refers to the power does not establish a precise definition of mamash: the Epistle does not define the word here, and the chapter's reading rests on its use elsewhere in the Epistle.

Chapter 10 | The Root of Torah and Mitzvot: An Inverted Seal and the Analogy of the Placenta

What We Already Know

In the preceding chapters we learned that in Malchut, the last sefirah, the power of Ein Sof to create "a yesh and a separate thing" is revealed. We also saw how

"their beginning is embedded in their end": the beginning is present in the end. We will continue to distinguish the source of the power from the place of its revelation, and the order of levels from above downward from the relationship from below upward.

Here we will encounter the letters of the name Havayah, "whiteness" and "path" in the Zohar's language, and the analogies of the seal and the placenta. We will also return to Ze'ir Anpin, Nukva and Arich Anpin, and to Gulgulta and Mocha Stimaah, which we encountered in Chapter 6. Each term will be explained in its place.

Where We Stand

The two preceding chapters dealt with Malchut. Chapter 8 established that "the principal coming into being of a yesh and an entirely separate thing" is from Malchut of Atzilut, the last sefirah, "for there is no king without a people." It also showed that this end is not as weak as it appears: "their beginning is embedded in their end," and in Malchut the power of Ein Sof to create something from nothing is revealed. Chapter 9 showed this power acting in birth. The souls, angels and palaces of the world of Beriah are born from Malchut, while the root of the "drop" is drawn "from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof." From this came the

conclusion: "It follows that this is a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light through gestation and birth."

Immediately after this conclusion, the Alter Rebbe writes: "And through this it will be understood." What will be understood? The place of the mitzvot and the place of Torah. This seems like a leap to another subject: until now we discussed sefirot, the birth of souls and worlds, and suddenly we turn to Torah and mitzvot. But the connection is close. The two preceding chapters showed that the last level bears the highest power. The Epistle now applies the same principle to a question very close to human life: why a simple act, such as putting on tefillin or taking the lulav, is connected to a root higher than the root of understanding and intellectual study.

There is also a second reason for this connection, which we mentioned at the end of the previous chapter and which the Epistle itself will state in a few lines. In the birth of souls, separate created beings emerge, and only separate created beings can be commanded. Yesh is created as separate "so that the Emanator, blessed be He, will be King over all the separate beings, through their fulfilling His commandments that He will command them." Thus the question "How is a separate thing created?" naturally leads to "For what purpose is it created?" and the answer proceeds through the mitzvot.

Here the mitzvot enter the body of the Epistle's argument for the first time. At its end, it will return to them and conclude with "the great superiority of practical mitzvot, which are the purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world." But already now, before the conclusion, they are part of the explanation itself, not a moral conclusion appended afterward.[278]

Understanding the Will and Fulfilling It

The distinction the passage develops is familiar from life. A person can understand very well why helping others matters, explain it and be moved by it. But when someone who needs help arrives, there is a further demand: to act. Understanding can guide the act and give it sensitivity and precision, but cannot replace the help itself. This example makes the difference between wisdom that explains something and the will that it be done more accessible.[279]

In Torah and mitzvot this relationship is incomparably higher, because the subject is G-d's wisdom and will. When we study the reason for a mitzvah, our intellect receives inward content. When we fulfill the mitzvah,

[278] Iggeret HaKodesh 20: the end of the preceding passage, "Thus this is a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light through gestation and birth"; and the end of the Epistle, "And after these words and this truth, it is easy for a person of understanding to understand, through all that has been stated above, the great superiority of practical mitzvot, which are the ultimate purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world." On the fact that here "the mitzvot enter the substance of the argument long before the concluding line," see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1574–1576, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification"; on the two places in the Epistle where mitzvot are discussed, each in its own role, see ibid., pp. 1607–1608.

[279] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1579, in "Seal and Placenta: Two Analogies That Do Not Negate Torah."

the will is realized also in a limb and a physical object. It follows that outward appearance alone does not measure a thing's root: an act that seems simple can be connected to a will above the reason we apprehend.

The Passage in Three Steps

The passage before us, 143 Hebrew-source words, is built in three steps:

1. **The map.** Below, the mitzvot are in Malchut, the final he of the name Havayah, and Torah is in Ze'ir Anpin, the letter vav. (The letters of the Name allude to the sefirot; we will see this from Iggeret HaTeshuvah in the section "Two Maps.") Above, in Arich Anpin, the order appears reversed: the mitzvot are in Gulgulta, in the "whiteness," and the root of Torah is in Mocha Stimaah, "the wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot." (Gulgulta means the skull, "whiteness" means the white, and Mocha Stimaah means the closed and concealed brain; each term will be explained in its place.)
2. **The explanation.** "Except that it is like an inverted seal." That is, "their beginning is embedded in their end" is the power of Ein Sof to create something from nothing, so that yesh will be "a thing separate from Divinity" and the Creator will be "King over all the separate beings, through their fulfilling His commandments." In the familiar phrase: "the end of the deed is first in thought."

3. **The evidence and conclusion.** Therefore the Jerusalem Talmud says that even Rabbi Shimon interrupts his study for the lulav, and that for one who studies without intending to act, "it would have been better for him had his placenta turned over upon his face." The reason: the placenta was formed first and was "the basis of the fetus" until forty days. "And likewise, the mitzvot are the basis of the Torah and its root," although the mitzvah is corporeal and Torah is wisdom; "except that this is in the outer dimension and that in the inner dimension, as explained below."

Along the way we will encounter Aramaic words from the Zohar, names of partzufim and two analogies. We will explain each separately, then return to the sentence in which it stands.[280]

Four Questions for Reading

The question "Which is greater, Torah or a mitzvah?" is really several different questions, and the passage teaches us to separate them. We will therefore ask four questions about each sentence:

- **Root.** From which aspect above is the thing drawn?
- **Place of revelation.** At which level is it revealed, and in what manner does it reach us?

[280] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1573–1576: the opening of "Torah and Mitzvot: Root, Action and Purpose," the Epistle's wording divided into fifteen units, and "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification": "How are the mitzvot in Malchut while their root is above the root of Torah, and what do the whiteness, the pathway, the lulav and the placenta teach?"

- **Inner and outer dimensions.** Is it absorbed within the person, like understanding that becomes part of his thought, or is it also revealed outside him, in a limb and an object?
- **Purpose.** For what end is everything done, and through what is the intention fulfilled?

Each question may have a different answer: at the root, the mitzvot come first; in the order of revelation, Torah is higher than they are; Torah is absorbed within the intellect, while the mitzvah is also performed in a limb and an object; from the perspective of purpose, the mitzvah is the "end" that was "first in thought." Thus, when discussing the superiority of Torah or of a mitzvah, we must clarify in which sense that superiority is asserted.[281]

Two Analogies and Two Roles

The passage uses two analogies, each with a different role. The inverted seal teaches that the order apparent in the result can be the reverse of the order at the root. The analogy of the placenta adds a different relationship: priority in time and fundamental importance, between what is formed first and makes development possible, and the form that develops after it. The two analogies should not be required to say the

[281] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1578–1581, in "Resolving the Issue: There Is No Single Scale for All the Virtues of Torah and Mitzvot": "The question 'Which is greater?' conceals several criteria: root, inner dimension, mode of revelation, and actual purpose." Already in the opening of the issue, ibid., pp. 1573–1574: "Root, inner dimension, revelation, human action and the result of drawing down are not the same criterion."

same thing; each brings closer a different aspect of the claim that the mitzvot are the basis of Torah and its root, in the context discussed here. We will ask two questions about each analogy: what relationship does it teach, and where does it stop?[279]

The example of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, whose Torah study is his occupation, connects the greatness of study with the obligation to fulfill a mitzvah. Torah teaches action and leads to it: study illuminates action, and action gives the Divine will a place in the world. On this basis, we can also understand the Epistle's closing statement about the superiority of "one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world."[282]

"And Through This It Will Be Understood Why the Mitzvot Are in Malchut": Two Maps

W10-01
source words
1–11

And through this it will be understood why the mitzvot are in Malchut, the he of the name Havayah, and Torah in Ze'er Anpin,

And through this means "through this matter": through what was just said, that the power of Ein Sof is revealed specifically at the end, in Malchut and the birth proceeding from it, and that the beginning is

[279] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1579, in "Seal and Placenta: Two Analogies That Do Not Negate Torah."
[282] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 4: Torah and mitzvot, and enjoyment of the radiance of the Shechinah.

"embedded" in the end. This is the key that will resolve the coming difficulty.

It will be understood means it will be explained. The Epistle does not introduce a new question from outside, but shows that a principle we have already learned resolves a difficulty familiar to students of Kabbalah.

Why the mitzvot are in Malchut: היות means the fact of their being there, that is, their association with במל', "in Malchut." The Epistle assumes this as something known and does not prove it here.

The he of the name Havayah: Malchut is alluded to in the final he of the name Havayah. The Name's four letters allude to the ten sefirot, and the final letter to Malchut.

And Torah in ZA: ZA is Ze'ir Anpin, "the small face," the name of the partzuf of the six emotional attributes, from Chesed through Yesod. We already encountered the concept of a partzuf in Chapter 6 and will recall it shortly.

W10-02
source words
12–22

the vav of the name Havayah. Although above, in Arich Anpin, the mitzvot are in Gulgulta, in the whiteness,

The vav of the name Havayah: Ze'ir Anpin is alluded to in the letter vav. This ends the first sentence, the "map below": the mitzvot are in he, and Torah in vav.

Although means "even though…." Here the difficulty begins: what follows the word appears to contradict the first map.

Above means at the root, at levels above Torah and mitzvot as they are revealed.

In Arich Anpin: בא"א means in Arich Anpin, "the long face," the partzuf in which Keter becomes vested in relation to the partzufim below it.

The mitzvot are in Gulgulta: the root of the mitzvot is in Gulgulta, the skull, the higher aspect in the head of Arich Anpin.

In the whiteness means in the white. In the text before us: "in 'Gulgulta,' in the 'whiteness,' which is the 'path'…." The second expression makes the first more precise: not all of Gulgulta, but the whiteness within it. The word "which" will immediately identify the whiteness as the "path." We will explain this in the next section.

The Letters of the Name: Vav and He

Why connect Torah and mitzvot to letters of the name Havayah? Because all ten sefirot are alluded to in this Name. The Alter Rebbe explains this in Iggeret HaTeshuvah: they "are included and alluded to in the name Havayah." The yud alludes to Chochmah, and the first he to the expansion of apprehension and understanding, that is, Binah. When the influence is

drawn "further below, to the revealed worlds, like a person who wishes to reveal his wisdom to others through his speech," it "is included and alluded to ... in the letters vav-he." "The vav indicates drawing down from above to below," and this drawing down is "through the attribute of His kindness and goodness and His other holy attributes, which are generally included in the number six." His attribute of Malchut "is called 'the word of G-d' " and "is included and alluded to in the final he of the name Havayah."[283]

From this we can understand the map below. The vav is a straight line descending from above to below: the drawing down itself, through the emotional attributes. Torah belongs to this aspect. It is higher wisdom and will that have descended and become defined content, in laws, reasons and narratives that a person can understand and live by. The final he is "speech," the place where the influence turns toward someone outside it. The mitzvah belongs to this aspect. It is a command issued to a recipient, "the king's commandment," and performed in the world. The same epistle also says that "true service in the occupation with Torah and mitzvot, through voice and speech or action, is the letters vav-he." Kuntres Acharon 4 explicitly says that Torah "is Ze'ir Anpin."[284]

[283] Tanya, Iggeret HaTeshuvah, chapter 4: the letters of the name Havayah and the sefirot they allude to.

[284] Iggeret HaTeshuvah, ibid.: "From this is drawn the true service of engaging in Torah and mitzvot, through voice and speech or action: these are the letters vav and hei, etc." Kuntres

According to this map, in the order of revelation Torah is higher than the mitzvot: vav precedes he, and the emotional attributes precede Malchut, which receives from them. The Epistle takes this as its starting point. It will immediately set another map alongside it.

"Although": A Second Map That Appears Reversed

The second map concerns the root, in Arich Anpin: there the mitzvot are "in Gulgulta," and Torah "in Mocha Stimaah." The skull surrounds the brain and is above it. It follows that above, the mitzvot are higher than Torah, while below, Torah is higher than the mitzvot. This is the difficulty introduced by "although": how can what is earlier at the root come later in revelation?

This difficulty is familiar from experience as well. A person studies the reason for a mitzvah. His intellect is active, new connections become clear, and he feels he is touching profound wisdom. Then he rises and performs the mitzvah with a simple object. At first glance, it seems that he is descending from spiritual elevation to a lower action. The Epistle seeks to show him something further: what is outwardly apparent does not by itself teach the thing's root and purpose.

Acharon, section 4: "Therefore prayer is called 'the life of the hour,' which is Malchut descending into Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah, and Torah 'eternal life,' which is Ze'ir Anpin." The expression "the King's commandments" is taken from the explanation in Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar: "For the revelation of the mitzvot is the aspect of the King's commandments."

It is important to notice: the Epistle does not say that the first map is mistaken. "The mitzvot are in Malchut" remains true, and "Torah is in Ze'ir Anpin" remains true. The two maps answer two of our four questions: one concerns the place of revelation, the other the root. The difficulty is not that both are true, but that their order is reversed. The explanation will come with the word "except."

This difficulty also appears in Likkutei Torah, in the explanation of "The Root of the Mitzvot" in Parashat Bamidbar, where it is formulated as three difficulties: "Sometimes it appears that the mitzvot are higher than Torah … and sometimes it appears that Torah is higher than mitzvot," and there are places where the mitzvot are connected to Ze'ir Anpin, "the 248 commandments are the 248 limbs of the King." The explanation quotes our passage from the Epistle; an explanation and analogy that we will bring later are taken from it.[285]

Arich Anpin, Gulgulta and Mocha Stimaah

To understand the map above, three concepts are needed.

Partzuf. As we have already seen, a partzuf in kabbalistic language is a complete system of sefirot

[285] Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, "ביאור על הדברים הנ"ל," opening "להבין שרש המצות," section 2: the three difficulties (within parentheses), and the quotation "This is what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi chad,' as follows: 'Through this one may understand why the mitzvot are in Malchut and the Torah in Ze'ir Anpin…' " The explanation printed in Likkutei Torah also contains additions in parentheses and square brackets; the authorship of the layers was not resolved here, so the material is cited as an explanation.

functioning as a single configuration, with a "head," "body" and "limbs." These are names for relationships, not for a shape. "Head" means the directing and prior aspect; "brain" means inner wisdom; "hairs" are fine extensions emerging from the head toward what is outside it.

Arich Anpin. This is the partzuf of Keter, the aspect above Chochmah as it turns toward everything below it. The name Arich Anpin, "long face," stands opposite Ze'ir Anpin, "small face": the former is a higher, encompassing aspect, the latter the aspect of the defined emotional attributes.

Gulgulta and Mocha Stimaah. Two aspects are distinguished in the head of Arich Anpin. Gulgulta is the skull, wrapping the head from above. Mocha Stimaah, "the concealed brain," is the hidden wisdom within the skull. In the Idra Rabba of the Zohar, which we will examine in the next section, the hairs hang upon Gulgulta, and in every hair there is "a spring issuing from Mocha Stimaah," from the concealed brain.[286]

The explanation in Likkutei Torah gives a bodily analogy for the skull that clarifies much. There are inner organs, connected to the brain "through arteries and sinews." There are also outer organs, which

[286] Zohar, Idra Rabba (Parashat Naso), in the description of the "locks of hair" of the gulgalta: "Within each and every hair is a spring emerging from the concealed brain... and it shines and flows through that hair to the hairs of Ze'ir Anpin."

"connect to the bone of the skull in the head." The "skull, the bone of the cranium," is "above the head and has no connection or joining with the mochin" such as the inner organs have; it is "the aspect of Keter, but the outer dimension of Keter." From this the explanation concludes: the mitzvot correspond to "the outer dimension of the organs," and their root is in Gulgulta; Torah corresponds to "the inner dimension of the organs," which receive from the brain. The analogy does not teach that there are a skull and bones above. It teaches two kinds of connection. One connection passes through understanding, like that between the brain and an inner organ. Another passes above understanding, like that between the skull and an outer organ.[287][288]

"In the Whiteness, Which Is the Path in the Parting of the Hairs": One Path and 613 Ways

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which is the path in the parting of the hairs that branches into the 613 paths of Torah in Ze'er Anpin,

Which is: הי"א identifies: "in the whiteness, which is the path." The whiteness just mentioned is itself the

[287] Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, the above explanation, section 2: "The inner organs receive their vitality from the mochin in the head through arteries and sinews, etc.... whereas the outer organs are not connected with one another in the brain in the head, but are connected with the skull bone"; the conclusion: "From the above one may understand the mitzvot, which are the King's commandments, namely the outer dimension of the organs; 'the 248 commandments are the 248 organs' refers to the inner dimension of the organs, which is Ze'ir Anpin, the aspect of Torah."
[288] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1574–1578, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification."

path. There are not two things here, whiteness followed by a path, but two names for one thing.

The path: אורחא is Aramaic for a way or path.

In the parting of the hairs: the Aramaic prefix ד־ is like the Hebrew ש־, "that" or "which." פלגותא is division, the place where the hair parts to two sides; שערי means hairs. "The path in the parting of the hairs" is thus the path at the place where the hairs part. Anyone who has seen a head with hair parted in the middle knows the narrow line left exposed. The white of that line is the "whiteness."

That branches means "that divides": the path itself divides. The root פלג, "divide," occurs twice here: the path is situated at the parting of the hairs, and itself divides further.

Into 613 paths means into six hundred and thirteen ways.

Of Torah: דאורייתא means of the Torah.

In ZA means in Ze'ir Anpin.

The sentence therefore says: the root of the mitzvot in Arich Anpin is one path, and this path divides and becomes 613 paths of Torah in Ze'ir Anpin. These words thus connect the two maps. The single path above is the root of the mitzvot, and it itself appears below as 613 "paths of Torah." Torah in Ze'ir Anpin is therefore not a system separate from the root in

Gulgulta. It is the detailing of that one path into 613 paths.

“In the Whiteness, Which Is the Path”: One Name, Not an Additional Layer

Are the whiteness and the path two aspects, one above the other? No; the word הי״א, “which is,” in the Epistle identifies the whiteness with the path. So too in Kuntres Acharon 4: the Alter Rebbe cites “elsewhere” that the mitzvot “are 613 paths drawn from one path, etc., which is whiteness.” In the additions to Torah Or, Parashat Tetzaveh, it says: “The aspect of whiteness in Gulgulta, called chivartei, is what is called paths.” Chivartei is Aramaic for whiteness, and archin means paths. Three names, one thing.[289]

The same passage in Torah Or also says, “the whiteness above the hairs.” Is this a third layer? No, and the continuation explains what “above” means: the whiteness “is the root from which the hairs growing from it draw sustenance,” “for the whiteness sustains the growth of the hairs.” The whiteness is higher than the hairs as a root is higher than what grows from it, not as an additional floor. “Above the hairs” therefore

[289] Kuntres Acharon, section 4: “In one place he wrote that the 248 positive mitzvot are in the five chassadim and the 365 prohibitions in the five gevurot, etc.; elsewhere he wrote that they are the 613 pathways drawn from one pathway, etc., which is whiteness, etc.” Torah Or, Additions, Parashat Tetzavveh, in the discourse “להבין שרשי הדברים הנ״ל ע״פ ואתה תצוה את בנ״י.” In the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1606–1607: in the body of the Epistle the whiteness is identified through “it is the pathway in the parting of the hair,” and the sentence contains no second layer; expansions such as identifying the whiteness with the Chesed aspect in the gulgalta are secondary explanation. Likewise ibid., pp. 1589–1591.

describes a relationship of root and growth within the same image. It does not add an independent aspect that the Epistle does not mention.[290]

The Source of the Image: The Idra Rabba

This image comes from the Idra Rabba, the part of the Zohar in which the "configurations" of Arich Anpin and Ze'ir Anpin are described through the language of head, hair and beard. The additions to Torah Or that we mentioned say of it, "as is known in Idra Rabba and Idra Zuta." We will not detail here how the image passed from the Zohar to the writings of the Arizal and from there into the Epistle; the Zohar's own wording is sufficient for the argument. Of the hairs of Gulgulta it says that they are "white and clean, like wool when it is clean," and that no hair becomes entangled with another. Of the parting of the hairs it says:

"בפלגותא דשערי, אזיל חד ארחא דנהיר למאתן ושבעין עלמין. ומניה נהיר ארחא דזעיר אנפין, דנהירין ביה צדיקייא לעלמא דאתי... ומן ההוא ארחא אתפרשא לשית מאה ותליסר אורחין דאורייתא, דפליג בזעיר אפין. דכתיב ביה: כל ארחות ה' חסד ואמת".

In a free translation: in the parting of the hairs runs one path, illuminating 270 worlds. From it shines the path of Ze'ir Anpin, in which the righteous shine in the

[290] Torah Or, Additions, Tetzavveh, ibid.: "Accordingly, the letters of Torah, whose root is in the hairs, are merely a garment and vessel for the revelation of light and vitality vested in them, namely the whiteness above the hairs. For the whiteness in the gulgalta, called chivvarta, is what is called pathways; it is the root of the sustenance of the hairs that grow from them, etc. As is known from the Idra Rabba and Idra Zuta, the whiteness sustains the growth of the hairs, etc."

World to Come. From that path branch off 613 paths of Torah, divided in Ze'ir Anpin, as it is written: "All the paths of G-d are kindness and truth."[291]

From this description the Alter Rebbe takes only what is needed for the argument: one path in Gulgulta, dividing into 613 paths in Ze'ir Anpin. He does not cite the other details, numbers and worlds, and there is no reason for us to impose them upon the Epistle. The verse "All the paths of G-d are kindness and truth" also teaches something about the term orcha: G-d's ways are paths a person walks. A mitzvah is a way of conduct, not merely an idea.

Hairs and Whiteness: What They Are in the Analogy

In the additions to Torah Or already mentioned, the image is explained at length. "The aspect of the hairs of Gulgulta is the aspect of the letters of Torah," "for it is known that the analogy of hairs is precisely like the analogy of speech." In the analogy, a hair is described as a hollow conduit. Just as "the light of intellect emerges through combinations of the letters of speech," so "the radiance breaks through and emerges from the mochin through the hollow of the hairs." The letters of Torah are therefore "a garment and vessel"

[291]Zohar, Idra Rabba (Parashat Naso), in the description of the hairs of the gulgalta and their division. The verses in the passage: Proverbs 4:18 ("The path of the righteous is like a shining light"), Psalms 25:10.

for the light, while the whiteness between the hairs, their root, is "the aspect of the mitzvot, called paths."[292]

From this the discourse reaches a sharp conclusion: "Torah is the explanation of the mitzvot." Long passages in Torah describe "the making of the breastplate and the ephod," and in all the mitzvot, "the letters of Torah explain how the mitzvot are to be." Therefore: "The mitzvot are primary, and Torah is only the explanation, in a subordinate aspect." This is very close to the Epistle's wording, "the mitzvot are the basis of the Torah and its root," and we will return to it when we reach that point.

Already here, however, a limit must be marked. The discourse addresses a particular relationship: the relationship between the explanatory letters and the will they explain. In the same language it teaches that the light itself "breaks through and emerges" through these letters, and that from the whiteness "the light emerges only through a great contraction, namely in the letters of Torah." That is, without the letters, the will within the whiteness is not revealed at all. Elsewhere the Alter Rebbe explains the superiority of

[292]Torah Or, Additions, Tetzavveh, ibid.: "The root of the mitzvot themselves is above, in the gulgalta of Arich Anpin, in the 613 pathways. For the hairs of the gulgalta are the letters of Torah"; "An explanation is everywhere secondary to the thing it explains; likewise the mitzvot are primary and the Torah is only the explanation, in a secondary capacity. This is because the letters of Torah are the hollow hairs of the gulgalta through which light pierces and emerges from the whiteness of the gulgalta, which is the aspect of mitzvot called pathways"; "The actual performance of the mitzvah has its root above in the chivvarta of the gulgalta of Arich Anpin, from which the light emerges only through great contraction, namely in the letters of Torah that explain them."

Torah study from other perspectives, in which it is greater than all the mitzvot; we will address this at the chapter's end. For now, it is enough to remember: what is "subordinate" along one dimension is not "subordinate" along every dimension.

The 613 Paths: One Will and Many Ways

The number 613 invites a calculation: is each "path" a particular mitzvah, and does each mitzvah have a particular hair on the head of Arich Anpin? The Epistle does not say so. It says that one "path" "branches" into 613 "paths of Torah in ZA." These are paths of Torah in Ze'ir Anpin, not a list of mitzvot enumerated item by item. The precise identification of the paths with particular mitzvot remains open.[293]

In the parallel sources too, the number serves as a structure, not a table. Torah Or, Parashat Lech Lecha, says that "the 613 Torah mitzvot and the seven rabbinic mitzvot are 620 pillars of light, from the paths of the whiteness of Gulgulta." Here the number is already 620, the numerical value of כתר, Keter, rather than 613. In Kuntres Acharon 4, "the extension divides into 613 particular extensions, according to the character of the mitzvot," and only examples are given: "For example, through charity and acts of kindness, the light of Ein

[293] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1606–1607: "The 613 pathways of Torah in Ze'ir Anpin" are the ways of Torah in Ze'ir Anpin, dividing from the pathway; they should not be equated in advance with the count of 613 mitzvot. The wording is verified, while the precise identification remains hypothetical. Ibid., pp. 1592–1593, among the open questions: the sources in the Arizal's writings for the whiteness, the path in the hair, and the 613 ways.

Sof, blessed be He, is drawn to the outer dimension of the vessel of Chesed of Ze'ir Anpin; through upholding laws, to the outer dimension of Gevurah; and through compassion, etc."[294]

If the number is not a table, what does it teach? It teaches ordered multiplicity. The higher will is one, and it becomes many defined ways. Each mitzvah has its own way, with details and limits, yet all issue from one path. A person thus encounters the one will through many particular acts, and each particular act connects him to the shared root.

"And the Root of Torah … the Wisdom of the Reasons for the Mitzvot": Will and Reason

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32–42

and the root of Torah, which issues from supernal Chochmah, is in Mocha Stima'ah of Arich Anpin, namely, the wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot,

And the root of Torah means "and Torah's root." Until now the subject was the root of the mitzvot; from here it is the root of Torah.

Which issues: דנפקא is Aramaic for "which emerges."

[294]Torah Or, Lech Lecha, the first discourse ("ענין לך לך וילך למסעיו"): "The drawing down of supernal Chochmah into physical things is through the light of Keter, for 'Torah emerges from Chochmah' in terms of revelation, but its source is higher: the 613 Torah mitzvot and seven Rabbinic mitzvot are 620 pillars of light, from the pathways of the whiteness of the gulgalta, the aspect of Keter, which is Malchut of Ein Sof; through this it is drawn so far below." In the explanation in Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, section 2: "613 pathways, 620 pillars, the letters כתר [Keter]." Kuntres Acharon, section 4, in the paragraph "The matter, however, is that all the mitzvot are to rectify the 248 organs of Ze'ir Anpin."

From supernal Chochmah: מח"ע expands to מחכמה עילאה, "from supernal wisdom." The words allude to a saying the Alter Rebbe cites in many places: "Torah issues from Chochmah."[295]

Is in Mocha Stimaah: במו"ס means במוחא סתימאה, "in the concealed brain."

Of Arich Anpin: דא"א means of Arich Anpin.

Namely means "that is." The word specifies which wisdom is meant.

The wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot means the wisdom of the mitzvot's reasons. This is the "Torah" the passage sets opposite the mitzvot: not Torah in all its aspects, but Torah as wisdom explaining why the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded what He commanded.

The map above is now complete. The root of the mitzvot is in Gulgulta, in the whiteness that is the path. The root of Torah is in Mocha Stimaah, in the wisdom of the reasons. Gulgulta encompasses the brain, so at the root the mitzvot come first.

Two Questions About the Same Mitzvah

A person asks why he was commanded to perform a particular mitzvah. The question itself assumes that there is a defined act and that he seeks to understand its reason. The will that the act be performed and the

[295]Tanya, Iggeret HaTeshuvah, chapter 4: "'Torah emerges [נפקא] from Chochmah,' which is the yud of the name Havayah." With the wording "מחכמה נפקת": Torah Or, Lech Lecha, ibid.; and Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, in the above explanation.

wisdom explaining it are connected, but are not one thing. One can understand part of the reason without exhausting the will. One can also perform the act when its reason is not apprehended at all.

These two sides have names. "Reason" answers "why?": it explains, connects and shows what the thing accomplishes. "Will" answers "what is desired?": it is why there is anything to explain in the first place. A will can be explained, but the explanation does not create it; it follows it and describes it from within.

Neither term means what it may seem to mean at first. "Will" is not merely emotional enthusiasm, and "wisdom" is not merely information. Will determines the desired purpose, while wisdom reveals it through content and apprehension. When a person fulfills a mitzvah, he encounters G-d's will in action, even if he does not yet apprehend its profound reason. When he studies Torah, that will shines in his intellect through understanding.

We can now understand the map. Gulgulta, the encompassing root, is the will that the mitzvah be performed. In Kuntres Acharon 4, the Alter Rebbe writes of the whiteness: "It is the supernal delight and desire to draw the light downward." That is, the whiteness is the desire, the supernal delight that the thing be done. In the same sentence it is called "the source of the mochin": will is the source from which

wisdom too is drawn. Mocha Stimaah, the inner wisdom, is "the wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot."[296]

The principle that will precedes wisdom is not an innovation of this passage alone. In Iggeret HaTeshuvah, when the Alter Rebbe explains that the yud of the name Havayah alludes to Chochmah, he adds: "And the tip upon the yud alludes to the aspect of the supernal will, blessed be He, which is far, far above the level of supernal Chochmah, as is known." The small tip at the top of the letter stands above the whole letter. In this way will stands above wisdom, although it appears "smaller" and does not develop into detail as wisdom does.[297]

"We Will Do and We Will Hear": Will Before Understanding

The priority of will over understanding has a famous source in the Talmud: "When Israel put 'we will do' before 'we will hear,' a heavenly voice went forth and said to them: Who revealed to My children this secret used by the ministering angels?" Readiness to act preceded hearing and understanding, and this precedence is called a raz, a secret. The explanation in Likkutei Torah already mentioned connects this to our

[296] Kuntres Acharon, section 4: "The matter, however, is that all the mitzvot are to rectify the 248 organs of Ze'ir Anpin through drawing the blessed Ein Sof light into the mochin, included in the five chassadim and five gevurot. The source of the mochin is the whiteness, etc., which is the supernal delight and desire to draw the light down to the 248 organs of Ze'ir Anpin."

[297] Tanya, Iggeret HaTeshuvah, chapter 4.

subject. According to it, Israel understood on their own that the higher revelation of the Giving of the Torah would not endure for generations "without first putting the yoke of the mitzvot first: 'we will do,' and afterward 'we will hear.' " The same explanation also says that "the root of the mitzvot in Keter" is "the aspect of the supernal will in the mitzvot," that is, "that G-d, blessed be He, desires that we perform the mitzvah, that we put on tefillin and wrap ourselves in tzitzit."[298]

This does not mean that understanding is unnecessary. "We will hear" is said immediately after "we will do," and is part of the acceptance itself. It means that there is an order: first the connection to the will, and then understanding, which progressively deepens what has been accepted.

What the Reason Gives, and What It Does Not

If so, is there a reason to study the reasons for the mitzvot? Certainly. The reason illuminates the mitzvah from within: it enables a person to know what he is doing and why, and connects his thought to his actions. "The wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot" is itself higher wisdom, the root of Torah.

[298] Shabbat 88a. Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, the above explanation, section 3, explaining "Who revealed this secret to My children?" In section 2, in the square-bracketed addition: "The supernal will within it, that G-d desires us to perform the mitzvah, to put on tefillin and wrap ourselves in tzitzit: similarly, one may understand the root of the mitzvot in Keter, namely the supernal will within the mitzvot."

But there are three things the reason does not do. First, it does not replace the act, since what is desired is that the thing be done. Second, it is not a condition of the commandment's validity: a mitzvah whose reason we do not understand is as binding as a mitzvah whose reason is clear to us. Third, it does not exhaust the will. What we apprehend of the reasons is a radiance of the higher wisdom, which here is called Mocha Stimaah, a concealed brain. If the wisdom itself is concealed, the will above it is even more concealed.

Torah and mitzvot contain both will and wisdom. In Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 4, the Alter Rebbe says that Torah "is the wisdom and will of the Holy One, blessed be He," and that the Holy One "contracted … His will and wisdom within the 613 mitzvot of the Torah and their laws." Here he emphasizes different aspects of them to explain the relationship between root and emergence.[282]

"Except That It Is Like an Inverted Seal"

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43–53

except that it is like an inverted seal. And "their beginning is embedded in their end" is the power of Ein Sof, blessed be He,

Except means "but." This is the answer to "although." It does not cancel what was said: both maps remain

[282] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 4: Torah and mitzvot, and enjoyment of the radiance of the Shechinah.

true, and now the explanation of their reversal will follow.

That it is means "that the matter is." The word refers to the entire relationship, that is, the order of Torah and mitzvot above and below, not to one of the preceding words.

Like an inverted seal means like a seal whose form is reversed when it is impressed.

And their beginning is embedded in their end means "their beginning is fixed within their end," the wording from Sefer Yetzirah. We will detail it in the next section.

Is the power of Ein Sof, blessed be He: "is" identifies here, like "means": "their beginning is embedded in their end" means the power of Ein Sof, blessed be He.

What Is an Inverted Seal?

A seal is an implement with a form engraved upon it. It is pressed against wax or soft material, and the form passes into the material, but not as it is. What projects in the seal is recessed in the impression, and what is recessed in the seal projects in it. The sides also exchange places: the seal's right appears on the impression's left. Thus someone who engraves his name on a seal in ordinary letters will obtain reversed writing; to obtain straight writing, the letters must be engraved in reverse.

This is an ancient image. The Book of Job already says, “It is transformed like clay under a seal”; the material receives the seal’s form and is transformed. In Pardes Rimonim by the Ramak, the image describes letters whose order reverses: “Like the seal that turns from ל”ך into כ”ל.” In Likkutei Torah, Parashat Ekev, it is applied to the human being: “Tzelem is a projecting form that, when imprinted, becomes recessed,” “for man is like an inverted seal: what is left above becomes right below.”[299]

The image teaches two things. First, the form is preserved: the impression truly is the seal’s impression, not another form. Second, the order reverses: what was high in the seal, projecting, becomes low in the impression, recessed. Hence the warning: someone looking only at the impression and asking what is “high” in it will err if he infers from this what was high in the seal.

Which Pair Is Reversed Here?

Let us place the two orders side by side, like a seal and its impression:

[299] Job 38:14. Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 1, chapter 8. Likkutei Torah, Ekev, discourse beginning ארץ הרים ובקעות, at its opening; there, in square brackets: “Likewise in Mishnat Chassidim, Tikkun Tefillin, chapter 14, section ה [5]: the human being, in relation to Ze’ir Anpin, is like an inverted seal.”

	At the root, in Arich Anpin	In revelation, in the name Havayah
The mitzvot	In Gulgulta, in the whiteness: the encompassing will	In Malchut, in the final he
Torah	In Mocha Stimaah: "the wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot"	In Ze'ir Anpin, in the vav
What comes first	The mitzvot	Torah

The seal explains why the order below is not a copy of the order above. What comes first at the root, the mitzvot, appears below at the last level. What is inward at the root, wisdom, appears below at the level above it.

The analogy explains the relationship between the two orders presented by the Epistle: the root above and the revelation below.[300]

"Whatever Is Higher Can Become Vested Lower"

Why does what is higher appear lower? The explanation in Likkutei Torah, after the analogy of the skull and the outer organs, formulates a principle: "Whatever is higher can become vested lower." Its example comes from the soul's faculties: the faculty of sight "becomes vested in physical action, unlike the faculty of hearing." Immediately afterward it quotes

[300] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1608–1609, in the critique of the glossary: the words "but it is like an inverted seal" follow the sentence about mocha setimaah, while the Epistle states the lower map in a different sentence. Combining the two maps is permissible as a summary, but is not derived from the word "seal" alone. Likewise ibid., pp. 1581–1582, in "What Is an Inverted Seal?": "This is an editorial analogy explaining the relation between the supernal root and the appearance of things below."

our passage from the Epistle: "Except that it is like an inverted seal, and their beginning is embedded in their end; see there."[301]

The Alter Rebbe himself writes something similar in Torah Or, Parashat Lech Lecha: "The drawing of supernal Chochmah into physical things is through the light of Keter." That is, Chochmah alone does not descend all the way into matter. What brings it down to the parchment of tefillin and to the etrog is Keter, which is above it. "Therefore the revelation of supernal Chochmah vested, for example, in the passage 'Kadesh' is greater than the revelation of Chochmah itself in its higher place, because it is drawn through Keter, which is above Chochmah." Again the same principle: specifically the higher level can descend to the lowest place.[302]

In Kuntres Acharon 4, the same idea appears in the language of vessels: "The outer dimension of the higher descends below, and the inner dimension of the lower ascends above." The inner dimension of the higher level remains in its place, while its outer dimension descends and becomes vested in lower

[301] Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, the above explanation, section 2, within a parenthetical note: "The outer dimension of the organs is connected with the gulgalta, and this is the root of the mitzvot, whose root is in the gulgalta. When drawn below, they vest themselves specifically in the outer dimension of the organs, below Torah, which is the inner dimension. For whatever is higher can vest itself lower… Likewise the analogy of the power of sight, which vests itself in physical action, unlike the power of hearing. This is what is stated in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi chad.' "

[302] Torah Or, Lech Lecha, the first discourse; earlier there: "In taking an etrog, for example, since Chochmah is vested in it, it is as though one grasps supernal Chochmah."

things. Thus the drawing from above downward takes place "specifically through practical mitzvot … and specifically in the outer dimension of the vessels."[303] The same Kuntres contains another example, on a different subject and for a different reason, of something low in revelation and high at its root: the refinements accomplished "through Torah and mitzvot in thought, speech and action" in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah "are higher at their root" than the nefesh, ruach and neshamah within a person.[304] "Refinements" here means the powers within the lower worlds that still require refinement; in Chassidic language, birur, "refinement," is the service through which a person draws out the good power concealed in a physical thing and elevates it to holiness. We will return to this example and this term in the fourth part.

[303] Kuntres Acharon, section 4: "The drawing down from above downward, however, is specifically through practical mitzvot, to draw light into the vessels, and specifically into the outer dimension of the vessels, for the outer dimension of the higher descends below, and the inner dimension of the lower ascends above." Earlier there: " 'My face shall not be seen': the inner dimension of the higher cannot descend below, only its outer dimension and its back-aspect." This is contrasted there with "intellectual fear and love," which arouse "elevation from below upward."

[304] Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening "To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer." Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot "over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love"; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is "from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon," in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah "which have already been rectified through Mah"; the human being who "lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him"; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses "the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout,' etc.," and thus "the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels"; and elevation and drawing down, "both of which are a supernal need," "and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above."

The Analogy's Limit

In the Epistle, the seal explains the relationship between Torah and mitzvot: the place of revelation alone does not attest to the height of the root. This must not be extended to every lowly thing or every other domain.[279]

The principle in Likkutei Torah, "Whatever is higher can become vested lower," likewise says what the higher "can" do. It does not say that everything vested below is necessarily high. In the same explanation, in an addition within square brackets, it says that this explanation resolves "the three places where the mitzvot are sometimes in Gulgulta, sometimes in ZA, and sometimes in Malchut, for all are true," and that its conclusion is: "At the root of Torah and mitzvot, the mitzvot are higher, Gulgulta above Mocha; below, Torah is higher, like an inverted seal." Three places, all true. The seal cancels none of them; it explains the relationship between them.[305]

It remains open how the will in Gulgulta is revealed as a mitzvah in Malchut, and whether the reversal applies in the same way to every mitzvah and every detail of

[279] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1579, in "Seal and Placenta: Two Analogies That Do Not Negate Torah."

[305] Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, the above explanation, at the end of section 2, in the square-bracketed addition opening "All the above difficulties concerning the root of Torah and mitzvot are resolved."

Torah. Here the Epistle describes their general relationship.[306]

Finally: the mitzvah need not become wisdom in order to have a lofty root. It remains an act, and precisely through this fulfills its purpose. So too the impression does not become a seal; it remains an impression, and precisely within it the seal's form becomes visible in the world.

" 'Their Beginning Is Embedded in Their End' Is the Power of Ein Sof": The Power in the End

The formula "their beginning is embedded in their end" is taken from Sefer Yetzirah: "Ten sefirot of belimah: their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end, like a flame bound to a coal." "Embedded" means fixed in place, firmly attached, like a stake. "Their beginning" and "their end" are the beginning and end of the sefirot; the Hebrew suffix ן־, "their," refers to them, that is, to the entire chain of levels, from first to last.[307]

How should the syntax in the Epistle be understood? In the Kehot text, the formula is enclosed in quotation

[306] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1581–1582: the analogy "explains the reversal of the order, not the entire mystery of coming into being." Ibid., pp. 1600–1602, in the glossary, among the matters not proven by the wording alone: how many levels are reversed, and whether every pairing of mitzvah and Torah is reversed or only the general order. Likewise ibid., pp. 1589–1591: the detailed mechanism of projecting and recessed, right and left, is a teaching aid from explanatory works, not the Alter Rebbe's wording in the Epistle.

[307] Sefer Yetzirah, chapter 1, mishnah 7. On the three places where the formula is used in the Epistle, see chapter 8 and below.

marks and followed by a comma: "And 'their beginning is embedded in their end,' is the power of 'Ein Sof,' blessed be He, to create something from nothing." According to this punctuation, "is" defines: the formula "their beginning is embedded in their end," as used here, means the power of Ein Sof to create something from nothing.

One can also read "like an inverted seal, and their beginning is embedded in their end" as a single expression, with "is the power of Ein Sof" then beginning the explanation of both. This is how the explanation in Likkutei Torah brings the passage, quoting "except that it is like an inverted seal, and their beginning is embedded in their end" and stopping there. In both readings the content is the same: the highest power, Ein Sof's power to create something from nothing, is embedded in the "end." It is revealed in Malchut, the last level, and in what is created from it. This is what we learned in Chapter 8, and it now serves a new explanation.

Why does this explain the seal? Because the mitzvot are directly connected with this power. They are performed in the physical world, in yesh created from ayin, and within physicality the power of the beginning is "embedded." In other words, what appears to be the end of the chain carries its beginning within it. It is therefore no wonder that something whose place of

revelation is last, in Malchut, has so high a root, in Gulgulta.

W10-06
source words
54–64

to create yesh me'ayin, and not through cause and effect, in which the effect would be encompassed by its cause

To create yesh me-ayin means to bring forth existence from ayin. This distinguishes the power of Ein Sof: every other power can only change the form of something that exists, or extend it further.

And not through cause and effect means not by way of a cause and its result: ilah is the cause, and alul is what is caused by it.

In which … would be: שיהיה means here "in which it would be." The word describes what happens by way of cause and effect, not the created yesh; that will be discussed only after the word "rather."

The effect would be encompassed by its cause: "the effect" is the result. "Encompassed by its cause" means that it is included within its cause, surrounded by it on every side, with no standing outside it. This is not spatial encompassing, like a wall around a city, but inclusion: the result does not leave the domain of its cause.

W10-07
source words
65–72

and nullified in its existence. Rather, the yesh is to be a thing separate from Divinity,

And nullified in its existence: "and nullified" continues to describe the effect: its existence is nullified in relation to its cause. It exists, but does not experience itself as an existence in its own right.

Rather: רק means "but rather." Here the Epistle moves from the mode it rejects to the mode it seeks.

The yesh is to be means the created being is to be yesh, an existence.

A thing separate from Divinity means a thing that stands in its own eyes as an existence in its own right, outside Divinity. This describes "knowledge from below upward," from the created being's perspective; it does not mean that the created being is truly independent (see below, "Separate, Independent, Nullified").

What "Encompassed" and "Nullified" Mean

We already encountered "encompassed" and "nullified" at the Epistle's opening, in the description of chainlike descent: "In chainlike descent, the effect is encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence before it, like the sun's radiance within the sun, as is written in Pardes by the Ramak." The sun's radiance, the light within the sun's body, is actual light. But within the sun it has no name of its own; it is "nullified" within its source. So too everything that

descends level after level: it is included within its cause, and its cause encompasses it.[308]

Hence the argument. Had the world been created only through cause and effect, it would have remained like the sun's radiance within the sun. There would be no yesh standing before its Creator, and no one who could be commanded. For something separate to exist, another power is needed: a power that does not extend a cause into an effect, but brings into being from nothing. This is the power of Ein Sof alone.

Separate, Independent, Nullified: Three Words Not to Confuse

Does "a thing separate from Divinity" mean that the created being does not depend on the Creator, or is not nullified to Him? No. The Epistle itself already distinguished two sides: "Although the created yesh too is accounted as naught before Him, that is, it is nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it … this is specifically 'before Him,' which is His blessed knowledge from above downward." From the other side: "But in knowledge from below upward, the created yesh is an entirely separate thing in this knowledge and apprehension

[308] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, at its beginning: "However, the intention is to say that they are Divinity to create yesh me-ayin like Ein Sof, and not merely in the manner of a chainlike descent of cause and effect"; immediately afterward: "In hishtalshelut the alul is encompassed by the ilah and nullified in its existence to it, like the sun's radiance within the sun, as written in the Ramak's Pardes."

from below, because the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all."[309]

Three words must remain distinct:

- **Separate.** This is how the created being appears to itself, "in knowledge from below upward": the power bringing it into being is hidden from it, so it experiences itself as yesh.
- **Independent.** This is what the created being is not. Its existence depends on the power bringing it into being from nothing at every moment. In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe explains that the Holy One "hid and concealed … the vitality of the world so that the world would appear to be a separate thing on its own"; without the attribute sustaining the world in this way, "the world would return to its source."[310]
- **Nullified.** From the other side, this is what the created being remains: "before Him," before the Holy One, blessed be He, in His knowledge "from above downward," it is "accounted as naught."

The difference between the two sides is a difference of perspective, not a different reality. From above, everything is nullified. From below, the created being is separate. Precisely because it is separate from

[309] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in its first part, explaining " 'Yesh me-ayin' is called 'creation' in the Holy Tongue." There the Alter Rebbe adds two reasons why the yesh is "entirely" separate in knowledge from below: the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all, and there is "no commensurability" between the nature of the yesh and the power bringing it into being.

[310] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7.

below, it can hear a command and fulfill it by choice. A person does not fulfill a mitzvah like the sun's radiance within the sun. He fulfills it as someone standing in a defined world, experiencing himself, and turning from his place toward a will above him. In Chapter 8 we saw that the Epistle explains separateness "from below upward" not only through lack of apprehension, but also through the utter incommensurability between the nature of the created being and the nature of the power bringing it into being. Here the question is whether that separateness means independence; the answer is no.

"Their Beginning Is Embedded in Their End": Three Times in the Epistle

The formula "their beginning is embedded in their end" appears three times in the Epistle, each time serving a different role. The first occurrence, discussed in Chapter 8, explains why Keter is "an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated beings, and it contains the lowest aspect of Ein Sof." In the second occurrence, here, it is "the power of Ein Sof, blessed be He, to create something from nothing," directed toward the purpose: separate created beings fulfilling mitzvot. In the third occurrence, later in the Epistle, it will explain "returning light": "And Malchut

of Atzilut is the aspect of Keter from below upward, and 'their beginning is embedded in their end.' "[311]

The three places should be compared, but not conflated. In each, the formula says that the end is not detached from the beginning, but what counts as "beginning" and "end" changes with the context. In Likkutei Torah too, in the discourse "כי תצא למלחמה" ("When You Go Out to War"), the same formula serves an entirely different division: there Torah is "their beginning is embedded in their end," compared "to water descending from a high place to a low place," while the mitzvot are "their end in their beginning." We will return to that discourse at the chapter's end. For now it is enough to know that the formula is not a fixed dictionary: "embedded" does not always mean "Torah," nor does it always mean "mitzvot."

"So That the Emanator, Blessed Be He, Will Be King Over All the Separate Beings": Why Separate?

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73–80

so that the Emanator, blessed be He, will be King over all the separate beings,

[311] Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "This is what is written: 'Their beginning is embedded in their end,' for Keter is an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated" (see chapter 8); later in the Epistle, concerning returning light: "Malchut of Atzilut is the aspect of Keter from below upward, and 'their beginning is embedded in their end.' " On the use here as a "new application" of the same principle, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1581–1582; on the distinction between the formula's structural meaning and its meaning here, concerning creative power and purpose, see ibid., pp. 1603–1605.

So that means "in order that…." Here the purpose is stated: separateness is not only a result of the manner of creation, but directed toward something.

The Emanator, blessed be He, will be: "the Emanator" is the Creator, named in a way that describes Him as the source of Atzilut. That is, the King over the separate beings is the same source from which all Atzilut was drawn, not another power added below.

King means one who has a people accepting his kingship. This does not mean control over something independent standing outside Divinity. It is a relationship revealed when a created being, within the existence given to it, accepts a command upon itself.

Over all the separate beings means over all who appear to stand on their own. "All" means not only the souls that were born, but all separate created beings.

W10-09
source words
81–89

through their fulfilling His commandments that He will command them; and the end of the deed is first in thought.

Through their fulfilling means "by their fulfilling." This is the way kingship is realized: it is not enough that separate beings exist; they must fulfill.

His commandments means the King's commandments. The act is the fulfillment of a command, not merely an action upon matter.

That He will command them means that He will command the separate beings. The future tense points toward fulfillment of the mitzvot, the purpose of their creation.

And the end of the deed is first in thought: "the end of the deed," what is done last, was "first in thought," first in intention. The wording is familiar from the liturgical poem "Lecha Dodi": "Established from the beginning, from of old; the end of the deed is first in thought."

Kingship Requires Separate Beings

Why does kingship specifically require separate beings? In Chapter 8 we encountered the saying "there is no king without a people," and its explanation in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah: am, "people," is "from the word omemut, dimness: things that are separate, alien and distant from the king's stature." "For even if he had very many sons, the term 'kingship' would not apply to them." The difference is simple: a father governs his sons through natural closeness, whereas a king reigns over those who stand outside him and accept his authority.[312]

This also makes clear why the power of Ein Sof is needed. A world encompassed within its cause and nullified within it like the sun's radiance within the sun would resemble "sons" more than a "people." For

[312]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7; Proverbs 14:28 ("In a multitude of people is the king's glory"). See chapter 8.

kingship to exist, there must be a yesh that experiences itself; for such a yesh to exist, the sole power that brings something into being from nothing is required. In the same breath, the Epistle says what all this is for: "through their fulfilling His commandments."[313]

No Deficiency Is Being Filled Here

The analogy of king and people can mislead. A mortal king needs his people; without them he lacks something and has no kingship. Does the Creator too "need" created beings to fulfill mitzvot? No. In Chapter 8 we already saw that the saying describes the revelation of kingship, not His Essence. For His kingship to be revealed, there must be those who accept it, but He Himself lacks nothing.

In Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 36, the Alter Rebbe explains the purpose of creation in the Sages' words: "The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to have a dwelling in the lower realms." This is the language of will, not need: "For so it arose in His blessed will, that there should be gratification before Him, blessed be He." In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, he explains the verse "I, G-d, have not changed": "There is no change whatsoever"; after creation He is as He was alone before it.[314]

[313] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1582–1583, in "The Purpose of Malchut."

[314] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 36. Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7: "From what has been explained, one may understand what is written, 'I, G-d, have not changed,' meaning that there is no change at all." The verse: Malachi 3:6.

This is the difference between will and need. Need arises from a lack and disappears when that lack is filled. Supernal will does not arise from a lack, nor does it disappear when fulfilled; it is choice. We therefore should not ask, "What does He lack?" We can ask only, "What did He desire?" The Epistle answers: to be King over separate beings, through their fulfillment of His commandments.

"His Commandments That He Will Command Them": The Command Is the Link

The link connecting the separate created being with the purpose is the command. The sentence does not say that every contact with matter is a mitzvah, or that every action in the physical world realizes the purpose by itself. It says, "through their fulfilling His commandments that He will command them." A person putting on tefillin fulfills the will because he was commanded to put on tefillin. The exact same movement, without the command, would remain a movement of a hand.[315]

This also distinguishes the mitzvot from the "physical world" in general. Matter is prepared for this, but the command makes it a vessel. Later in the Epistle, when it discusses the vegetative power in earth and "returning light," we will again see how ready

[315] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1578, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification": "This does not permit identifying every contact with matter as a mitzvah; the command is an explicit link."

physicality is to reveal a higher power. But the command determines the purpose.

"The End of the Deed Is First in Thought"

What does the sentence mean? In Chapter 8 we gave an analogy: someone building a house first plans all its details, the foundations, walls and roof, while moving into the house comes only at the end of execution. In thought, however, this came first: it was for this that he began planning. "The end of the deed," what comes last in execution, was "first in thought," first in intention.

So too the analogy of the teacher in Chapter 8: the student eventually says a short sentence in his own words. The sentence comes last, but the understanding revealed in it is what motivated the teacher from the beginning. Both analogies teach only the order between a purpose and the path leading to it. Their limit: the teacher needs his student's success, whereas the Creator needs nothing.

In the analogue, fulfillment of the mitzvot in the separate world is the "end." It lies at the bottom of the chain: after Atzilut, after the creation of the worlds and souls, after the soul's descent into a body. Yet it is "first in thought": everything was done for its sake. This is the deep connection between the seal and "their beginning is embedded in their end." What is at the end of the order of revelation is connected to the

beginning of the intention, so it is no wonder that its root is high.

Likkutei Torah too, in the discourse "כי תצא למלחמה" ("When You Go Out to War"), uses the same wording, saying of the mitzvot that they are "their end in their beginning, for the end of the deed is first in thought." But as we have already said, the usage there differs, and we will not merge the two passages into a single formula.[316]

From the Epistle's First Question to Action

Here the connection between the question that opened the Epistle and the act of a mitzvah becomes clear. At first we asked how גרמוהי, the vessels, which are limited, can be Divinity "to create something from nothing." Now we learn that the coming into being of yesh is connected from the outset to a purpose: that the created being fulfill its Creator's will. Study of the vessels thus does not remain in heaven. It descends to the hand giving charity, the mouth studying Torah, and the matter becoming a vessel for a mitzvah.

The discussion of the power of bringing into being therefore leads to its purpose: fulfillment of the mitzvot by the created being. The Epistle will conclude with

[316] Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, "כי תצא למלחמה," section 4. "The end of the deed is first in thought" is the Epistle's own wording; explaining it as a summary of the direction of the entire argument is commentary based on the Epistle's wording and conclusion (Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1582–1583 and 1613–1615). The expression is familiar from Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz's hymn "Lecha Dodi."

this, in "the great superiority of practical mitzvot, which are the purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world, as it is written: 'Today, to do them.' "[317]

"And Therefore They Said in the Jerusalem Talmud": Even Rabbi Shimon Interrupts

W10-10
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90–98

And therefore they said in the Jerusalem Talmud: "Does Rabbi Shimon not agree that one interrupts [study] for the lulav?" etc.

And therefore means "for this reason." What now follows results from what was said: since action is the "end" that was "first in thought," we can understand the Sages' words.

They said in the Jerusalem Talmud means in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

Does Rabbi Shimon not agree: ולית ליה לר"ש is Aramaic for "Does Rabbi Shimon not hold…?" ר"ש is Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The question is rhetorical: of course he does.

That one interrupts for the lulav means interrupting study for the lulav. In the Jerusalem Talmud itself: "to make a sukkah and to make a lulav."

[317] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, at its end; "Today to perform them": Deuteronomy 7:11. Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1579–1581: "The issue connects the beginning of the Epistle with its end."

Etc. means "and so forth": the Alter Rebbe abbreviates, relying on the reader to know the continuation or consult it.

W10-11
source words
99–108

"And whoever studies without intending to act, it would have been better for him had his placenta turned over upon his face," etc.

And whoever studies without intending to act means someone who studies without an intention to act, that is, studies in a way that disconnects study from doing.

It would have been better for him means "it would have been good for him." This is very severe language in the Sages' words.

Had his placenta turned over means that his placenta would have turned over. The placenta is the membrane and tissue within which the fetus develops, emerging after it at birth.

Upon his face: ע"פ expands to על פניו.

Etc.: in the Jerusalem Talmud the sentence continues, "and he had not come into the world." That is, it would have been better for him not to have been born at all.

What Is Written in the Jerusalem Talmud?

The statements appear in two places in the Jerusalem Talmud, in almost identical wording: Berachot, Chapter 1, halachah 2, and Shabbat, Chapter 1, halachah 2. The starting point is the Mishnah in

tractate Shabbat. Someone who has begun a haircut, bathing, a meal or a court proceeding close to the time of Minchah "does not interrupt"; but "one interrupts to recite the Shema, and does not interrupt for prayer." In the Jerusalem Talmud's Berachot, this Mishnah is introduced with תמן תנינן, "we learned there."[318]

The discussion opens with striking statements about the power of study: "Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: People like us, occupied with Torah study, do not interrupt even for the recitation of the Shema." Rabbi Shimon, whose Torah study is his occupation, does not stop studying even to recite the Shema. It is further reported in his name that, had he stood at Sinai, he would have asked that a person be created with תרין פומין, "two mouths": one to occupy itself with Torah, and one for all his needs.

Then the Talmud asks:

"Does Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai not concede that one interrupts to make a sukkah and to make a lulav? Does Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai not hold: One studies in order to act, not without intending to act, for one who studies without intending to act would have been better off not having been created? And Rabbi Yochanan said: One who studies without intending to act would have

[318] Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat, chapter 1, halachah 2; compare also Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot, chapter 1, halachah 2. The Epistle cites Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and interrupting study for the lulav, and the statement about one who studies without intending to practice.

been better off had his placenta turned over upon his face and he had not come into the world."

That is: even someone who does not interrupt study for the Shema, does he not concede that one interrupts to make a sukkah and lulav? Does he not accept the principle that one studies in order to act? The Talmud immediately explains Rabbi Shimon's position concerning the Shema: "This is recitation and that is recitation, and one does not interrupt recitation for recitation." The Shema is the utterance of verses, like study itself, so there is no reason to interrupt words of Torah for words of Torah. But sukkah and lulav are action, and for action even Rabbi Shimon interrupts.[319]

Three Layers Not to Confuse

To read the line in the Epistle correctly, we must separate three layers of text:

The Talmud's wording. In the Jerusalem Talmud there are two separate questions: "Does he not concede … that one interrupts to make a sukkah and to make a lulav?" and "Does he not hold … one studies in

[319] Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot, chapter 1, halachah 2, and Shabbat, chapter 1, halachah 2; the Mishnah: Shabbat, chapter 1, mishnah 2. The Jerusalem Talmud's wording is cited here according to the Guggenheimer edition, in the text of tractate Berachot. The Shabbat wording is almost identical: "One who learns in order to practice, not one who learns without intending to practice; for one who learns without intending to practice would have been better off never having been created. Rabbi Yochanan said: One who learns without intending to practice would have been better off had his placenta been overturned onto his face and he not emerged into the world." Rabbi Shimon's reason—in Berachot: "זהו שינון וזה שינון ואין מבטל שינון מפני שינון" [This is recitation and that is recitation, and one does not interrupt recitation for recitation]; in Shabbat: "זה שינון וזה שינון, ואין מבטלין שינון מפני שינון" [This is recitation and that is recitation, and we do not interrupt recitation for recitation].

order to act?" The statement about the placenta is made by Rabbi Yochanan.

The Epistle's wording. The Alter Rebbe cites the material briefly and freely. He combines the two questions into one, "Does Rabbi Shimon not agree that one interrupts for the lulav? etc.," and brings the statement about the placenta in the form, "And whoever studies without intending to act … had his placenta turned over upon his face, etc." The substance has not changed. But anyone wishing to know precisely what is written in the Jerusalem Talmud must open the Jerusalem Talmud itself.

Later notes. References and notes were added in editions of Tanya and its commentaries, for example indicating which of the two places in the Jerusalem Talmud to consult. They help locate the source, but are not part of the Epistle's wording. In any case, the discussion appears in both places, and both are faithful sources for the statements.[320]

"Studying Without Intending to Act" in Halachah

Does this wording imply that every act always takes precedence over study? No. The Alter Rebbe himself

[320] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1578, in "The Placenta Is Not a Substitute for the Argument": one must distinguish the Jerusalem Talmud's wording, the Alter Rebbe's explanation and the editor's proposal, and must not give a later reference the status of an additional sentence in the Epistle. On the comparison between the Talmudic discussion's wording and its citation in the Epistle, see ibid., pp. 1597–1598.

ruled on this in Hilchot Talmud Torah, in precise language:

"If the performance of a mitzvah and Torah study are before him, if the mitzvah can be performed by others, he should not interrupt his study … and if the mitzvah cannot be performed by others … he should interrupt his study, perform the mitzvah and return to his study." Further: "If he does not do so, it turns out that he studied without intending to act, and it would have been better for him had his placenta turned over upon his face and he had not emerged into the air of the world."[321]

According to halachah, "studying without intending to act" does not describe everyone who studies and does not rise to act at that moment. It describes someone who studied, then faced a mitzvah that could not be performed by others, or a mitzvah personally incumbent upon him such as prayer, and refused to rise from his place. This principle also recurs in Kuntres Acharon 4: "For the fulfillment of a mitzvah that cannot be performed by others, Torah study is interrupted, even the study of the Divine Chariot."[322]

The same halachic ruling emphasizes the greatness of study: "The positive commandment of Torah study, in itself, is also greater than the other mitzvot"; "Torah

[321] Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchot Talmud Torah, chapter 4, section 3.

[322] Kuntres Acharon, section 4, in the paragraph "For the fulfillment of a mitzvah that cannot be performed by others."

study is equivalent to all the mitzvot together, for study leads to action"; "Therefore study takes precedence over action everywhere." The severe wording concerning "one who studies without intending to act" is thus directed against disconnection, not against study. One must not infer from it that every practical occupation is preferable in every situation to Torah study; precedence depends on the details of halachah.[323]

"And Therefore": What Does the Jerusalem Talmud Prove?

Why does the Alter Rebbe bring precisely this example? Because it shows the seal at work. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai represents study at an unsurpassed height. If even he, immersed in Torah, rises to make a sukkah and lulav, action is not "beneath" study. The practical mitzvah does not become unnecessary when study reaches a lofty level. On the contrary: specifically knowledge of Torah obligates one to heed its demand for action.

The wording about "one who studies without intending to act" shows the other side. A person may be moved by wisdom and still refuse to give the will it reveals a place in his life. Here we must distinguish someone who still struggles to fulfill from the approach described here: study aimed from the outset at not

[323] Hilchot Talmud Torah, chapter 4, sections 2–3. Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1578–1581.

arriving at action. Someone who studies in this way has severed study from its root and purpose. The Talmud says that it would have been better for him not to have been born, and the Epistle explains why the image of a placenta was chosen for this.[318]

"For the Placenta Was Formed First from the Drop": The Analogy of the Placenta

W10-12
source words
109–118

For the placenta was formed first from the drop, and it alone was the basis of the fetus

For means "because…." Here the Alter Rebbe explains why the Sages specifically chose the image of a placenta.

The placenta is the membrane and tissue within which the fetus grows and through which it receives nourishment.

Was formed first means was formed before the fetus had a form.

From the drop means from the drop from which the fetus begins; the same "drop" we encountered in Chapter 9 in the description of gestation and birth.

And it alone means only it. At this stage there is nothing else to point to.

[318] Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat, chapter 1, halachah 2; compare also Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot, chapter 1, halachah 2. The Epistle cites Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and interrupting study for the lulav, and the statement about one who studies without intending to practice.

Was the basis of the fetus means it was the principal element of the fetus, its central part.

W10-13
source words
119–124

until forty days, when the form of the fetus began.

Until forty days: מ׳ means forty.

When … began means "when it then began," that is, until the day on which it began.

The form of the fetus means its form, the formation of its appearance and limbs.

What the Analogy Describes

The Epistle describes two stages: first the placenta, which "alone was the basis of the fetus," and afterward, from the fortieth day, "the form of the fetus." At the end, the placenta appears as an outer covering, but in this description it is first and primary, and within it the form develops.

This is precisely what the Epistle seeks to show: what appears to the eye as an outer covering is actually the first and fundamental element of the process. "And likewise," it will immediately say, "the mitzvot are the basis of the Torah and its root." The mitzvah, which appears bodily and external, is first and primary; Torah, wisdom, is the form that develops.

Forty Days

Where does the number forty come from? The Alter Rebbe gives no source here, but the framework is familiar from halachah. The Mishnah says: "One who miscarries on the fortieth day need not be concerned that it is a fetus"; only from the forty-first day must one be concerned that it is a fetus. In the Babylonian Talmud, Rav Chisda says of the days before this: "Until forty days, it is mere water." Berachot too mentions this boundary: "From three days until forty, he should ask for mercy that it be male"; from that point onward the matter has already been determined.[324]

The chronological framework is the one familiar from the Sages' words and halachah. In the Epistle's argument, the number forty marks the transition from the stage in which the placenta "alone was the basis of the fetus" to the stage at which "the form of the fetus began": first the basis and root, then the form.

What the Placenta Analogy Adds to the Seal

The seal showed that the order of revelation can be the reverse of the order at the root. But a seal is a spatial image: what is above and below, what projects and what is recessed. The placenta adds an image of time and growth: what precedes what, and what develops from what. It therefore teaches that the mitzvah is not

[324] Mishnah, Niddah, chapter 3, mishnah 7; Yevamot 69b (Rav Chisda); Berachot 60a.

merely "higher at its root" in some distant, abstract place. It is first and primary within the living process itself, and from it the form is built.

The Epistle explains why the placenta is primary, but does not interpret the Jerusalem Talmud's severe phrase, "his placenta turned over upon his face." We will offer our own explanation: someone who "studies without intending to act" holds on to the form, that is, wisdom and understanding, and disconnects it from the basis from which it grew and for whose sake it exists. According to this explanation, the analogy says: it would have been better for the basis, the placenta, to remain covering the face, and for the form not to emerge into the world at all, than for it to emerge as something separate from its basis.[325]

The Analogy's Limits

The placenta analogy does not replace the argument. The argument is the seal, "their beginning is embedded in their end," and the purpose; the analogy merely illustrates it. The correspondence itself is determined by "and likewise," which follows it: what is said of the placenta applies to the mitzvot only in what the Epistle specifies.[326]

[325] This explains the choice of image, based on "For the placenta…" and "So too the mitzvot…" in the Epistle. The Alter Rebbe does not further interpret the wording "his placenta was overturned onto his face." See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1583–1586, at the station on the placenta: "The placenta provides a living analogy for the concept of 'essence and root.' "

[326] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1578, in "The Placenta Is Not a Substitute for the Argument": "The analogy highlights priority and root despite bodily externality. One must not infer from it

Two details of the analogy therefore do not pass into the analogue. First: at birth the placenta emerges after the child and is discarded. One must not infer that the mitzvot are a stage abandoned when one reaches study. The Epistle takes from the analogy only the stage until forty days, that is, priority and fundamental importance, not what happens to the placenta afterward. Second: one must not infer the opposite either, that study is merely preparation discarded when action arrives. The analogy does not cancel the child's life, and action does not cancel Torah.[279]

The importance of preserving these limits is apparent from another use of the same image. In the explanation of "שחורה אני ונאוה" ("I Am Black and Comely") in Likkutei Torah, the placenta appears as that "which surrounds the fetus," and it is said of it that "at its root, when it was included in the drop, it is higher, and afterward through refinement it is separated and discarded." There the image serves an entirely different subject: a shell that precedes the fruit and is discarded after refinement. The same image, two roles. Each source takes from it what it needs, and a detail must not be transferred from one place to another.[327]

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that every embryological detail corresponds to a particular sefirah, or formulate a contemporary medical claim from it. The parallel is established by the wording 'So too the mitzvot' that follows."

[279] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1579, in "Seal and Placenta: Two Analogies That Do Not Negate Torah."

[327] Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, "ביאור הדברים ע"פ שחורה אני ונאוה." The Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1610–1611, regards this passage as only a distant echo: it uses the vocabulary of the placenta but does not prove the argument in the Epistle.

“And Likewise, the Mitzvot Are the Basis of the Torah and Its Root”

W10-14
source words
125–134

And likewise, the mitzvot are the basis of the Torah and its root, although the mitzvah is corporeal

And likewise means “and so.” Here the analogy is applied to the analogue: as with the placenta, so with the mitzvot.

The mitzvot are means the mitzvot are.

The basis of the Torah means the principal element in Torah: that around which the whole Torah revolves.

And its root means its source. “Basis” and “root” are not redundant. “Basis” concerns purpose and centrality: what Torah comes to accomplish. “Root” concerns origin: from where it is drawn. The placenta was both: first, and also “the basis of the fetus.”

Although means “even though….” As at the beginning of the passage, “although” acknowledges that at first glance things appear reversed.

The mitzvah is corporeal means that the mitzvah is performed with the body and an object: with the hand, parchment, etrog or sukkah.

W10-15
source words
135–143

and Torah is wisdom; except that this is in the outer dimension and that in the inner dimension, as explained below.

And Torah is wisdom means that Torah is wisdom and is absorbed in the intellect.

Except means "but that…," "the only difference being that…." The word limits the difference: it is not in fundamental importance and root, but in manner.

This is in the outer dimension: the first "this" is the mitzvah, mentioned first; it is "in the outer dimension."

And that in the inner dimension: the second "this" is Torah, mentioned second; it is "in the inner dimension."

As explained below means "as will be explained later." We will devote a separate section to this word.

"The Basis of the Torah and Its Root": What Does This Mean?

"The mitzvot are the basis of the Torah" does not mean that Torah is inferior or can be dispensed with. It means that the whole Torah revolves around the mitzvot. Much of it teaches how to perform them, and its other parts, the narratives, prophecies and mysteries, illuminate the will they fulfill. In the additions to Torah Or, as we saw, it says that "Torah is the explanation of the mitzvot," and that many passages were written about "the making of the breastplate and the ephod" to explain how to make them.

"And its root" returns us to the map above: the will in Gulgulta is the one path branching into 613 "paths of

Torah." That is, the root of the mitzvot is also the root from which the ways of Torah branch. They therefore cannot be separated: one who studies Torah studies the ways of a will that seeks to be fulfilled.

"This" and "That": What Do They Refer To?

The sentence "except that this is in the outer dimension and that in the inner dimension" has two pronouns, and we need to know what each refers to. The order decides: "the mitzvah is corporeal and Torah is wisdom." The mitzvah was mentioned first, and it is "in the outer dimension"; Torah was mentioned second, and it is "in the inner dimension." This also accords with the content: what is corporeal appears outside, while wisdom is absorbed within.

The word "except" establishes the weight of the difference. It does not cancel it: the difference between outer and inner is real, and in a moment we will see how deep it is. But it is a difference in the manner of emergence, not in fundamental importance and root. In fundamental importance and root, the mitzvot come first. In manner of emergence, the mitzvah is external and Torah internal.

Outer and Inner Dimensions: A Manner of Emergence, Not a Ranking

Usually "external" means superficial, while "internal" means deep and important. Not here. "Internal" is

what is absorbed within a person: when he understands a line of reasoning in Torah, his intellect grasps it and it becomes the content of his thought. "External" is what is also revealed outside consciousness: the act of the mitzvah takes place in a limb and an object, and exists even when the person does not understand its full depth. This is a distinction in the manner of revelation, and alone does not determine what is higher at the root of will.

The Alter Rebbe uses the same terms in Kuntres Acharon 4, where they acquire a precise meaning in the language of vessels: "Through Torah study, in the inner dimension, that is, the drawing down of mochin; and through the fulfillment of mitzvot, in the outer dimension of the vessels, which are the aspects of Netzach, Hod and Yesod" in Ze'ir Anpin, "except that they become vested in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, in the physical Torah and mitzvot of this world." That is, Torah study draws light into the inner dimension of the vessels, into their mochin, their intellect; the mitzvot draw light into their outer dimension.[328]

In Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 5, precisely the same pair serves to show another aspect: the superiority of Torah. The person studying Torah "apprehends, grasps and encompasses in his intellect the will and wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He," "and this is a

[328] Kuntres Acharon, section 4, at its beginning.

wondrous union, like which there is no other." "Our Sages of blessed memory therefore said that Torah study is equivalent to all the mitzvot, because the mitzvot are garments alone, whereas Torah is nourishment and also a garment for the intellectual soul." Nourishment enters the body and becomes part of it, "the aspect of inner light"; a garment surrounds from outside, "the aspect of encompassing lights."[329]

The same pair, inner and outer, thus serves two different emphases in two places. In Likkutei Amarim, inwardness is Torah's superiority, because the question there is what connection forms between a person and what he apprehends. In the Epistle, precisely the outer dimension is connected to fundamental importance and root, because the question here is from where the thing is drawn and for what purpose. The contradiction disappears when we remember our four questions. "Inner" and "outer" answer the question of the manner of emergence; the questions of root and purpose are answered separately.

We can return to the analogy of the house. The plan in the designer's mind is rich in details, while at the end there stands a door that someone opens and enters. The door is more tangible and external, but using the house is the reason for which the plan was made. This does not mean that planning is unnecessary; without it,

[329] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 5: the unity effected through apprehending Torah.

the act would not have been done properly. Here too the analogy stops: the plan can be thrown away once the house stands, whereas Torah is the Holy One's wisdom, without end and never dispensable.

"As Explained Below": Where Does the Word Point?

"As explained below" means "as will be explained later": the Alter Rebbe promises that the distinction between outer and inner dimensions will be explained in the continuation. But where?

In the Epistle as we have it, there is no separate passage detailing this pair. After the placenta analogy, the Epistle turns to union in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, to the kav and the parsa, and then to the vegetative power in earth and "returning light." There are related points: it says that the kav shines from below upward into the neshamah-light of the last level in Asiyah, and that this neshamah-light originates "from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut"; at the Epistle's end comes the conclusion concerning "the great superiority of practical mitzvot, which are the purpose of the souls' descent." But an explicit elaboration of "this is in the outer dimension and that in the inner dimension" is not present. At the

end of the Epistle it is printed: "Thus far we have found in his holy handwriting."[330]

Outside the Epistle there are places where this pair is explained at length: Kuntres Acharon 4, which we have just seen, and discourses in Likkutei Torah. An English note in the Kehot edition refers to Kuntres Acharon 4 and to three places in Likkutei Torah, including the explanation in Parashat Bamidbar that quotes our passage. All of these are good parallels and explain the subject.[331]

It is unclear where "as explained below" points: the Alter Rebbe may have intended to explain the subject later in the Epistle and not had time, or may have intended another place. The parallels explain the distinction, but do not prove that they are the destination of the reference.[332]

[330] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later and at its end. On checking "as below" against the continuation of the Epistle, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1591–1592 and 1606–1608.

[331] The English note in the Kehot edition, as cited in the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1591–1592, refers to Kuntres Acharon, section 4, and three places in Likkutei Torah: Emor 33a and following; Bamidbar 13a and following; and Bamidbar 17a and following. The explanation "על הדברים הנ"ל" in Parashat Bamidbar, the one quoting our passage, begins on folio 17a. The Research Book identifies the note as part of the edition's apparatus, not a continuation of the Epistle's body (pp. 1607–1608).

[332] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1579: "The reference 'as below' remains incompletely identified"; " 'As below' does not acquire a proven destination merely because a parallel discusses inner and outer dimensions. The forward reference in the Epistle and the content of the parallel are separate questions." Ibid., pp. 1591–1592: either the continuation was not written or did not reach us, or the Alter Rebbe intended another place; the body of the Epistle alone does not supply the expansion.

Torah and Mitzvot: There Is No Single Ladder

The passage we have studied emphasizes the superiority of the mitzvot; someone reading it alone might think Torah has been pushed to the margins. We will therefore now examine other places where the Alter Rebbe discusses the relationship between Torah and mitzvot, and see how they complement our passage rather than contradict it.

Is Torah Always Descent, and Are Mitzvot Always Ascent?

Such a division is easy to remember, but is not faithful to the sources. In Likkutei Torah, in the discourse "כי תצא למלחמה" ("When You Go Out to War"), the Alter Rebbe discusses the verse "and G-d your G-d will deliver him into your hand": "Havayah is the aspect of Torah, which is His blessed will and wisdom … and 'your G-d' is the aspect of the mitzvot," "and the root of these two aspects is 'their beginning is embedded in their end and their end in their beginning.' " Torah is "the aspect of a king," and the mitzvot "the aspect of a servant." Torah "is compared … to water descending from a high place to a low place, and this is 'their beginning is embedded in their end,' " while "the aspect of the mitzvot is 'their end in their beginning,' for the end of the deed is first in thought."[333]

[333] Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, "כי תצא למלחמה," sections 1 and 4: the root of the animal order, and Torah and mitzvot as ratzo and shov.

From this the discourse draws an explicit conclusion: "Therefore our Sages of blessed memory sometimes said, 'Study is great, for it leads to action,' implying that action is preferable, and sometimes said, 'Torah study is equivalent to them all,' for both are true: in the aspect of 'their beginning is embedded in their end,' Torah study is greater; in the aspect of 'their end in their beginning,' action is greater, and both must be present in a person." That is, the two sayings of the Sages, "Study is greater, for study leads to action" and "Torah study is equivalent to them all," do not contradict one another. Each is true in a different aspect.[334]

Further there: "The extensions a person draws through the aspect of Torah are to bring about ratzo, running forth, through contemplation of their beginning and their root … and 'if your heart runs, return to One' means through the performance of mitzvot, whose end is in their beginning, ascending and becoming included in their root … and through this the power of the fire above will be drawn and spread below … and reach the animal soul." In study, the person contemplates the root, and Torah awakens ratzo within him, yearning to ascend and draw close. In performing the mitzvot, he is in the aspect of shov, return: he

[334] Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, "כי תצא למלחמה," section 4, opening by explaining "This is 'G-d your G-d shall deliver him into your hand.' " The Sages' statements: Kiddushin 40b ("Study is greater, for study leads to action"); Mishnah, Pe'ah, chapter 1, mishnah 1 ("And Torah study is equivalent to them all").

returns to the world. The mitzvah, ascending to its root, precisely through this draws higher power below, as far as the animal soul.

In the same discourse, Torah both "descends," like water, and awakens ratzo upward; the mitzvot both ascend and become included in their root, and draw down below. To understand each side, we will clarify its root, what the person does, and what is drawn through his act.[335]

Put simply: the same act can be considered in terms of what a person elevates and what he draws down. In Torah study, the person rises through understanding, while at the same time Torah's wisdom is drawn into his intellect. In a mitzvah, he dedicates physical strength and an object to Divine service, while at the same time fulfilling a higher will within the world. These are aspects of the same process, not two disconnected actions.

So too in Kuntres Acharon 4: Torah study draws light, "through Torah study, in the inner dimension," while the mitzvot draw it into the outer dimension of the vessels. The contrast there is not between an action containing Divinity and one lacking it, but between two ways of drawing down. When the Kuntres contrasts practical mitzvot with something else, it is not Torah

[335] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1576–1578, in "A Rejected One-Direction Glossary": "Three columns are required: root, operation and result"; ibid., pp. 1573–1574, on the correction of the sharp division "Torah: descent; mitzvot: ascent."

study, but "intellectual fear and love," the love and awe of contemplation, which are "an elevation from below upward."

"And Likewise Their Study": Studying Halachah as Grasping the Mitzvah

In Kuntres Acharon 4, the discussion has a surprising continuation: "Furthermore, the superiority of practical mitzvot, and likewise their study, is indeed exceedingly great and lofty." That is, not only action, but also study of the practical mitzvot.

The reason is explained further: "When one grasps the etrog and waves it according to halachah, one actually grasps its vitality vested within it from Nukva of Atzilut." "But in studying the laws of the etrog, one apprehends and grasps the actual etrog and its mitzvah according to halachah, in the aspect of speech and thought." Someone studying the laws of the etrog grasps the mitzvah itself in his speech and thought. Thus it is said of studying the mitzvot that "it is accounted to him as though he had actually fulfilled them, as it is written: 'This is the Torah, etc.' " The conclusion is: "One must increase the study of all 613 and their actual fulfillment in thought, speech and action."[336]

[336] Kuntres Acharon, section 4, from the paragraph "Moreover, the superiority of practical mitzvot is truly exceedingly great and lofty" onward, and in the paragraphs on the etrog. "This is the Torah": Leviticus 7:37; Menachot 110a: "Whoever engages in Torah is as though he had offered a burnt offering, a meal offering, a sin offering and a guilt offering."

This shows that our passage does not diminish Torah. Precisely because the mitzvot are "the basis of the Torah and its root," study concerning them carries their superiority. Halachah is not external "knowledge about" the mitzvah; it is a grasp of the mitzvah itself through the faculties of intellect and speech.

Study That Leads a Person to Action

A person can study halachah with great depth and still ask: what changed in me when I rose and fulfilled it? The answer: study gave understanding, while action established G-d's will within an actual object, time and place. The Epistle asks us to see their connection and the superiority of the practical purpose.

This does not mean that understanding loses its worth. Without study, how would a person know what to do and how? The Alter Rebbe rules that "it is impossible to fulfill all the mitzvot according to their laws, conditions and details without studying thoroughly to know all the halachot." There is also a lofty union in the very apprehension of Torah, as we have seen. But when study is detached from readiness to fulfill, it lacks the purpose of which the Epistle speaks. This too is the Sages' intention in "Study is greater, for study leads to action": study is great, and what makes it great includes its leading to action.[337]

[337] Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchot Talmud Torah, chapter 4, section 2; Kiddushin 40b.

Study gives action clarity, precision and vitality: knowing what we were commanded, discerning the necessary detail and recognizing its worth. Action gives study a place in life, so that understanding does not remain inward inspiration alone. Depth of study can awaken a person's desire to draw close, and the mitzvah gives that desire a place in the hands, the mouth and the physical object. Each side illuminates the other, and the purpose is built through their joining in a person's Divine service.

This relationship also clarifies the purpose of this book. Study of vessels, lights and roots is not intended to distance a person from the simple act, but to show what the act carries. If the explanation succeeds, the reader can return to a familiar mitzvah and feel its connection to a profound process of creation, will and purpose. This is vitality arising from understanding, without requiring everyone first to apprehend every kabbalistic detail.

Greater in What Sense?

Whenever we ask which is greater, Torah or a mitzvah, we will first clarify: greater in what sense? At the root, in revelation, in apprehension, or in fulfilling the intention? A precise question opens an understanding that a simple ranking cannot provide. One can cherish the special depth of study while also understanding the precedence of the mitzvah from the perspective of

creation's purpose. There is no need to diminish Torah to elevate action. On the contrary: the more deeply Torah is studied, the more it clarifies what action is desired, how to fulfill it, and what will is drawn through it into the world.[338]

Returning to the Wording: A Continuous Reading

We can now read the entire passage continuously, hearing in each sentence what we have learned.

"And through this it will be understood": in light of what we learned, that the power of Ein Sof is revealed specifically at the end, in Malchut and the birth proceeding from it, this too is explained: "why the mitzvot are in Malchut, the he of the name Havayah, and Torah in Ze'ir Anpin, the vav of the name Havayah." In the order of revelation, the mitzvot are at the last level, the level of speech and command, while Torah is at the level of the emotional attributes above it.

"Although above, in Arich Anpin, the mitzvot are in Gulgulta, in the whiteness": although at their root the mitzvot are in the encompassing skull, in its whiteness, "which is the path in the parting of the hairs," the white path at the parting of the hairs, "that branches into the 613 paths of Torah in Ze'ir Anpin," dividing into the 613 ways of Torah in Ze'ir Anpin. "And the root of

[338] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1578–1579, in "Resolving the Issue: There Is No Single Scale for All the Virtues of Torah and Mitzvot."

Torah, which issues from supernal Chochmah, is in Mocha Stimaah of Arich Anpin, namely, the wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot": the root of Torah, by contrast, is in the concealed wisdom within the skull, the wisdom of the reasons. Above, will encompasses wisdom; below, wisdom stands above action.

"Except that it is like an inverted seal": nevertheless, there is no contradiction. In a seal, what projects becomes recessed in the impression; thus the higher order appears below in reverse.

"And 'their beginning is embedded in their end' is the power of Ein Sof, blessed be He, to create yesh me-ayin": the beginning is embedded in the end because at the end the highest power is revealed, the power of Ein Sof to bring something into being from nothing. "And not through cause and effect, in which the effect would be encompassed by its cause and nullified in its existence," like the sun's radiance within the sun, "rather, the yesh is to be a thing separate from Divinity," experiencing itself as standing on its own, although before Him it is accounted as naught.

"So that the Emanator, blessed be He, will be King over all the separate beings, through their fulfilling His commandments that He will command them": separateness is intended to make possible a people who accept kingship upon themselves by fulfilling the

command. “And the end of the deed is first in thought”: the act, which comes last, was first in intention.

“And therefore they said in the Jerusalem Talmud: ‘Does Rabbi Shimon not agree that one interrupts for the lulav?’ etc.”: even Rabbi Shimon, who does not interrupt study for the Shema, interrupts to make a sukkah and lulav. “ ‘And whoever studies without intending to act, it would have been better for him had his placenta turned over upon his face,’ etc.”: someone who disconnects study from action would have been better off not having been born.

“For the placenta was formed first from the drop, and it alone was the basis of the fetus until forty days, when the form of the fetus began”: the image is fitting, because the covering that seems external was formed first and was primary, and only afterward did the form begin.

“And likewise, the mitzvot are the basis of the Torah and its root, although the mitzvah is corporeal and Torah is wisdom; except that this is in the outer dimension and that in the inner dimension, as explained below”: the mitzvot are the basis and root, although the mitzvah is corporeal and Torah is wisdom. Their difference lies in the manner of emergence: the mitzvah is revealed outwardly, while Torah is absorbed within. A further explanation is promised “below.”

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

The chapter taught us to ask several separate questions about Torah and mitzvot, rather than seek a single ladder. Here are the answers, according to the passage and the parallels we have seen:

Question	The mitzvot	Torah	What determines the answer
Root	In Gulgulta, in the whiteness: the higher will	In Mocha Stimaah: "the wisdom of the reasons for the mitzvot"	At the root, the mitzvot come first
Place of revelation	In Malchut, the final he	In Ze'ir Anpin, the vav	In revelation, Torah is higher
Inner and outer dimensions	"In the outer dimension": revealed in a limb and an object	"In the inner dimension": absorbed in the intellect and united with it	The difference is in the manner of emergence, and is not by itself a ranking
Purpose	"The end of the deed is first in thought": separate beings were created for them	Teaches action and leads to it, while containing a special union of its own	The purpose is built through both together

What the passage does **not** teach:

- It does not teach that everything low is higher at its root than everything above it. The seal explains one particular pair.
- It does not teach that study is unnecessary, or merely preparation discarded when action arrives.

Halachah itself establishes that "study takes precedence over action everywhere," except for a mitzvah that cannot be performed by others and for mitzvot personally incumbent upon him, such as prayer.

- It does not teach that the separate created being is independent, or is not nullified before the Holy One, blessed be He. From below it is separate in its own experience; from above it is nullified.
- It does not teach that the Creator needs the mitzvot to fill a deficiency. This is a purpose freely chosen, not the satisfaction of a need.
- It does not teach biological details, nor construct a map of forty levels.
- Nor does it provide a table in which each of the 613 mitzvot has its own "path."

Three questions remain open:

- **Where is "below"?** The word "as explained below" promises an explanation of the distinction between outer and inner dimensions, but the body of the Epistle contains no such elaboration. Kuntres Acharon 4 and discourses in Likkutei Torah explain the subject, but there is no evidence that the Alter Rebbe intended them.
- **How far does the reversal extend?** The Epistle discusses the general relationship between Torah and mitzvot. Whether every detail reverses in the

same way, and at precisely which levels, is not explicit.

- **Precisely how?** The seal explains the reversal of order, and the purpose explains the intention. But precisely how the power of Ein Sof brings something into being from nothing, and what happens at every stage along the way, is not explained here.[339]

From Here to Union in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah

The passage concerning Torah and mitzvot stood in the middle of a single discussion. Before it came the birth of souls from Malchut; after it, the Epistle returns to the same line: "And behold, likewise, from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah there were created from ayin into yesh all the beings that are created, formed, and made."[340] We will study the meaning of "likewise" at the opening of the next chapter.

The next chapter will therefore open with a new question. Until now we have discussed Malchut of Atzilut, in which the power of Ein Sof is embedded. Now we ask: how does that same power act within

[339] Research Book, vol. II: on "as below," pp. 1576–1579 and 1591–1592; on the extent of the reversal, pp. 1592–1593 and 1600–1602; on the fact that the analogy "does not detail the entire mechanism of yesh me-ayin," pp. 1583–1584, and also pp. 1615–1616.

[340] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, the beginning of the next passage. See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1597–1598: the transition from the placenta to "Likewise" extends the same model: just as Malchut gives birth to a separate yesh, so the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah creates the creatures of those worlds.

worlds that already contain created vessels? What does union mean in such a place, and what is "within" this union that enables it to create from ayin into yesh? The Epistle will answer with two concepts: "the neshamah-light within them, which is Divinity," and "the radiance of the kav." The connection between higher and lower, which we saw in Malchut, in gestation and now in mitzvot, will be clarified within the worlds themselves, all the way to earth.

Studying the Chapter with Artificial Intelligence Tools

In this chapter there are four places where an artificial intelligence tool may answer more confidently than the evidence permits: an internal reference, "as explained below," whose destination has not been identified with certainty; the inverted-seal analogy, which is easily expanded into a general rule; a quotation from the Jerusalem Talmud that must be read in its source; and the placenta analogy, from which it is easy to transfer more to the analogue than the Epistle takes. The exercises examine them in this order. The first returns to the distinction between a parallel and evidence, explained in the "Further Study" part, in the section "Parallel and Evidence": a source explaining the same subject does not by itself prove where a word in the Epistle points. The fourth returns to a related

distinction: an analogy illustrating a claim does not prove it.

Exercise 1: Where Does "As Explained Below" Point?

What to ask. Supply the sentence "except that this is in the outer dimension and that in the inner dimension, as explained below," ask where it points, and request for each proposal the wording of the source and the evidence that this is the reference, not merely a parallel.

What to check. An artificial intelligence tool may confidently suggest Kuntres Acharon 4 because it explains the outer dimension of mitzvot and the inner dimension of Torah. Open the sources and check whether they contain evidence for the reference, or only similarity of content.

The limit of the conclusion. A good parallel explains the subject, but does not prove where the word was intended to point. If the evidence is lacking, record the suggestion as a suggestion, and the question remains open.[341]

[341] The parallels to "as below" were discussed above in " 'As Below': Where Does the Word Point?" On the distinction between a source's wording, an explanation and a hypothesis, and the fact that a tool's answer, even agreement among tools, is not evidence, see "Studying Further," in "How to Check That a Source Is Genuine" and "A Few More Habits of a Learner."

Exercise 2: The Limits of the Inverted Seal

What to ask. Request an explanation of the inverted-seal analogy, and ask what can be learned from it about Torah and mitzvot.

What to check. Check whether the explanation has expanded the analogy into a general rule: "Everything low is high at its root." According to the chapter, the seal explains a particular pair; it does not teach that every low thing precedes every high thing at its root.

The limit of the conclusion. The seal explains the reversal of order. Precisely how the power of Ein Sof brings something into being from nothing, and what happens at each stage along the way, is not explained here.

Exercise 3: Checking the Quotation from the Jerusalem Talmud

What to ask. Ask where in the Jerusalem Talmud it says "Does Rabbi Shimon not agree that one interrupts for the lulav?" and what its full wording is, including the continuation of "And whoever studies without intending to act."

What to check. Open the places indicated in the chapter's notes (in the Jerusalem Talmud's Shabbat and Berachot) and compare the wording with what the tool supplied. Finding a location and folio in an answer

is not checking; checking means reading the source itself.

The limit of the conclusion. The check confirms that the quotation is found in the Jerusalem Talmud. It does not prove which of the two places the Alter Rebbe intended, nor that everything said in that discussion is included in the Epistle's "etc."

Exercise 4: What Must Not Be Learned from the Placenta Analogy?

What to ask. Request an explanation of the placenta analogy and ask what it teaches about the relationship between mitzvot and Torah.

What to check. The trap is to transfer to the analogue what happens to the placenta after birth: it is discarded. An answer concluding that the mitzvot are a stage to be abandoned, or conversely that study is preparation to be discarded, has exceeded the analogy. The Epistle takes only the stage until forty days: priority and fundamental importance.

The limit of the conclusion. A correct explanation of the analogy does not prove the claim that the mitzvot are "the basis of the Torah and its root"; the claim rests on the seal and "their beginning is embedded in their end," while the analogy merely illustrates it. Nor does it teach anything about embryological research.

Part Three — The Vitality of the Worlds and the Vegetative Power in the Earth

Chapters 11–16

In the second part, we asked where the power to bring something into being from nothing comes from, to bring into existence something that previously existed in no form. We saw that this power belongs to the Emanator alone, acting in the vessels of Atzilut and through them. The third part continues the question downward: how does this power reach and give life to the worlds below Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, abbreviated BYA, and how is it ultimately revealed in the lowest thing we know, the earth that brings forth growth?

A brief reminder for those arriving here after a pause. Atzilut is the level in which the lights and vessels are united with Divinity; below it are the three worlds of BYA, in which created existence is already present and a Divine radiance gives it life. The kav is the drawing of the light of Ein Sof with order and measure (Chapter 7), while a “radiance” is a revelation drawn from the light, more contracted than it. For “light” and “vessel,” see Chapter 1 and the basic concepts in the Reading Map.

These familiar concepts return in this part, but within new relationships, so each time we must ask what they refer to. “Vessels” may designate vessels descended from Atzilut, or the vessels of the worlds of BYA themselves. “Neshamah” may designate a light of the sefirot, a sefirah’s source of vitality; the word must not lead us to infer that a human soul is meant. Thus, before any attempt to draw a single simple route of the light from above downward, we will clarify two questions in each sentence: who is the recipient, and what is the action?

In the second question, it is worth distinguishing three matters: what gives life to and sustains the created being, how it comes into being from ayin into yesh, and what an additional radiance adds within it. The terms “vitality,” “coming into being” and “additional revelation” help make the question in each place precise. This is not a division into three separate stages in time, and one must not infer that every addition of light is a new creation.

The course of this part in brief. Chapter 11 discusses the union within the worlds of BYA from which their created beings are created, and the Divine light acting within it. Chapter 12 brings a second description: the kav itself, reaching the end of the order, and three levels of radiance from it; the precise relationship between the two descriptions will be discussed there,

with room remaining for further study. Chapter 13 adds the light of Ein Sof that "encompasses," present everywhere equally, shining toward the kav through the vessels. These three chapters clarify what gives life to the worlds and brings them into being. In Chapters 14–15, attention turns to one tangible place, the earth: within earth there is a power to bring forth growth, and we will ask why such a power is revealed specifically in the lowest of the worlds. Chapter 16 moves from growth to sowing, planting and human service, connecting it with a dwelling in the lower realms. The overall conclusion concerning the superiority of practical mitzvot will be explained in Chapter 20, after the discussion of food and sacrifice.

When we reach the earth that brings forth growth, we will preserve two distinctions. The appearance of the power within earth does not turn earth into a creator, and the analogy from vegetation does not cancel the difference between spiritual and physical. We will seek the innovation specifically in the action of growth, and in the relationship between the end of the order and the source from which the power is drawn.

As in the previous parts, each chapter will close with exercises for working with artificial intelligence tools (for their structure, see "How a Chapter Is Structured" in the Reading Map). The exercises teach readers to check the tools' answers against the book and the

sources, and to continue exploring with a rabbi or study partner.

Chapter 11 | Union and Coming into Being in the Worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah

What We Already Know

Before continuing, let us recall the two preceding chapters, to which the Epistle itself returns with the words "And behold, likewise."

In Chapter 9 we encountered a description of supernal birth. The Epistle said there that the creation of souls is "to become an existent, separate thing on its own in the world of Beriah," and called it "birth," "like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which depends on Atika." From this it concluded: "It follows that this is a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light through gestation and birth." The language of birth, then, was not intended there to describe a natural process between two equivalent realities. It described the way the power of Ein Sof is revealed when something emerges to become separate yesh.

In Chapter 10 the Epistle paused and said, "And through this it will be understood." From that same

principle it explained the places of mitzvot and Torah, the "inverted seal" and the placenta analogy, ending with "as explained below." Now, with the word "and behold," it returns to the chain of coming into being itself. "Likewise" connects what follows with what was said about birth: just as in Atzilut there was a union through which the power of Ein Sof was revealed in the emergence of separate yesh, so too a union acts within the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, and within it all their created beings are created "from ayin into yesh."[342]

"And Behold, Likewise": The Chain Continues into Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah

There is also a difference here, and in it lies the chapter's question. In Chapter 9, the union was of ZON of Atzilut, Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva (see Chapter 4), and the result was souls, angels and palaces for the world of Beriah. Here the subject is the union of ZON of BYA themselves, that is, of the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, and the result is "all the beings that are created, formed, and made." Yet in Chapter 4 we learned that "created yesh" begins in these worlds: their vessels are already created. Hence the question: how can a system containing created vessels be a site of coming into being from ayin into yesh, when no

[342] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1687–1689, in "The Creation of BYA and the Piercing of the Parsa": the Epistle returns here to the idea of birth and applies it to the creation of all creatures in BYA. On birth from the union of ZON of Atzilut, see above, chapter 9.

created being possesses such an ability? The Epistle answers within the same sentence: the coming into being is “through the neshamah-light within them, which is Divinity from the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut of Atzilut”; within this neshamah-light shines the radiance of the kav, which pierced the parsa, the partition between Atzilut and Beriah, together with the vessels. Each of these terms will be explained in its place in the chapter.

Three questions will guide our reading of the sentence: where does the action take place, who participates in it, and from where does its power come? Coming into being occurs within BYA, but it does not yet follow that its power belongs to BYA themselves. We will clarify what a parsa is, what “pierced … with them” means, and in what respect “just as in Atzilut itself” is said. Later we will encounter a difficulty from Etz Chaim, the foundational work of the Arizal’s Kabbalah.

Two principles will accompany us. First: the Divine power being drawn is one thing, and the created aspects receiving it are another. This distinction makes it possible to understand an action occurring within a limited world yet depending on a root above its limitation. Second: do not turn an initial understanding into a sweeping rule. We will see, for example, that a partition between worlds does not prevent influence from passing through it, and that

mochin complete relative to one world do not automatically explain every birth.

The Language of Union in a World Without a Body

"Union" in kabbalistic language is a joining of imparting and receiving aspects, from which influence is drawn and a new result emerges. It does not mean a physical body in the higher worlds. Ze'ir Anpin, abbreviated ZA, is the name of the system of emotional attributes, the imparting aspect. Nukva is Malchut, the aspect that receives the influence and reveals it in action, as speech reveals thought. ZON is the two together. By contrast, Abba and Imma are designations of Chochmah and Binah. From them come the mochin: the intellectual powers illuminating and directing the emotional attributes, as a person's intellect directs his emotions.

An example from the life of the soul can help us remember these designations and their order. A teacher wishing to teach an idea begins with a flash of understanding, Chochmah; develops its details, Binah; is moved to wish to draw the student close and impart to him, the emotional attributes; and finally finds words and speaks, Malchut. Speech is Nukva in this sense: it receives from intellect and emotion and reveals them outwardly. Mochin are intellect as it illuminates emotion: a teacher who understands what a student

needs loves him differently from a teacher who does not understand. The example helps us remember the roles, and is limited: in a person's soul these are the faculties of one person, whereas in kabbalistic language each of these designations is a partzuf, a complete system of sefirot functioning as a single unit of Divine revelation. The analogy must not lead us to infer that there is a "person" thinking and speaking in the higher worlds.

Hence a principle for reading: "union" is not one word for one thing. In every place we must ask who unite, what is drawn through their joining, and what new thing results. Two neighboring partzufim do not always give birth to the same result, and not every union is a union that gives birth to souls. This distinction will serve us when we reach the difficulty from Etz Chaim.

W11-01
source words
1–8

And behold, likewise, from the union of ZUN of BYA there were created from ayin into yesh

"And behold" introduces a return to the Epistle's central line after the explanation of Torah and mitzvot. כמו"כ, "likewise," applies to BYA what was said of birth from the union of ZON of Atzilut. "From the union of ZON of BYA" means from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. These pairs belong to the worlds themselves; the sentence does not say merely that the worlds receive the result of a higher

union. “There were created” is the language of creation, and “something from nothing is called beriah in the Holy Tongue,” as we learned in Chapter 2. “From ayin into yesh” means that the created being is not a natural continuation of what preceded it, but a newly arisen yesh. The sentence identifies here the site and type of action; it will immediately explain its power.

“From Ayin into Yesh”: Even When the Order Is Union

The language of union and birth can mislead. In our world, parents and child belong to the same kind of reality, and the child comes from them in a natural chain. Do created beings here too emerge from ZON as an effect from its cause? The Epistle rules this out with two Hebrew words: “from ayin into yesh.” In Chapter 2 we learned the difference. In a chainlike descent of cause and effect, “the effect is encompassed by the cause and nullified in its existence before it.” In something from nothing, by contrast, the created being is a separate thing, and in Chapter 3 we learned that from the created beings’ perspective, “the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all.” In Chapter 7 we also learned who can create in this way: only the Emanator, “whose existence is from His own essence,” “and therefore He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing and from truly absolute nonbeing.”

Union therefore does not change the kind of coming into being. It describes the order and location: in which system and through which aspects the created beings come into being. It does not turn ZON of BYA into a natural cause from which yesh follows. Already in the birth of souls in Atzilut, the Epistle emphasized that birth is "like the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, which depends on Atika," an act depending on a level higher than the ordinary order, and that it is "a revelation of the actual Ein Sof light." Here too the language of union preserves the order, while "from ayin into yesh" preserves the source.

Three Verbs, Three Worlds

"All the beings that are created, formed, and made": the three verbs correspond to the names of the three worlds: "created" to Beriah, "formed" to Yetzirah, "made" to Asiyah. The names rest on the wording of the verse "Everyone called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed, whom I also made" (Isaiah 43:7), interpreted in kabbalistic literature as referring to the order of the worlds.

We should not think that only the physical objects around us are meant. In each of the worlds there are spiritual created beings, angels and levels of vitality; Asiyah also includes our physical world. The word "all" encompasses all these domains. Nor is there reason to

exclude souls and angels in advance from this "all." Precisely how they are included in it is a question we will ask again when we reach the difficulty from Etz Chaim.[343]

W11-02
source words
9–16

all the beings that are created, formed, and made, through the neshamah-light within them,

"All" means without excluding any domain of the three worlds. "The beings that are created, formed, and made" means those coming into being in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. "Through" means by means of; the word identifies the way the thing occurs and does not say that the means possesses the power. "The neshamah-light" is the level of light that is a neshamah to the sefirot of BYA; it is not the soul of a particular person. "Within them" means within ZON and the sefirot of these worlds. The pronoun alone does not define its scope precisely, and later the Epistle calls the same level "the neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA."[344]

[343] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1640–1643, in "The Unions of BYA: Distinguishing the Products Is Still Insufficient," and pp. 1672–1674: "all created beings" must not be interpreted so as to exclude souls and angels in advance.

[344] On "the light of the neshamah" and the pronouns שבתוכן [within them], בתוכה [within it], עמהם [with them] and בהם [in them], see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1630–1633, in "What Is 'the Neshamah' in This Passage, and to What Do the Pronouns Refer?"; on the alternation between "שהיא אלקות" and "שהוא אלקות" [which is Divinity, feminine and masculine], see ibid., pp. 1630–1632 and 1635–1637; for the distinction between the status of the radiance and the status of the recipient, see ibid., pp. 1618–1619, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification." On the two meanings of "vessels," see above, chapters 4 and 7.

What "The Neshamah-Light" Is, and What It Is Not

The word neshamah immediately reminds us of the human soul, but in Chapter 4 we learned another use of it. The Epistle wrote there: "Now, the beginning and first emergence of created yesh are the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and also the lights of nefesh and ruach; they were created from the aspect of neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity, namely the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." In each sefirah of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah there are therefore two sides. On one hand, vessels and lights of nefesh and ruach, belonging to the world itself and counted as "the beginning of created yesh." On the other, the aspect of neshamah giving it life, which is Divinity: the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended and became its source of vitality. Neshamah here denotes a role, a Divine source in relation to the system it gives life to, not a particular person. Etz Chaim too describes a similar structure: vessels of Atzilut descending into the three lower worlds become there a "neshamah" for those worlds' lights, while their ruach and nefesh are garments for it.[345]

[345] Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10: "The outer vessels of Atzilut themselves, when they descend to the three lower worlds of BYA, actually become the neshamah of the essence of those lights of the worlds themselves, while the ruach and nefesh of those worlds are garments for the neshamah." The subject there is the "outer" vessels of Atzilut, and the author of Etz Chaim is uncertain whether the inner vessels also descend, tending to the view that only the outer ones do; in the Epistle the subject is the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. The structure is shared, but the details must not be equated without examination.

This is the key to our sentence. "The neshamah-light within them, which is Divinity" attributes Divinity to the aspect of neshamah, not to the local vessels within which it dwells. These vessels remain created even when Divine light shines within them. A Divine radiance becoming vested within a vessel does not turn the created vessel itself into Divinity.

In another epistle too, the Alter Rebbe writes in a similar structure. In Iggeret HaKodesh 15 he says, "Even the nefesh of Asiyah comes from the union of ZON of Asiyah and their mochin," adding that these mochin "are the very back-aspects of the vessels of ZON of Atzilut, which are actual Divinity." The context there is the human soul, and all the details must not be transferred from there to our Epistle. But the general line is shared: within the system of a lower world, an inner level acts whose source is in the vessels of Atzilut, and which is Divinity.[346]

Where does the power come from? Here we must be precise, as we learned in Chapter 7. The power to create something from nothing belongs to the Emanator alone: "And therefore He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing." The light of Ein Sof, "for the light is of the nature of the luminary," "became enclothed … in the vessels of the

[346] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 15, at the opening: "Even a nefesh of Asiyah comes from the union of ZON of Asiyah and their mochin"; these mochin "are the back-aspects of the vessels of ZON of Atzilut, which are actual Divinity."

ten sefirot of Atzilut, and unites within them in the ultimate unity, to the point that He and His vessels are one, to create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude, and particularly through their enclothement in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah." The power is the Emanator's power, acting "in them and through them," within the vessels and by their agency. Our sentence shows how this occurs within BYA: "through the neshamah-light," which is those very vessels of Malchut of Atzilut vested in these worlds. This is not a power handed over to the created vessels, nor does the neshamah-light become an independent source. It is the way the one power acts within the lower world.

Let us summarize the chain in three steps, since each was learned in a different chapter. The first step, from Chapter 7: the power to create something from nothing belongs to the Emanator alone. The second, also from Chapter 7: this power acts in and through the vessels of Atzilut, because the light of Ein Sof unites with them. The third, from Chapter 4 and our sentence: the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut descended into BYA and became the neshamah-light of the sefirot there. Hence the conclusion: when the created beings of BYA come into being "through the neshamah-light," they come into being by the Emanator's power, acting through those vessels that descended. Someone who skips the

second step may think the power "passed" to BYA and became their own. Someone who skips the third will not understand why the neshamah-light specifically is the means.

We can cautiously use the example of a window through which light passes. The window's shape determines how the light will enter the room, but the glass has not become the sun. The analogy helps separate the recipient from the source of the action. Its limits have two aspects. The window and sun are both created and distant from one another, whereas in the analogue the light unites with the vessels of Atzilut "in the ultimate unity." Nor does the analogy explain how something comes into being from nothing. It teaches only that action within a vessel is possible without the vessel being the source.

W11-03
source words
17–26

which is Divinity from the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut of Atzilut; and within it, too, is the radiance of the kav

"Which is," שהיא, is feminine, referring to neshamah in "the neshamah-light." "Divinity" states the status of the neshamah, not of the local vessels. "From the vessels" identifies the source from which it comes. "Of the ten sefirot of Malchut of Atzilut": Malchut too, like every sefirah, includes ten, and Chapter 4 mentioned "the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." "And … too" adds another layer within the same structure. "Within

it,” בתוכה, is feminine; straightforwardly, within the neshamah. “The radiance of the kav” is a radiance drawn from the kav, not the kav itself.

A small grammatical note, so that we do not build too much upon it. Elsewhere in the Epistle the same level is described as “which is Divinity,” שהוא אלקות, in the masculine: in Chapter 4, “from the aspect of neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity,” and in Chapter 12, “in the neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity.” The grammatical gender may shift according to the word on which the sentence rests, אור (“light”) or נשמה (“neshamah”); but in Chapter 4, שהוא also appears without the word “light.” Both forms are preserved, and no kabbalistic distinction should be inferred from the change of gender alone.[344]

“And Within It, Too, Is the Radiance of the Kav”: What Does “Too” Add?

If the neshamah-light is already Divinity, what does “and within it, too, is the radiance of the kav” add? The Epistle identifies two different things here. The first is the nature of the neshamah in terms of its source: it comes from the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, and is

[344] On “the light of the neshamah” and the pronouns שבתוכן [within them], בתוכה [within it], עמהם [with them] and בהם [in them], see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1630–1633, in “What Is ‘the Neshamah’ in This Passage, and to What Do the Pronouns Refer?”; on the alternation between “שהיא אלקות” and “שהוא אלקות” [which is Divinity, feminine and masculine], see ibid., pp. 1630–1632 and 1635–1637; for the distinction between the status of the radiance and the status of the recipient, see ibid., pp. 1618–1619, in “Mapping the Question and Its Clarification.” On the two meanings of “vessels,” see above, chapters 4 and 7.

therefore Divinity, retaining its connection to Atzilut. The second is what shines within it: the radiance of the kav. "Too" adds a description within the same structure. It does not set two creative powers side by side.[347]

Let us recall what the kav is. In Chapter 7 we learned that the kav is the light of Ein Sof drawn with order and measure, like a thin line, and that it is vested in the vessels of Atzilut: "the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav from the light of Ein Sof is enclothed." "The radiance of the kav" is a radiance drawn from it, a revelation more contracted than the kav itself. The Epistle consistently preserves the distinction: here it writes "the radiance of the kav," and only in the following sentence, which we will study in Chapter 12, will "the kav itself" appear.

An example can make the distinction more accessible. The sun itself is one thing, and its radiance entering a room is another: the radiance comes from the sun and reveals it, but is not the sun in its full intensity. Similarly, "the radiance of the kav" is drawn from the kav and reveals it in a more contracted revelation. The example's limit: the sun and its radiance are two physical things situated in different places, whereas there is no spatial distance between the kav and its radiance. Nor does the example decide whether the

[347] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1632–1633, in "If the Neshamah Is Divinity, What Does 'Also within It Is the Radiance of the Kav' Add?"

radiance is a "part" of the kav. It teaches only that there is a difference in the measure of revelation, and that the radiance depends on its source.

Why are the vessels of Atzilut called "Divinity" at all? The answer is the foundation of the entire Epistle: "He and His vessels are one," because the light of Ein Sof unites with them in the ultimate unity. We therefore must neither set the vessels up as an independent source nor erase them as though only the light acts. The syntax of our sentence does not decide whether the vessels' unity with the light of Ein Sof depends specifically on the kav, or in what manner. This is a profound question, and remains for further study.

W11-04
source words
27–32

of the light of Ein Sof, vested in Atzilut as far as the parsa.

"Of the light of Ein Sof": the kav is the light of Ein Sof in its ordered extension. "Vested," המלובש, is masculine. Straightforwardly it refers to "the kav" or "the light of Ein Sof." But in the next sentence we will see that verbs referring to "the radiance of the kav" also appear in the masculine, so grammar alone does not decide whether the vesting "as far as the parsa" is said of the kav or its radiance. "In Atzilut" means in Atzilut's sefirot and vessels. "As far as the parsa" means as far as the boundary between Atzilut and Beriah. The boundary is stated here concerning vesting in Atzilut. The sentence does not say what is drawn beyond that boundary. The

next sentence will say this, and in another way so will the sentence in Chapter 12 about "the kav itself."

As far as the parsa, the subject is vesting in Atzilut; what passes through it will be described in the next sentence. The shifts between masculine and feminine do not by themselves decide the interpretation. For that we must examine the course of the idea and the parallel passages.

What Is a Parsa?

Parsa means a partition, a screen spread between levels. In Etz Chaim, the boundary between Atzilut and Beriah is also called "a screen and curtain."[348] In our Epistle the word parsa appears twice, in two neighboring sentences: "as far as the parsa" and "pierced the parsa with them."

The parsa has a positive role: it marks the place where the manner of revelation changes. Above it, in Atzilut, the lights and vessels "are all Divinity," in the wording of the Epistle's opening. Below it, "unlike in BYA," begins the domain of "created yesh," studied in Chapter 4. The parsa is the separation that makes possible a lower, defined existence: limited created beings that, in knowledge from below upward, are "an entirely separate thing" (Chapter 3).

[348] Etz Chaim, Gate 47, chapter 3: "Her feet touch the screen and curtain between Beriah and Atzilut." The word parsa itself appears twice in our Epistle, in the two adjacent sentences. See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1690–1692 and 1709–1711.

It is also worth stating how not to picture it. The parsa is not a material wall standing in a particular location, and the piercing about to be described is not a hole opened in a wall. Above all, the worlds beneath it are not disconnected from the Creator: everything below the parsa lives and comes into being through Divine power, as the Epistle itself will detail in the following chapters. What the parsa changes is the way the light is revealed and received. The Emanator's action continues below it as well.

An analogy of a boundary between countries may help. A king's emissary crosses the border and enters another country, carrying the king's seal. In the foreign country, the seal in his hand is truly the king's seal, as in the capital; but the country has not become the capital, and its inhabitants do not see the king's face. The analogy orders our questions: who passes through, with what, and precisely where is "as in Atzilut" said? Its limits are clear. In the analogue there is no space and no border posts. The emissary and the seal possess no authority of their own; all their validity comes from the king. Nor does the analogy explain how something comes into being from nothing.

W11-05
source words
33–42

And the radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut pierced the parsa with them,

“And the radiance of the kav”: the subject is the radiance, not the kav itself. “That shone” means that previously shone in Atzilut. “In the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut” means in those same vessels of Malchut of Atzilut mentioned a moment ago as the source of the neshamah-light. “Pierced” means passed through the partition. “The parsa” is the boundary between Atzilut and BYA. “With them” means together with those vessels. The verbs היה מאיר, “shone,” בקע, “pierced,” and later ומאיר, “and shines,” are masculine. They may agree with the adjacent noun “kav,” as happens in Hebrew in a construct phrase, such as קול דמי אחיך צעקים, “the voice of your brother’s blood cries out” (Genesis 4:10). This syntax does not shift the subject from “the radiance of the kav” to “the kav itself.”

The Radiance of the Kav Passes Through, Together with the Vessels

We have already seen that the sentence’s subject is “the radiance of the kav,” not the kav itself. It did not pass through alone: it pierced “with them,” with the vessels of Malchut. More than that: even before the piercing, the radiance is called “the radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels.” We therefore must not say that the parsa turned the kav into a radiance. A radiance shines in Atzilut too, in the vessels of Malchut; the

parsa is described here as the place where this radiance passes together with its vessels.[349][350]

"With them" connects the sentence to earlier chapters. In Chapter 4 we learned that the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut become a neshamah for the sefirot of BYA, and Chapter 7 said, "and particularly through their enclothement in BYA." Now it becomes clear what remained within them when they descended: the radiance of the kav that shone within them in Atzilut descended with them. The presence of the radiance of the kav in BYA is thus connected with these vessels. It is not described here as light spreading everywhere in BYA in the same manner.

The Rebbe Rashab, Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn, the fifth Rebbe in the Chabad dynasty, discusses this matter in Hemshech 5672, a lengthy series of Chassidic discourses named for the year in which it began. He mentions there as a known matter "that the radiance of the kav ends in Malchut of Atzilut and does not shine in BYA."[351][352] According to the kav's ordinary order, its radiance ends at the end of Atzilut.

[349] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1683–1684 and 1686–1687, in "The Parsa and 'Just as in Atzilut Itself,' " and pp. 1727–1728, in "Is It the Parsa That Turns the Kav into a Radiance?"

[350] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1684–1686, in "The Kav through the Parsa: Corrections from Hemshech 5672."

[351] Hemshech 5672, vol. II (Kehot 5763): discourse beginning "בראשית ברא," pp. תרצז–תרצח [697–698]; discourse beginning "ויהי ביום השמיני," pp. תתקמט–תתקנ [949–950]; discourse beginning "אדם כי יהי' בעור," p. תתקנה [955]: the radiance in Malchut, passage through the parsa, and the additional revelation drawn down through Divine service.

[352] Hemshech 5672, p. תרצז [697]: "As is known, the radiance of the kav ends in Malchut of Atzilut and does not shine in BYA." See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1757–1760.

Our sentence therefore contains an innovation: the radiance of the kav is present in BYA because it pierced the parsa together with the vessels in which it shone. This is a later explanation, helping us understand why the Epistle first writes "as far as the parsa," then immediately "pierced the parsa with them." Put simply: without the vessels that descended, the radiance of the kav would not have reached BYA; through the vessels it is present there.

We also need to know what the sentence does not resolve. The piercing explains how the radiance of the kav is present in BYA, within the vessels that descended. It does not by itself explain the entire mystery of coming into being from ayin into yesh: the Epistle has already attributed creative power to the Emanator alone, and in Chapter 13 it will add that the encompassing light of Ein Sof too shines toward the kav through the vessels and gives them power to create. Nor does the piercing teach the measure of Divine light in the souls that emerged and became separated from the vessels, of which we learned in Chapter 7 that they "are not actual Divinity, capable of creating something from nothing." One word cannot bear all these questions.

W11-06
source words
43–48

and shines in them in BYA just as in Atzilut itself.

“And shines” is present tense, describing something ongoing. “In them” means in the vessels that pierced together with the radiance, the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended and became vested. “In BYA” is their present location. “Just as in Atzilut” compares the radiance of the kav within these vessels with its shining within them in Atzilut. “Itself,” mamash, reinforces the resemblance: this is not a radiance in name alone. In precisely what respect the resemblance is stated will be clarified immediately below. It must not be read as saying that BYA became Atzilut, or that all the created beings within them receive the same revelation.

A Map of the Pronouns in the Sentence

The table gathers the pronouns in the sentence and their meanings.[344]

Word	What it refers to	What must not be read into it
“Within them,” שבתוכן	Within ZON and the sefirot of BYA	That the pronoun alone defines its full scope
“Which is Divinity,” שהיא אלקות	Neshamah in the expression “neshamah-light”	That the local vessels are Divinity

[344] On “the light of the neshamah” and the pronouns שבתוכן [within them], בתוכה [within it], עמהם [with them] and בהם [in them], see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1630–1633, in “What Is ‘the Neshamah’ in This Passage, and to What Do the Pronouns Refer?”; on the alternation between “שהיא אלקות” and “שהוא אלקות” [which is Divinity, feminine and masculine], see ibid., pp. 1630–1632 and 1635–1637; for the distinction between the status of the radiance and the status of the recipient, see ibid., pp. 1618–1619, in “Mapping the Question and Its Clarification.” On the two meanings of “vessels,” see above, chapters 4 and 7.

Word	What it refers to	What must not be read into it
"And within it, too," וגם בתוכה	Within the neshamah	A second creative power alongside the neshamah
"Vested … as far as the parsa," המלובש… עד הפרסא	Straightforwardly, the kav, or the light of Ein Sof, vested in Atzilut; grammar alone does not exclude "the radiance of the kav"	A statement about the kav's entire extension (see Chapter 12)
"With them," עמהם	The vessels of Malchut of Atzilut	The whole reality of BYA
"In them," בהם	Those same vessels when they are in BYA	The worlds of BYA themselves or their created beings

"Just as in Atzilut Itself": In What Respect Are They Similar?

The word mamash may sound as though there is no longer any difference between BYA and Atzilut. To see that this is not so, we will distinguish three comparisons. Put simply, they are three questions: do the worlds themselves receive this revelation? Is Malchut equivalent to the rest of Atzilut? Does the same radiance, in the same vessels, shine after the passage as before it? Each answers a different question, and a source resolving one does not necessarily resolve another.[353]

[353] On the three comparisons and the scope of mamash, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1683–1684, 1728–1729 and 1741–1742; on "What Is Preserved in the Word Mamash," see ibid., pp. 1684–1687. On Hemshech 5672, pp. תרצז–תרצח [697–698] (the two reasons, and the vessels' need for light within them in order to be light and neshamah for BYA), see ibid., pp. 1757–1760; on p. תתקנ [950] (the vessels as they are in Atzilut and as they have descended to BYA, the abundance of vessels

The first comparison is between what shines within the vessels and the worlds of BYA themselves. Here "in them" decides: the radiance of the kav shines within the vessels that pierced with it. The Rebbe Rashab, in Hemshech 5666, explicitly interprets it this way: "That is, in the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, but not in BYA themselves," and elsewhere in the same series, "but not in the created beings of BYA." The Rebbe cites this qualification in a note to one of his discourses.[354] The worlds themselves and their created beings do not receive this revelation as it is in Atzilut.

The second comparison is between the radiance of the kav in Malchut and the totality of Atzilut's lights. The Rashab first distinguishes the radiance of the kav in Malchut's vessels from the lights of Atzilut in general. This distinction concerns Malchut's own level and may already exist within Atzilut before any piercing. It therefore does not by itself prove a change caused in the passage.

The third comparison is the most subtle: the same radiance, in the same vessels, before and after the piercing. Of this too the Rashab writes, using the

and paucity of light), see ibid., pp. 1646–1650. In note 38 to the discourse beginning "וירד הוי' על הר סיני," 5727, the Rebbe refers to Hemshech 5672, p. תתקנ [950].

[354] Hemshech 5666, p. כא [21]: "The fact that the kav pierced the parsa with them and shines in them in BYA as in Atzilut, etc., refers to the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, but not to BYA themselves" ("the kav pierced" is the commentator's abbreviated wording; the Epistle reads "the radiance of the kav… pierced"); p. תכד [424]: "It may be said that this means that it shines in the vessels of Malchut… but not in the created beings of BYA." The Rebbe cites Hemshech 5666 in note 34 to the discourse beginning "וחזקת והיית לאיש," 5728. See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1638–1640, 1727–1728 and 1742–1744.

expression “it may be said”: “From this it is understood that the light as it is in Atzilut is certainly not comparable to it as it has pierced the parsa.” Elsewhere in Hemshech 5672, he discusses the “difference in the vessels as they are in Atzilut and as they have descended into BYA,” writing that when the vessels of Atzilut are vested in the sefirot of BYA, “the lights of Atzilut do not shine within them in the manner in which they shone in Atzilut.”[351][350] There is thus a change even in the light within those same vessels themselves.

These distinctions show that mamash must not be interpreted as identity in every respect: not every revelation in Malchut is like revelation in the rest of Atzilut, and the worlds and their created beings do not receive the radiance as it is in Atzilut. Even the manner of its shining in those same vessels after the piercing remains open to clarification.

Nevertheless, this must not lead to the conclusion that the radiance has lost its Divine character or its part in creation. The Epistle itself continues to attribute coming into being to this light: the created beings were created “through the neshamah-light … and within it, too, is the radiance of the kav.” The Rashab too, in the

[351]Hemshech 5672, vol. II (Kehot 5763): discourse beginning “בראשית ברא,” pp. תרצז–תרצח [697–698]; discourse beginning “ויהי ביום השמיני,” pp. תתקמט–תתקנ [949–950]; discourse beginning “אדם כי יהי׳ בעור,” p. תתקנה [955]: the radiance in Malchut, passage through the parsa, and the additional revelation drawn down through Divine service.

[350]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1684–1686, in “The Kav through the Parsa: Corrections from Hemshech 5672.”

same discussion, explains that the vessels need light within them to be light and neshamah for BYA, and that vessels without lights resemble a body without a soul. His continuation concerning the vessels that descended discusses the multiplicity of vessels and the diminution of light, to the point of making possible a source for the coming into being of yesh, and emphasizes that coming into being is from the light through the vessels. The diminution described in the parallels therefore does not cancel the attribution of coming into being to the light within the vessels.[351][353]

What, then, does mamash add? It may be read this way: mamash emphasizes that this is not a radiance in name alone, or a distant trace of Atzilut. The radiance within the vessels is truly Divine, shining within them in BYA as it shone within them in Atzilut: as light united with the vessels in and through which the Emanator creates. Precisely what is included in the resemblance still needs clarification: preservation of Divine status, the manner of unity, the measure of revelation, or several

[351] Hemshech 5672, vol. II (Kehot 5763): discourse beginning "בראשית ברא," pp. תרצז–תרצח [697–698]; discourse beginning "ויהי ביום השמיני," pp. תתקמט–תתקנ [949–950]; discourse beginning "אדם כי יהי' בעור," p. תתקנה [955]: the radiance in Malchut, passage through the parsa, and the additional revelation drawn down through Divine service.

[353] On the three comparisons and the scope of mamash, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1683–1684, 1728–1729 and 1741–1742; on "What Is Preserved in the Word Mamash," see ibid., pp. 1684–1687. On Hemshech 5672, pp. תרצז–תרצח [697–698] (the two reasons, and the vessels' need for light within them in order to be light and neshamah for BYA), see ibid., pp. 1757–1760; on p. תתקנ [950] (the vessels as they are in Atzilut and as they have descended to BYA, the abundance of vessels and paucity of light), see ibid., pp. 1646–1650. In note 38 to the discourse beginning "וירד הוי' על הר סיני," 5727, the Rebbe refers to Hemshech 5672, p. תתקנ [950].

of these together. What is being compared is clear, but the comparison's full meaning requires further study.

Let us return to the analogy of the emissary. The seal in his hand is truly the king's seal, even in the foreign country. But "truly" applies to the seal, not the country; the country has not become the capital. Nevertheless, in the foreign country the seal is not seen in all its splendor as at the king's court. Likewise, "just as in Atzilut itself" is said of the radiance in the vessels, not of the worlds, and does not exclude a change in the measure of revelation. Here too the analogy's limit is clear: in a human seal there are two things, the king and his symbol; in the analogue the radiance is not an existence standing independently alongside the Emanator.

Less Revelation Does Not Mean Less Power

From this comes a distinction important to the entire chapter: the ability to create is not measured by the amount of light the created being experiences. In Chapter 3 we already learned that in knowledge from below upward, created yesh is an entirely separate thing, "because the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all." There can be great concealment, and specifically within it limited yesh comes into being. Diminished revelation makes the recipient's mode of

existence possible. It does not establish another creator or grant the world complete independence.

An example: a father explains a profound matter to a small child in a few simple words. The child hears little, but the brief explanation arose from the father's full understanding; without it, he could not have formulated it in that way. The smallness of what appears does not indicate smallness of the power behind it. The example's limit: father and child are two human beings, and the child's existence does not depend on the explanation. Nor does the analogy explain why there is concealment in the worlds. It teaches only that the measure of the acting power must not be inferred from the apparent measure of revelation.

Another question concerns the revelation a person adds through Divine service. In Chapter 10 we learned that the purpose of coming into being is "so that the Emanator, blessed be He, will be King over all the separate beings, through their fulfilling His commandments." Human Divine service adds Divine revelation in the world. It does not give the world its very existence, which comes from the power bringing it into being. Here too the question "How much is revealed?" differs from "Who brings into being?"

A Local Union, and a Power Whose Source Is Above

We can now arrange the whole sentence according to five questions: where does the action occur, who participates, what is done, what is produced, and through which power? The following table shows what answers each question and what must not be inferred from the answer. For the last question, we should remember the entire chain: the power is that of the Emanator alone, acting in the vessels united with His light; in BYA it acts "through the neshamah-light," the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended there, and also the radiance of the kav within it.

Question	What the sentence says	What must not be inferred from it
Where?	In Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah	That the action occurs only in Atzilut
Who unite?	ZON of these worlds	That the union of ZON of Atzilut, or the union of Abba and Imma, is the same union
What is done?	"There were created from ayin into yesh"	That this is a chainlike descent of cause and effect
What is produced?	"All the beings that are created, formed, and made"	That only physicality is meant, or that souls and angels are excluded in advance
Through which power?	The Emanator's power, "through the neshamah-light" and the radiance of the kav within it	That the local vessels create by their own power

The two statements are therefore not inherently contradictory: the union is local, while the creative power is not an independent local power. Precisely this combination is the subject of the explanation. If we immediately transferred every action to Atzilut, we would lose what the Epistle says about BYA. If we gave the created vessels a creative power of their own, we would lose what we have learned since the Epistle's opening about the source of the ability to bring something into being from nothing.

The description requires a further distinction: there is influence coming into a system, and there is action by the system's own participants. Etz Chaim (Gate 47, Chapter 5) describes a union of ZON of Atzilut from which "vitality and influence [are drawn] to Yetzirah and Asiyah alone, for their own needs and not for birth"; it also describes a union of Abba and Imma of Yetzirah, giving "influence and vitality to ZON of Yetzirah." Neither of these unions is a union of ZON of Yetzirah or Asiyah themselves. A source establishing influence into a system does not establish that its local participants unite; a source concerning Abba and Imma of a particular world is not a source concerning ZON of that world.[355]

[355] Etz Chaim, Gate 47, chapter 5. See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1623–1625, 1642–1643 and 1664–1665, in the discussions distinguishing a union that nourishes a system from a union of its participants, and distinguishing Abba and Imma from ZON; on the question of why the sentence mentions ZON rather than Abba and Imma, see ibid., pp. 1627–1632.

An example will clarify the distinction. Water piped into a garden from a neighboring city proves that the garden receives water; it does not prove that the garden has its own spring. Likewise, a source describing influence coming into Yetzirah and Asiyah does not prove that ZON of those worlds themselves unite. The example's limit: in the garden there are two separate sources of water, whereas in the analogue all influence ultimately comes from the Emanator. The question is not where the power comes from, but which aspects are described as participating in the union.

Why does the sentence mention specifically ZON rather than Abba and Imma? It identifies the union from which the created beings come into being at the stage closest to them. It is not a list of all the higher sources nourishing this union. Abba and Imma were already mentioned in Chapter 9 as the source of the mochin in the drop, "and in every union it is drawn to Abba and Imma from Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin, and from higher and higher, up to Ein Sof." The sentence's silence about them is not a denial of their action.

Evidence of Union in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, and the Difficulty from Etz Chaim

Throughout the comparison, we will keep before us the Epistle's statement about union in BYA, examining how far other sources explain it and at what point a

difficulty remains. On a first reading, one may return to this discussion later and move to the summary at the chapter's end, which also preserves the unresolved difficulty.

Etz Chaim contains statements that seem to contradict the Epistle. To understand the difficulty, we will examine what each source says: first the evidence for union in BYA, then the statements denying it, and finally the distinctions that may bring them closer together.

The first evidence is our sentence itself, attributing the coming into being of all created beings to the union of ZON of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. The second is the Alter Rebbe's wording in Iggeret HaKodesh 15: "Even the nefesh of Asiyah comes from the union of ZON of Asiyah and their mochin."[346] This explicitly concerns Asiyah, a local union, and mochin. The third is from the writings of the Arizal. In Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10, a union of vessels is described in each world: from the union of the outer vessels emerge the souls of the angels of that world, and from the union of the inner vessels, aspects of human souls. The sparks from Beriah are called there "the neshamot of the righteous," those from Yetzirah "ruchin," and those

[346] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 15, at the opening: "Even a nefesh of Asiyah comes from the union of ZON of Asiyah and their mochin"; these mochin "are the back-aspects of the vessels of ZON of Atzilut, which are actual Divinity."

from Asiyah "nefashot."[356] Shaar HaPesukim says of ten levels of unions that they exist "in each and every partzuf, in each world of the four worlds of ABYA."[357]

Later Chassidic explanations also read our sentence this way. They attest to how the Epistle was read, but are not independent evidence against Etz Chaim. The Rebbe Rashab cites the Epistle as saying that all created beings come into being from the union of ZON of BYA through the neshamah-light; Lessons in Tanya explicitly explains a union of Ze'ir Anpin and Malchut among the sefirot of BYA, from which the created beings of their worlds come into being.[358]

Set against all these are the statements of Etz Chaim in Gate 47, which distinguish between the worlds.[359]

[356] Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10: unions and birth in each of the worlds. "Angels exist in each and every world"; angels' souls come from the union of the outer vessels: "Angels are made from kisses, and human beings from complete union, for kisses are the cleaving of the outer vessels"; the angel's neshamah "vests itself within the ruach, nefesh and vessels of the angels themselves." From the union of the inner vessels: the sparks "that come from the world of Beriah are called the neshamot of the righteous; the sparks in Yetzirah are called ruchin, and the sparks of Asiyah are called nefashot." There also: "The angels themselves are not the outer dimension of the worlds; likewise, the souls themselves are not the inner dimension of the worlds."

[357] Shaar HaPesukim, Genesis, section 21 (Parashat Vayera, in the discourse on "Sarah conceived and gave birth"). See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1648–1653.

[358] Hemshech 5672, p. תתקנה [955]; Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya on Iggeret HaKodesh 20, explaining the passage "Likewise, from the union of ZON of BYA." Both are later explanations of the Epistle, not independent sources reconciling Etz Chaim. See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1644–1646, 1651–1653 and 1754–1756.

[359] Etz Chaim, Gate 47, chapters 3–5: mochin and the conditions for union. Chapter 3: "ZON have no complete union to give birth to souls except through the mochin given to them by Abba and Imma"; Beriah "has the capacity to have complete mochin in order to give birth to actual souls," but "Beriah has power only to bring forth the souls of the angels of Yetzirah"; "Yetzirah and Asiyah, which the light of the first three [sefirot] does not reach, have no mochin and likewise no ability to give birth to souls." Chapter 4: "Therefore ZON of Yetzirah have no birth, all the more so in Asiyah." Chapter 5: "Its ZON have no union because they have no mochin." Comparison of the details with other passages requires further study.

In Beriah, it says there, the light of the upper three sefirot (GAR) shines, "and therefore the light of Beriah too … has the ability to possess complete mochin in order to give birth to actual souls." But this light reaches Beriah only through a screen, and therefore "Beriah has the power only to bring forth the souls of the angels of Yetzirah." Beriah thus has local birth, but its products are limited.

In Yetzirah the situation differs: "Yetzirah and Asiyah, which the light of GAR does not reach, have no mochin and also lack the ability to give birth to souls." In the neighboring chapter: "Therefore ZON of Yetzirah have no birth, and all the more so in Asiyah." Further, in the context of the six weekdays: "In its ZON there is no union, because they have no mochin."

And in Asiyah, "all the more so in Asiyah": a fortiori, there is no generation there. Yet it is precisely of Asiyah that the Alter Rebbe writes, "And even a nefesh of Asiyah comes from the union of ZON of Asiyah and their mochin."

Here lies the difficulty: our sentence attributes the coming into being of all created beings to the union of ZON in all three worlds; Etz Chaim denies mochin and generation in Yetzirah and Asiyah; and the Alter Rebbe himself speaks of mochin and union in Asiyah. Both

descriptions are explicit in the sources, and we must understand how they fit together.[360]

Care with quotations is needed in this discussion too. A sentence beginning "And every soul, even in the lowest world of Asiyah" has sometimes been presented as though it belonged to the text of Epistle 15. It is not the Alter Rebbe's wording, but that of a later commentary, Tanya LaAm. One may learn from such a commentary, but it must not be cited as evidence of the author's wording.[360]

Several distinctions may help bring the sources closer together, and each has a basis. We shall present them one by one and say what each seeks to explain.

The first distinction concerns the kind of result: the existence and vitality of a world, additional light, and the generation of new souls are not the same thing. Etz Chaim itself distinguishes a union "to draw down vitality and influence" from a union "for the purpose of generation." On this distinction, there may be union in Yetzirah and Asiyah without generation in the sense denied by Gate 47.

The second distinction is between inward and outward dimensions: Etz Chaim distinguishes the union of the

[360]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1619–1622, in "Local Union in BYA: Positive Evidence and a Remaining Difficulty." For a precise distinction between the Alter Rebbe's wording and a later explanation, see ibid., pp. 1622–1623.

[360]See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1619–1622, in "Local Union in BYA: Positive Evidence and a Remaining Difficulty." For a precise distinction between the Alter Rebbe's wording and a later explanation, see ibid., pp. 1622–1623.

outer vessels, from which angelic souls derive, from the union of the inner vessels, from which human souls derive; a later kabbalist's explanation says that the union of the outward dimension draws vitality to the worlds, while the union of the inward dimension brings forth new souls. On this distinction, the two formulations may concern different layers of the same world.

The third distinction concerns the standard by which mochin are measured: Etz Chaim teaches that mochin and completeness are sometimes measured relative to that world, and sometimes relative to the world above it; we shall address this immediately. On this distinction, "there are no mochin" and "there are mochin" can be said of the same partzuf from two perspectives.

The fourth distinction concerns state: katnut and gadlut, weekdays and Shabbat. "Katnut" and "gadlut" are states of receiving mochin: in katnut, the attributes operate without the intellect's full expansion; in gadlut, the mochin are revealed within them. Similarly, a child's attributes do not operate from the same depth of understanding as those of a mature person. The comparison helps us understand the connection between inner development and the ability to impart, but does not turn the partzufim into human figures; it does not mean that a spiritual body grows or shrinks.[361]

[361] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1621–1623, in "Complete Mochin: What Etz Chaim 3:3 Proves."

On this distinction, the negation and affirmation concern different states.

None of these distinctions, however, has yet been established as a complete resolution. “All created beings” is not necessarily a domain excluding souls and angels, so the distinction of result alone does not remove the difficulty. Gate 40 itself counts the nefashot of Asiyah among the products of the inward union, so one cannot simply say “a nefesh is not a neshamah.” No source was found explicitly stating that the negation in Gate 47 concerns one layer and the union in the Epistles another. Nor should the question be closed with the word “Shabbat” without an explicit source. What we have is a direction toward a resolution, not a resolution.[362]

“Complete According to That World”: What Does Etz Chaim 3:3 Teach?

The third distinction requires precision, because it is easy to overstate. At the end of Gate 3, Chapter 3, Etz Chaim says that the ZON of each world require three periods, gestation, nurturing, and mochin, to attain completeness, “relative to Arich Anpin and Abba and Imma of that world, which are complete according to that world.” “In the overall aspect,” however, all five

[362] On the proposed distinctions and their limits: Etz Chaim, Gate 28, chapter 1; Gate 29, chapter 3; Gate 40, discourse 15; and among later Kabbalists, Nehar Shalom by the Rashash, folios 14b–15a. See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1654–1657, 1662–1670 and 1674–1678. We have no evidence that the Alter Rebbe relied on the Rashash’s explanation.

partzufim of one world are called “ZON” relative to the world above it, and lack mochin in that relationship. It further says that gestation, nurturing, and mochin exist in both the inner and outer vessels, and therefore “do not be surprised if it sometimes appears that there are already mochin and sometimes that they are still in nurturing … for this is in the inward dimension and that in the outward dimension.”[363]

What does this source establish? That “complete” and “lacking mochin” are relational expressions. A partzuf can be complete “according to that world” while lacking in relation to the higher world; mochin can be present inwardly while the outward dimension is still in nurturing. There is a positive side to this too: mochin in a lower world are not necessarily a defective imitation of higher mochin. A world can be complete relative to its own order.

Yet we must see where the evidence ends. The source teaches that “complete” is relational, but does not say that every ZON in every world is always in a state of gadlut sufficient for generation. Nor does it itself apply this to our question: it does not say that the negation in Gate 47 concerns “the overall aspect,” while the union in the Epistles is “according to that world.” This is an

[363] Etz Chaim, Gate 3, chapter 3, at its end: mochin in the orders of the worlds. The ZON of every world require gestation, nursing and mochin “in relation to Arich Anpin and Abba and Imma of that world, which are complete according to that world”; “in the general aspect,” all the partzufim of a world are called ZON relative to the world above it. There are gestation, nursing and mochin in both the inner and outer vessels. Relative completeness of mochin does not, in itself, settle all the conditions of birth.

approach that can be examined, but must not be attributed to the source. Finally, completeness, union itself, and the power of generation are three different things; relative completeness does not imply an ability to generate at every moment.[361]

A simple example will help. A student may perfectly complete the task assigned to their class, but this still does not mean being capable of everything required of an adult. The completeness is real within its domain, but does not cancel the difference between domains. Names recurring in several worlds should be read this way: Chochmah of Beriah is Chochmah relative to Beriah, and its name alone does not make it Chochmah of Atzilut. The analogy's limit: in a person, development proceeds in time and in a body; in the analogue, the subject is levels and states of revelation, without time or body.

This sharpens the concepts of "katnut" and "gadlut" encountered in the fourth distinction: they concern capacities for reception, governance, and imparting within the order under discussion, and which mochin illuminate the attributes and in what manner. Thus even when a source describes a partzuf as "complete," we must clarify in what relation the completeness is stated and which state is being discussed. Relative completeness does not automatically meet all the

[361] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1621–1623, in "Complete Mochin: What Etz Chaim 3:3 Proves."

conditions required for generation according to other sources.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

Several things are clear. The Epistle describes a union of ZON in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and Epistle 15 explicitly describes such a union in Asiyah; it must not be erased to make reconciliation with Etz Chaim easier. The coming into being is “from ayin to yesh,” through the Emanator’s power, “through the neshamah-light,” which is Divinity from the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, with the radiance of the kav within it. The local vessels do not become Divinity and do not create by their own power. The radiance of the kav broke through the parsa with the vessels of Malchut and illuminates them in BYA “just as in Atzilut itself”; the comparison concerns the radiance in the vessels, not the worlds or their created beings. Diminished revelation is not the loss of the power of bringing into being.[360]

What still requires further study? First, precisely how the local union in Yetzirah and Asiyah accords with the negations in Gate 47. There are substantive approaches, but no source has yet been found explicitly applying them to both sides of the difficulty.

[360] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1619–1622, in “Local Union in BYA: Positive Evidence and a Remaining Difficulty.” For a precise distinction between the Alter Rebbe’s wording and a later explanation, see ibid., pp. 1622–1623.

Second, precisely what is preserved in "itself" after revelation diminishes. Third, the relationship between the Epistle's two descriptions of the kav: the radiance of the kav breaking through with the vessels, and the kav itself at the conclusion of Netzach, Hod, and Yesod of Adam Kadmon. This is the next chapter's question.

The foundation clarified in the Epistle is that the power of creation belongs to the Emanator, while the local union is the path through which it operates in BYA. On this basis we shall proceed to the next chapter, with the difficulty from Etz Chaim still open.

Toward the Continuation of the Epistle

The Epistle's next sentence opens: "And likewise, also the kav itself, vested in the conclusion and end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon." This is the second description of the kav, the subject of Chapter 12. The distinction between vessels required in Chapter 13—that the vessels of Malchut that descended are not BYA's local vessels—will be addressed in its place.[364]

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter is well suited to practice because its sentence is very precise and its difficulty is well defined and remains open. In each exercise, it is worth

[364] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20: "The beginning and inception of created yesh are the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA" (above, chapter 4); "Shines toward the inner kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and by shining within the vessels gives them power and strength to create yesh me-ayin" (below, chapter 13). On "their vessels" as against "with them" and "in them," see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1630–1633.

keeping the Epistle's wording open before us and checking the tool's answer against it.

Exercise 1: Checking a Quotation at Its Location

What to ask. Ask the tool for a source in Etz Chaim or Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 15, for union in the world of Asiyah, with a precise location: gate, discourse, or chapter.

What to check. Open the book at the specified location and check that the wording is actually there. We saw in the chapter that a sentence from a later commentary, Tanya LaAm, has sometimes been presented as belonging to the text of the Epistle. Such a tool may make precisely the same error, or assemble a quotation from two different formulations.

Limit of the conclusion. Even when the quotation is found in its place, this proves only that it exists. What it teaches, and of which layer it is said, must be clarified from its context in the book, not from the explanation the tool attached to it.

Exercise 2: A Proposed Resolution of the Difficulty

What to ask. Present the difficulty to the tool: the Epistle describes a union of ZON in Yetzirah and Asiyah, while Etz Chaim, Gate 47, denies mochin and generation in them. Ask for a resolution.

What to check. For each step in the resolution, ask: which source says this explicitly? Does the tool apply a correct distinction, such as outward and inward dimensions, to a side to which the source does not apply it? Does it close the question with a single word, such as "Shabbat," without a source?

Limit of the conclusion. A resolution that sounds convincing remains an approach as long as no source applies it to both sides of the difficulty. No such source was found in the chapter. If the tool supplies a source, open it and check whether it applies the resolution to both sides; if not, the resolution remains an approach, even when well formulated.

Chapter 12 | The Kav and Its Radiances: Three Levels of Vitality

What We Already Know

This chapter opens with a question left open at the end of Chapter 11: what is the relationship between the radiance of the kav, which broke through the parsa with the vessels of Malchut, and "the kav itself"? To ask it, we need only what was clarified there. The created beings of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah come into being "from ayin to yesh" from the union of ZON in these worlds, through the Emanator's power, "through the

neshamah-light," the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended to them. The local vessels created there do not create by their own power. The radiance of the kav shines in the vessels of Malchut in BYA "just as in Atzilut itself," a comparison concerning the radiance in the vessels, not the worlds or their created beings.

"And Likewise, Also": A Second Description of the Kav

In the previous chapter we studied the radiance of the kav that broke through the parsa with the vessels of Malchut. "Just as in Atzilut itself" compared the radiance in those vessels, not the worlds themselves; the precise point shared by the comparison still requires further study. We shall not reopen that investigation here.

The Epistle now says "and likewise, also," adding a second description. This time it begins not with the radiance in the vessels of Malchut, but with "the kav itself," as vested at the end of Adam Kadmon. From there it descends step by step, as far as "all the created, formed, and made beings," concluding: "And all this is in the aspect of the spreading of vitality to give them life." This chapter thus concerns two questions: what the second description adds to the first, and how Divine vitality is received in three levels, down to the last created being.

The key to reading is simple: whenever we read "radiance," we shall ask, "A radiance of what, and within whom?" An analogy from a teacher can bring the question closer. When a teacher explains an idea, we can distinguish the teacher's own understanding, the explanation adapted to the student, and the knowledge the student succeeds in absorbing. All three come from the same idea, but are not the same stage. If we confuse them, we will not know whether we are discussing the source of the explanation or what has already been absorbed. So too the Epistle's repetition—radiance, radiance of a radiance, radiance of a radiance of a radiance—is not empty repetition: at each stage the recipient changes, and the manner of reception changes accordingly. The analogy has two limits. With teacher and student there are time, speech, and human intellect; in the analogue there is no process in time. And the student can think independently about the received idea, whereas in the analogue no stage has a source of light of its own.

This order also prepares the following chapters. The radiance reaches the lowest created being, but the discussion does not end there. Later we shall learn that at the conclusion of the descent a special superiority is revealed. To appreciate it, we must first understand the manner of descent itself.

Kav, Adam Kadmon, and Yosher: Concepts Before Reading

"Kav" is a term for a Divine drawing down with order and measure. In Chapter 7 we learned that the kav is Divine light, even though it comes in order and measure, and that it is vested in vessels: "the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav from Or Ein Sof is vested." It is not a line drawn in space. "Kav" teaches that the light is drawn in measure and order, making the existence of levels possible.

"Adam Kadmon," abbreviated AK, names the totality of the first lights drawn through the kav, before all worlds. Etz Chaim states: "The first lights emanated within that place through the kav of yosher extending from Ein Sof, who encompasses everything … are the aspect of the ten sefirot, whose combined totality is called Adam Kadmon, primordial to all primordial beings."[365] "Kadmon" means first, prior to all. "Adam," a human being, because its levels are arranged in a human configuration, with head, arms, body, and feet. No physical figure is intended. It is an analogy for a structure with above and below, each part fulfilling a different function.

Etz Chaim explains two ways in which the sefirot are arranged. One is "circles … one within another," and

[365] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 4. On the terms "Netzach, Hod and Yesod of Adam Kadmon" and "the feet of yosher," see also the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1771–1773.

the other is “yosher,” the upright configuration, “through three lines, in the appearance of a human being with head, arms, shins, body, and feet.” In igulim, all levels are close to the Ein Sof encompassing them “in complete equality.” In yosher, there is an ordering of above and below, like head and feet.[366] For our purposes, this suffices: “the feet of yosher” are the lower endpoint of the order of yosher. The Epistle will return to igulim later (Chapter 15), and we shall not expand on them here.

A simple image can help distinguish the two arrangements. Circles within circles resemble the rings formed in water around a fallen stone: each ring surrounds the one within it, and none is “head” or “feet.” Yosher resembles a ladder, or a standing person: it has above and below, with each step occupying a fixed position in the order. The image’s limit: rings and ladders are shapes in space, whereas in Etz Chaim these are two ways of ordering levels. Nor does the image explain the relationship between the two arrangements; it merely helps us remember what “yosher” means when the word recurs in the chapter.

“NeHY” is an acronym for Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, the three sefirot below Chesed, Gevurah, and Tiferet.

[366] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 2: “There were two aspects in the ten sefirot: one was their being circular, in the form of ten circles one within another; they also had another aspect, being ten sefirot in an upright configuration along three lines, resembling a person with a head, arms, legs, body and feet”; on the circles: “They are all near and cleave to the Ein Sof surrounding them in complete equality.”

In the human analogy, they are the lower part. Etz Chaim says that "Chesed, Gevurah, and Tiferet are the two arms and body, and Netzach, Hod, and Yesod are the two shins and the male organ": Chesed and Gevurah are the arms, Tiferet the body, and NeHY the shins and Yesod, the part in which the structure extends downward and stands upon its feet. It further states that "the world of Atzilut is only a garment for NeHY of Adam Kadmon, which are the aspect of his feet alone."[367] Even the entire world of Atzilut is only a garment for the lower part of Adam Kadmon, and the worlds beneath it are still farther below. Thus when the Epistle mentions "the conclusion and end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon," it points to the part of Adam Kadmon extending to the bottom of the worlds.

W12-01
Hebrew-source words
49–57

And likewise, also the kav itself, vested in the conclusion and end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon,

"וכן — And likewise": and so, similarly; connects the new description to the preceding account of the radiance of the kav breaking through the parsa. "גם — Also": adds another thing that is also true. "הקו בעצמו — The kav itself": as distinct from "the radiance of the kav" mentioned in the previous chapter. "המלובש — Vested": the same word as in the preceding sentence,

[367] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 5: "Keter is the skull, Chochmah–Binah–Daat are the three brains, Chesed–Gevurah–Tiferet are the two arms and torso, and Netzach–Hod–Yesod are the two legs and the male organ"; "The world of Atzilut is only a garment for Netzach, Hod and Yesod of Adam Kadmon, which are his feet alone."

“vested in Atzilut as far as the parsa”; here it is said of “the kav itself” and of another garment. “בסיום וסוף — In the conclusion and end”: two words for one endpoint, emphasizing the very end. “נה”י — NeHY”: Netzach, Hod, and Yesod. “דא”ק — Of Adam Kadmon.” The sentence does not yet say what this kav does. “The kav itself” is the subject of the discussion; what is said about it comes later in the sentence, after “behold.”

“The Kav Itself”: What Does the Second Description Add?

Let us compare the two places where the Epistle says “vested.” The preceding sentence said “the radiance of the kav of Or Ein Sof vested in Atzilut as far as the parsa.” There we may ask whether “vested” refers to “the kav” or “the radiance of the kav,” and grammar alone does not decide (see Chapter 11). Here there is no such question: “the kav itself, vested in the conclusion and end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon”; what is vested is the kav. The main difference is the garment. There, the garment is Atzilut, and the investment reaches as far as the parsa. Here, the garment is Adam Kadmon, and the Epistle points to its lower end, whose “feet of yosher” terminate “in Malchut of Asiyah.” The kav itself reaches that far, and from there its radiance shines.

What, then, does “and likewise, also” add? Two things, both written in the Epistle’s wording. The first is a different starting point for the description: not the radiance in the vessels of Malchut, but the kav itself at the end of Adam Kadmon. The second is the continuation: from this point, the Epistle enumerates all the stages of radiance, from the neshamah-light to all created beings. The first description said that the radiance shines “in them,” in the vessels of Malchut in BYA, and that the created beings came into being “through the neshamah-light,” within which is the radiance of the kav; the stages of reception between the neshamah and the created beings were not detailed there. In the second description, the Epistle follows the radiance to the final recipient.[368]

The table summarizes the comparison between the descriptions:

	First description (Chapter 11)	Second description (this chapter)
Starting point	Radiance of the kav in the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut	“The kav itself,” at the end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon
Garment	Atzilut, “as far as the parsa”	Adam Kadmon, as far as “Malchut of Asiyah”
What reaches BYA	The radiance, which broke through the parsa “with them”	Radiance of the kav, shining “from there”
Degree of detail	As far as the neshamah-light	As far as “all the created, formed, and made beings”

[368] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1764–1766, in “Two Descriptions of the Kav and Three Levels of Radiance.”

How do the descriptions relate to one another? On one hand, we cannot say that there are two independent kavim here. The Epistle speaks of "the kav" in the singular, and "and likewise, also" connects the descriptions rather than setting them against one another. On the other hand, we cannot say with certainty that the very same process is being described twice. The Epistle does not explicitly say this, and the descriptions differ in starting point and garment. They may be seen as two routes of one drawing down, two aspects of it, or two cross-sections of it; the Epistle does not choose between these.[369] A later commentary on the Epistle proposed that the second description explains how the radiance also reaches levels that are not Divinity, beyond the neshamah-light.[370]

The first description is not rendered unnecessary. It teaches continuity: the radiance of the kav in the vessels of Atzilut did not stop at the parsa. The second description adds the full path, from the end of the order to the final created being. Two opposite errors must therefore be avoided. Divine influence must not be cut off where a particular description of the kav ends, as

[369] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1762–1764 and 1766–1767, in "Two Descriptions of the Kav and Three Levels of Radiance": there is no need for two lines, but saying "it is the same kav" does not by itself explain what each description adds; identity of mechanism is an inference, not explicit wording. See also ibid., pp. 1769–1770.

[370] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1783–1784, in "Why Both the Kav in Atzilut and the Kav in Netzach, Hod and Yesod of Adam Kadmon?" The explanation is presented there, with the observation that its grounding in the Rebbes' discourses and the Ari's writings must be checked; it also remains unresolved whether the two descriptions should be called "two routes," "two aspects," or "two cross-sections of the same drawing down."

though “as far as the parsa” meant that the kav is wholly absent below it. Nor should every later radiance be described as though it were the source’s full power, unchanged. The precise terms—kav, radiance of the kav, investment, breaking through, and conclusion—teach at each point what is drawn down and in what manner.

W12-02
Hebrew-source words
58–65

which is the end of its feet of yosher, terminating in Malchut of Asiyah:

“שהוא — Which is”: refers to “the conclusion and end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon”; this end is the end of the feet. “סוף רגלי — The end of the feet”: their extremity. “היושר — Of yosher”: of the order of yosher, in which the levels stand one above another in a human configuration. “שלו — Its”: of Adam Kadmon. Later the Epistle states this explicitly: “for the feet of Adam Kadmon terminate at the bottom of Asiyah,” “at the conclusion of the yosher of the feet of Adam Kadmon.”[371] “המסתיימים — Terminating”: the feet reach their end there. “במל’ דעשיה — In Malchut of Asiyah”: the final sefirah of the final world.

[371]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, below (chapter 15): “This is only because the feet of Adam Kadmon end at the bottom of Asiyah”; “Also the kav from the Ein Sof light that ends at the end of the feet of Adam Kadmon”; “Which ends at the end of the yosher of the feet of Adam Kadmon, shines from below upward.”

The End of the Feet: The Endpoint of the Order, Not the End of the Light

"End" and "terminating" may sound like a place where the light runs out. But the end mentioned here is the endpoint of the order of yosher: the last level at which the structure concludes. There is no absence of light there. On the contrary, the Epistle mentions it to say that the kav, vested in Adam Kadmon, reaches that far, and that from there its radiance shines.[372] Malchut of Asiyah is the lowest sefirah in the lowest world, so no level in the order of worlds remains beyond its reach.

"Feet," "end," and "place" are not physical dimensions. There is no large body standing in space with its feet touching the ground. The human analogy teaches relationships: there is a level that is "head," the source of governance, and a level that is "feet," the extremity where the structure meets what lies beneath it and stands upon it. So too in the analogue: the end of Adam Kadmon's feet is the place where the entire order meets the lowest level. The analogy's limit: a person has distance between head and feet, and the limbs are distinct from one another; in the analogue there is neither distance nor separation, but an ordering of levels of revelation.

[372] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1771–1772 and 1773–1774: the "end" of the feet of yosher is the extremity of the order, not an absence of light.

Later in the Epistle we shall return to this end of the feet. There we shall learn what shines "beneath his feet," and what shines from the end "from below upward." This belongs to the following chapters.

W12-03
Hebrew-source words
66–77

behold, the radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity.

"הנה — Behold": opens the main statement after the long introduction. "הארת הקו — The radiance of the kav": the sentence's grammatical subject; the verbs מאירה, "shines," and מתלבשת, "vests itself," are feminine and agree with it. "מאירה — Shines": gives light. "משם — From there": from the place just described, the end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon, the end of the feet of yosher in Malchut of Asiyah. "ומתלבשת — And vests itself": is present within a recipient according to its form, as the soul is vested in the body. "באור הנשמה די"ס דבי"ע — In the neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA": of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. "שהוא אלקות — Which is Divinity": a relative clause attached to "the neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA," stating its status.

"From There": From Where Does the Radiance Shine, and Whom Does It Reach?

The sentence has two parts. The first presents the subject of the discussion: "the kav itself, vested in the

conclusion and end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon." The second, after "behold," states what is said about it: "the radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the neshamah-light." The kav itself is not described here as becoming vested in the neshamah; what shines and becomes vested is its radiance. Thus the Epistle preserves the distinction between the kav and its radiance even within a single sentence.

"From there" indicates the starting point: the end of Adam Kadmon, in Malchut of Asiyah. The first recipient is the neshamah-light of the sefirot of BYA. The sentence says no more. It describes no route, intermediate stations, or direction of movement; it contains no additional parsa or screen, and these must not be added to obtain a convenient picture. Later in the Epistle (Chapter 15), it will explicitly say that the kav ending at the extremity of Adam Kadmon's feet shines "from below upward in the aspect of returning light." The relationship between that description and "shines from there" in our sentence is a question to investigate in its place, rather than transferring the answer from there to here without study.[373]

[373] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1766–1767 and 1784–1786: "from there" indicates a connection to the place mentioned in the order of levels, but does not prove an exclusive route; returning light from the end of the kav is explicit later in the Epistle, but identifying every "from there" and all destination levels in the two paragraphs requires further study.

The Neshamah-Light of the Sefirot of BYA, Not a Human Soul

"The neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA" is not a new concept. In Chapter 4 we learned: "Now, the beginning and first emergence of created yesh are the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and also the lights nefesh and ruach; they were created from the aspect of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity, and these are the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." The neshamah of the sefirot of BYA is thus the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, which descended and became an inward source of vitality for these sefirot. In Chapter 11 we saw that of this neshamah it is said, "and also within it is the radiance of the kav." In the second description too, then, the first recipient of the radiance of the kav is that same neshamah. Both descriptions meet in their first recipient, and the second continues onward from there.

"שהוא אלקות — Which is Divinity" attaches to the noun phrase preceding it, "the neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA," establishing its status as Divinity. Here שהוא, "which is," is masculine, whereas in Chapter 11 the same level was described with שהיא אלקות, "which is Divinity," in the feminine. Does the alternation indicate two levels? No: Chapter 4 too said "from the aspect of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity" (שהוא אלקות), in the masculine, even though

the word “light” does not appear there; a distinction therefore cannot be built on grammatical gender. What decides is the sentence’s structure and the parallel in Chapter 4: both passages say that the neshamah of the sefirot of BYA is Divinity.

Why does the Epistle repeat “which is Divinity” here? It may be marking the Divine level before the radiance passes to recipients that are not Divinity.[374]

The word “neshamah” immediately brings to mind a person living in a body. Here it signifies the inward vitality of the system of sefirot. A human being is one of the created beings receiving vitality from this system, and is not identical with the Divine neshamah within it merely because their names resemble one another.

This distinction prevents a difficulty born of imprecise reading. One might ask: if every human soul receives the radiance of the kav in the same way that it becomes vested in the neshamah of the sefirot, why does it not create? Before answering, we must check whether the Epistle stated that premise. In our sentence, the pronouns refer to the sefirot of BYA and their vessels, not to human souls.[375] Of souls that emerged from the vessels, we already learned in Chapter 7 that they “are

[374] On the repetition of “which is Divinity,” see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1780–1781 and 1784–1786; on the alternation between שהיא and שהוא [feminine and masculine “which is”], see ibid., pp. 1630–1632, 1635–1637 and 1787–1789, and above, chapter 11.

[375] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1777–1781 and 1786–1787: human nefesh, ruach and neshamah must not automatically be identified with the nefesh and ruach of the sefirot of BYA, nor the three radiances with the three worlds.

not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing." Moreover, even the neshamah of the sefirot, which is Divinity, does not become an independent creator: the power to create belongs to the Emanator alone, and He operates "in and through them" (Chapter 7). The sentence concerns the neshamah of the sefirot; the human soul's stature must be learned from the sources discussing it.

W12-04
Hebrew-source words
78–89

And a radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh-ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even also in all their vessels.

"והארה דהארה — And a radiance of a radiance": the letter ד means "of." "מתלבשת — Vests itself": again feminine, like "the radiance of the kav." "בנפש רוח — In the nefesh-ruach": in the aspects of nefesh and ruach. "די"ס דבי"ע — Of the ten sefirot of BYA": of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. "ואף גם — And even also": adds a recipient we might not have expected. "בכל הכלים שלהם — In all their vessels": in all the vessels of these sefirot. שלהם, "their," is masculine and can refer to nefesh and ruach, to the sefirot, or to the worlds. Grammatical gender alone does not decide; the structure of the sentence and the parallel in Chapter 4 show that the subject is the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA.

Nefesh, Ruach, and Vessels: Divine Light in a Created Recipient

Who are the recipients of the second radiance? The Epistle already listed them in Chapter 4 in these very words: "The beginning and first emergence of created yesh are the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and also the lights nefesh and ruach." Thus the radiance of a radiance becomes vested precisely in what the Epistle called "the beginning of created yesh." Here lies the chapter's important boundary: until now, both light and recipient were Divinity; from now on, the light is a Divine radiance, while the recipient is created.

"And even also" adds the vessels. The vessels are the outermost side of the sefirot, something like their body, yet the radiance reaches them too. Etz Chaim describes a similar structure: when the outer vessels of Atzilut descend to BYA and become a "neshamah" within them, "the ruach and nefesh of those worlds are garments for the neshamah."[376] Accordingly, we can order the recipients: the neshamah is inward; ruach and nefesh are its garments; and the vessels, of which the Epistle says "and even also," are the outermost side.

[376] Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10: "The outer vessels of Atzilut themselves, when they descend to the three lower worlds of BYA, actually become the neshamah of the essence of those lights of the worlds themselves, while the ruach and nefesh of those worlds are garments for the neshamah." The subject there is the outer vessels of Atzilut; the structure is similar, but the details must not be equated without examination (see above, chapter 11). Later in the Epistle (chapter 15), the "light of the neshamah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah" is said to be "actual Divinity, from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut."

The second radiance is a radiance of the radiance in the neshamah, reaching the garments and the vessels.

This yields a distinction we must maintain throughout the chapter: the light has a status, and the recipient has a status. A Divine radiance vested in a created vessel does not make the vessel itself Divinity.[368] Just as a profound idea written in letters does not turn the paper into intellect, the presence of light does not give the vessel all the properties of its source. The analogy is narrow: it helps separate that which illuminates from its recipient, but the Divine relationship is not like placing one object inside another.

We must also be precise about which vessels are meant. The vessels mentioned here are not the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut: those vessels are the "neshamah" itself, of which the Epistle said in Chapter 11, "and shines in them in BYA." "Their vessels" are the vessels of the sefirot of BYA, the worlds' local vessels, and receiving a Divine radiance does not turn them into vessels of Atzilut. If every reception erased the recipient's status, there would be no point in distinguishing the neshamah-light from nefesh and ruach. The Epistle lists them in detail because the differences remain meaningful.

Later commentaries on the Epistle emphasize the Divine aspect of this radiance. This does not contradict

[368] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1764–1766, in "Two Descriptions of the Kav and Three Levels of Radiance."

the Epistle's own description of the recipients as "the beginning of created yesh," as long as the status of the light is distinguished from that of the recipient: what is said of the radiance does not automatically pass to the recipients. Anyone wishing to say more—that the recipients themselves too are not "created beings" in the ordinary sense—must distinguish two meanings of "created": the world's spiritual beginning of yesh, and a defined individual creature, and demonstrate that distinction from the source. This is a possible proposal, not explicit wording.[377]

Already in Chapter 3, the Epistle said that created yesh is nullified "in relation to the power and light flowing into it from the vessels of the ten sefirot of ABYA, in which the kav, Or Ein Sof, blessed be He, shines." There the matter was stated briefly: the kav illuminates the vessels of all the worlds, and the created being receives power and light from them. Here one side of that statement is detailed: in which recipients in BYA the radiance of the kav shines, and in what manner. In Chapter 13, the Epistle will discuss the same vessels, "the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA," from another side: the encompassing Or Ein Sof shines through them, "and in its radiance within the vessels, it gives them strength and might to create something from

[377] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1762–1764, 1786–1787 and 1790–1796, in the discussion of the Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya commentary on this passage: the status of the light and the status of the recipient remain two distinct assertions; the distinction between senses of "created" is a proposed reading, not explicit wording.

nothing.” Thus two different radiances are described in the same local vessels: the radiance of a radiance from the kav, and the radiance of sovev. There is no contradiction; these are two descriptions of what operates within the same recipients.

W12-05
Hebrew-source words 90–97

And a radiance of a radiance of a radiance is in all the beings that are created, formed, and made,

“והארה דהארה דהארה — And a radiance of a radiance of a radiance”: a third stage. “הוא — Is”: here in the sense of “is present”; the masculine form does not change the subject, which is “a radiance of a radiance of a radiance.” The Epistle does not repeat “vests itself” here, and the change alone does not establish a distinction. “בכל — In all”: without exception. “הנבראים ונוצרים ונעשים — The beings that are created, formed, and made”: the created beings of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, like “all the created, formed, and made beings” in Chapter 11.

Three Levels According to Recipients

We can now see the whole chain. It is enumerated by recipients, not by worlds. To see this, let us go through the stages one by one, asking two questions at each: what shines, and who receives?

At the first stage, the radiance of the kav becomes vested in the neshamah-light of the sefirot of BYA,

"which is Divinity": both light and recipient here are Divinity.

At the second stage, a radiance of that radiance becomes vested in the nefesh and ruach of the sefirot, and even in their vessels: the light is still a Divine radiance, but the recipients are "the beginning of created yesh." The transition here is from the neshamah to its garments; what shines in the garments comes through what shines in the neshamah.

At the third stage, a further radiance is present "in all the beings that are created, formed, and made": the recipients are the individual creatures in the worlds, which, as we learned in Chapter 11, were created from the union of ZON of BYA. The transition here is from the worlds' system of sefirot to their created beings.

Let us notice what happened along the way. Between the first and second stages, the recipient's status changed, from Divinity to created being. Between the second and third, the kind of recipient changed, from the world's system of sefirot to its individual creatures. The source changed in neither transition.

Notice that the stages do not correspond to the worlds. One must not say that the first radiance is in Beriah, the second in Yetzirah, and the third in Asiyah. The first two stages were said of the sefirot "of BYA," meaning those of each of the three worlds; the third was said of "all the beings that are created, formed, and made,"

meaning the creatures of all three. Thus each world has the neshamah of its sefirot, nefesh and ruach and vessels, and created beings. Nor should the three levels be identified with human nefesh, ruach, and neshamah.[375]

The table brings together the three levels of radiance and their recipients:

The Epistle's wording	Recipient	Recipient's status	What must not be inferred
"The radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself"	"The neshamah-light of the ten sefirot of BYA"	"Which is Divinity" (also in Chapter 4)	That this is a human soul, or concerns the world of Beriah alone
"And a radiance of a radiance vests itself"	"The nefesh-ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even also in all their vessels"	"The beginning of created yesh" (Chapter 4)	That the recipients have become Divinity, or that this concerns the world of Yetzirah alone
"And a radiance of a radiance of a radiance is"	"In all the beings that are created, formed, and made"	Created beings of the three worlds	That this concerns the world of Asiyah alone, or that the created beings stand independently

There are not three sources here, nor three entities. There is one source and a multiplicity of relationships: a radiance in one recipient, a radiance from it in another, and a further radiance in created beings. The

[375] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1777–1781 and 1786–1787: human nefesh, ruach and neshamah must not automatically be identified with the nefesh and ruach of the sefirot of BYA, nor the three radiances with the three worlds.

source's unity does not cancel the differences between recipients, and the differences do not divide the source.[368]

"A Radiance of a Radiance": Light of Light

What does the repetition of "radiance" mean? A "radiance" is a revelation drawn from a source, not the source itself as it is. "A radiance of a radiance" adds a relationship: what shines now comes through a revelation already present before it. Each additional ד, "of," indicates another stage of mediation, not a new source.

An analogy for such a structure appears in the Alter Rebbe's own words in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah. He describes "the light shining upon the earth at night from the moon, while the moon's light is from the sun; thus the light upon the earth is the light of the sun's light." There, when describing the drawings down from which individual creatures are created, he writes, "and drew forth and brought down a radiance of a radiance of a radiance from the radiances of the letters."[378] The analogy teaches a simple point: the moon has no light of its own. The light on earth at night is weaker than sunlight, yet it is entirely sunlight that arrived through the moon. So too "a radiance of a

[368] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1764–1766, in "Two Descriptions of the Kav and Three Levels of Radiance."

[378] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 12. On its structural similarity to our Epistle and the limits of that similarity, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1784–1786 and 1789–1790.

radiance": light arriving through a prior radiance, with no other source.

This analogy too has limits. The moon and earth are bodies in space, and light passes between them in time; the analogue has neither space nor time. The moon is a body standing in its own right; in the analogue, the intermediate levels are not independent entities. And in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah the analogy concerns letters and their substitutions. There is a structural likeness to our Epistle here, but this does not prove that the Epistle discusses the very same mode of drawing down.

The Epistle mentions no partitions between the three levels of radiance. The parsa was mentioned as the boundary between Atzilut and BYA, through which the radiance of the kav broke "with them," with the vessels of Malchut. The levels differ in recipient and manner of reception, not as three quantities of light. Nor is there a fourth level here. When the Epistle returns to the matter in the following paragraph, it will write "a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the kav, as above." The "etc." there abbreviates what has already been said, "as above," and does not suggest an additional stage.[379]

[379] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1762–1764 and 1766–1767: one must not add a screen or parsa at every transition merely because the word "radiance" recurs, nor add a fourth level. On "a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the kav, as stated above" (below, chapter 13), see ibid., pp. 1795–1797.

What remains open? The Epistle does not explain exactly how a radiance is drawn from a radiance: which aspect of the neshamah illuminates nefesh and ruach, and precisely what conveys the radiance from the sefirot to created beings. The recipients are clear, and the order is clear. The details of the drawing down are not specified here.

W12-06
Hebrew-source words 98–106

as it is written, “the seas and all that is in them, and You give life to them all.”

“כמ”ש — As it is written.” “The seas and all that is in them”: the seas and everything within them. “And You give life to them all”: You bestow life upon them all. This is a verse from Nehemiah (9:6).

“And You Give Life to Them All”: What Does the Verse Teach?

The verse occurs in the Levites’ prayer in Nehemiah: “You alone are the L-rd; You made the heavens, the heaven of heavens and all their host, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them, and You give life to them all; and the host of heaven bows down to You.”[380] The Epistle quotes the end of the list, “the seas and all that is in them,” adjacent to “and You give life to them all.” “All” includes everything enumerated in the verse: the heavens and their host, the earth and

[380] Nehemiah 9:6: “You give life to them all,” within the enumeration of the heavens, the earth, the seas, and all that is in them.

everything upon it, and the seas and everything within them.

What does the verse teach here? It teaches the extent of the vitality: there is no creature that does not receive vitality from G-d. This is exactly what the third stage said, "in all the beings that are created, formed, and made." But the verse does not enumerate three radiances or mention Adam Kadmon, the parsa, or the neshamah of sefirot. The Epistle constructs the gradation from kabbalistic teachings, and brings the verse for the point to which the gradation leads: the vitality in all created beings. Why does the quotation begin specifically with "the seas"? Perhaps the Epistle simply quotes the portion adjacent to "and You give life." The reason for choosing "the seas" specifically still requires further study.[381]

On this same verse, the Alter Rebbe expounds in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah: " 'And You give life to them all': read not mechayeh, 'give life,' but mehaveh, 'bring into being,' that is, something from nothing." There he rejects the comparison of creation with human workmanship, as though "once a vessel leaves the craftsman, it no longer needs the craftsman's hands." Creation is not like this: "the power of the agent must always be in that upon which it acts, to give it life and

[381] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1787–1789: the verse teaches the scope of vitality but does not by itself enumerate the three radiances; the reason for choosing to begin the quotation with "the seas" was not resolved.

sustain it"; if the Creator's power withdrew from the creature, "the created being would return to absolute nothingness and nonbeing."[382] The vitality of which the verse speaks is not an addition to something already standing independently. It is the power bringing the creature into being and sustaining it at every moment.

Less Revelation, the Same Dependence

When light is received in a more contracted manner, the recipient apprehends and feels less. This does not mean that it has less need of the power giving it life. Let us return to the light on earth at night: it is far weaker than daylight, yet contains no light that is not sunlight. Its weakness does not make it an independent source; if sunlight ceased, nothing of it would remain. In the analogue, dependence is even greater: not only the light but the creature's very existence depends on the source.

Already in Chapter 3 we learned that the created being does not apprehend the power bringing it into being: "for the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all." Absence of apprehension is not absence of dependence. The more contracted the radiance, the more hidden the source is from the recipient, but the recipient does not become more independent. The

[382] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 2. See also the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1781–1783 and 1786–1789.

three levels describe modes of receiving light; the Epistle assigns no quantitative measure to each.[383]

Thus "and You give life to them all" is not merely a verse that neatly closes the paragraph. It gives meaning to the entire enumeration of levels: all levels depend on Divine vitality. The differences explain how vitality is received, not who can exist without it. Precisely after the extensive detail, the verse returns everything to one source.

W12-07
Hebrew-source words 107–112

And all this is in the aspect of the extension of vitality to give them life.

"וכל זאת — And all this": everything described so far. "בבחינת — In the aspect of": in the manner of; defines the perspective from which the matters were described. "התפשטות — Extension": drawing down to many recipients according to their levels. "החיות — Vitality": the Divine power of life. "להחיותם — To give them life": to give life to the created beings.

"And All This": Vested Vitality, and Another Aspect to Come

"And all this" sums up everything described: the radiance of the kav, and the levels drawn from it down to all created beings. All these are "the extension of

[383] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1777–1780: the Epistle does not give a quantitative measure for each level.

vitality," vitality drawn down and vested in recipients, each according to its level.

"In the aspect of" defines the perspective from which the discussion has been stated. We described vitality as it spreads and becomes vested in recipients. The Epistle's next sentence opens with "however," presenting another aspect: "However, the existence and nature of Or Ein Sof is not within the category of place at all, and encompasses all worlds equally." There the Epistle again distinguishes: Or Ein Sof is "in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding … and not the spreading and investment of vitality to give them life and bring them into being from ayin to yesh, except through a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the kav, as above."[384] Thus what we studied in this chapter is the manner of investment.

That sentence teaches another important point. There the Epistle joins "to give them life and bring them into being from ayin to yesh," attributing both to the same radiance from the kav. And the Alter Rebbe expounds, as we saw, "gives life" as "brings into being." Thus "the extension of vitality" in our sentence is not a second process occurring after creation, as though created beings first existed and afterward received life. Yet the Epistle does not specify precisely how the third radiance connects with the union of ZON of BYA

[384] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, below (chapter 13). See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1766–1767 and 1777–1780.

through which the creatures were created (Chapter 11). Nor should every meaning of "vitality" be identified with every meaning of "coming into being" without study.[385]

There are not two stages here, first creation and then vitality. The power giving life to the creature is the power bringing it into being, at this moment and at every moment.

The "however" of the next sentence does not correct a mistake in our paragraph. What we learned here about graded vitality remains true after it. "However" adds a second aspect: alongside vitality vested in recipients according to their level, there is a presence of Or Ein Sof that is not vested in them or measured by them. In the next chapter we shall study this aspect and the "strength and might" that sovev gives the vessels, and see how the two aspects stand together.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

Much is clearly explained in this chapter. The Epistle describes the kav in two accounts, connected by "and likewise, also." The first is the radiance of the kav that broke through the parsa with the vessels of Malchut. The second is the kav itself, vested at the end of NeHY

[385] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1781–1783 and 1786–1787: the third radiance is the extension of vitality as far as the created being, not necessarily a "second creation"; the assumption "it is formed and afterward lives" is not necessary. Nevertheless, one must not equate every sense of vitality with every sense of coming into being without examination.

of Adam Kadmon, whose feet of yosher terminate in Malchut of Asiyah, with its radiance shining from there. There are not two kavim, and neither description is superfluous. From this endpoint, three levels are enumerated according to recipients: the neshamah-light of the sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity; nefesh and ruach and their vessels, which are "the beginning of created yesh"; and all created beings. The light's status does not pass to the recipient, and the neshamah of the sefirot is not the human soul. All levels depend on Divine vitality: "and You give life to them all."

What still requires further study? First, the precise relationship between the two accounts of the kav: are they two routes, two aspects of one drawing down, or two cross-sections of it? Second, precisely how a radiance is drawn from a radiance. Third, the relationship between "shines from there" in this chapter and the returning light "from below upward" to be described in Chapter 15. Fourth, how the third radiance connects with the union through which the creatures were created.

It is worth reading the three levels of radiance in both directions. From source to recipients, we see an order: the neshamah-light, followed by nefesh, ruach, and vessels, followed by all created beings. From the creature back to its source, we learn that no recipient

stands by its own power. The details explain the modes of reception, and the verse returns them all to one source.[368]

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter invites a particular kind of mistake: three levels look like an invitation to match them with three familiar things. This is a good opportunity to test an AI tool and see where it fills gaps from its imagination. Four exercises follow.

Exercise 1: A Table of Levels

What to ask. Copy into the tool the Epistle's passage from "And likewise, also the kav itself" to "And all this is in the aspect of the extension of vitality to give them life," and request a table with three columns: level, recipient, recipient's status.

What to check. Three familiar errors. Does the table match the levels to the worlds, the first to Beriah, the second to Yetzirah, the third to Asiyah? Does it identify them with human nefesh, ruach, and neshamah? Does it add a fourth level from the "etc." in the following paragraph? We saw in the chapter that each of these steps adds to the Epistle's wording. If the answer falls into one of them, ask the tool to point to the words in

[368] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1764–1766, in "Two Descriptions of the Kav and Three Levels of Radiance."

the Epistle on which it relies. When there are no such words, the error reveals itself.

Limit of the conclusion. A table free of these errors still does not answer the questions left open, such as precisely how a radiance is drawn from a radiance. If the tool confidently fills this in too, it is its own conjecture.

Exercise 2: The Two Descriptions of the Kav

What to ask. Ask the tool to compare "the radiance of the kav … broke through the parsa with them" (Chapter 11) with "the kav itself, vested in the conclusion and end of NeHY of Adam Kadmon," and state their relationship.

What to check. Does the tool present the descriptions as two independent kavim? Does it assert with certainty that the same process is described twice? Both assertions exceed what is written. Compare its answer with the chapter's reference table.

Limit of the conclusion. The precise relationship between the descriptions remains an open question in the chapter. An answer that closes it must supply a source; without one, it is one possible reading.

Exercise 3: The Analogy of Moon and Sun

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain "a radiance of a radiance" through an analogy; if it gives the moon analogy, ask for its precise location.

What to check. Compare the location the tool gives with the reference to Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah in the chapter's notes, and check the wording in the book. Then check whether the tool states the analogy's limits: space and time, and the moon as a body standing in its own right.

Limit of the conclusion. Even an analogy originating in the Alter Rebbe's words does not prove that the Epistle discusses the very same mode of drawing down. If the tool presents the analogy as proof, that is its addition: establishing this requires a source applying the analogy to the Epistle's wording.

Exercise 4: A Verse and Its Scope

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain what "and You give life to them all" adds to the passage, and why the quotation begins with "the seas."

What to check. Does the tool attribute a particular mystical meaning to the sea, and if so, on what source does it rely? Does it quote "read not 'give life' but 'bring into being' " from its place in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, or use different wording?

Limit of the conclusion. In the chapter, we established that no decisive explanation was found for beginning with "the seas." An attractive explanation from the tool does not change this as long as it has no source.

Chapter 13 | Sovev Illuminates the Kav: Presence, Vitality, and the Power of Bringing into Being

What We Already Know

This chapter's passage brings together matters learned in different chapters:

1. **Something from nothing is not successive derivation.** A creature coming into being from nothing is not a natural continuation of what preceded it, like an effect issuing from its cause. It is something new, and from its perspective "the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all" (Chapters 2–3).
2. **The power to create belongs to the Emanator alone.** "He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing." Or Ein Sof unites with the vessels of Atzilut, and the Emanator creates "in and through them" (Chapter 7).

3. **There are two kinds of vessels in BYA.** There are local vessels, created in these worlds and constituting "the beginning of created yesh"; within them is a Divine "neshamah," the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended to them (Chapters 4 and 11).
4. **The radiance of the kav descended with the vessels.** It broke through the parsa with the vessels of Malchut and shines in them in BYA "just as in Atzilut itself" (Chapter 11).
5. **Vitality becomes vested in three levels.** From the kav, vested at the end of Adam Kadmon, a radiance, a radiance of a radiance, and a radiance of a radiance of a radiance are drawn forth, down to all created beings (Chapter 12).

From the vitality explained, the next question arises: what more is said of the relationship of Or Ein Sof to the worlds? Later we shall clarify how it gives power to the vessels, although the power of creation belongs to the Emanator alone.

Where We Stand

"And all this" described vitality vested in recipients. Now the Epistle says "however," adding an aspect that is not extension.[386]

[386] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in the paragraph preceding our passage (above, chapter 12): "Likewise, also the kav itself vested in the conclusion and end of Netzach–Hod–Yesod of Adam Kadmon… the radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the light of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah, which is Divinity. A radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh and ruach of the ten sefirot of Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah, and even in all their vessels. A radiance of

To hear the question, it is worth formulating both sides. On one hand, if "there is no place empty of Him," if no place lacks the presence of Ein Sof, why is the whole order of graded radiances needed? On the other, if vitality reaches creatures only as "a radiance of a radiance of a radiance," is Ein Sof far from our world, touching it only at the end of a long chain? The passage before us answers both sides. It distinguishes the existence of the light itself, which is not within the category of place and is equally present in all worlds, from vitality vested in creatures, which comes through the radiances of the kav. It immediately adds that these are not two separate domains: the encompassing Or Ein Sof illuminates the kav and gives the vessels the power to create.[387]

Earlier chapters also prepare this passage. We already listed above the foundations learned in Chapters 7 and 11; the end of Chapter 11 also recorded a question left for our chapter: the Epistle will say here that sovev "gives them strength and might to create something from nothing." How does giving power to the vessels accord with the principle that the power to create

a radiance of a radiance is in all created, formed and made beings, as it is written: 'The seas and all that is in them, and You give life to them all.' All this is in the mode of the extension of vitality to give them life." The verse: Nehemiah 9:6.

[387]Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1799–1801, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification": "If there is no place devoid of the Ein Sof light, why are graduated radiances necessary? What does the radiance of sovev toward the kav through the vessels add?" There also: "The equal presence of the Ein Sof light is not equal inward vesting."

belongs to the Emanator alone? This question will accompany us throughout the chapter.[388]

The Passage in Three Steps

The passage can be summarized in three steps:

1. **The distinction.** Or Ein Sof is not limited to place and is equally present in all worlds, including the physical earth. Its presence is in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding, as explained in Likkutei Amarim. The vitality vested in creatures to give them life and bring them into being is drawn through the radiances of the kav.
2. **The connection.** That same encompassing Or Ein Sof illuminates the inward kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and by shining within them gives them power to create something from nothing.
3. **The result.** Since creation takes place through the vessels, created beings are numerous, distinct, and limited, particularly through the letters.

The first step distinguishes, the second connects, and the third draws a conclusion. Someone reading only the first may think that sovev has no involvement in

[388] Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the blessed Emanator, whose existence is of His own Essence… Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin"; "The Ein Sof light vested itself in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut and unites within them in the ultimate unity… to create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude" (above, chapter 7); "The radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut pierced the parsa with them and shines in them in Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah just as in Atzilut itself" (above, chapter 11). For the question recorded there in anticipation of our chapter, see the end of chapter 11.

creation. Someone reading only the second may think the distinction has been canceled. The third returns us to the actual, defined, limited created being, and explains why it is so.

Three Concepts Neither to Confuse nor to Separate

Three concepts will help us read the passage: presence, vested vitality, and the power of bringing into being. Each answers a different question about Or Ein Sof's relationship to the worlds.

Presence. Is there a place, world, or created being where Or Ein Sof is not present? The answer is no. "No place is empty of Him," "even on this physical earth." This presence is not measured according to the recipient, and is therefore "equal" in all worlds.

Vested vitality. How does a particular creature receive its life, and in what measure? Here there are great differences. Vitality "vests itself" in each creature according to what it can receive, and therefore comes in an order of radiances, level after level.

The power of bringing into being. Where does the power come from to bring something into being from nothing, and to do so in such a way that it is particular and limited? The second and third steps address this: sovev illuminates the kav through the vessels, "and by shining within the vessels, gives them strength and

might to create something from nothing"; and "since creation takes place through the vessels," the creature emerges defined and limited.

The three concepts answer three questions, but are not three sources. In his Derech Mitzvotecha, the Tzemach Tzedek, the Alter Rebbe's grandson and successor, follows our Epistle's wording, mentions it by name, and sums up the matter in one sentence: "The One who shines in the aspect of sovev is the One who shines in the aspect of memale, and sovev is also within memale." ("Memale" names the light vested in creatures according to their measure; the word does not appear in the Epistle, and we shall address it later in the chapter.) The One who illuminates is one. He shines in a manner not measured according to the worlds, and in a manner vested in them according to their capacity; the first manner illuminates within the second. In the chapter we shall study each aspect separately, while remembering that they are aspects of one illumination.[389]

Questions for Reading

For each sentence in the passage, we shall ask three questions:

[389] Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2. At the beginning of the chapter the Tzemach Tzedek describes the kav and the three radiances in the Epistle's wording; later he mentions it by name: "As stated in Iggeret HaKodesh (section 20)." The sentence quoted here closes the chapter: "...There is none besides Him, blessed be He: He who shines in the mode of sovev is He who shines in the mode of memale, and also sovev within memale."

- **What is being discussed?** Presence, vested vitality, or the power of bringing into being?
- **From which perspective?** That of the light as it is, or that of the recipient according to what it can receive?
- **Through what?** Through the kav, the vessels, or the letters, or does the sentence discuss what is not measured by them?

These questions will keep us from joining statements that concern different matters. The passage says "equally," and at its end it says "multiplicity, division, limitation, and finitude"; anyone reading both expressions as though stated from the same perspective will find a contradiction. Thus when "equally" is said, we shall ask: equal in what respect? And when "multiplicity and limitation" is said: whose multiplicity, and for what reason?

On the Images

"Surrounding," "encompassing," and "inward" are taken from spatial language. What surrounds is around; what encompasses wraps around from outside; what is inward is within. "Surrounding" can conjure something standing outside the world and encircling it, like a wall around a city. But the Epistle itself opens with a negation: "not within the category of place at all." The words describe a relationship of revelation and reception here, not place and distance. We shall

see below that this is how the Alter Rebbe himself explains them in Likkutei Amarim.

Examples from human life will help distinguish modes of revelation and reception. They rest on a created person's limited powers and do not describe the Divine light itself.

"However, the Existence and Nature of Or Ein Sof Are Not Within the Category of Place at All"

W13-01
Hebrew-source words 1–10

However, the existence and nature of the light of Ein Sof are not within the category of space at all,

אמנם — However: "yet," "but in truth." This is the third time the word opens an important step in the Epistle. At the beginning: "However, the intention is to say that they are Divinity, to create something from nothing"; in Chapter 8: "However, it is known that the principal coming into being of yesh and a completely separate entity is from Malchut of Atzilut." Each time the word does not cancel what preceded it. It adds a point that sets the preceding statements within their proper limits. Here it comes immediately after "And all this is in the aspect of the extension of vitality to give them life."

מציאותו ומהותו — Its existence and nature: "existence" is a thing's very being; "nature" is what it is. In this

expression, the Epistle means the light itself as it is, not what is drawn from it as vitality to creatures.

של אור האי"ס — Of the light of Ein Sof: of Or Ein Sof. The word של, "of," and the suffix ־ו, "its," in מציאותו ומהותו show that the subject is the light's existence and nature. Here the Epistle does not say "the nature and Essence of the Emanator," as it did in the passage studied in Chapter 7, but "the existence and nature of the light." We shall address this below.

אינו בגדר — Are not within the category: not within the domain, not of that kind. A geder is a boundary defining a domain; what is not "within the category" of something does not belong to the kind of questions asked about it at all.

מקום — Place: place in the ordinary sense, location, distance, near and far, inside and outside.

כלל — At all: not in any way. The word also rules out the possibility that the light is "almost" not in place, or that it is in a "very large" place.

What "However" Adds

The previous chapter concerned vitality that "spreads," a word itself indicating a source and recipients. Thus at every stage we can ask about it: who received, and how much? The neshamah of the sefirot received a radiance; nefesh, ruach, and vessels received a radiance of a radiance; and creatures received a

radiance of a radiance of a radiance. This is a correct description, which the Epistle does not retract.

But if we stopped here, we might think that Or Ein Sof stands at the head of the chain, far from creatures, with only its emissaries reaching them. "However" blocks this mistake. There is another aspect, not "extension" at all: the existence of the light itself. It does not reach creatures at the end of a chain, because it is not in a place from which it could "reach" them. It is equally present everywhere.

"However" adds an aspect not addressed by the previous description: the existence of the light itself, unrestricted by place. The graded vitality described earlier remains intact.[390]

We can bring the difference closer through human life. There is a particular explanation that a person understands in all its details and can state what and how far they have understood. There is also a deep will directing the whole of a person's life, even when it is not articulated at that moment in any one thought. Of the explanation one can ask, "How much of it was absorbed?" The same question does not suit the deep will in the same way: it is not more present in one part of the person's life than another, nor is it outside that

[390] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1797–1799, at the opening of "Sovev, the Kav, and the Power to Bring into Being and Give Life": "The explanatory strength of the image of 'supplementation' may also be its weakness. If one depicts the kav as having lost its ability and sovev as coming to bypass the failure, one creates a simple storyline that the Epistle does not tell."

life. The example is very limited: human will is a created power, changing and subject to influence. It only helps us leave behind the picture of physical "outside" and "inside," distinguishing what is measured by the recipient from what is not measured that way.

What "Place" Is, and What Is Denied Here

Place is the framework in which something is "here" rather than "there." It has boundaries; there are near and far, inside and outside. Everything in place can be measured: how much of it is here and how much there. Thus whatever is in place is always partial. If it is in this room, it is not in the other; if it is in both, part is here and part there.

"Not within the category of place at all" denies all these questions in relation to the light's existence. One cannot ask where it is, how much of it is in heaven and how much on earth, or whether it is closer to an angel than to a stone in terms of distance. The questions do not receive a negative answer; they do not apply.

The Alter Rebbe wrote this explicitly in Likkutei Amarim, in the chapter to which the Epistle refers, as we shall see below: "The meaning of surrounding and encompassing from above is not in the spatial sense, G-d forbid, for the category of place has no application at all to spirituality." There too appears "at all." He also

gives the positive meaning there: "surrounding and encompassing from above with regard to the aspect of the revelation of influence." Thus "surrounding" and "encompassing" describe not where the light is, but how its influence is, or is not, revealed in the recipient. Even "from above" does not indicate height: "Every influence in a state of concealment is called encompassing from above, because the 'concealed world' is higher in level than the 'revealed world.' " "Above" means higher in level.[391]

This provides a positive understanding too, not merely a negation. What is not within the category of place is not "absent" from any place. Precisely because it has no location, no place lacks its presence. Something located in space can be distant; what is not within the category of place cannot be distant from the world. Thus the sentence immediately continues: "and encompasses all worlds equally," and "no place is empty of Him."

"Light," Not "Essence"

The two words מציאותו, "His/its existence," and מהותו, "His/its nature," appear in the Epistle only twice. The first time, in Chapter 7, they were said of the Emanator:

[391]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: the meaning of sovev kol almin. "The meaning is not that it surrounds and encompasses from above in a spatial sense, G-d forbid, for spatiality does not apply to spirituality at all"; revealed influence is called "vested," "for they clothe and apprehend the influence they receive," while concealed influence is called "encompassing and surrounding"; the analogy of "this physical earth" and of knowledge encompassing "in actual fact." The pairing "memale kol almin" and "sovev kol almin": ibid., chapter 41.

"For the light is akin to the Luminary, which is the nature and Essence of the Emanator, blessed be He, whose existence is from His Essence." The second time, here, they are said of the light: "the existence and nature of Or Ein Sof." This precision is not accidental. In Chapter 7 we distinguished the light from the Luminary: the light is "akin to the Luminary," resembles it, but is not the Luminary itself. Here the Epistle speaks of the light, saying that its existence is not within the category of place.

Thus "the existence and nature of Or Ein Sof" must not automatically be replaced with "the Creator's Essence." In Derech Mitzvotecha, the Tzemach Tzedek explains that the aspect of "sovev kol almin" is "only the aspect of Or Ein Sof, that is, a radiance and ray from His nature and Essence, blessed be He." He adds that this radiance "is an aspect of actual Ein Sof, since it is a radiance from Him, blessed be He," immediately qualifying: "Of His nature and Essence, blessed be He, it is not at all appropriate to say 'encompassing all worlds,' for He is not within the category of worlds at all" (מהו"ע abbreviates "His nature and Essence").[392]

[392] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27: "Nevertheless, an understanding person will grasp that sovev kol almin is only the aspect of the Ein Sof light, namely a radiance and glow from His blessed nature and Essence. This radiance is the aspect of actual Ein Sof, since it is a radiance from Him, blessed be He; but nevertheless, since it is merely a radiance and glow, it effects no change in His blessed nature and Essence... Of His blessed nature and Essence it is entirely inapplicable to say 'encompasses all worlds,' for He is not within the category of worlds at all." This is the Tzemach Tzedek's wording.

Notice the likeness and difference between the two expressions. The Epistle says of Or Ein Sof that it is "not within the category of place at all," yet it "encompasses all worlds": it has a relationship to the worlds, but that relationship is not spatial. The Tzemach Tzedek says of His nature and Essence, blessed be He, that He is "not within the category of worlds at all": even the description "encompassing worlds" does not apply to Him, since every such description expresses a relationship to the worlds. These are not two entities, but precision of language: when we speak of "sovev," we speak of the light in relation to the worlds, not of the Luminary as He is in Himself.

Distinguishing sovev from the Essence does not distance it from the Creator. The Epistle teaches that the ability to create something from nothing belongs to the One "whose existence is from His Essence"; according to the Tzemach Tzedek, sovev is a radiance from Him and is therefore "an aspect of actual Ein Sof."[393]

[393] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1796–1797: "One must not simply equate sovev with Essence. Sovev is still 'Ein Sof light.' In Epistle 20 as a whole, the Alter Rebbe indeed leads to a deeper principle: the ability to create yesh me-ayin ultimately belongs to His blessed Essence." This was said there in discussing the sentence near the end of the Epistle, "a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the Ein Sof light that encompasses all worlds" (below, chapter 18); the principle applies here as well. Ibid., pp. 1839–1840: "One must not automatically replace 'the existence and nature of the Ein Sof light' here with 'the Creator's Essence'… The Epistle explicitly speaks here of the Ein Sof light." On "the nature and Essence of the Emanator… whose existence is of His own Essence," see above, chapter 7.

So far we have considered what the sentence denies, place, and what it discusses, the light rather than the Essence. Let us now turn to what it affirms: that this light "encompasses all worlds equally."

"And Encompasses All Worlds Equally": Equally Close to All

W13-02
Hebrew-source words
11–22

and it encompasses all worlds equally; "I fill the heavens and the earth" with one and the same equality,

וסובב — And encompasses: surrounds. The root ס־ב־ב means "to go around." We have already said that the word is taken from spatial language, and that the Epistle uses it after denying place. "Sovev kol almin" is familiar from the wording of the Zohar, in Raaya Mehemna, one of its sections, in the portion Pinchas, quoted by the Alter Rebbe in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah: "איהו סובב כל עלמין ... ולית מאן דנפיק מרשותיה לבר," "He encompasses all worlds ... and no one goes outside His domain."

כל עלמין — All worlds: in Aramaic. Later in the passage, the Epistle will specify "the four worlds, Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah."

בשוה — Equally: in the same measure. This word will occupy us more than any other in the following sections, and we shall ask of it the question posed at the chapter's opening: equal in what respect?

ואת השמים ואת הארץ אני מלא — I fill the heavens and the earth: from the verse in Jeremiah: " 'Can a person hide in secret places and I not see him?' declares the L-rd. 'Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the L-rd." In the verse itself, the prophet addresses someone who thinks he can hide, answering: no place is hidden from the Holy One, blessed be He, because He "fills" the heavens and the earth. "Fill" here is the verse's wording, not the kabbalistic term "memale kol almin," which we shall discuss below.[394]

בהשוואה אחת — With one and the same equality: in one equality. This is the Epistle's addition to the verse. The verse says that the Holy One, blessed be He, "fills" the heavens and the earth; the Epistle specifies that He fills them "with one and the same equality," meaning that there is not "more" of Him in heaven than on earth.

Thus "equally" and "with one and the same equality" say the same thing twice. The doubling raises the central question of the following sections: if all is equal, what of the vast differences between worlds that the Epistle itself described in the previous chapter? Before answering, let us hear the end of the sentence, where the point is stated most forcefully.

[394] Jeremiah 23:24. For the distinction between "I fill" in the verse and the term memale kol almin, see the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1822–1823.

“And No Place Is Empty of Him, Even on This Physical Earth”

W13-03
Hebrew-source words 23–30

and no place is empty of Him, even on this physical earth.

ולית אתר — And no place: Aramaic for “and there is no place.”

פנוי מיניה — Is empty of Him: vacant of Him. The expression comes from Tikkunei Zohar, a work accompanying the Zohar, Tikkun 57: “דלית אתר פנוי מניה, לא בעלאין ולא בתתאין,” “there is no place empty of Him, neither in the upper realms nor in the lower.” The Alter Rebbe quotes this in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, Chapter 7, near the Raaya Mehemna wording cited above.[395]

אף — Even: includes the case that seems most distant.

בארץ הלזו הגשמית — On this physical earth: this earth, the physical earth. הלזו, “this,” is demonstrative: the very earth on which we stand, not “earth” in a spiritual sense. The Alter Rebbe uses the same wording in Likkutei Amarim, in the chapter we shall see below: “Now this physical earth.”

[395]Tikkunei HaZohar, Tikkun 57 (91b): “There is no place devoid of Him, neither in the higher realms nor in the lower.” Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7: “This is what is written in the Tikkunim, Tikkun 57: ‘There is no place devoid of Him, neither in the higher realms nor in the lower’; and in Raaya Mehemna, Parashat Pinchas: ‘He grasps all and none grasps Him, etc.; He encompasses all worlds, etc., and none goes outside His domain; He fills all worlds, etc.’ ” The source in Raaya Mehemna: Zohar III, 225a.

What Is Equal, and What Is Not?

We are accustomed to connecting closeness with felt presence. A person near us is heard more clearly; a light nearby appears stronger. Thus when we hear "equally," we tend to understand that everything receives the same measure, and heaven and earth are equal in every respect. But this is not the Epistle's meaning. It itself described three levels of radiance and vast differences from world to world. What, then, is equal?

The Alter Rebbe answers in Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 36: "Now, before Him, blessed be He, above and below do not apply, for He, blessed be He, fills all worlds equally." Immediately afterward: "The difference is only in the recipients of His vitality and light, blessed be He, who receive through many garments covering and concealing His light, blessed be He." ("Fills" is used here in a somewhat different sense from the one we shall encounter later in the chapter; we shall address this in its place.) There are two key expressions here: "before Him" and "in the recipients." Equality is "before Him," from the perspective of the light itself. Difference is "in the recipients," from the perspective of what they receive and what is concealed from them.[396]

[396]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 36, at its beginning.

Equality, then, does not mean that all feel the light to the same degree, or that an angel and dust have become equal in every quality. It means that the light is not grasped and limited within any of their vessels. In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe formulates it thus: the Holy One, blessed be He, "is not like a human soul within its body, which is grasped within the body to the point of being affected and undergoing changes through the body's changes"; He "undergoes no change through the changes of this world, from summer to winter and from day to night … because He is not grasped within the worlds at all, even though He fills them." A high spiritual level can receive revelation that a lower level cannot; but even it does not turn the boundless light into the limit of its apprehension.[397]

We can thus hold two statements together. There is an immense difference between the levels of the worlds; and there is a relationship of Ein Sof in which that difference does not determine near and far. These are two perspectives of contemplation, not a contradiction. To know how much revelation a vessel receives, we examine the vessel and the light vested in it. To understand what is not measured by the vessel, we cannot place it on the same scale of measures.

[397]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7, explaining "none grasps Him."

Why the Physical Earth Specifically?

The Epistle emphasizes the earth because it is the hardest test: revelation there is greatly contracted. In the words of Likkutei Amarim, Or Ein Sof is not vested in it "in the aspect of revealed influence, except for an exceedingly minute vitality, the aspects of the inanimate and vegetative alone." Anyone measuring presence by revelation will say that the earth is where Ein Sof is most distant. The Epistle says the opposite: here too, "with one and the same equality." The same chapter in Likkutei Amarim says of the earth: "All of Or Ein Sof, blessed be He, is called encompassing it, although it is literally within it."[398]

A stone does not apprehend the source of its existence. Does this mean it is far from it? No: absence of apprehension is not absence of dependence, nor absence of presence. The difference between the stone and the angel is in what they apprehend and reveal, not in the light being present in one and absent from the other.

The Sages taught the same principle in the Midrash about the burning bush. A gentile asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha why the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke with Moses specifically from a bush, a low,

[398] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7, in the paragraph "From here one may understand the error of some who are wise in their own eyes"; Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: "The analogy for this is this physical earth... all the blessed Ein Sof light is called encompassing it, although it is actually within it."

thorny shrub. He replied: "To teach you that there is no place without the Shechinah, even a bush." The bush is the Midrash's "this earth": the place that seems least suited to revelation, chosen precisely to teach that there is no place from which the Shechinah is absent.[399]

There is also protection here against another kind of error. In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe rejects those who understood the tzimtzum in the Ari's writings—the description that, before creation, Or Ein Sof "contracted" itself to make "room" for the worlds—"literally, as though the Holy One, blessed be He, withdrew Himself and His nature, G-d forbid, from this world, and merely watches over it from above." He says, "It is utterly impossible to speak of tzimtzum literally, which is among the properties of a body, in relation to the Holy One, blessed be He." "No place is empty of Him, even on this physical earth" states the same thing positively: the physical world is not a place Divinity has left, with only providence remaining from afar.[398]

The next chapter will teach a further novel point. Precisely in the earth, at a level with no knowledge or intellect, a power is apparent that cannot be explained from the appearance of the dust: the power to make

[399]Shemot Rabbah, section 2, on "from within the bush." The note on our sentence in the Kehot Tanya edition with English translation refers to this Midrash with "compare."

[398]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7, in the paragraph "From here one may understand the error of some who are wise in their own eyes"; Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: "The analogy for this is this physical earth... all the blessed Ein Sof light is called encompassing it, although it is actually within it."

growth emerge from nothing continually. Here we learn its foundation: the earth is not far from Ein Sof. It only conceals Him more.

Equality Without Uniformity

Two examples will help distinguish equality from uniformity.

Consider a great light and different vessels receiving from it. Each vessel receives according to its properties: clear glass transmits more, cloudy glass less. The differences in modes of reception are real, yet none of the vessels defines the light's source as though its whole existence were measured by the vessel's dimensions. Here is also the example's limit: a physical lamp occupies a place, and a vessel nearer it receives more. If "sovev" were a large body surrounding smaller bodies, one could ask which is closer to its edge. Sovev has no near or far in this sense, since Ein Sof is not in a place from which distance can be measured; closeness is explained here in terms of revelation and reception. A loftier world receives in a loftier way, with more revelation; but it too does not become a measure for Ein Sof.

Another example from human life: one purpose can give meaning to every part of a complex action. When building a house, the purpose—a house fit to live in—is equally present in foundations, walls, and roof. It is not

“larger” in the larger part or “smaller” in the smaller. Yet each part performs a different function, and the foundation must not be exchanged with the roof. So too equality toward the worlds does not erase their levels: in how they receive vitality there is order and difference; in relation to light not measured by them, none can grasp it in a way that sets a boundary for the source. This too is only an example of the pattern of thought. The purpose is a created person’s thought, and in relation to Divinity the example does not exhaust the matter.

So far we have considered equality: what is equal, and what is not. But the sentence does not stop at equality. It continues with “except,” defining the manner of this presence: “in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding.” Here, for the first time in the passage, the Epistle directs us to another book.

“Except That It Is in the Aspect of Encompassing and Surrounding, as Its Meaning Is Explained in Likkutei Amarim”

W13-04
Hebrew-source words 31–38

Except that it is in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding, as its meaning is explained in Likkutei Amarim,

רק — Except: except that. The word qualifies the manner of presence, not the presence itself. After

saying that no place is empty of Him, it adds the manner in which He is present everywhere.

שהוא — That it is: refers to what the sentence has discussed from the outset, the existence and nature of Or Ein Sof.

בבחי' — In the aspect of: an "aspect" is a side or manner in which something stands in relation to something else. "In the aspect of encompassing" means: in relation to the worlds, it stands in an encompassing manner.

מקיף וסובב — Encompassing and surrounding: two closely related words. "Encompassing" wraps around, and "surrounding" is around. They are not two places or two levels. They express a relationship not grasped through measured investment. In Likkutei Amarim too they appear together: "called 'encompassing' and 'surrounding.' "

וכמ"ש — As … is explained: the abbreviation can mean "and as it is written" or "and as I have written." In the text with abbreviations expanded (the Kehot edition, Chabad's publishing house), it is expanded as "and as has been explained."

הפי' — Its meaning: the explanation of the words "encompassing and surrounding."

בלק"א — In Likkutei Amarim: this is the name of the entire Tanya and, in common usage, of its first part.

Where Is "Its Meaning Explained"?

The Epistle does not specify a chapter, so the location must be identified by wording and subject. The main destination is Chapter 48 of Likkutei Amarim, and four signs point to it. First, the chapter deals precisely with the meaning of "sovev," saying: "The meaning of surrounding and encompassing from above is not in the spatial sense." The Epistle's "meaning" matches this wording. Second, the chapter quotes "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" which the Epistle has just cited. Third, it uses the same expression already mentioned, "Now this physical earth." Fourth, it says of Or Ein Sof that it "is called encompassing it, although it is literally within it." Actual presence and "encompassing" are stated together there, exactly as in our sentence.[391] The note on this sentence in the Kehot English translation of Tanya also refers to Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 48.[400]

Might the reference instead be to Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah? Its Chapter 7 cites "no place is empty of Him" and "encompassing all worlds," which we have

[391] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: the meaning of sovev kol almin. "The meaning is not that it surrounds and encompasses from above in a spatial sense, G-d forbid, for spatiality does not apply to spirituality at all"; revealed influence is called "vested," "for they clothe and apprehend the influence they receive," while concealed influence is called "encompassing and surrounding"; the analogy of "this physical earth" and of knowledge encompassing "in actual fact." The pairing "memale kol almin" and "sovev kol almin": ibid., chapter 41.

[400] The note on the sentence in the Kehot Tanya edition with English translation cites Likkutei Amarim, part I, chapter 48. It also cites Jeremiah 23:24; Tikkunei HaZohar, Tikkun 57 (91b) and Tikkun 70 (122b); Shemot Rabbah, section 2; and Zohar III, 225a, on "encompassing and surrounding." See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1819–1821 and 1839–1840.

already encountered, and explains "the matter of sovev kol almin" through the same analogy of a thought encompassing something that we shall shortly see. Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah is Part Two of Likkutei Amarim. But when the Epistle refers to it, it does so explicitly. Thus in its first part, in the sentence studied in Chapter 3: "and like the sun's radiance within the sun, as explained in Likkutei Amarim, Part Two" (בלק"א ב"ח). Here it says only בלק"א, "in Likkutei Amarim," without ב"ח, "Part Two," so the plain reading is the first part. The reference therefore appears to point to Chapter 48; Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah is an illuminating parallel.[401]

What We Learn from Chapter 48

The chapter in Likkutei Amarim gives us five things, all needed for reading the Epistle.

It is not place. "The meaning of surrounding and encompassing from above is not in the spatial sense, G-d forbid, for the category of place has no application at all to spirituality." We have already seen this.

It is a mode of revelation. "Rather, it means surrounding and encompassing from above with regard to the aspect of the revelation of influence, for

[401] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, in its first part: "Like the sun's radiance within the sun, as stated in Likkutei Amarim, part II" (above, chapter 3); the analogy is explained in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 3. Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7, in the paragraph "This is also the meaning of sovev kol almin": "His thought and knowledge, by which He knows all created beings, actually encompass each and every created being, for they are its very vitality and its actual coming into being from ayin to yesh."

influence that is revealed in the worlds is called 'investment,' becoming vested in the worlds, because they clothe and apprehend the influence they receive." By contrast, "influence that is not revealed but concealed and hidden, and which the worlds do not apprehend, is not called 'vested,' but encompassing and surrounding." Here is the positive definition of the two terms. ("To apprehend" means to grasp intellectually, to understand.) "Vested" influence is something the recipient "clothes": contains and apprehends according to its measure. "Encompassing and surrounding" is influence operating in the recipient that it neither contains nor apprehends. "Inward" too does not mean "inside" spatially: inward is what the recipient apprehends and receives according to its measure.

It is the principal light. What becomes vested is "exceedingly little, a minute radiance contracted very, very greatly, only to give them life in the aspect of limit and finitude. But the principal light, without so much contraction, is called 'encompassing' and 'surrounding.' " Sovev is not a marginal part of the light. On the contrary, it is its principal part. What becomes vested is the little.

It is within the thing. "All of Or Ein Sof, blessed be He, is called encompassing it, although it is literally within it." "Surrounding" does not mean "outside."

It acts. Here comes the analogy. When a person "pictures in his mind something he has seen or is seeing," his mind "encompasses" the entire thing, "except that it is not actually encompassed, but only in the imagination of the person's thought and mind." But the Holy One, blessed be He, "of whom it is written, 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts,' " has thought and knowledge that "encompass every created being from its top to its bottom, its interior and innermost interior, all in actual reality." Of the earth it says: "This knowledge is the vitality of the whole thickness of the entire globe, and its coming into being from ayin to yesh." Finally: since this knowledge "is in the aspect of Ein Sof, it is not called vested in the globe … but encompassing and surrounding, although this knowledge includes all its thickness and interior in actual reality, and thereby brings it into being from ayin to yesh."[391]

The last point is the most important for our chapter. Already in Likkutei Amarim, sovev is not merely "present." It is the earth's "vitality" and "coming into being from ayin to yesh," and "brings it into being." Anyone thinking of sovev as a quiet background while

[391]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: the meaning of sovev kol almin. "The meaning is not that it surrounds and encompasses from above in a spatial sense, G-d forbid, for spatiality does not apply to spirituality at all"; revealed influence is called "vested," "for they clothe and apprehend the influence they receive," while concealed influence is called "encompassing and surrounding"; the analogy of "this physical earth" and of knowledge encompassing "in actual fact." The pairing "memale kol almin" and "sovev kol almin": ibid., chapter 41.

only the kav acts will have difficulty reconciling this with the chapter to which the Epistle itself refers.

The analogy itself teaches where it stops, and the Alter Rebbe says so openly. Human thought encompasses only "in imagination": it forms an image within itself, while the thing itself is entirely unaffected by it. G-d's knowledge encompasses "in actual reality," and is itself the creature's vitality. The difference is not one of degree, as though His thought were stronger than ours. It is a difference of nature: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts." The analogy gives us only the structure: one can encompass a thing "in its entirety" without being limited by it or "vested" in it.

One more thing is learned from the chapter, preparing the end of our passage. According to Likkutei Amarim, the earth "would not come into being as it now is, possessing limit and finitude and exceedingly little vitality … except through many immense contractions." Limitation does not come from sovev. It comes from the contractions. In the Epistle we shall hear this in different words: "And since creation takes place through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the aspect of multiplicity, division, limitation, and finitude."

What the Epistle Adds

If Chapter 48 already explains "encompassing and surrounding," what does the Epistle add? Two things: it places Likkutei Amarim's distinction within the kabbalistic map it has constructed, and says how the two aspects connect.

Chapter 48 has no kav, no vessels of ten sefirot, and no "radiance of a radiance of a radiance"; only the gloss in that chapter briefly mentions "the mystery of the contractions and the investment of lights in vessels." The chapter's main text has "contractions" and "encompassing." The vested vitality, "exceedingly little" in Likkutei Amarim, is in the Epistle "a radiance of a radiance of a radiance … from the kav." Limitation, which in Likkutei Amarim comes through "contractions," comes in the Epistle "through the vessels" and "through the letters." The correspondence between contraction and vessels was stated by the Alter Rebbe himself in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, as we saw in Chapter 8: "The aspect of contraction and concealment of vitality is called 'vessels,' and the vitality itself is called 'light.' " Thus these are not two different teachings, but the same matter in two languages.[402]

[402] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 4, at the end, in parentheses; see above, chapter 8.

The second point is genuinely new: the relationship between the aspects. Likkutei Amarim says that sovev is the earth's "vitality" and "coming into being," and that what becomes vested is "exceedingly little." The Epistle says how they connect: sovev "shines toward the inward kav through the vessels," and "by shining within the vessels" gives them power. This is the passage's second step, which we shall examine below.

Chapter 23 of Likkutei Amarim prevents an error easily made here. There the Alter Rebbe says that Or Ein Sof "does not actually become vested within them, but encompasses all worlds in an encompassing aspect, to give them their principal vitality; only a certain radiance becomes vested within them, what they can bear without becoming utterly nullified in existence." Sovev gives "their principal vitality": even life, not only coming into being, comes primarily from it. The Tzemach Tzedek similarly writes, following our Epistle: "Nevertheless, in truth, the principal vitality is from sovev." Thus the roles must not be divided simply into "the kav gives life and sovev brings into being." We shall return to this in detail when studying the sentence's two subsequent verbs: giving life and bringing into being.[403]

[403] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 23. Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2: "In truth, nevertheless, the principal vitality is from sovev. The matter is that every created being has matter and form… The form, which is the soul, is drawn from the aforementioned memale; but the coming into being of matter and the aspect of yesh cannot occur in any way through a chainlike descent of cause and effect… only through the radiance of sovev, which is omnipotent."

“Memale”: A Name Not Written Here

A student familiar with “memale kol almin and sovev kol almin” will look for “memale” in our sentence and not find it: it does not appear anywhere in the passage. The Epistle says “sovev kol almin,” “encompassing and surrounding,” and “that surrounds and encompasses”; it describes the other aspect in different terms: “the extension and vesting of vitality … through a radiance of a radiance of a radiance … from the kav,” and “the inward kav.” When studying the verse, we already noted that “I fill the heavens and the earth” is not the term “memale,” but the prophet’s language for a presence from which one cannot hide. “Memale” is used here as an explanatory term, although it does not appear in the Epistle’s wording.[404]

Nevertheless, its use is justified if we know where it comes from. The full expression appears in Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 41, together with the same verse: “And He ‘fills all worlds’ and ‘encompasses all worlds,’ as it is written, ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’ ” Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah defines “memale kol almin” as follows: “It is the aspect of vitality vested within the created being itself, greatly contracted within it according to the nature of the created being.” This is exactly what the Epistle

[404] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1811–1813 and 1822–1823: the word memale is not printed in the body of the Epistle in this passage; applying it to the passage is interpretation. “I fill” in the verse is not the technical term.

describes as “the extension and vesting of vitality.” Following the Epistle, the Tzemach Tzedek explicitly calls the kav and its three radiances by this name: “וכ”ז הוא הנק’ ממכ”ע שמאיר לכל חד לפום שיעורא דילי’ ולא לכולם בשוה,” all this is called “memale kol almin,” illuminating each according to its measure, not all equally. We shall therefore sometimes use “memale” as an auxiliary term, remembering that it comes from parallel passages, not the sentence’s own wording.[405]

One further caution: the same word does not always mean the same aspect. In Chapter 36 of Likkutei Amarim, quoted above, it says “fills all worlds equally”; there “fills” describes His presence “before Him,” in which there is neither above nor below. In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, “memale” is vitality vested “according to the nature of the created being,” and is not equal. The word serves two senses, with context deciding. So too “sovev”: in Chapter 23 of Likkutei Amarim it is “His will, blessed be He, called ‘sovev kol almin,’ ” while in Chapter 48 it is “the stored-away and hidden light.” A student must ask everywhere: which relationship is meant here? Someone asking this will not construct a dictionary in which every word corresponds to one aspect in every occurrence.

[405] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 41; Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7, in the paragraph “ ‘Memale kol almin’ is the vitality vested within the created being itself,” and at the end of the chapter, “This is the aspect of memale kol almin, unlike sovev kol almin”; Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2.

Before continuing, let us summarize what "encompassing and surrounding" has given us. "Sovev" is not a place but a mode of influence: influence the recipient does not "clothe" or apprehend according to its measure. It is the principal light, is literally within the thing, and effects vitality and coming into being within it. What the recipient does clothe and apprehend is "exceedingly little," called "memale" in the parallels. We can now read the second part of the sentence, which says how sovev differs from vested vitality.

"And Not an Extension and Vesting of Vitality … Which Is Only Through a Radiance of a Radiance of a Radiance, Etc., from the Kav, as Above"

W13-05
Hebrew-source words
39–46

and not an extension and vesting of vitality to give them life and bring them into being from ayin into yesh,

ולא — And not: and not in the manner of. The word opens the other side of the distinction. "Except" stated how the light's existence stands in relation to the worlds, "in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding"; "and not" states the manner in which it does not act within them: not through extension and investment.

התפשטות — Extension: drawing down from a source to recipients, not expansion in space. This is the word in the summary line studied at the end of the previous chapter, “And all this is in the aspect of the extension of vitality”; the Epistle repeats it here: the manner now being denied is the one described there.

והתלבשות — And vesting: vitality entering a recipient in a manner the recipient “clothes,” containing and apprehending it according to its measure. This is how the Alter Rebbe defined it in Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 48, which we studied: “vested” influence is influence the worlds “clothe and apprehend.” The two words complement one another: “extension” describes the path from source to recipient, while “vesting” describes the manner of reception within it.

החיות — Vitality: the life-giving power.

להחיותם — To give them life: to give life to and sustain created beings.

ולהוותם — And bring them into being: to bring them into existence.

מאין ליש — From ayin into yesh: from nothing into something. This is the same matter called elsewhere “yesh me-ayin,” something from nothing; here the word order follows the direction of movement, from ayin into yesh.

W13-06
Hebrew-source words
47–54

which is only through a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the kav, as above.

כ"א — Which is only: an abbreviation of כי אם, "except only."

ע"י — Through: by means of.

הארה דהארה דהארה — A radiance of a radiance of a radiance: the third level studied in the preceding chapter, present "in all the beings that are created, formed, and made."

וכו' — Etc.: "and so forth," all the rest: this entire order, in all its details, as stated. The word points to what has already been described, without adding an unmentioned fourth level.

מהקו — From the kav: all the radiances are drawn from the kav.

כנ"ל — As above: as mentioned above. The reference returns to the Epistle's description of the three radiances, studied in the preceding chapter.

The Syntax: "Except … and Not … Which Is Only …"

The long sentence opening with "however" consists of four parts. It is helpful to see them one below another:

- **א [1].** "The existence and nature of Or Ein Sof are not within the category of place at all, and encompass

all worlds equally … and ‘no place is empty of Him,’ even on this physical earth”;

- **ב [2].** “Except that it is in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding, as its meaning is explained in Likkutei Amarim”;
- **ג [3].** “And not an extension and vesting of vitality to give them life and bring them into being from ayin into yesh”;
- **ד [4].** “Which is only through a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the kav, as above.”

We shall read it thus: the existence of the light is present everywhere (א [1]); except that it is present in an encompassing and surrounding manner (ב [2]); not in the manner of vitality spreading and becoming vested in creatures to give them life and bring them into being (ג [3]); this vested vitality comes only through the threefold radiance from the kav, “a radiance of a radiance of a radiance,” as described (ד [4]).

To what does “which is only” apply? One might think the fourth part continues to describe sovev, teaching an additional radiance from it. But “which is only” does not return to sovev. The fourth part answers a question raised by the third: if the light’s existence itself is not what becomes vested in creatures, where does their vested vitality come from? The answer: from the kav, in its three radiances, “as above.” There is no need to

invent a new radiance from sovev here; the sentence returns us to what has already been described.[406]

This establishes the kav's place in the sentence: through it, vitality was described as descending in order and measure, level to level, down to the third radiance in creatures. But this distinction does not divide authority into two domains, as though there were two separate sources. The kav is a radiance from Or Ein Sof in an ordered, measured drawing down; sovev is Or Ein Sof in a relationship not defined by the recipient's measure. The Epistle is about to explain how both aspects participate in the same coming into being.

What the Negation Leaves Intact

A negation must be read precisely: know what is denied, and deny no more. "And not an extension and vesting of vitality" denies one mode of relationship, investment. Three things remain intact, although one can easily think, mistakenly, that the negation cancels them.

Sovev is present in creatures too. The first part of the sentence said that "no place is empty of Him," "even on this physical earth."

[406] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1841–1842, in "Does 'Only through a Radiance of a Radiance of a Radiance' Describe Sovev?": "The vested extension described here is through the radiance from the kav, as explicitly stated at the end of the sentence. There is therefore no need to invent a new third radiance from sovev here. 'Only' completes the clarification of the aspect from which vesting comes, and 'from the kav, as stated above' refers back to the preceding discussion." See ibid., pp. 1830–1831.

Sovev participates in bringing into being. The next sentence will explicitly say that sovev "shines toward the inward kav … and gives them strength and might to create something from nothing." Even before that, the chapter in Likkutei Amarim to which the Epistle refers said that sovev is "the vitality of the whole thickness of the entire globe, and its coming into being from ayin to yesh." The negation concerns investment. It denies neither sovev's operation in bringing into being nor its connection with the kav; the next sentence will explicitly describe this connection.[407]

The kav remains a means. The kav is Or Ein Sof in its drawing down. In Chapter 7 we learned that the power to create belongs to the Emanator alone; the Tzemach Tzedek even emphasizes that relative to the encompassing light, "the kav and thread is only a mere radiance from Or Ein Sof, blessed be He." "Through the kav" means by way of the kav, not "by the kav's power in its own right."[408]

[407] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1841–1842, ibid. On the fact that "not… except… from the kav," together with "also… shines toward the kav" in the next sentence, rules out a disconnection between sovev and the kav, see ibid., pp. 1830–1831 and 1835–1836. "The vitality of the entire thickness of the whole globe of the earth, and its coming into being from ayin to yesh": Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48.

[408] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27; see above, chapter 7.

“To Give Them Life and Bring Them into Being”: Two Verbs

The sentence attributes two verbs to the vested extension: giving life and bringing into being. It is easy to skip the second, which is very important. According to the Epistle’s own wording, what comes “through a radiance of a radiance of a radiance … from the kav” is not merely vitality for something already existing; it is also its coming into being. Thus one must not say, “The kav only gives life, while sovev alone brings into being.”

In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah too, the Alter Rebbe attributes both verbs to vested vitality. Of a stone, he says that the minute vitality vested in it is “the nefesh of the inanimate, giving it life and bringing it into being from ayin to yesh at every moment,” adding, “This is the aspect of ‘memale kol almin,’ unlike the aspect of ‘sovev kol almin.’ ” The vested vitality “must first undergo many immense contractions, until through its power and light the created beings themselves come into being as they are, possessing limit and finitude.” On the other side, we have already seen in Chapter 23 of Likkutei Amarim that sovev is the worlds’ “principal vitality,” and in Chapter 48 that it is the earth’s “vitality” and “coming into being.” Both verbs are thus said of both aspects. Their difference is not a simple division, “life” to one side and “existence” to the other;

it is first and foremost one of manner: measured investment, or encompassing that is not measured.[409]

There is an opposite error, and it too must be avoided. In the preceding chapter, we saw the Alter Rebbe's exposition in Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah of the verse with which the Epistle closed its account of the radiances: " 'And You give life to them all': read not mechayeh, 'give life,' but mehaveh, 'bring into being,' that is, something from nothing." The exposition deepens "give life," revealing continual coming into being within it: a creature's life is, at its depth, its coming into being at every moment. It is easy to leap from this to the conclusion that the two words are identical everywhere, but that cannot be learned from the exposition: if they were always identical, why would the Epistle write both? Both distinctions must therefore be maintained: vitality alone must not be attributed to the kav and coming into being alone to sovev; nor should the exposition "give life—bring into being" lead to the conclusion that the words are identical in every context.[410]

[409]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 7, in the paragraph " 'Memale kol almin' is the vitality that vests itself," and in the parenthetical paragraph "After all these contractions"; Likkutei Amarim, chapters 23 and 48.

[410]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 2; the verse: Nehemiah 9:6. Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1845–1848, in "Kav and Sovev: There Is a Real Distinction, and Its Application Still Requires a Bridge": "It is incorrect to divide kav = vitality alone and sovev = coming into being alone; it is also incorrect always to use 'giving life = bringing into being' to erase every distinction." The distinction there rests on the discourse "וחזקת והיית לאיש" (5728), section 2, which distinguishes within the kav itself "between the coming into being of the worlds' existence and vitality in the sense of revelation"; the discourse's statements are cited here as described in the Research Book.

Why does “give them life” precede “bring them into being”? The order of verbs need not be temporal, as though a creature received life before existing. Perhaps it continues the preceding summary line, “the extension of vitality to give them life,” and then goes deeper into “bring them into being.” Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, Chapter 12, uses the opposite order: “to create the worlds from ayin to yesh, and give them life and sustain them.” Thus a fixed rule should not be built on the word order here. The precise reason for the order of verbs here still requires further study.[411]

So far we have studied the passage’s first step, the distinguishing step: sovev is present everywhere, and vested vitality comes from the kav. Someone stopping here may think that sovev has no part in bringing into being. The next sentence, opening with “and also,” prevents this thought. This is the second step, the connecting step.

“And Also, from the Encompassing Or Ein Sof … There Shines Toward the Inward Kav Through the Vessels”

W13-07
Hebrew-source words
55–63

And also, from the light of Ein Sof that surrounds and encompasses the four worlds of ABYA equally,

[411]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 12. Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1839–1842, in “Why ‘to Give Them Life’ before ‘to Bring Them into Being’?”

וגם — And also: furthermore. After stating the manner in which sovev does not operate, "and also" says how it does operate.

מאור א"ס הסובב — From the light of Ein Sof that surrounds: the letter mem means "from"; from it is drawn the radiance about to be described.

ומקיף — And encompasses: again the pair "surrounds" and "encompasses," as in the preceding sentence.

לארבע עולמות אבי"ע — The four worlds of ABYA: Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. "Encompasses all worlds" in the preceding sentence is specified here by name.

בשוה — Equally: the same "equally" as at the passage's beginning; equality from the light's perspective, "before Him," not from the recipients' perspective. This equality is not canceled even when sovev illuminates the kav and operates through the vessels. Sovev does not become "part of the vessels" or measured by them.

W13-08
Hebrew-source words
64–71

there shines toward the inner kav, through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA,

מאיר — Shines: a present-tense verb; shines without interruption. This is an action, not merely presence.

אל — Toward: a directional word; the radiance is directed toward the kav. Sovev does not replace the kav; it illuminates it.

הקו הפנימי — The inner kav: "inner" describes the kav. Inward is what becomes vested in a recipient and is received according to its measure, as we learned from Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 48. The kav is called inward relative to the encompassing sovev.

דרך — Through: by means of. The word indicates a path or mediation.

הכלים די"ס דבי"ע — The vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA: of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. Which vessels these are will be clarified when we reach "within the vessels."

The subject of "shines" is not explicitly stated, so the syntax can be read in two ways. In one, sovev itself "shines toward the kav," and the mem of מאור, "from the light," marks the source. In the other, the subject is the radiance, and the sentence specifies its path. This is how the Kehot English translator rendered it: the illumination from Or Ein Sof that surrounds and encompasses the four worlds equally, toward the inward kav, is by way of the vessels of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.[412] The first reading emphasizes the action, the second the path. Either way, direction and path are clear: from sovev toward the kav, through the vessels.

[412] Tanya, Kehot edition with English translation, Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "Also, the radiation from the light of the En Sof… to the inner gleam (kav) is by way of the kelim of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah"; later: "By its radiation within the kelim, it confers unto them the power and force to create"—"them" there refers to the vessels.

"And Also": The Same Sovev, an Additional Relationship

"And also" introduces no other light. It returns to "the encompassing Or Ein Sof" we have discussed, adding a second relationship. The first was presence: it is everywhere, equally, without becoming vested. The second is illumination: it shines toward the inward kav through the vessels and gives them power. In the terms of the three concepts at the chapter's opening, we move here from presence to the power of bringing into being.

"And also" teaches that sovev acts in bringing into being: it illuminates the kav and gives power to the vessels. The kav remains a means of drawing down, and the power of creation belongs to the Emanator alone.[413]

Three Participants and Their Roles

Three are mentioned in this sentence: sovev, the kav, and the vessels. What is each one's role?

Sovev is the radiance of the power not measured by the worlds. The Epistle says that through its illumination it "gives … strength and might to create something from nothing." The Tzemach Tzedek emphasizes this even more strongly in Derech Mitzvotecha: "Rather, the principal coming into being of yesh is specifically

[413] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1799–1801, in "Mapping the Question and Its Clarification."

through the aspect of sovev kol almin … which encompasses all four worlds equally, and through its radiance shining upon them gives strength and might." Elsewhere he explains why: the coming into being of matter and "the aspect of yesh" is impossible "in any way through successive derivation through cause and effect, for the nature of an effect is to be included in its cause in nullification, not to be an aspect of yesh; this is only through the radiance of sovev, which is omnipotent."[414]

The kav is the inward, ordered, measured drawing down. Through it comes the vitality vested in each creature according to its capacity, "each according to its measure," in the Tzemach Tzedek's words. It is "the kav of Or Ein Sof," in the Epistle's wording, but drawn through contraction and measure. Thus relative to sovev, the Tzemach Tzedek calls it "only a mere radiance." This does not belittle the kav. It defines its function: bringing light to recipients in an order and measure they can bear.

The vessels provide definition. They are the path, "through the vessels," and the place in which the radiance operates, "within the vessels." Through them the creature is a particular thing: this rather than another, of this quantity and quality. The next sentence

[414] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27; Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2. These are the words of the Tzemach Tzedek, explaining the principle in the Epistle; "specifically" is his emphasis.

will state this explicitly: "And since creation takes place through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the aspect of multiplicity, division, limitation, and finitude."

These three participants are not three creators, each adding its own portion to the creature. They are three relationships within one process of imparting and bringing into being: what the root of the ability to bring into being is, in what manner it is drawn down, and how the creature becomes defined.[415]

In his discussion following the Epistle, the Tzemach Tzedek also distinguishes functions, but within the creature itself. He says that "every created being has matter and form": the form, "which is the nefesh," is drawn from memale; but "the coming into being of matter and the aspect of yesh" is possible only "through the radiance of sovev." This distinguishes form from the thing's very being as "yesh," not "life" from "creation"; we have already cautioned against that simple division. He then adds what prevents this distinction from becoming two sources: "For in truth, the intention is not that sovev shines without the mediation of memale, G-d forbid, G-d forbid, but that sovev shines through memale."[416]

[415] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1801–1803, in "Sovev Gives Power: Correcting the Bypass Model."

[416] Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2. The Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1818–1819, observes that this parallel teaches the same principle as the Epistle: a separate yesh does not emerge through cause and effect, and sovev is required for this. It does not, however, provide evidence for the Epistle's three levels of radiance.

This Is Not a Story of Failure and Bypass

The order of sentences may suggest a simple picture. First came the radiances of the kav, level after level, and only afterward the "and also" of sovev. It is easy to picture a story: the kav grows weaker and weaker until it can no longer create; then sovev comes from outside, bypasses the vessels, and supplies what the kav failed to achieve. This is a picture of a small power trying and failing, with a great power coming to its aid. Already at "however" we encountered the warning against the image of "supplementation"; here, with sovev described as acting toward the kav, the temptation is greater still. But this is not the meaning.

The Epistle's own wording contradicts the picture in three places. Sovev shines "through the vessels," so it does not bypass them. It shines "toward the kav," so it does not replace it. And the kav has not "failed": the preceding sentence attributed to its radiances not only "giving them life" but also "bringing them into being."

The Tzemach Tzedek says this explicitly: "The intention is not that sovev shines without the mediation of memale, G-d forbid, G-d forbid." Sovev shines "through memale," that is, within the kav and through it. The kav and sovev are not two independent agents, and the vessels do not act apart from the Creator.[415]

[415] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1801–1803, in "Sovev Gives Power: Correcting the Bypass Model."

Why, then, is the radiance of sovev needed within the kav? The answer is not a story of a kav that tried and failed. The Tzemach Tzedek does indeed say that "what the radiance of memale is insufficient to bring into being, sovev effects through its unlimited power." But he says this only after establishing that "the intention is not that sovev shines without the mediation of memale," and he speaks of the nature of a contracted drawing down, not an event of trial and failure. He describes sovev thus: "Like hyle, which gives unlimited strength and might to this radiance of memale kol almin, to bring forth all its operations that it is prevented from actualizing on its own, since, although Divine, it has already been contracted." "Hyle," in the philosophers' language, is prime matter, without a form of its own and ready to receive any form. Through this image, the Tzemach Tzedek says that sovev, "one simple, unlimited light," is not limited to a particular operation and enables the radiance of memale to actualize its operations. This is his image, and it must not be taken to teach that sovev is "passive" like matter.[417]

[417] Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2: "...In truth, the intention is not that sovev shines without memale as intermediary, G-d forbid, G-d forbid. Rather, sovev shines through memale; its character is that it is one simple, unlimited light, and is like a hyle giving unlimited power and strength to this radiance of memale kol almin to bring all its operations to light, which it cannot actualize on its own, since, although Divine, it has already been contracted as stated above. Therefore each created being comes into being according to what its nature ought to be on the basis of its being drawn from memale; only, what the radiance of memale is insufficient to bring into being, sovev effects through its unlimited power..." בבע"ג means "without limit." Later there: "Sovev is like a hyle that commands that physicality too come into being from the radiance of memale."

What is "prevented on its own"? The radiance of the kav is Divinity, but it "has been contracted": this is its nature and function. A contracted drawing down descends from level to level and reveals light in measure; in the Tzemach Tzedek's words, "each creature comes into being according to what its nature must be through its being drawn from the aspect of memale." But a "yesh" incommensurate with the power bringing it into being is not simply one more level lower in a graded order. Already at the Epistle's beginning the Alter Rebbe said: "Even very many contractions will not suffice for coarse matter like dust to come from the successive derivation of spirituality"; of this he also said: "He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing."[418]

It is worth pausing at this step, because it explains why a contracted drawing down does not suffice. Contraction diminishes what is drawn down but does not change its kind. Dim light is still light, only weaker; it will never become a stone. Likewise, a spiritual drawing down that grows progressively more contracted remains spiritual and remains nullified to its source, like an effect to its cause. "Yesh," by contrast, is something that feels itself separate and has

[418] Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2; there: "For an obstacle can exist only in relation to the finite, whereas in relation to Ein Sof no obstacle exists." Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "Even very numerous contractions will not suffice for physical matter as dense as earth to arise from the chainlike descent of spirituality" (above, chapter 2); "Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh me-ayin" (above, chapter 7).

no commensurability with the power bringing it into being. For such a "yesh" to exist requires a power unrestricted by the order of levels: an "omnipotent" power. The example's limit: light and stone are both physical things, and the transition between them is impossible for natural reasons. In the analogue the issue is not a law of nature, but a difference between kinds of coming into being; the example only illustrates why "more of the same, but less" does not produce something new.

This is why the Epistle also says "bring them into being" of the radiances of the kav: the unlimited power operates within the measured drawing down, not outside it. The kav does what it is—an ordered, measured drawing down—and within it an unlimited power operates. The Epistle does not tell of a malfunction and its repair. It teaches us to analyze one profound operation into aspects that can be understood one after another; the order of explanation is not a sequence of events in time. The One who illuminates is one: "The One who shines in the aspect of sovev is the One who shines in the aspect of memale, and sovev is also within memale."[415]

[415] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1801–1803, in "Sovev Gives Power: Correcting the Bypass Model."

“Through the Vessels”: What Is Clear and What Is Open?

What does the sentence establish with certainty? Three things. The direction: from sovev toward the inward kav. The path: the vessels. And the place where the radiance operates: “within the vessels.” Thus sovev is not disconnected from the kav and does not act without the vessels.

What does the sentence not establish? Precisely how. Does “through the vessels” describe the passage of sovev’s radiance toward the kav, the place where it is received in the kav vested in the vessels, or both? Is this an additional drawing down, or a mode of operation of the same system? The Epistle’s wording connects all the aspects without specifying the details. The precise order of radiance among sovev, vessels, and kav still requires further study.[419]

So far we have considered the radiance’s direction and path. The next sentence says what this radiance does within the vessels, and contains the passage’s most difficult word: “gives.”

[419] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1841–1842, in “Why Does Sovev Shine toward the Kav, and Moreover through the Vessels?”: “Does ‘through the vessels’ describe the passage of the radiance of sovev to the kav, the location of its reception in the kav vested within them, or a combination of both? The Epistle’s wording connects them all, but a one-direction diagram may add what the sentence does not contain.” Ibid., pp. 1839–1840: “Shines toward the inner kav” “describes a functional relation but does not specify whether this is a new drawing down or a mode of operation of the same system.”

“And in Shining Within the Vessels It Gives Them Power and Strength to Create Something from Nothing”

W13-09
Hebrew-source words 72–81

and in shining within the vessels it gives them power and strength to create yesh me’ayin.

ובהארתו — And in shining: through its radiance. The suffix ־ו, “its,” refers to the encompassing Or Ein Sof, discussed since “and also.” A “radiance” is light drawn from a source. Just as we knew “the radiance of the kav,” here there is “the radiance of sovev.” The Tzemach Tzedek writes in the same language: “and through its radiance shining upon them.”

תוך הכלים — Within the vessels: these are the vessels just mentioned, “the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA.” The radiance does not remain above them; it operates within them. If sovev does not “become vested,” how does it act “within” the vessels? We shall return to this below, in the Tzemach Tzedek’s words.

נותן — Gives: a present-tense verb. The giving is not a one-time act that took place and ended; it continues.

בהם — Them: a masculine plural form, referring to the local vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, not the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended. The kav is singular, so “them” does not refer to it alone. The Kehot English

translator understood it this way too, rendering בהם as a pronoun referring to the vessels.

כח ועוז — Power and strength: two related words, their doubling adding emphasis. Oz is power with force. The same expression will recur later in the Epistle: "And through this there is power and strength at the conclusion of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, which is in the element of earth." We shall discuss this in Chapter 15.

לברוא — To create: to effect "creation." Thus the Epistle's first part said: " 'Something from nothing' is called 'creation' in the Holy Tongue."

יש מאין — Yesh me-ayin: something from nothing, neither from prior material nor through successive derivation by cause and effect.

Who Gives, and to Whom?

The pronouns connect the giving with the encompassing Or Ein Sof: "through its radiance," the radiance of sovev; it is the giver, by means of its radiance, and "in them" means in the vessels to which it gives "power and strength to create."[420]

One can ask: does "in them" also include the kav? Grammatically, "in them" refers to the vessels. But sovev shines "toward the kav" in the vessels, so the

[420] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1833–1835, in the "Pronouns / Sentence Subjects" table: "Shines toward the kav: the encompassing Ein Sof light"; "Gives them power: the radiance of sovev within the vessels"; the confidence for both is "high."

power is given in vessels within which the kav shines. The Tzemach Tzedek formulates it thus: "gives strength and might to the aspect of the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, together with the kav within them." There he speaks of the vessels of Atzilut, which we shall address immediately.

Which Vessels?

Several kinds of vessels are mentioned in the Epistle, so we must clarify which the sentence means. We shall seek the answer in the Epistle's own wording, which consistently uses "the vessels of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah." In Chapter 4 we learned: "Now, the beginning and first emergence of created yesh are the vessels of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and also the lights nefesh–ruach; they were created from the aspect of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, which is Divinity, and these are the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." In Chapter 12: "And a radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh–ruach of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and even also in all their vessels."

Thus in the Epistle's language, "the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA" are the created vessels of the sefirot in the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, "the beginning of created yesh." They are not the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut: those are called "the

neshamah of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah," and are Divinity. Simply put: there are local vessels, created in these worlds, and within them a Divine neshamah, the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended to them.

In Chapter 11 we encountered another "in them": "And the radiance of the kav that shone in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Malchut broke through the parsa with them, and shines in them in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah just as in Atzilut itself." Someone reading both sentences together may think they concern the same vessels or find a contradiction. But these are two sentences on two subjects: there "in them" refers to the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that broke through the parsa, and the subject is the radiance of the kav; here "in them" refers to the local vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and the subject is the radiance of sovev. A difference of subject is not a contradiction. Chapter 11 already made this distinction, and it follows from the Epistle's wording.[421]

What of the Tzemach Tzedek, who wrote in Derech Mitzvotecha that sovev "gives strength and might to the

[421] Iggeret HaKodesh 20 (above, chapters 4, 11 and 12). In chapter 11: "The two sentences thus concern different subjects and different sources of radiance: here, the radiance of the kav in the descended vessels of Atzilut; there, the radiance of sovev in the vessels of BYA. The difference in wording is not in itself a contradiction." Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1828–1830: "The beginning of created yesh: the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and also nefesh and ruach, were created from the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity—the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut." Ibid., pp. 1852–1853, among the stable premises: "The beginning of yesh = vessels and nefesh–ruach, not nefesh–ruach–neshamah; the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut are the Divine side."

aspect of the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, together with the kav within them"? Do his words not challenge what we learned here, that our sentence concerns BYA's vessels? We already quoted this in Chapter 7. There the Tzemach Tzedek discusses the vessels of Atzilut and explains a general principle: every coming into being of something from nothing, from its beginning, is "specifically through the aspect of sovev kol almin." In the same passage he adds the lowest endpoint: "And therefore the aspect of Malchut of Asiyah has strength and might to bring physical yesh into being."

There is no contradiction here, but one pattern recurring at several levels: sovev gives power to vessels in which the kav shines—in Atzilut, according to the Tzemach Tzedek; in the vessels of BYA, according to our sentence; and in Malchut of Asiyah, according to the Tzemach Tzedek's explanation of the Epistle's continuation. This does not identify the vessels with one another, but repeats the same relationship, at each level according to its character. At the last level, precision is needed: the Epistle itself will say there that the "power and strength at the conclusion of the vessel" come "through this," meaning the radiance of the kav described there, and

nearby it will mention sovev shining "beneath his feet." We shall discuss this in Chapter 15.[422]

"Gives Them," and "He Alone"

We can now return to the question recorded in Chapter 11, accompanying us from this chapter's beginning. In Chapter 7 we learned: "He alone has the power and ability to create something from nothing." Here we learn that sovev "gives" created vessels "power and strength to create something from nothing." Have the vessels become creators?

No. Four things in the sentence and its context prevent that conclusion.

The power is "given." "Gives them" means the power is not their own. In Chapter 7 we said: the vessels are not a source, since they have no power of their own. Here this is said in one word: "gives."

The power remains the radiance of sovev. It is given "in shining within the vessels." It does not pass to the vessels as property, or become detached from its source. The Tzemach Tzedek explains why this radiance can act this way: "For this light is actual Ein Sof, omnipotent, and although it shines in an encompassing aspect, it nevertheless effects salvations

[422] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27; see above, chapter 7. "At the end of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah": Iggeret HaKodesh 20, below, chapter 15. The Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1819–1821, regards this passage in Derech Mitzvotecha as a parallel belonging to the same family as our sentence, and notes that it does not prove the Epistle's three levels of radiance or the measure of the kav in souls.

within them through this radiance." That is, Or Ein Sof is what acts, and it acts "within them," in the vessels, "through its radiance." His words also answer our question about "within the vessels": the light operates in the vessels "although it shines in an encompassing aspect." "Encompassing," as we learned from Likkutei Amarim, is influence the recipient does not contain or apprehend according to its measure. Thus the power operates in the vessels without becoming their possession.[423]

Creation is "through" the vessels. The next sentence will say: "And since creation takes place through the vessels." "Through" means by means of. The vessels are the path through which the power operates, not its source.

This is how the Epistle speaks everywhere. In Chapter 3 we learned that the created being "is nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it from the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, in which the kav, Or Ein Sof, blessed be He, shines." In Chapter 7: Or Ein Sof became vested in the vessels "to create in and through them." Later in the Epistle, as we shall see in Chapter 15: "And through this there is power and strength at the conclusion of the vessel." In all these places the power flows from the vessels or acts "in and

[423] Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27.

through them," and Or Ein Sof shines within them. The vessels are the "where" and the "how"; they are not the "who."[424]

This can be summarized in three questions that must not be confused. **Who is the source of the power?** The Emanator, "whose existence is from His Essence," "He alone"; according to the Tzemach Tzedek, sovev is a radiance from Him and is therefore "actual Ein Sof, omnipotent." **How is the power given?** "In shining within the vessels," without becoming detached from its source. **How does it operate?** "Through the vessels," so the result is a defined, limited creature. This explains how unlimited power operates through vessels whose created result is limited. Sovev acts in creation, in addition to its presence everywhere.[425]

By G-d's Word and by G-d's Desire

The Tzemach Tzedek also illuminates sovev's part in creation from Scripture. He brings two seemingly contradictory verses from Psalms. One says: "By the word of the L-rd the heavens were made"; the other: "Whatever the L-rd desired, He did in heaven and on

[424]Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "Although the created yesh too is accounted as naught before Him, meaning that it is nullified in its existence in relation to the power and light flowing into it from the vessels…" (above, chapter 3); "To create in them and through them creatures possessing limit and finitude" (above, chapter 7); "Through this there is power and strength at the end of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah in the element of earth" (below, chapter 15).

[425]Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1841–1844, in "If the Kav Creates, Why Is Power and Strength from Sovev Needed?" There: "One must distinguish 'creation occurs through the kav and the vessels' from 'the kav is an independent source of the ability to create.' The first accords with the Epistle's argument; the second does not follow from it."

earth." Was the world created through speech or through will? He answers: "In truth there is no difficulty at all, for by the word of the L-rd, which is memale kol almin, all created beings were made through the desire of the L-rd, which is sovev, willing the fulfillment of His word." There is no difficulty: through G-d's word, memale, all creatures were made, by G-d's desire, sovev, which wills His word to be fulfilled. In Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah too, he brings sovev close to will: this radiance "is the aspect of the supernal will … the revelation of this will is not apprehended in the created being, yet through it something comes into being from nothing."[426]

An example from human life may bring this closer. A person wants to write a letter. The will is not more in the fingers than in the eyes; it is not "located" in one organ. Yet it moves the hand to write and the eye to guide it. The hand writes according to its structure, and the writing emerges in a particular form, this person's handwriting rather than another's. The will "gives power" to the hand, and the hand defines what emerges. The hand alone, without the will, writes nothing.

The example teaches one point: a power not measured by an organ can operate through it, and the result is

[426] Psalms 33:6; 135:6. Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2; Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27, where there also appears "Our G-d is in the heavens; He has done whatever He desired" (Psalms 115:3) and the designation "the will of all wills."

defined according to the organ. Its limits are clear. Human will is a created, limited power, influenced by the body. The organs exist without the will too, and the will does not create them; in the analogue, however, the vessels themselves are created, and the power given them is the power to create something from nothing. Nor in the analogue do we know how to describe the way the power acts in the vessels. The example does not explain creation; it only separates two questions: what is the source of the power, and what defines the result? Both are therefore needed: the unlimited root alone does not explain why precisely this particular thing emerged, and limitation alone does not explain the power that acted within it. A limited result does not require the source of the power to be measured by the same limitation.

What Is Not Explained Here

The sentence says who gives power and through what, but does not detail how the radiance enters the vessels, joins the kav within them, and brings about a defined creature.

One conjecture naturally suggests itself here, and precisely for that reason it must be examined. One might think that the vessels “filter” the power of sovev so that creatures are not nullified by its intensity. There is background for this in the sources: Likkutei Amarim says that the vested light is contracted to “what they

can bear without becoming utterly nullified in existence." But this was said of vested vitality, not the vessels' function in our sentence. Whether the vessels' role in our sentence can be interpreted this way still requires clarification.[427]

A deeper question remains. If the drawing down from the kav has already been said to "bring into being," precisely what does the radiance of sovev add to it? We saw the direction of an answer: the source of the power, its drawing down, and the manner of limiting the result are different questions. According to the Tzemach Tzedek, sovev gives "omnipotent" power and shines "through memale"; the Epistle attributes "bringing them into being" to the radiances of the kav as well. But the precise relationship between the two aspects in every coming into being, what belongs to one and what to the other, is not detailed in the Epistle. The precise relationship between sovev and kav in each coming into being still requires further study.[428]

[427] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 23; see also chapter 48, at the opening: "So that they should not be nullified out of their existence." Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1847–1850: the claim "that the vessels moderate sovev so that they will not be nullified is a hypothesis requiring a source"; "The correct statement is that no source has been supplied establishing this as the vessels' role in the sentence under examination. This mechanistic image was not incorporated into the commentary as fact."

[428] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1842–1844; ibid., pp. 1848–1850, in "Kav and Sovev: No Return to 'Kav = Yesh Mi-Yesh Alone' ": "The good question remains: what does the radiance of sovev within the vessels add to the operation already attributed to the kav?"

What About the Souls?

The discussion of vessels raises a question about souls, since the Epistle defined their status in relation to the vessels. In Chapters 5 and 7 we learned about souls emerging from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut. They are "a likeness of an aspect of Divinity under immense contraction," "but they are not actual Divinity, to create something from nothing, since they have already emerged and become separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav from Or Ein Sof is vested." Now that we have learned that sovev is equally present everywhere, we may ask: is sovev not present in the souls too? If so, what is the measure of Divine light within them?

Three things are known. First, sovev's equality is equality from the light's perspective, not equality in reception: it is present in everything, without this meaning that every creature receives the same thing from it. Second, the Epistle connects the power to create with the vessels in which the kav is vested, and in our sentence with the vessels within which sovev gives power. The souls, according to the Epistle, "emerged and became separated from the vessels of the ten sefirot, in which the kav is vested," meaning the vessels of Atzilut. Third, in Chapters 5 and 7 we read "which is the kav vested in their nefesh, ruach, and neshamah" as the context favors: the nefesh, ruach,

and neshamah of the sefirot themselves, not of angelic and human souls. These words therefore cannot support an assumption that the kav is vested in the souls in the same manner as in the vessels.

What is not known? The Epistle gives no "measure" of the kav or of Divine light in the souls after they emerged and became separated. It does not discuss the soul's structure here, but the creation of the worlds. The distinctions learned in this chapter—presence, vested vitality, and the power of bringing into being—organize the question without answering it. The open question concerns the manner and measure of the kav's presence in the souls, alongside their certain connection to Divinity.[429]

So far we have discussed the source of the power and how it is given. The passage's third step remains, returning us to the world we know: why are creatures emerging from an unlimited power numerous, different from one another, and limited?

[429] Iggeret HaKodesh 20 (above, chapters 5 and 7). On "their nefesh, ruach and neshamah," see above, chapter 7, and the Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya explanation cited there. The Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1850–1852, rejects the declaration that the question has already been resolved, and notes that Shiurim explains the kav as being in the nefesh, ruach and neshamah of the sefirot and explains finitude together with unity in the vessels.

“And Since Creation Is Through the Vessels, the Created Beings Are Therefore in the Aspect of Multiplicity, Division, Limitation, and Finitude”

W13-10
Hebrew-source words 82–91

And since creation is through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the aspect of multiplicity

ומאחר — And since: because; opens a reason.

שהבריאה — Creation: creation of something from nothing, just discussed: “gives them power and strength to create something from nothing.”

היא ע”י הכלים — Is through the vessels: takes place through the local vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA. The words summarize “through the vessels” and “within the vessels” in the preceding sentence. These are not the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut that descended.

לזאת — Therefore: opens the conclusion.

הם הנבראים — The created beings are: הם, “they,” refers to the created beings. The multiplicity and limitation about to be listed are said of the recipients, not the one source.

בבחינת — In the aspect of: in the status or manner of.

ריבוי — Multiplicity: many, not one.

W13-11
Hebrew-source words
92–98

and division and limitation and finitude, and particularly through the letters, as above.

והתחלקות — And division: division and distinction; creatures differ from one another, each distinct from the next.

וגבול — And limitation: every creature has boundaries, in quantity and quality: up to here it is this thing, and beyond here it is not.

ותכלית — And finitude: here meaning "end," "termination," as in Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 48, which says of Ein Sof that it is "without end, with no termination or finitude at all." The Epistle uses תכלית in several senses: "the purpose of man's creation" and "the purpose of the souls' descent" mean aim; "in the ultimate unity" means completeness; but the pair "limit and finitude" means boundedness. So at the Epistle's beginning: "For the vessels are in the aspect of limit and finitude"; in Chapter 7: "created beings possessing limit and finitude"; and here too.

ובפרט — And particularly: especially; points to a more specific factor within the general category.

ע"י האותיות — Through the letters: through the letters of Divine speech.

כנ"ל — As above: as mentioned above. The reference returns to a sentence studied in Chapter 8, as we shall see immediately.

The Chain of Causation

The sentence is structured as an inference: a premise, "since," and a conclusion, "therefore." The premise is that creation takes place through the vessels. The conclusion is that creatures are many, divided, limited, and finite. What connects them? The vessels' nature. At the Epistle's beginning it said: "For the vessels are in the aspect of limit and finitude, as written in Etz Chaim." What is made through something limited receives its form. Ten different vessels produce distinctions; each limited vessel produces a limited result.

A kitchen example can illustrate the idea. One dough pressed into different molds emerges in different shapes: the dough has not changed, while the molds determine each cookie's shape and boundary. The example's limit: dough exists before the molds, whereas in the analogue there is no "material" preceding creation; yesh comes into being from nothing. The mold is also something separate from the baker, whereas the vessels are not an independent power. The example teaches only the direction: limitation comes from that through which the power operates, not from the power itself.

The four words "multiplicity, division, limitation, and finitude" are not four separate kabbalistic levels. We can hear two pairs in them. "Multiplicity and division" answer "how many, and how do they differ?" There are many creatures, each different from the next. "Limitation and finitude" answer "how far?" Every creature is defined and has an end. Each word can be explained without attributing an independent level to it.[430]

Notice where limitation lies. The power "to create something from nothing" is given through the radiance of sovev, unlimited "power and strength." Limitation comes from the vessels. Thus infinite power produces finite creatures without the power itself becoming limited. This is what we learned in Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 48: the earth would not have come into being "possessing limit and finitude … except through many immense contractions." In the Epistle: "And since creation takes place through the vessels, therefore …"

A circle opened at the beginning of the Epistle is thus closed. It opened with the question: "How is Ein Sof one with 'His vessels,' which are the kelim, when the vessels are in the aspect of limit and finitude?" In Chapter 7 we learned the fundamental answer: "And in order that this existent being, created by the power of

[430] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1830–1831: "Four separate technical levels are not required; one can read two pairs (quantity/division + limitation/finitude). 'תכלית' here means finitude, not a teleological purpose, until shown otherwise." Ibid., pp. 1797–1799: "Every word should be explained, but one need not attribute an independent Kabbalistic level to each."

Ein Sof, should possess limit and measure, Or Ein Sof became vested in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut … to create in and through them created beings possessing limit and finitude, particularly through their investment in Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah." "Particularly" appeared there for the first time, and returns here. There the subject was the vessels of Atzilut and their investment in BYA; here, BYA's own vessels. The principle is one: the power is infinite, and the vessels give the result its limit.[431]

Limitation is not a deficiency. In Chapter 10 we learned why yesh was created as "something separate from Divinity": "so that the Emanator, blessed be He, should be King over all the separate beings through their fulfilling His mitzvot that He commands them." A world of many, distinct, limited creatures is the world in which a command can be fulfilled. Multiplicity and limitation are part of the intention, not a malfunction on the way to it.

"And Particularly Through the Letters, as Above"

Where does "as above" point? To Chapter 8, to the sentence: "Also, the multiplicity and division of created beings, which were created by the power of Ein Sof, singular and united in the ultimate unity, is through the multiplicity of letters issuing from

[431] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, at the beginning (above, chapter 1), and later (above, chapter 7). Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48.

Malchut, 'the mouth of the L-rd,' 'and by the breath of His mouth all their host'; the five outlets of the mouth are from the five Gevurot of Nukva." The same words recur: "multiplicity" and "division." The Epistle reminds us of what it has already taught, without beginning a new subject.

What do the letters add to the vessels? The vessels explain limitation and multiplicity in general. The letters explain the particular: why this creature is a stone, that one a tree, and another an angel. In Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe wrote that "created beings are divided into their kinds, generally and specifically, through changes in combinations, exchanges, and substitutions," because "each letter is a drawing down of a particular, specific vitality and power." "Particularly" says: even after we have understood the vessels' role, the layer specifying the creature down to its particulars is still missing.[432]

An example from our own language can bring the idea closer. The same letters are used to write a poem and a contract; changing their order produces another word with another meaning. The combination determines what is said. The example's limit: our letters are signs for things already existing, whereas in Shaar HaYichud

[432] Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 12: letters, combinations and the multiplicity of created beings. Created beings are differentiated "through changes in combinations, substitutions and permutations"; "Each letter is the drawing down of a particular, distinct vitality and power," and when letters combine into a word, "the drawing down of a higher power and a general vitality"; "Each letter that comes first in a combination predominates and is the principal element in this creation."

VehaEmunah the letters are “a drawing down of vitality and power” from which the creature itself comes into being. The example explains only why “combination” and “exchange” are suited to explain differences between creatures.

In Chapter 8 we also learned how not to read this. The Alter Rebbe wrote: “The vessels are the very letters.” “Vessel” and “letter” are not two systems alongside one another, nor two creators. “Vessel” describes contraction in terms of measure and concealment; “letter” describes it in terms of division and combination. Nevertheless, the Epistle does not specify a correspondence of each letter to a particular vessel, and we must not construct such a table on our own.[433]

There is a subtle connection here with what we learned about sovev. In Derech Mitzvotecha we saw: “By the word of the L-rd, which is memale kol almin, all created beings were made through the desire of the L-rd, which is sovev, willing the fulfillment of His word.” Speech, the letters, defines what will be created; desire, the will, gives speech its power to be fulfilled. We can hear a correspondence with the two parts of our sentence: “and particularly through the letters” corresponds to speech, and “gives them power and strength” to desire. This correspondence is our proposal for reading the

[433]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 4, in the parentheses at the end; see above, chapter 8. Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1832–1833: “What is not stated here is a one-to-one mapping between letter and vessel; what is stated is that without them the explanation of multiplicity and division is incomplete.”

Epistle in light of the Tzemach Tzedek's words; the Epistle itself does not state it here.

One further linguistic echo is worth hearing without overstating it. At the end of Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, the Alter Rebbe describes the descent of the letters: "Likewise, G-d illuminated further, drawing forth and bringing down a radiance of a radiance of a radiance from the radiances of the letters. Likewise He continued drawing forth and bringing down, ever lower through successive derivation, until actual inanimate matter was created, such as stones and dust." The same expression, "a radiance of a radiance of a radiance," used for the kav in the Epistle, is used there for letters, leading to stone and dust. This does not prove the systems identical. But it reminds us that in both descriptions the process descends as far as the earth, and with the earth the next chapter will open.[434]

From One Power to the Particular Detail

"Multiplicity" is important: the intention is not a single mass of existence without any differences, but a world of particular creatures. A teaching example can bring this closer. A teacher with a profound idea cannot be satisfied with understanding it clearly; for it to reach the student, the teacher must express it in words the student can receive. The words are not the source of

[434]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 12, at its end. Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2.

the wisdom, but without them the wisdom would not appear in the student in this form.

The example stops at a certain point. The student exists before the words arrive, and the words are only a means of conveying something. In the analogue, vessels and letters are not merely means of communication with a creature already existing. They participate in its manner of coming into being as a particular yesh. Limitation is therefore deeper here: it is bound up with the very emergence of the particular. Multiplicity and unity meet in the same operation: one power bringing many creatures into being through defined paths.

This distinction returns us to the opening. The names sovev, kav, vessels, and letters help explain different aspects of one process without dividing unity. The more detailed the map, the more important it is to remember what it concerns: the modes of revelation and reception within creation's absolute dependence on the one Creator.

So much for the passage itself: presence, vested vitality, the power of bringing into being, and multiplicity and limitation. Before summarizing, let us ask two questions it raises for someone living a life of Torah and mitzvot. First: if the world is already being brought into being and sustained at every moment, what does human Divine service add? Second: if there

are so many names—sovev, kav, vessels—to whom does a person turn in prayer?

What Does Human Divine Service Add?

If vitality and the power of bringing into being are already operating in the world, what do prayer and a mitzvah add? The question naturally arises because we are accustomed to hearing that human Divine service "draws down" light. Does the world receive no vitality before a person prays?

The world does not await human prayer in order to receive its very existence for the first time. The passage we studied describes continual coming into being: "shines" and "gives" in the present tense. The Epistle and its parallels distinguish between the vitality sustaining existence and additional revelation and drawing down aroused through human Divine service. A person does not begin to create a world previously without a source. The person acts within an existence established by the Holy One, blessed be He, drawing additional light into it according to their service.

The Rebbe Rashab's discourses in Hemshech 5672 provide a basis for this distinction. One passage first mentions, in the name of Iggeret HaKodesh 20, the coming into being of all creatures from the union of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah through the neshamah-light; it then describes a

drawing down in "Baruch She'amar," so that the light should shine in the vessels as in Atzilut and there should be a revelation of its nature within them. This provides an explicit basis for distinguishing ongoing coming into being from additional revelation through Divine service. It also yields a rule of caution: a source discussing additional revelation does not prove that without the addition there would have been no creation.[435][436]

There is a limit in the opposite direction too. It has not been established that the radiance of sovev giving "power and strength" in our Epistle is identical in every detail with the additional revelation in prayer or at the Giving of the Torah. Discourses discussing the Giving of the Torah, lights and vessels, and revelation below deepen understanding, but a complete mechanism must not be transferred from them to our sentence, and certainly they must not be taken to imply that the kav "failed."[437]

[435] Hemshech 5672, vol. II (Kehot 5763): discourse beginning "בראשית ברא," pp. תרצז–תרצח [697–698]; discourse beginning "ויהי ביום השמיני," pp. תתקמט–תתקנ [949–950]; discourse beginning "אדם כי יהי' בעור," p. תתקנה [955]: the radiance in Malchut, passage through the parsa, and the additional revelation drawn down through Divine service.

[436] Hemshech 5672, p. תתקנה [955], as described in the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1801–1802, in "Additional Revelation Is Not the Beginning of Existence": "Hemshech 5672, p. תתקנה, first mentions created beings coming into being from the union of ZON of BYA, and afterward the drawing down in Baruch SheAmar so that there will be revelation in the vessels. This is a counter-test to the claim that before the addition there is no coming into being." Ibid., pp. 1856–1858: "There is thus a textual basis for distinguishing existing coming into being from additional revelation through Divine service"; pp. 1801–1803: "A source about additional revelation does not prove that without the addition there was no creation."

[437] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1855–1858, in "Kav and Sovev: What Chapter 129 and 5703 Contribute": Hemshech 5672, vol. I, chapter 129, and Sefer HaMaamarim 5703, pp. 131–133, "distinguish the role of the lights and vessels, and revelation according to the levels of hishtalshelut from

The distinction gives Divine service a real place without attributing to it the power's very existence. It will later illuminate the analogy of sowing. The Epistle will teach that the earth has a power of growth, yet "the fruits produced through raising 'mayin nukvin,' namely sowing and planting, are very, very much finer than those growing spontaneously through the power of growth in the earth alone; from this we shall understand the drawing down of supernal lights in Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, which is the purpose of man's creation." "Mayin nukvin," Aramaic for "female waters," names an arousal rising from the recipient's side. The power is given from above, while the person arouses its appearance in a particular, superior manner. Both aspects join, and each is studied according to its role. We shall discuss this in Chapter 16.[438]

One further point concerns prayer itself. After so detailed a map of sovev, kav, vessels, and letters, one can ask: to whom does the person praying turn? Prayer turns to the Holy One, blessed be He. The attributes and sefirot are not separate addresses among which human service is divided; when Chesed or mercy is

a drawing down that enables revelation and nullification below as well. The context is the revelation of light and the innovation of the Giving of the Torah"; "This does not prove that the radiance of sovev that gives 'power and strength' in the Epistle is identical in every detail to the additional revelation in prayer or at the Giving of the Torah." Ibid., pp. 1801–1803: "The 5703 discourse on the Giving of the Torah, lights and vessels likewise does not by itself prove the kav's failure." The reference to both sources appears in note 41 of the discourse "וחזקת והיית לאיש" (5728), as described ibid., pp. 1841–1842. These sources' statements are cited here as described in the Research Book.

[438] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later (below, chapter 16).

mentioned, this describes the manner of influence requested from Him. In Chapter 7 we quoted the Tzemach Tzedek on this and the principle "to Him, not to His attributes." One brief source sharpens this principle and, equally, requires caution in the opposite direction, as we shall now see.

Hayom Yom, 11 Tishrei: A Parallel, Not a Shortcut

This section brings a parallel and is not a link in reading the Epistle. On a first reading, you may proceed to "Sovev and Returning Light: Two Different Things" and return here afterward.

Hayom Yom, a calendar of sayings and customs for each day of the year compiled by the Rebbe, recounts for 11 Tishrei teachings heard from the Alter Rebbe after Yom Kippur in 5556, in Liozna. As was customary then, he delivered "short discourses," this time on "whenever we call to Him" and the principle "to Him, not to His attributes." Three interpretations of "to Him" are given there. This is the source's wording, in Yiddish and Hebrew: "דער פרדס זאגט אליו איז אורות המתלבשים בכלים דע"ס דאצילות, דער רבי דער בעש"ט זאגט אליו איז דער אלקות וואס אין כלים דע"ס דאצילות, דער פירוש הפשוט איז: אליו עצמות א"ס וואס עס איז בא יעדען פשוטין אידען בידיעה עצמית דורך אמונה פשוטה, און דאס איז קרובים אליו און בכל קראנו אליו עצמות א"ס און עצמות הנשמה, תפלה באמונה פשוטה איז מחבר עצמות הנשמה מיט עצמות א"ס, אז עצמות א"ס זאל זיין דער רופא חולים און מברך השנים." [English rendering: "The

Pardes says that 'to Him' means the lights vested in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut. The Rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov, says that 'to Him' means the Divinity in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut. The simple meaning is: 'to Him,' the Essence of Ein Sof, which every simple Jew knows with essential knowledge through simple faith. This is 'close to Him' and 'whenever we call to Him': the Essence of Ein Sof and the essence of the soul. Prayer with simple faith joins the essence of the soul to the Essence of Ein Sof, so that the Essence of Ein Sof should be the One who heals the sick and blesses the years."][439][440]

In our free translation: the Pardes—Pardes Rimonim by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, the Ramak—says that "to Him" means the lights vested in the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut. The Baal Shem Tov, called here "the Rebbe" by the source, says that "to Him" means the Divinity within the vessels of the ten sefirot of Atzilut. The simple meaning is: "to Him," the Essence of Ein Sof, whom every simple Jew knows "with essential knowledge," through simple faith; this is "close to Him" and "whenever we call to Him": the Essence of Ein Sof and the essence of the soul. Prayer with simple faith joins the essence of the soul with the Essence of

[439] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1802–1803, in "Hayom Yom, 11 Tishrei: A Parallel to Examine, Not a Shortcut."

[440] Hayom Yom, 11 Tishrei. The original is in Yiddish; the translation in the next paragraph is ours. See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1801–1802, in "Hayom Yom and Three Readings of 'To Him,'" and pp. 1836–1839, in "Supplementary Study—'To Him, Not to His Attributes': Hayom Yom for 11 Tishrei."

Ein Sof, so that the Essence of Ein Sof should be "the One who heals the sick" and "the One who blesses the years."

What does this source add to reading the Epistle? It teaches that the language of lights and vessels need not turn prayer into an appeal to an intermediary entity. One can study all the details of drawing down—kav, sovev, vessels, and letters—while knowing that prayer turns "to Him," to the Essence of Ein Sof. It helps preserve the distinction between describing modes of drawing down and the One to whom a person turns.

What does it not add? Three things. First, "sovev" does not appear in it at all. It says "the Essence of Ein Sof," without "light," whereas the Epistle says "the existence and nature of Or Ein Sof." Proximity of subject is not enough to identify the two expressions; "Essence" and "sovev" must not be spoken of as interchangeable names. Second, it offers no basis for matching the three interpretations of "to Him" with the Epistle's three levels of radiance. Third, it does not interpret our sentence or determine how sovev illuminates the kav and gives power to the vessels. A brief saying delivered in another context can illuminate study, but does not replace the Epistle's detailed sentence, which states to whom the radiance is given and through what it operates.[439]

[439] See the Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1802–1803, in "Hayom Yom, 11 Tishrei: A Parallel to Examine, Not a Shortcut."

The Tzemach Tzedek, as we saw, states this explicitly from the other side: sovev is "a radiance and ray from His nature and Essence," and "of His nature and Essence, blessed be He, it is not at all appropriate to say 'encompassing all worlds,' for He is not within the category of worlds at all." Thus Hayom Yom is not evidence that sovev is the Essence; Derech Mitzvotecha explicitly says it is not.

Nevertheless, there is a connection between the sources, and we can hear it. The ending of Hayom Yom connects turning to the Essence of Ein Sof with a very concrete request: "the One who heals the sick and blesses the years," healing for the body and blessing for the crops. Turning to the deepest level does not move away from bodily needs and life; it seeks healing and blessing within them. The Epistle's course is similar: from the investigation of Divinity, through sovev and kav, to the earth that makes things grow, to food, and to practical mitzvot. The sources are close here in their direction of thought, although Hayom Yom does not interpret the Epistle.[441]

We turn from here to one final distinction concerning the Epistle's own continuation.

[441] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1837–1839: "This is a connection between the sources, not a claim that Hayom Yom explicitly explains section 20 or resolves the questions of kav and sovev"; there also: "The attribution of the interpretations to Pardes and to the Baal Shem Tov is reported here according to Hayom Yom."

Sovev and Returning Light: Two Different Things

This section anticipates something we shall study in its place in Chapter 15. On a first reading, it is enough to remember one sentence: the Epistle says “returning light” of the kav, not of sovev.

Later in the Epistle, two further concepts will appear close to sovev: “the feet of Adam Kadmon,” where the kav ends, and “returning light,” light shining “from below upward.” Someone who has just learned that sovev “shines toward the kav” may connect these matters and attribute the movement “from below upward” to sovev itself. It is therefore worth distinguishing sovev from returning light already now.

When the Epistle explains why the earth specifically produces growth from nothing, it will state two sentences. First: “And beneath his feet shines Or Ein Sof, blessed be He, encompassing all worlds, with no great interruption between them, only the igulim of Adam Kadmon alone”; immediately afterward: “And also the kav from Or Ein Sof, which ends at the conclusion of the feet of Adam Kadmon, shines from below upward in the aspect of returning light.” These are two things, connected by “and also”: sovev shines “beneath his feet,” and it is the kav that “shines from below upward in the aspect of returning light.” When the Epistle returns to the subject near its end,

"returning light" will serve two roles. At the sentence's opening, "for it is an aspect of returning light from below upward," it names the whole phenomenon. Later in the same sentence, it specifies: "a radiance of a radiance, etc., from Or Ein Sof encompassing all worlds, and from the kav, Or Ein Sof at the conclusion of the feet of yosher of Adam Kadmon, in the aspect of returning light." In this specification, "in the aspect of returning light" closes the part concerning the kav and, as a description of light, naturally refers to it.[442]

In our passage, by contrast, sovev "shines toward the kav." There is no returning movement here, no "from below upward." "Sovev" signifies light not contracted according to a vessel or level; "returning light" describes, in the Epistle, the kav that has reached the endpoint of its order and shines from there in the opposite direction. There is no source for saying that sovev "pushes" the kav to return, and a movement of returning light must not be attributed to sovev itself. As with "surrounding" and "encompassing," "above" and "below" there do not mean physical distance. This is a local distinction in this Epistle's wording; it is not a general prohibition on every other kabbalistic use of these concepts.[443]

[442] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later (below, chapters 15 and 18). Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1858–1860: "Sovev shines there, whereas it is the kav that is described as shining there in the mode of returning light"; on the sentence at the end of the Epistle: "The final words apply most directly to the kav."

[443] Research Book, vol. II, pp. 1856–1858: "There is no source for a mechanism in which sovev pushes the kav to return. Returning light is formulated with reference to the kav; it need not be

We shall study the conclusion of the kav, the feet of Adam Kadmon, and returning light in detail in Chapter 15.

Returning to the Wording: A Continuous Reading

We can now read the whole passage continuously, hearing in each sentence what we have learned.

"And all this is in the aspect of the extension of vitality to give them life": the three radiances described in the preceding chapter are all one mode, vitality drawn to creatures and vested in them according to their levels.

"However, the existence and nature of Or Ein Sof are not within the category of place at all": the light itself, as it is, is entirely outside the domain of place. It is neither near nor far, inside nor outside. "And encompasses all worlds equally": it surrounds all worlds in the same measure. " 'I fill the heavens and the earth' with one and the same equality": in the prophet's words, He "fills" the heavens and earth, equally. "And 'no place is empty of Him,' even on this physical earth": no place is empty of Him, not even this physical earth on which we stand.

"Except that it is in the aspect of encompassing and surrounding, as its meaning is explained in Likkutei

applied to sovev itself. 'Above' and 'below' here are not physical distances." Ibid., pp. 1858–1860: "Sovev kol almin is not 'a ray that fell below and now returns above' "; p. 1861: "One must not formulate a general prohibition on every other Kabbalistic use of returning light and sovev."

Amarim": it is present in an "encompassing" manner, meaning influence the worlds do not "clothe and apprehend" according to their measure, as the Alter Rebbe explained in Likkutei Amarim, Chapter 48. "And not an extension and vesting of vitality to give them life and bring them into being from ayin into yesh": not in the manner of vitality spreading to creatures and becoming vested in them to give them life and bring them into being. "Which is only through a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the kav, as above": this vested vitality comes only through the threefold radiance from the kav, as described.

"And also, from the light of Ein Sof that surrounds and encompasses the four worlds of Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah equally": furthermore, from that same light equally encompassing the four worlds, "there shines toward the inward kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah": a radiance issues toward the inward kav, through the vessels of the sefirot in the created worlds. "And in shining within the vessels, it gives them power and strength to create something from nothing": through its radiance within the vessels, it gives them power and strength to create something from nothing. The power is its; the vessels are the path and place.

"And since creation takes place through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the aspect of

multiplicity, division, limitation, and finitude": because creation takes place through vessels, which have limits, creatures are many, different from one another, limited, and finite. "And particularly through the letters, as above": especially through the letters of Divine speech, whose combinations and substitutions specify each creature down to its particulars.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

The whole chapter can be stated in five simple sentences. (1) Or Ein Sof is not "in a place," so there is no place, even the dust, that is far from it. (2) What creatures receive and apprehend, each according to its measure, is contracted vitality coming from the kav in three levels. (3) But sovev is not merely "present": it shines toward the kav through the vessels and gives power within them to create something from nothing. (4) The power belongs to the Emanator and His radiance; the vessels are the path, so creatures emerge numerous and limited, particularly according to the combinations of the letters. (5) The many names describe aspects of one operation; they are neither separate powers nor separate addresses for prayer.

Several tempting readings do not stand up to the passage's wording. Each has a correction within the passage itself:

- "Surrounding" and "encompassing" are terms of revelation and concealment. Thus sovev must not be pictured outside the world, sending vitality into it from outside.
- "Equally" is said "before Him," while the differences are "in the recipients." The equality of the worlds themselves does not follow.
- "Bring them into being" is also said of the drawing down from the kav, while "their principal vitality" is said in Likkutei Amarim of sovev. The division "the kav gives life and sovev brings into being" is too simple.
- Sovev shines "toward the kav" and "through the vessels," always. This is not a story of a kav that failed and a sovev that came to its aid.
- The power is "given" in the vessels, through the radiance of sovev, and creation is "through them." The vessels are the path, not the Creator.
- The Epistle speaks of "Or Ein Sof," and the Tzemach Tzedek explains that of the Essence "it is not at all appropriate to say sovev." The two must not be identified.
- "Returning light," as a description of light, is said later in the Epistle of the kav, not of sovev.

The passage leaves five questions open:

- **"Through the vessels."** "Shines toward the inward kav through the vessels" establishes direction, path,

and place. It does not say whether "through the vessels" means the radiance's passage toward the kav, the place of its reception in the kav vested in the vessels, or both; nor whether this is an additional drawing down or a mode of operation of the same system.

- **What exactly does sovev add?** The Epistle also attributes coming into being to the drawing down from the kav. According to the Tzemach Tzedek, sovev is the "omnipotent" power and shines "through memale." But the precise division, what belongs to each aspect in every coming into being, is not detailed.
- **What is the measure of the kav in souls?** The Epistle connects the power to create with the vessels and says that the souls "emerged and became separated" from them. The manner and measure of the kav's presence in souls after separation are not explained here.
- **Why "give them life" before "bring them into being"?** This need not be a temporal order, and no explicit explanation was found for this order specifically here.
- **Sovev and additional revelation.** There is a basis for distinguishing ongoing coming into being from additional revelation through Divine service. But the Epistle's radiance of sovev has not been established as identical in every detail to the

additional revelation in prayer or at the Giving of the Torah.

From Here to the Earth

Until now, one might have imagined that the supernal power is felt chiefly at levels far from our world. After learning that sovev is equally present "even on this physical earth," and that the power of creation is given in the vessels until creatures emerge in "multiplicity, division, limitation, and finitude," we can understand why the next chapter reverses the direction of our gaze.

The Epistle will continue: "And furthermore, beyond all that has been mentioned above, the radiance of a radiance of a radiance, and all that has been mentioned above, displays its power and ability in the physical element of earth with immense revelation, with greater strength than in the elements higher than it." "All that has been mentioned above" includes what we have learned here: the kav and its radiances, and sovev illuminating the kav and giving power to the vessels. Precisely in the earth, the last place, a special power of renewal is apparent: the ability to produce "continually something from nothing, namely grasses and trees."

The understanding we have gained is especially important as we approach the earth. What is low in its measure of revealed vitality is not necessarily without any superiority. Precisely there, an operation can be

revealed whose source is higher than first appears. Why specifically there? The Epistle will explain this later through the feet of Adam Kadmon, sovev shining beneath them, and the kav's returning light. We shall discuss it in Chapters 14 and 15.[444]

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter relies extensively on parallel sources: Likkutei Amarim, Chapters 23, 36, and 48; Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah; the Tzemach Tzedek's Derech Mitzvotecha; and Hayom Yom. This is precisely the environment in which an AI tool can greatly help, and also mislead. It can locate a distant parallel and suggest a connection between sources; it can also "complete" a long quotation from memory in wording that sounds correct but is not written that way.

Exercise 1: Three Questions, Sentence by Sentence

What to ask. Copy the passage from "However, the existence and nature" to "and particularly through the letters, as above" into the tool, and ask it to assign each sentence to one of the three questions we maintained: presence, vested vitality, or the power of bringing into being.

[444] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later: "Moreover, beyond all the above…" (below, chapter 14), and "This is only because the feet of Adam Kadmon end at the bottom of Asiyah…" (below, chapter 15).

What to check. Does the answer fall into one of the three oversimplified readings we saw: "the kav gives life and sovev brings into being"; a story of the kav failing and sovev coming to its aid; or identifying sovev with the Essence? If so, ask the tool to address "bring them into being" in the passage itself, or the Tzemach Tzedek's wording, "of His nature and Essence, blessed be He, it is not at all appropriate to say sovev."

Limit of the conclusion. Correctly assigning the sentences organizes the material well; it does not solve the questions left open in the chapter, such as the precise division between sovev and kav in every coming into being.

Exercise 2: Where Is Its Meaning Explained?

What to ask. Ask the tool which passage in Likkutei Amarim is indicated by "as its meaning is explained in Likkutei Amarim" (וכמ"ש הפי' בלק"א), and request a reason.

What to check. Compare its answer with the chapter's four indications: the explanation of "sovev," the verse, "this earth," and "encompassing … although it is literally within it." If the tool proposes Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, check whether it notices the distinction between בלק"א, "in Likkutei Amarim," and בלק"א ח"ב, "in Likkutei Amarim, Part Two."

Limit of the conclusion. Identifying the place rests on indications, not an explicit reference in the Epistle. An overconfident answer, as though the Epistle specified a chapter, is itself a sign that the tool has added something.

Exercise 3: Hayom Yom and Iggeret HaKodesh

What to ask. Ask the tool to connect Hayom Yom for 11 Tishrei, on "to Him, not to His attributes," with sovev in the Epistle.

What to check. Does the tool identify "the Essence of Ein Sof" in Hayom Yom with "the encompassing Or Ein Sof" in the Epistle? Does it align the three interpretations of "to Him" with the three levels of radiance? Neither step is written in either source.

Limit of the conclusion. A connection between sources is not an interpretation of one by the other. The confidence with which the tool presents a connection adds no evidence; evidence would be a source explicitly connecting them.

Chapter 14 | The Earth That Makes Things Grow: The Power of Creation and the Place of Mazal

What We Already Know

This chapter rests on three points clarified in Chapters 12–13.

1. **Vitality comes from the kav in three levels.** What creatures receive and apprehend, each according to its measure, is contracted vitality from the kav: a radiance, a radiance of a radiance, and a radiance of a radiance of a radiance (Chapter 12).[445]
2. **Or Ein Sof is not "in a place."** Thus no place, even the earth, is far from it: "No place is empty of Him, even on this physical earth" (Chapter 13).
3. **Sovev gives power to create within the vessels.** Sovev "shines toward the inward kav through the vessels," and within them "gives power and strength to create something from nothing." The power

[445] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, in the Wikisource text: "The radiance of the kav shines from there and vests itself in the light of the neshamah of the ten sefirot of BYA, which is Divinity; a radiance of a radiance vests itself in the nefesh and ruach of the ten sefirot of BYA, and even in all their vessels; a radiance of a radiance of a radiance is in all created, formed and made beings, as it is written: 'The seas and all that is in them, and You give life to them all.'" Later: "Also from the Ein Sof light, which surrounds and encompasses the four worlds of ABYA equally, there shines toward the inner kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA; by shining within the vessels it gives them power and strength to create yesh me-ayin. Since creation is through the vessels, the created beings are therefore in the category of multiplicity, division, limit and finitude, particularly through the letters, as stated above." The sentence studied in this chapter immediately follows "particularly through the letters, as stated above." Likewise in the Kehot text on Sefaria, in which the abbreviations are expanded (Sefaria).

belongs to the Emanator and His radiance, and the vessels are the path (Chapter 13).

On this foundation, we can hear the chapter's novel point: precisely in the earth, the last place, the power to create is revealed "with greater strength."

Seeing the Renewal Taking Place in the Soil

A person may pass a field many times without wonder. Knowing that this is how plants grow, habit conceals the question. The Epistle asks us to stop: how does earth, without revealed life, become a place from which grass, trees, and fruit emerge year after year? This is not a request to ignore the seed, rain, and soil. The question concerns the source of the power operating within all of these, and the relationship between what is visible and the ability drawn into it.

The Epistle now adds something surprising: not a new source of power, but a surprising revelation of that power in the lowest place. The physical element of earth, the lowest place in the order, is not merely a place that also has vitality. Specifically there, the radiance "shows its strength and ability," "in an immense revelation, with greater force," more than in the elements above it and more than in the hosts of heaven. The evidence is that earth causes grasses and trees to grow "continually … from nothing." In the middle of the sentence, the Epistle opens a parenthesis

and answers an objection concerning the mazal that "strikes and says, 'Grow!' " At the end of the sentence, it defines the relationship between "the vegetative power" and the plants: the power is "ayin and spiritual, whereas they are physical." It explains why the power is evident specifically below only in the next sentence, to which the next chapter is devoted.

The sentence's progression can be summarized as follows: beyond everything said so far, the third radiance and everything mentioned with it reveal their power in physical earth, in a greater revelation and with greater force than in the elements above it and in the stars of heaven. Those do not have the ability to bring forth something new, something from nothing, again and again, as earth causes grasses and trees to grow. (And if you object that the Sages said the mazal in heaven tells the grass, "Grow!": the mazal addresses grass that has already sprouted, enlarging it and bringing it to fruition; before the grass has sprouted, it has no one to address.) The plants emerge from the power of growth in earth, and that power is "ayin" and spiritual in relation to them, whereas they are physical.

The central distinction is between the strength of the power revealed in the activity and the degree of vitality and awareness in the recipient. A power of growth is revealed in earth, even without knowledge and awareness. Through this distinction, we will clarify

what the mazal does and what it means that the power of growth is “ayin and spiritual” in relation to physical plants.

W14-01
source words
1–13

And furthermore, beyond this, beyond all the above, a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, and all the above,

“ועוד זאת” (“and furthermore”) means “and this further point”: an expression introducing an addition to what has already been said. “יתר על כן” (“beyond this”) means “more than this”; the phrase strengthens the addition and announces that it is greater than expected. “על כל הנ”ל” (“beyond all the above”) means beyond everything mentioned above; הנ”ל abbreviates הנזכר לעיל, “mentioned above.” “הארה דהארה דהארה” (“a radiance of a radiance of a radiance”) is the third radiance in the order of the kav’s radiances, the one of which the Epistle said that it is “in all created beings.” “וכל הנ”ל” (“and all the above”) means everything else mentioned earlier: the higher radiances of the kav and the radiance of sovev in the vessels. This is a collective expression, not the name of a fourth light. “A radiance of a radiance of a radiance, and all the above” is the subject of the sentence, and its predicate comes in the next unit: “shows its strength.” Concerning the words “הנ”ל .. הנ”ל הארה,” that is, from the first הנ”ל to the second, the Rebbe commented in the “Notes and Corrections” table, the list of comments he appended

to Tanya: “צ”ע הל’ והכוונה.” This means that both the wording and the intention require further study.[446]

“And Furthermore, Beyond This”: What Is Added Here?

One might think that the Epistle is adding another level in the order of radiances. But that order has already been enumerated: the radiance of the kav that vests itself in the light of the neshamah, a radiance of a radiance, and a radiance of a radiance of a radiance “in all created beings.” The Epistle does not enumerate a fourth level after the third radiance, nor does it introduce here a source of power not previously mentioned. What is added is the place of manifestation. The power already described, the power of creation operating through the kav and the vessels and through the radiance of sovev, now becomes visible where we would not have expected it.

And why specifically now? The descent through the order of radiances has reached “all created beings,” the last level. Seemingly, the farther the radiance descends, the more its revelation diminishes. At this

[446] He’arot VeTikkunim to Tanya, on folio 131b, the line beginning יתר’, on the words “.. הנ”ל הארה הנ”ל”: “The wording and intention require study,” as quoted in the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1914–1916 and 1948–1950. On the purpose of the addition, the revelation of power in earth, and the repetition of wording left unresolved, see ibid., pp. 1866–1869 and 1976–1978. On the subject of “it displays its power,” and whether the kav and sovev are included within the radiance or enumerated alongside it, see ibid., pp. 1868–1870. Regarding “etc.” in the preceding sentence, “only through a radiance of a radiance of a radiance, etc., from the kav, as stated above,” another note from the same list is cited there, on folio 131b, the line beginning דהארה: “What it includes requires study”; see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1914–1916.

point comes “beyond this”: precisely at the extremity, the power is revealed with greater force. In the previous chapter, we heard that no place is empty of Him, “even in this physical earth.” Now more is being said: not only is earth not empty, but the power of creation is revealed in it “with greater force.” This does not reverse the order of levels. Earth remains low in terms of its manifest vitality, as we will see shortly. What is new is another place in which the power can be recognized.

Why do the words “all the above” occur twice? The following reading may be proposed: the first “beyond all the above” refers to the discussion so far, meaning the entire preceding explanation. The second “and all the above” gathers together the powers mentioned in that explanation and joins them to the third radiance as a single subject. On this reading, the sentence means: beyond everything said so far, the third radiance and everything mentioned with it show their power in the element of earth. This reading remains a proposal: the Rebbe commented on the wording, “Both the wording and the intention require further study.” Nevertheless, the intention of the addition itself is fairly clear: the sentence adds the revelation of the power in earth.

A related question is exactly what is included in the subject “היא” (“it,” feminine). Seemingly, the feminine היא agrees with הארה, “radiance.” But the previous

sentence said of it “הוא בכל הנבראים” (“it is in all created beings”), in the masculine, so grammar alone does not decide the matter. “And all the above” joins it, but the wording does not determine whether the higher radiances of the kav and the radiance of sovev are included within the third radiance or enumerated alongside it. This question remains for further study, and the argument does not depend on it, since one point is clear: no new source of power is added here. Sovev has already been described as that which “gives them strength and force to create something from nothing,” and the kav has already been described as the source of the radiances. Earth is where the power already mentioned is revealed; the source of the power remains Divine.

W14-02
source words
14–24

shows its strength and ability in the physical element of earth, in an immense revelation, with greater force

“היא” (“it”) is the subject at the beginning of the sentence: the radiance, together with “and all the above,” which has been joined to it. “מראה” (“shows”) means reveals, makes visible; not “sees.” “כחה ויכלתה” (“its strength and ability”) means the strength and ability of the radiance. “ביסוד העפר” (“in the element of earth”) means one of the four elements of which the physical world is composed according to the sources on which the Epistle draws. We will discuss the

elements below. “הגשמי” (“physical”) means the actual earth beneath our feet, not a spiritual aspect bearing this name, such as the “element of earth” in the soul mentioned in Tanya, chapter 1. “בגילוי עצום” (“in an immense revelation”) means a very great manifestation. “ביתר עז” (“with greater force”) means with greater strength; the expression is familiar from the biblical phrase “exceeding in dignity and exceeding in strength” (Genesis 49:3).

“Its Strength and Ability”: What Power, Where, and Compared with What?

What power? The combination of strength and ability takes us back to the beginning of the Epistle. There it says of the Creator, whose existence is of His own Essence: “Therefore He alone has the strength and ability to create something from nothing and absolute naught, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh.” Of Malchut of Atzilut, it says there that “in it is revealed the power of Or Ein Sof to create something from nothing.”[447] “Its strength and ability” in our sentence thus means the power to create something from nothing, a power no created being possesses of

[447] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, in the Wikisource text: “Therefore He alone has the power and ability to create yesh from actual ayin and absolute nothingness, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh”; later, concerning Malchut of Atzilut: “Therefore it is called alma de-itgalya, for in it the power of the Ein Sof light is revealed to create yesh me-ayin, not through cause and effect” (Sefaria). On “immense revelation” as revelation of power in operation, and the fact that one must not infer that earth apprehends more Divine light than the higher realms, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1868–1869, 1889–1890 and 1976–1978. On the limit of this distinction, which does not prove that no revelation of light is involved, see ibid., pp. 1919–1920.

itself. The word "revelation," too, is understood here like "is revealed," said there of Malchut: the power becomes evident in its action, in actual creation.

Where? "In the physical element of earth." The wording is precise: it does not say that earth has acquired the power for itself, but that the radiance "shows its strength" in it. In the next chapter, we will hear that the power dwells "at the termination of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah within the element of earth," meaning at the extremity of a vessel, an extremity situated within the element of earth. Already, we can say that earth is the place where the power operates.

Compared with what? "Than in the elements higher than it, and even than in the hosts of heaven." The comparison is neither one of general importance nor one of height of level. It measures one defined thing, which the Epistle will immediately formulate: the ability "to bring forth something from nothing continually."

Superiority of Power and Superiority of Awareness

A difficulty arises here. In Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48, it says of physical earth that nothing vests itself manifestly within it "except a very minute vitality, the aspects of the inanimate and vegetative alone," and

that "all the light of the blessed Ein Sof is called encompassing in relation to it." Chapter 38 says of the inanimate: "In the truly inanimate, such as stones and earth, the radiance is in a state of great contraction, unlike any other, and its vitality is so scant that it does not even possess the vegetative power."[448] If so, how can the Epistle say that there is "an immense revelation" in earth?

The natural answer is that there are two different measures here. One examines how much vitality vests itself in the created being and is revealed within it as its own life and awareness. By this measure, earth is the lowest of all. The other examines how much power is revealed in what is accomplished through it. By this measure, earth is outstanding: new entities emerge from it again and again. Chapter 38 of Tanya discusses the first measure, "its vitality." Our Epistle discusses the second, "shows its strength." This does not mean that there is no revelation of light at all in earth. The distinction teaches us what the expression "an immense revelation" refers to: the power evident in its action.

[448] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48: "Nevertheless, there is not vested within it, in a revealed mode of influence, more than a minute vitality, only the inanimate and vegetative categories. All the blessed Ein Sof light is called encompassing it, although it is actually within it" (Sefaria). Chapter 38: "In the physical body and the truly inanimate, such as stones and earth, the radiance is in a state of unparalleled, immense contraction, and the vitality within it is so slight that it does not even have the vegetative power; in vegetation, the radiance is not so greatly contracted" (Sefaria). On the difference between the two Tanya passages, chapters 38 and 48, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1920–1924. On the proposal to distinguish earth that does not itself grow from a power that causes other things to grow through it, and the fact that no explicit statement applying this distinction to both passages was found, see ibid., pp. 1922–1924 and 1976–1978.

The same distinction may also offer a resolution of a second difficulty, concerning the vegetative power. Chapter 38 says of the inanimate that "it does not even possess the vegetative power," whereas chapter 48 attributes "the aspects of the inanimate and vegetative" to earth, and the end of our sentence discusses "the vegetative power" within earth. The proposal is that earth itself does not grow and has no plant life of its own, yet a power operates within it that causes other created beings to grow. This is a possible reconciliation of the two passages in Tanya, but it still remains to be clarified whether this is indeed their intention.[449]

A simple comparison can help us sense the distinction. A person can explain a great deal about growth, and soil can explain nothing. Yet the person cannot produce from within himself the vegetative power that soil contains. He has the superiority of knowledge and awareness, while a different power operates in soil. There is no need to decide which is "better" in every respect. The two superiorities belong to two different domains. So too in the spiritual worlds: the superiority of a soul's or an angel's apprehension does not measure the power revealed in the action of a physical element. This is what we meant earlier in saying that

[449] For an examination of earth's superiority and the distinction between bringing forth vegetation and its growth, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1868–1870, in the resolution of the issue and the adjacent question map.

the order of levels is not reversed here: the Epistle adds a second perspective to the order of superiorities, revealing a connection between the lowest extremity and the highest root.

Does earth thereby become Divinity? No, and certainly it does not become "Essence." The Epistle speaks of a power operating in earth and a radiance reaching it, while physical earth remains created. In the next chapter, we will hear of "the light of the neshamah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, which is actual Divinity." The description "actual Divinity" is applied there to the light, not to earth. We already know this distinction from the discussion of neshamah and vessel: a Divine source can operate in a created recipient without erasing the difference between them. The novelty is not that soil ceases to be soil, but that the learner begins to see the depth of its dependence and the superiority revealed specifically through it.

We can illustrate this through a maker's craft. The idea is in his mind, but for the thing to exist in the world, he needs actual material. The material does not possess the maker's wisdom, yet the result appears only in it, and the result makes the maker's power evident. The analogy is limited: the maker shapes material that already exists, whereas here we are discussing something from nothing; the material in the analogy has no special connection to the source of the maker's

power, comparable to the connection the Epistle reveals between the lowest extremity and the highest root; and the maker does not vest himself in the material as the power of creation operates in the world. The analogy illuminates only one point. Superiority in the domain of apprehension does not negate the significance of the lower thing in the domain of action.

W14-03
source words
25–33

than in the elements higher than it, and even than in the hosts of heaven, which do not have the strength and ability

“מיסודות” (“than in the elements”): the prefixed mem is comparative, as in “greater than”; “ביתר עז מיסודות” means with greater force, more than in the elements. “העליונים ממנו” (“higher than it”) means the elements above earth in the order of elements. “וגם” (“and even”) adds a second group to the comparison. “מצבא השמים” (“than in the hosts of heaven”) means more than in the hosts of heaven: the sun, moon and stars, including the mazalot. “שאין” (“which do not have”) begins a negation. “בכחם ויכלתם” (“the strength and ability”) means within their strength and ability; again the same combination of strength and ability. The sentence is not yet complete, so we must not stop here: the negation is explained only by its continuation in the next unit.

The Elements and the Hosts of Heaven in the Source's Language

Before hearing what they lack the power to do, let us clarify what they are. The Epistle describes the world according to the map of the sources on which it draws. In this map, there are four elements: fire, air, water and earth. All four are mentioned in Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 1, as elements within the animal soul, where "the element of fire, which rises upward," the element of water, the element of air and "the element of earth" are enumerated. Later in our Epistle itself, it says: "the order of levels of the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking, which are the aspects of earth, water, fire and air." That is, the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking orders correspond to earth, water, fire and air.[450] Earth, corresponding to the inanimate, is the lowest of them, so the Epistle calls the other elements "higher than it." These are the source's concepts, not the chemical elements of modern science. The Epistle addresses the order of levels in the

[450]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 1, on the four elements in the animal soul: "Namely, anger and pride from the element of fire, which rises upward; appetites for pleasure from the element of water, for water causes all kinds of pleasure to grow; frivolity, scoffing, boasting and idle talk from the element of air; and laziness and sadness from the element of earth" (Sefaria). Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later, in the Wikisource text: "From this one can thoroughly understand the order of the levels of inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking, which are the aspects of earth, water, fire and air." On "aspects" as a correspondence of character rather than material identity, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1997–2002; on the explicit correspondence in Likkutei Torah, Parashat Pinchas, in the first discourse "צו את בני ישראל," section 3, see ibid., pp. 2005–2007 and 2010–2011.

created world, and no claim about the composition of materials should be inferred from this sentence.

"The hosts of heaven" is a biblical expression: "And you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the hosts of heaven" (Deuteronomy 4:19).[451] The mazal also belongs to this host. In the Midrash we will shortly cite, it is described as a "mazal in the firmament," meaning a star or constellation in heaven, not "mazal" in the sense of chance or success. And why does the Epistle specifically mention the hosts of heaven? In the world of the sources, the heavenly bodies are considered powerful influences on nature, and the Midrash itself connects them with growth. The comparison is thus with agents whose power in nature is great.

What, then, do they lack the power to do? Not every action, since the mazal, as we will shortly see, tells the grass, "Grow!" One ability is denied: "to bring forth something from nothing continually, as does the element of earth." The sentence does not explain why water does not possess this superiority, although it is connected with growth and, in the order we have seen, corresponds to the vegetative; nor does it compare all the elements with one another individually. The reason the Epistle will give later, which the next chapter addresses, concerns the lowest place and the

[451] Deuteronomy 4:19 (Sefaria). In Bereishit Rabbah, section 10:6, the mazal is described as "a mazal in the firmament."

“termination,” the extremity where the power dwells, rather than a property of one element or another. This reason explains the superiority of the lowest place, but the difference between earth and each of the other elements still requires further study.[449]

W14-04
source words
34–46

to bring forth something from nothing continually, as does the element of earth, which continually causes something to grow from nothing, namely grasses and trees

“להוציא” (“to bring forth”) means to actualize, bring into existence. “יש מאין” (“something from nothing”) means a new entity that is utterly incommensurate with the power bringing it into being, as the Epistle defined at its beginning. “תמיד” (“continually”) means not just once; the power acts and acts again. “כיסוד העפר” (“as does the element of earth”) means as is the case with the element of earth. “המצמיח” (“which causes … to grow”) means bringing forth plants. “תמיד יש מאין” (“continually … from nothing”): the words used negatively of the elements and the hosts of heaven are now repeated affirmatively of earth, in a slightly different order, and the repetition emphasizes that this is precisely the ability they lack. “הם עשבים ואילנות” (“namely grasses and trees”): this is how the Epistle

[449] For an examination of earth’s superiority and the distinction between bringing forth vegetation and its growth, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1868–1870, in the resolution of the issue and the adjacent question map.

explains what the emerging yesh is: small and large plants. The plural הם, "they," refers to this yesh, which is a multiplicity of plants. Here the sentence is interrupted by a parenthesis; its continuation, "from the vegetative power within it," will come afterward.

"To Bring Forth Something from Nothing Continually": What Emerges, and from Where?

At the beginning of the Epistle, "something from nothing" was defined from two sides. From the Creator's side, it is creation "from nothing and absolute naught, without any other cause or reason preceding this yesh," and therefore lies within His power alone. From the created being's side, the name "something from nothing" is used because "the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all, and they are utterly incommensurate with one another"; "it is therefore called specifically something from nothing."[452] The Epistle now applies this expression to growth. The grasses and trees are the yesh, and at the end of the

[452] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, at its beginning, in the Wikisource text: "But in knowledge from below upward, the created yesh is a wholly separate thing in this knowledge and apprehension from below, for the power flowing into it is not apprehended at all, and there is no commensurability whatsoever between the two… not any of it nor any portion of the difference between the nature of the created yesh and the nature of the power and light flowing into it to bring it into being from ayin to yesh. Therefore it is called specifically yesh me-ayin" (Sefaria). See "A Glossary for Rereading" at the end of the book, under "Yesh Me-Ayin." On what constitutes the "ayin" in the vegetative power, and the connection between its use here and the definition at the beginning of the Epistle, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1868–1870; for the distinction between the three uses—spiritual power versus a physical plant, "like yesh me-ayin," and "a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof"—see ibid., pp. 1894–1896.

sentence we will hear what the ayin is: "the vegetative power within it, which is ayin and spiritual, whereas they are physical." There is no claim here that a plant appears without soil, water or seed. The claim is that the power bringing forth the plant is utterly incommensurate with the physical plant that emerges.

Indeed, the Epistle itself recognizes seed and sowing. Later, it will distinguish between plants "that grow of themselves, from the vegetative power alone within the earth" and those "sown and planted," and say of the latter that they are "like something from nothing," because "the planted seed is utterly incommensurate with the fruit."[453] The distinction between "something from nothing" and "like something from nothing" will be discussed in chapter 16. For our purposes, one conclusion suffices: the Epistle's question concerns the source of the ability, not a denial of the means.

And what causes growth: earth or the power? The verb "causes … to grow" is attributed here to the element of earth, and such wording is familiar from the Torah: "And G-d said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation,' " "And the earth brought forth vegetation" (Genesis 1:11–12).

[453] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, later, in the Wikisource text: "Some of them, however, are through raising mayin nukvin, namely those sown and planted. Nevertheless, they are like yesh me-ayin, for the planted seed bears no commensurability at all to the fruit"; later: "The fruits produced through raising mayin nukvin, which is sowing and planting, are very, very much finer than those that arise on their own from the vegetative power in the earth alone." For the distinction between "yesh me-ayin" and "like yesh me-ayin," see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1894–1896 and 1986–1987. On not turning "those that arise on their own" into a biological claim that a plant is created without a seed or prior matter, see ibid., pp. 1967–1969, 1978–1979 and 1987–1988.

Earth is where the action occurs, and the plants emerge from it. But at the very beginning of the sentence, we learned what "shows its strength and ability": the radiance. Both sides are thus preserved. In Scripture's language and the Epistle's language, earth causes growth; at the deeper level, the power of growth is the power of creation operating within it. In the next chapter, the Epistle will identify this power with "the utterance, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation,' " operating "within the earth continually, forever and ever."

What does the word "continually," said twice in our unit, add? One can stand in a field and count its trees. The count will tell us how many trees are there now, but will not answer what the source of the power is that enables earth to produce growth next year as well. Nor is an entire field needed: even a single small blade of grass raises the question. It has a measure, a form and a lifespan, yet the power of growth is not exhausted in it. "Continually" describes an ability not exhausted by one realization, which operates again and again. This does not mean that a large number of results alone proves actual infinity, since a created power can perform many actions within its limits. What identifies this ability with the power of creation is not the count, but what we learned about "its strength and ability": this is the power to create something from nothing, which lies within the Creator's power alone.

“Continually” adds that this power is seen in repeated action.

“Power” here denotes an ongoing capacity for action and renewal. The question concerns the source of the ability to produce growth again and again within the order of creation.

The Epistle itself will make “continually” more precise later. First it will say “continually, forever and ever,” and then “continually, year after year,” “which is a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof, for if this world were to endure for myriads upon myriads of years, they would produce growth year after year.” That is: a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof, such that if this world were to endure for myriads upon myriads of years, they would produce growth each and every year.[454] “A likeness of” expresses resemblance rather than identity, and the condition “if … were to endure” makes the continuity dependent on the world’s existence. “Continually” must therefore not be read as a claim to unconditional infinity.[455] We will study these

[454] The Epistle’s wording on the utterance “Let the earth sprout,” in the Wikisource text: “To bring forth grasses, trees and fruit from ayin to yesh continually, year after year, which is a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof: if this world were to endure for multitudes of myriads of years, they would sprout year after year.” That is, a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof, if this world endures. “A likeness of” and “if it endures” qualify the manner of comparison.

[455] For an examination of the continuity conditional on the world’s existence and the meaning of “a likeness of Ein Sof,” see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1866–1868, in “Ein Sof in Repeated Operation,” and pp. 1868–1870, in the resolution of the issue; also pp. 1892–1896, in “Continually, a Likeness of Ein Sof, and Six versus Seven.” The questions concerning the continuity of growth, the multiplication of fruit, and the difference between yesh me-ayin and like yesh me-ayin are summarized ibid., pp. 1986–1988, and in the repeated table on pp. 2018–2019.

expressions in their places, in chapters 15 and 16. Here, “continually” merely prepares the ground.

In Parentheses: An Objection from the Mazal

The Epistle has just said that the hosts of heaven lack the power “to bring forth something from nothing continually, as does the element of earth.” A reader familiar with the words of the Sages will immediately object. Bereshit Rabbah says: “Rabbi Simon said: There is no blade of grass that does not have a mazal in the firmament that strikes it and tells it, ‘Grow!’ ”[456] If every blade of grass has a mazal in heaven directing it to grow, then it is the hosts of heaven that produce growth, not earth. Before continuing its main sentence, the Epistle opens a parenthesis and answers the objection.

The mazal “in the firmament” is an agent through which influence passes from above into the world. The Midrash’s wording contains three precise details: “each and every blade of grass,” each blade has its own mazal; “that strikes it,” an expression of direct action upon it; “and tells it, ‘Grow!’,” speech addressed to it. The Epistle neither rejects the Midrash nor corrects its

[456] Bereishit Rabbah, section 10:6: “Rabbi Simon said: There is not a single blade of grass that does not have a mazal in the firmament striking it and saying to it, ‘Grow.’ This is what is written (Job 38:33): ‘Do you know the ordinances of heaven? Can you establish its rule on earth?’ ” Later in the Midrash: “Kimah ripens the fruits”; “It is a mazal that disperses [ממזר] the fruits” (Sefaria). In Likkutei Torah, Parashat Pinchas, the statement is cited in different wording: “There is no blade of grass below that does not have a mazal above striking it and saying to it, ‘Grow.’ ”

wording. It reads it precisely: what does the mazal say, and to whom does it say it?

W14-05
source words
47–55

(and the mazal that strikes and says, "Grow!" does so after the grass has already sprouted,

"(": the parenthesis opens here, and will close at the end of the words "for each individual blade of grass in its particular details." "והמזל" ("and the mazal") means the mazal known from the Sages' words; the definite article refers to the Midrash. "המכה" ("that strikes") means striking the grass; this is the Midrash's wording, and need not mean a physical blow. In the Tzemach Tzedek's Or HaTorah, it is interpreted as an arousal that the mazal brings about.[457] "ואומר" ("and says") means and says to it. "גדל" ("Grow!") is an imperative: גְּדַל! "היינו" ("does so") means "that is"; here begins the Epistle's explanation of the Midrash. "לאחר שכבר" ("after … already") means after it has already done so. "צמח" ("sprouted") is in the past tense: the sprouting has already occurred. "העשב" ("the grass") means the particular blade of grass that the mazal addresses. The principal innovation lies in "after … already sprouted":

[457] Or HaTorah by the Tzemach Tzedek, Bamidbar, Discourses for Shavuot, p. קצו [196], according to the transcription cited in the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1962–1965: "For this reason he said that there is no blade of grass below on earth without a mazal that strikes it and says to it, 'Grow.' The meaning of this striking is that through it, it arouses the vegetative power vested in this grass to cause the grass to grow; this is what is meant by 'and says to it, Grow,' etc." The same passage also states "that the earth has no power to bring forth its growth, because its vegetative power needs arousal from the higher source of influence in the heavens above, namely the mazalot fixed in the heavens." The passage does not explicitly determine which stage of growth is meant; see the Research Book, ibid., pp. 1964–1965 and 1976–1981.

the command “Grow!” is addressed to grass that already exists.

W14-06
source words
56–66

and does not tell it to sprout from nothing into something, but to grow from small to large and to bear fruit,

“ואינו אומר לו” (“and does not tell it”): the mazal does not tell the grass. “לו” (“it”) is the same לו as in the Midrash, “and tells it, ‘Grow!’ ”: a particular addressee. “לצמוח מאין ליש” (“to sprout from nothing into something”) means to enter existence as a new thing; “from nothing into something” is the very process of yesh me-ayin, described in terms of its direction: from ayin to yesh. “אלא” (“but”) means but only. “מקוטן לגודל” (“from small to large”) means from a small plant to a large plant: enlarging something already present. “ולשאת פרי” (“and to bear fruit”) means to become fruitful and produce fruit. The last two phrases positively describe the mazal’s role: enlargement and fruit-bearing.

W14-07
source words
67–71

each and every species in its particular details.

“כל מין ומין” (“each and every species”) means each species individually. The mazal’s utterance is not a general push to all vegetation together. It is adapted to the species. “בפרטי פרטיות” (“in its particular details”) means in the finest details: size, form, fruit and the other properties distinguishing one species from

another. The period after פרטיות completes a sentence within the parenthesis. Thus far, the Epistle has described what the mazal does, and the role it gives it is real and detailed.

W14-08
source words
72–84

But before it sprouts, to whom would each individual mazal speak, for each individual blade of grass in its particular details?)

"אבל" ("but"): here the Epistle turns from the role to its limit. "בטרם" means before. "יצמח" ("it sprouts") means the grass comes into existence. "למי יאמר" ("to whom would … speak") is a rhetorical question: to whom would the mazal say "Grow!"? The understood answer is: there is as yet no one to address. "כל מזל ומזל" ("each individual mazal") means each of the mazalot, since each blade of grass has its own mazal. "לכל עשב ועשב" ("for each individual blade of grass") means to each and every blade of grass; these are the Midrash's own words, "each and every blade of grass." "בפרטי פרטיות" ("in its particular details") means in the fine details of each one. ")": the parenthesis closes here, and the main sentence resumes with "from the vegetative power within it." The Rebbe commented on the word order in this unit, and we will discuss his comment below.

The Course of the Proof

The parenthesis is brief, but contains a complete argument. It can be set out in five steps.

The first step rests on the word “Grow!” This is an imperative, and an imperative is always addressed to someone. The Midrash itself says “and tells it,” and “it” is a particular addressee.

The second step: whoever is addressed must exist when being spoken to. Thus, “does so after the grass has already sprouted.” The mazal’s utterance presupposes the grass’s existence; it does not bring it into existence.

The third step defines the content of the utterance: not “to sprout from nothing into something,” but “to grow from small to large and to bear fruit, each and every species in its particular details.” The mazal has a role, a broad and detailed one, but it is a role in growth rather than in coming into being.

The fourth step is the question: “Before it sprouts, to whom would … speak?” Before the grass exists, there is no “it.” Precisely the Midrash’s wording, “each and every blade of grass,” sharpens the point: the mazal has an individual addressee, and an individual addressee must exist.

The fifth step is not written within the parenthesis, but emerges from the main sentence that continues after

it. If the mazal does not bring the grass into existence, the sprouting itself comes from elsewhere: "from the vegetative power within it," meaning the power operating in the element of earth. This resolves the objection, and the claim in the main sentence stands: the hosts of heaven operate in growth, but bringing forth "something from nothing" is not within their power.

The Limits of the Proof

To study the proof correctly, we also need to know where it stops. Five observations will help.

This is a reading of a particular Midrash. The proof is not a logical rule for every cause and every context, as though every influence in the world needed a recipient already in existence. It rests on the Midrash's wording, "and tells it, 'Grow!'," and such an utterance presupposes an addressee.

The mazal retains a role. The Epistle recognizes and defines its role: growth, fruit-bearing and the details of each species. We need not choose between "everything is done by the mazal" and "the mazal has no role at all." The question is what each stage explains.

The detailed division remains open. Exactly how the details of species, flavor and fruit are divided among the seed, the vegetative power and the mazal is not decided by this proof. The Epistle attributes the

"particular details" of growth to the mazal, and later also attributes the production of fruit "from nothing into something" to the power operating in earth. This division still requires further study.[449]

The boundary is a conceptual one. "After … already sprouted" asks whether there is already grass to which one can say, "Grow!" At precisely what moment, during germination or emergence above the soil, the grass is considered to have "sprouted," the Epistle does not say; fixing such a boundary would add to what is written.

The proof does not require the seed's decay. One might try to prove that there is no addressee before sprouting from the fact that the seed decays in the soil, as described in Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 8. But the seed's subsequent decay does not show that it could not have received influence beforehand, so this is not a proof. The Epistle's proof rests on the Midrash's wording and on the words "after the grass has already sprouted," and needs no additional argument.[458]

The Rebbe also commented on the word order within the parenthesis. The comment concerns the wording; the substance of the proof does not depend on it.

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[449] For an examination of earth's superiority and the distinction between bringing forth vegetation and its growth, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1868–1870, in the resolution of the issue and the adjacent question map.

[458] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 8: "For their nature and essence perish and rot in the earth" (Sefaria). On the proposal to base "to whom would it say?" on the seed's decay, and its retraction, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1959–1961, 1974–1975 and 1978–1979. For the conclusion that the addressee of "Grow" is a particular blade of grass already in existence, see ibid., pp. 1868–1869 and 1985–1986.

"But Before It Sprouts, to Whom Would … Speak": A Comment on Word Order

In the same "Notes and Corrections" table, the Rebbe also commented on the words "אבל .. יאמר," meaning from אבל ("but") to יאמר ("would … speak"): "Seemingly, these words belong above, after the word 'העשב' ['the grass']. Or below, after the word 'פרטיות' ['particular details']."[459] That is: perhaps the words "but before it sprouts, to whom would … speak" should come immediately after "after the grass has already sprouted," or later, after the word פרטיות. The parenthesis contains two occurrences of פרטיות. It seems likely that the second occurrence, at the end of the parenthesis, is intended, since the words already stand after the first occurrence. But the comment does not say this explicitly.

What is the difference? In the printed order, the words "each individual mazal … for each individual blade of grass in its particular details" are read as continuing the question "to whom would … speak," so its addressee appears twice: "to whom" and "for each individual blade of grass." Under either proposal in the comment, the phrase "each individual mazal … for

[459] He'arot VeTikkunim to Tanya, on folio 132a, in the line beginning אבל, on the words "אבל יאמר ..": "Seemingly these words belong above, after the word 'העשב' [the grass], or below, after the word 'פרטיות' [particularity]," as quoted in the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1914–1916 and 1948–1950. On the fact that the note tentatively proposes two locations, without punctuation or a decision, and that relocating the words changes the syntax of "each and every mazal for each and every blade of grass in the most particular detail," see ibid., pp. 1914–1916, 1942–1945 and 1982–1983.

each individual blade of grass in its particular details" can be read as continuing the description of the mazal's activity, while the question "before it sprouts, to whom would … speak" stands on its own. The comment opens with "seemingly" and proposes two possibilities, without establishing a text. Nor does it contain explicit punctuation, so we have no agreed wording for either proposal. We study the text as printed, and the source units in this chapter reproduce its wording. The substance of the proof remains unchanged under any reading: the mazal tells grass that has already sprouted, "Grow!"; before it sprouts, it has no one to address.

Source and Means: The Evidence of Likkutei Torah

Must we therefore choose between the vegetative power in earth and the mazal, as though they were competing sources? An explicit answer appears in Likkutei Torah, the collection of the Alter Rebbe's Chassidic discourses on the Torah portions. In the portion of Pinchas, in the discourse "…צו את בני ישראל את קרבני לחמי לאשי" ("Command the Children of Israel … My Offering, My Bread for My Fire-Offerings"), the second of the discourses beginning with these words, the same teaching of the Sages is quoted in slightly different wording, and the Alter Rebbe explains the relationship between the agents:

"The meaning is this: through the chainlike descent of cause and effect alone, there could have been no descent as far as the physical world of Asiyah, for the physicality and materiality of the world did not come into being from spirituality, and spirituality does not produce physicality. Rather, as our Sages of blessed memory said, there is no blade of grass below that does not have a mazal above that strikes it and tells it, 'Grow!' The growth of the plant of the soil from the vegetative power within earth is through the mazal. But the coming into being of the plant of the soil and the actual physical grass is not through the mazal at all; it is solely the Divine power, the actual light of the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, before which spirituality and physicality are equal."[460]

This passage makes three assertions. First: a spiritual chainlike descent of cause and effect does not on its own reach physicality, "and spirituality does not produce physicality." Second: "The growth of the plant of the soil from the vegetative power within earth is

[460] Likkutei Torah, Parashat Pinchas, discourse beginning "צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם את קרבני לחמי לאשי כו'. ואמרת אליהם זה האשה אשר תקריבו כו' את הכבש אחד תעשה בבוקר כו'," end of section 3, folio 78. The continuation of the passage cited: "Just as He acted and made spirituality from ayin to yesh, so He acted and made physicality from actual ayin to yesh"; nearby: "Physicality did not come into being through the utterance by which the spiritual beings were created (see what is written on this elsewhere, in the discourse beginning 'יביאו לבוש מלכות' and in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi')" (Sefaria). On the mazal's place in the chain of influence, in the same discourse, section 1: "The mazal receives from the dregs of the ofanim, the ofanim receive from the holy chayot in the chariot, and the chayot from the seraphim, etc." (Sefaria). On this parallel and its printed location, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1940–1942, 1959–1961, 1965–1967 and 1991–1993. This discourse is not the first discourse in the Torah portion beginning with the same words, in which the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking orders are connected with earth, water, fire and air; see ibid., pp. 2010–2011.

through the mazal.” Growth has a source, “the vegetative power within earth,” and a means, “through the mazal.” Third: “The coming into being of the plant of the soil and the actual physical grass is not through the mazal at all,” but from “the Divine power, the actual light of the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds, before which spirituality and physicality are equal.” Later in the same passage, in discussing why physical beings did not come into being through the utterance in which spiritual beings were created, a parenthetical reference also points to “Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘איהו וחיוהי’,” meaning the Epistle we are studying.

In plain language: an order of spiritual causes and effects does not by itself reach matter. The plant’s growth comes from the vegetative power in earth, and the mazal is the channel through which it passes. But the plant’s very emergence into existence does not pass through the mazal at all; it comes from the power of the encompassing Or Ein Sof, before which spiritual and physical are equal.

It thus becomes clear that the mazal and the power in earth are not competing sources, but source and means within one process. Moreover, the mazal itself does not stand independently. The same discourse describes its place in the chain: “And the mazal receives from the dregs of the Ofanim, and the Ofanim receive from the holy Chayot of the chariot, and the

Chayot from the Seraphim." It is a link in an order of influence, not an independent source.

The analogy of teacher and student can illustrate the distinction. A good teacher helps a student develop a talent, broaden it and deepen it, yet the developing talent belongs to the student, and the assistance does not explain its very existence. Likewise, the plant grows from the vegetative power in earth through the mazal, without the mazal becoming the plant's source. The analogy distinguishes only between the questions. It should not be used to identify plant growth with human learning.

"Causes … to Grow" in Epistle 8: Contradiction or Division of Roles?

Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 8, says: "And the vegetative power within earth itself (עצמה) [variant: עצמו, 'itself,' masculine] is what brings forth and causes the ear of grain, the tree and its fruit to grow."[461] Seemingly, there is a contradiction: there, growth is attributed to the power in earth, while here it is attributed to the mazal. But the wording in Likkutei Torah teaches that there is no need to choose: growth is both "from the vegetative

[461] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 8: "The matter, however, is, by way of analogy, as when one sows seeds or plants a kernel: the ear of grain growing from the seed, and the tree and its fruits from the kernel, are not the nature and essence of the seed and kernel at all, for their nature and essence perish and rot in the earth; the vegetative power in the earth itself (עצמה, feminine) [variant: עצמו, itself, masculine] brings forth and grows the ear of grain, the tree and its fruits" (Sefaria). On the hypothesis that this contradicts our Epistle, and the resolution that there is no contradiction in light of Likkutei Torah, Parashat Pinchas, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1940–1942, 1959–1961, 1965–1967 and 1976–1979.

power within earth" and "through the mazal." The context of Epistle 8 is also different. There, the seed, whose nature "is consumed and decays in earth," is contrasted with earth's power, from which the ear of grain and the tree emerge. There is no discussion of the mazal there and no denial of its role. Thus, there is no contradiction: "causes … to grow" in Epistle 8 and "Grow!" in our Epistle can describe the same process from its two sides, the source and the means. Another question remains open: in Epistle 8, earth's power is actualized "through the seed," whereas our Epistle also discusses plants "that grow of themselves." We will return to this in chapter 16, when we reach those plants.

W14-09
source words
85–92

from the vegetative power within it, which is ayin and spiritual, whereas they are physical.

After the parenthesis, the main sentence resumes: the element of earth causes growth "continually … from nothing, namely grasses and trees … from the vegetative power within it." "מהכח" ("from the … power"): the prefixed mem here indicates a source. "הצומח" ("vegetative") means that which produces growth, the power from which plants emerge. "שבו" ("within it") means within the element of earth. "שהוא" ("which is") refers to the power. "אין" ("ayin") means it is not a "thing" like the plants; we will shortly discuss

the meaning of the word. “ורוחני” (“and spiritual”) means it is not physical. “והם” (“whereas they”) refers to the grasses and trees. “גשמיים” (“physical”) means possessing body and matter.

“Which Is Ayin and Spiritual, Whereas They Are Physical”

“Ayin” here does not mean “nonexistence.” The power exists and operates, and plants emerge from it. It is called ayin in relation to what it brings forth: the plant does not apprehend it, and they are utterly incommensurate. This is precisely the definition the Epistle gave at its beginning for the name “something from nothing” from the created being’s side: “The power flowing into it is not apprehended at all, and they are utterly incommensurate with one another.” The word ayin thus describes a relationship here. It does not teach that the plant emerged from a void. This is also how we should understand “from nothing into something” within the parenthesis: according to the end of the sentence, the ayin from which the plant emerges is “the vegetative power within it.”

The other two words, “spiritual” and “physical,” highlight the gap. The plant is not a spiritual thing that has thickened, nor is it matter that was concealed in the soil and has now been revealed unchanged. There are two modes of existence here, and the transition

between them lies at the heart of the comparison with creation. Just as a created being does not apprehend the power bringing it into being, so grass does not apprehend the power causing it to grow. In earth, on a small and readily visible scale, we see something of the relationship between the power of creation and created beings.

But spirituality alone does not explain this either. The power's being "spiritual" is not what gives it the ability to bring forth something physical. At the beginning of the Epistle, as we learned in chapter 2, it says: "Even very numerous contractions would not suffice for dense physical matter such as earth to come about through the chainlike descent of spirituality from separate intelligences, even those of the angels." And in Likkutei Torah, we saw: "Spirituality does not produce physicality."[462] Thus, "ayin and spiritual" describes the relationship between the power and the plant, and does not by itself explain the source of the ability. According to Likkutei Torah, the physical plant's coming into being derives from "the Divine power, the actual light of the blessed Ein Sof that

[462] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, at its beginning, in the Wikisource text: "Even very numerous contractions will not suffice for physical matter as dense as earth to arise from the chainlike descent of spirituality, from separate intelligences, even those of angels, but only for the spirit of the animal to arise from the ox's face, as stated elsewhere; see there" (Sefaria). Likkutei Torah, Parashat Pinchas, ibid.: "For the physicality and materiality of the world did not come into being from spirituality, and spirituality does not produce physicality." On "ayin and spiritual" as a description of the relation between a power and its products, and on spirituality in itself not being a creative power, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1865–1866, 1868–1869, 1940–1942 and 1978–1979.

encompasses all worlds, before which spirituality and physicality are equal." In our Epistle, the explanation begins in the next sentence, which grounds the power within earth in sovev and in the termination of the kav.

Just as the ability must not be attributed to spirituality as such, neither should it be attributed to earth, as though earth itself were the Creator. Earth is the place, and "strength and force" dwell within it, as we have already mentioned, "at the termination of the vessel." Whoever takes a shortcut and substitutes earth, spirituality as such or the mazal for the source of the power loses the argument the Epistle is building.

Sprouting, Growth and Fruit: A Conceptual Distinction

The parenthesis contains three expressions: "to sprout from nothing into something," "from small to large," and "to bear fruit." The first describes the plant's emergence into existence, which the Epistle denies to the mazal. The other two describe what happens to a plant already in existence, and these it attributes to the mazal.

The distinction becomes somewhat more complicated when we reach fruit. Later in the same Midrash, in the words of other Sages, it says that "Kimah makes the fruit tender," and that "it is a mazal that disperses (ממזר) the fruit." Kimah is a group of stars. The Sages

here attribute a role in the fruit's ripening to the hosts of heaven as well, which accords with "and to bear fruit" in the Epistle. On the other hand, later in the Epistle, it says of the power in earth that it operates "to cause grasses, trees and fruit to grow from nothing into something." Thus, the distinction is not between two kinds of objects, as though grass belonged to earth and fruit to the mazal. It is a distinction between two questions one can ask about the same process: how a new thing emerges into existence, and how what has already emerged develops. Both can be asked of every plant and every fruit. Still, exactly how the details are divided is a question the Epistle does not decide.

Nor does this distinction compete with knowledge about the processes of growth. One can know a great deal about a particular plant, its seed, the water it needs and its growing seasons. The Epistle does not invalidate this knowledge, but asks another question: what is the source of the ability through which all this occurs, and what is the place of each agent? The two modes of inquiry illuminate different questions, and neither invalidates the other.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

The sentence we have studied adds a place to the earlier explanation: the power to create something

from nothing, the Creator's power alone, is revealed "with greater force" specifically in the physical element of earth. Its superiority is that of power revealed in action, not manifest vitality or awareness. Earth remains a lowly created being and does not become a source. The mazal truly operates, but in the growth of what has already sprouted, and it is a means through which the plant grows from the vegetative power in earth. Sprouting itself comes "from the vegetative power within it," which is "ayin and spiritual" in relation to the physical plants.

Five questions remain open. There is no complete resolution of why the wording "beyond all the above … and all the above" is repeated, and the Rebbe wrote that it "requires further study." There is no decision as to whether the higher radiances of the kav and the radiance of sovev are included in the subject "it" or enumerated alongside it. No precise division has been established of the details of species, flavor and fruit among the seed, the power and the mazal. No alternative word order has been established for "but before it sprouts, to whom would … speak." And no full comparison has been made between earth and each of the other elements.

One may also ask why the Epistle chose growth from earth rather than the birth of animals and human beings, which also contains a great wonder. Later, the

Epistle itself will set "Let the earth sprout vegetation" against "Let the waters swarm" and "Let the earth bring forth a living soul," and point to the difference between them. For now, we can say that the example suits the claim concerning the lowest place and the growth emerging repeatedly from earth itself. This choice does not deny the power of Ein Sof in procreation.[463]

Toward the Next Chapter: Why Specifically Below?

The sentence we have studied establishes a fact without giving its reason. The next sentence opens with "And this is only because," beginning the explanation. It contains two components. The first: "The feet of Adam Kadmon end at the bottom of Asiyah, and beneath His feet shines the light of the blessed Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds." The second, introduced by "and also": "And also the kav from Or Ein Sof, which ends at the termination of the feet of Adam Kadmon, shines from below upward in the mode of returning light." Sovev and the kav are two components that "and also" joins in a single explanation; they must not be turned into one name or one movement. How they combine, what "beneath His

[463] Later in the Epistle the utterance "Let the earth sprout" is said to operate "within the earth continually, forever," and in parentheses, in the Wikisource text: "The aspect of Ein Sof, and not only during the six days of Creation, like the utterance 'Let the waters swarm' and the utterance 'Let the earth bring forth a living soul.' " On why vegetation was chosen rather than reproduction, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1894–1896, in "Why Earth Rather Than the Birth of Humans and Animals?" and pp. 1976–1978 and 1986–1987.

feet" means, and what shines from below upward and to where will be explained in the next chapter.[464]

Already, we can see that the answer to "why specifically below" is not the mazal. The parenthesis limited the mazal to the growth of what has already sprouted, and the reason for earth's superiority is sought in the order of the kav and sovev, that is, in the same power of which the sentence began by saying, "shows its strength and ability."

Earth takes us back to the unity and multiplicity with which we began the Epistle. Each leaf is defined, each fruit finite, yet the power operating in them is one: the power of creation. We will study the reason it is revealed specifically here in the next chapter. From there, the Epistle will lead us to human Divine service and explain why a single seed that a person sows can evoke growth far exceeding what was placed in the soil.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter is particularly well suited to practice, since it contains a complete, brief argument, parallel

[464] The Epistle's wording in the Wikisource text: "This is only because the feet of Adam Kadmon end at the bottom of Asiyah, and beneath his feet shines the blessed Ein Sof light that encompasses all worlds, with no great intervening separation, only the circles of Adam Kadmon alone. Also the kav from the Ein Sof light, which ends at the end of the feet of Adam Kadmon, shines from below upward in the mode of returning light." On the transition from earth to the question of why the power is specifically discernible there, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1869–1870. On returning light being explicitly attributed to the kav, and the absence of a source for sovev itself "returning," see ibid., pp. 1987–1988 and 2003–2005; on the radiance of sovev and the return of the kav as two components of one explanation, not one movement, see ibid., pp. 2014–2016.

sources whose wording is not identical, and a textual comment that does not decide the matter.

Exercise 1: Setting Out the Proof from the Mazal

What to ask. Copy into the tool the units from “and the mazal that strikes and says, ‘Grow!’ ” through “in its particular details?),” and ask it to set out the argument in steps, each accompanied by the words on which it rests.

What to check. Compare with the five steps in the chapter. Does the tool understand that mazal here is a star or constellation “in the firmament,” rather than success or chance? Does it preserve the difference between “to sprout from nothing into something” and “from small to large”? And does it recognize that the fifth step is not written within the parenthesis, but emerges from the main sentence?

The limit of the conclusion. We saw that the proof rests on the Midrash’s wording, “and tells it, ‘Grow!’ ” If the tool turns it into a logical rule about every cause in the world, it has extended it beyond what it says.

Exercise 2: Two Wordings of the Same Midrash

What to ask. Ask the tool for the Midrash’s wording in Bereshit Rabbah and its wording as quoted in Likkutei Torah, in the portion of Pinchas.

What to check. Compare with the quotations in the chapter. The wording is not identical in the two places ("each and every blade of grass … in the firmament" as against "grass below … above"), and precisely in such a small difference it is easy for a tool to "complete" from memory and mix the wordings.

The limit of the conclusion. Even when the wordings are found correctly, the difference between them does not of itself establish a difference in content. That must be checked in each source's context.

Exercise 3: A Textual Comment That Does Not Decide

What to ask. Ask the tool what the correct order is for the words "אבל בטרם יצמח למי יאמר" ("but before it sprouts, to whom would … speak").

What to check. Does the tool know that the Rebbe commented on this in the "Notes and Corrections" table, and that the comment opens with "seemingly" and offers two possibilities? If the tool confidently proposes one "corrected" order, it is saying more than is written.

The limit of the conclusion. The printed wording remains the text studied, and the substance of the proof does not change under any reading. A proposal from the tool, even if it sounds logical, is not a textual witness.

Chapter 15 | The Termination of the Kav and the Returning Light in the Earth

What We Already Know

This chapter answers the question with which the previous chapter ended: why specifically in earth? The answer rests on the following points:

1. **The kav and its radiances.** The kav is the drawing down of Or Ein Sof in order and measure. The Epistle distinguishes between "the kav itself" and "the radiance of the kav," and enumerates three levels of radiance, as far as "all beings that are created, formed and made" (chapters 11–12).
2. **Adam Kadmon and His feet.** Adam Kadmon is the first system drawn down through the kav, described in the image of a stature, "yosher," with head and feet. The kav vested within it reaches "the end of the feet of His yosher, which terminate in Malchut of Asiyah" (chapter 12).
3. **Sovev.** The encompassing Or Ein Sof is not within the category of place, and is present equally in all worlds, "even in this physical earth." It shines toward the kav through the vessels, and through its

radiance within them "gives them strength and force to create something from nothing" (chapter 13).

4. **The power in earth.** Specifically in the element of earth, the radiance "shows its strength and ability … with greater force," since earth causes growth "continually … from nothing." The mazal operates in the growth of what has already sprouted, not in its emergence into existence (chapter 14).
5. **Neshamah and vessel.** At every level there is "the light of the neshamah," its Divine vitality, and there are "vessels," the receiving and defining aspect. The light's status does not transfer to the vessel (chapters 4, 11–12).

Why the Termination Is Not Merely the Weakest Place

Why is the lowest place in the order of revelation the place where the power of bringing into being is evident "with greater force"? The Epistle itself gives the reason for the fact we learned in chapter 14, in the words "And this is only because."

When we think of a chain of transmission, we expect less to remain at the end: each stage received from the one before it, and finally a remnant arrives. This side of the description is not erased, and we studied it thoroughly in the preceding chapters: the farther one descends in the order of hishtalshelut, the more the

revelation measured in terms of the recipient contracts, down to "a radiance of a radiance of a radiance." The Epistle adds another perspective without negating the first. There is a superiority revealed specifically at the termination, since there the drawing down reaches its destination, and there a power becomes evident that was not apparent in the same way along the stages of the path. This prepares us to understand "returning light."[465]

Returning light is a name for a radiance operating from the termination, from below upward, and for the superiority of the termination revealed in it. It does not mean the reflection of physical light, but the relationship between the end of the drawing down and its root.

Diminished revelation does not necessarily mean a diminished root: the lower can be distant from manifest apprehension, yet carry a power whose source is lofty. Here this is examined in earth. In the next chapter, we will clarify the place of human Divine service: sowing, planting and arousal from below. The power given from above and the action revealing it below are connected, but are not interchangeable. A person is not an independent source of the light, yet

[465] For an examination of the end of the kav and returning light, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2018–2021, in the resolution "Separating Destination, Direction and Order of Vesting"; pp. 2011–2013, at the opening of the issue: "One must distinguish a summarizing sentence from its elaboration."

his service is not a meaningless addition.[466] In the next part, we will learn how the lower gives vitality to the higher through food and sacrifice, and from there arrive at the conclusion concerning practical mitzvot.[467]

What We Will Study in This Chapter

The Epistle gives two complementary reasons for "why specifically in earth": two parts of a single explanatory sentence joined by "and also." It then shows whom the radiance reaches, in what order it vests itself, and how it becomes a power operating within earth. We will follow the sentence in order:

1. **The first reason.** The feet of Adam Kadmon terminate at the bottom of Asiyah, and beneath His feet the encompassing Or Ein Sof shines without a great interruption.
2. **The second reason.** The kav, terminating in the same place, shines from below upward in the mode of returning light.
3. **The destination.** The light of the neshamah in Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah.

[466] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2066–2069, in "Raising Mayin Nukvin and the Human Purpose: The Contribution of Kuntres Acharon 4."

[467] Iggeret HaKodesh 20, later in the passage: "From this one can thoroughly understand the order of the levels: inanimate, vegetative, animal, speaking… Although the animal is higher than the vegetative, and the speaking higher than the animal, nevertheless the animal is nourished and lives from the vegetative, and the speaking receives its vitality from both." Food and sacrifice will be discussed in the following chapters.

4. **The path.** The order in which the radiance vests itself, according to Sefer HaGilgulim.
5. **The result.** A power given at the termination of the vessel within the element of earth: the utterance "Let the earth sprout vegetation," which operates continually.

The two reasons describe different aspects of the radiance, while the order of investment describes relationships between levels.

The Names in the Sentence: Relationships, Not Objects

We encountered most of the names in this sentence in chapters 12 and 13. Let us briefly recall them in terms of the spiritual relationships they describe here.

Adam Kadmon, abbreviated א"ק, is the name of a very lofty spiritual system in the order of hishtalshelut, preceding the four worlds of Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. "Adam" provides a form of description involving beginning, middle and termination, and relationships between powers, as the human body has a head, a body and feet; "Kadmon" points to the system's primordial position in relation to the order under discussion. This does not mean the physical Adam, the first man, and the two figures must not be identified because they share the word "Adam." Etz Chaim describes Adam Kadmon as the beginning of

the kav's drawing down after the tzimtzum, "in the appearance of a man of upright stature," that is, in the image of a stature with head and feet.[468]

The feet of Adam Kadmon are this system's termination. Head and feet here indicate beginning and termination. The feet are not organs. When the Epistle says that the feet "end at the bottom of Asiyah," it is saying that the higher order reaches the lowest extremity of the world under discussion. There is no extremity at which the influence ceases while existence goes on living by itself. Even when a level seems distant and disconnected, the higher order touches it at its termination.

Yosher is the mode of description in which there are a beginning, an end and successive levels, like a human stature. Reading yosher, one knows to ask what comes earlier or later in the order, what imparts and what receives, and what extremity the order reaches. **Igulim** are another mode of description, that of an encompassing relationship: each level encompasses the one below it, without the division into head and feet. "The igulim of Adam Kadmon" are the encompassing relationship of that same system, not a

[468] Etz Chaim, Gate 1 (Discourse on Igulim and Yosher), branch 2: the two aspects of the ten sefirot, "their being circular, in the form of ten circles one within another," and "their being ten sefirot in an upright configuration along three lines, resembling a person with a head, arms, legs, body and feet"; branch 4: the yosher of Adam Kadmon "like a person of upright stature, comprising 248 organs, in the form of a stature with a head, arms, palms, body and feet"; the order of the worlds' vesting within one another; and the end of the feet of the yosher of Adam Kadmon. For the local context, see the Epistle's wording on the feet of Adam Kadmon and the end of the kav.

circle drawn on a page. Etz Chaim explains that every world and every partzuf bear both modes of description together: igulim and yosher. These are two languages describing the same spiritual reality from two sides, not two objects placed next to one another.[468]

Or Ein Sof that encompasses all worlds is the radiance not measured according to the definition of each world: "encompassing" in the sense of a light that does not vest itself inwardly in the recipient or contract according to its capacity. It is not a wall around a house, nor is it the Creator's Essence. In the chapter on sovev, we learned that this relationship is, of itself, equal in relation to all worlds, and the difference lies only in the manner of reception. Here the Epistle adds where its revelation is emphasized for the purposes of our question: in relation to the termination of the feet.

The kav is the measured drawing down: a "line" in the sense of a fine, contracted light descending after the tzimtzum to give the worlds life from within, according to order and level. It comes from Or Ein Sof, vests itself in the order of hishtalshelut, and terminates at the termination of the feet of Adam Kadmon's yosher. The termination of the kav is the extremity of the extension

[468] Etz Chaim, Gate 1 (Discourse on Igulim and Yosher), branch 2: the two aspects of the ten sefirot, "their being circular, in the form of ten circles one within another," and "their being ten sefirot in an upright configuration along three lines, resembling a person with a head, arms, legs, body and feet"; branch 4: the yosher of Adam Kadmon "like a person of upright stature, comprising 248 organs, in the form of a stature with a head, arms, palms, body and feet"; the order of the worlds' vesting within one another; and the end of the feet of the yosher of Adam Kadmon. For the local context, see the Epistle's wording on the feet of Adam Kadmon and the end of the kav.

in the structure under discussion, not a limit to the Divine Essence.

These names are neither different designations for one thing nor competing powers. Sovev, the igulim of Adam Kadmon, the yosher of Adam Kadmon and the kav within it remain distinct relationships, even when they appear together in one explanation. In a diagram, they can all be drawn with similar lines, creating the temptation to identify them with one another. Anyone doing so substitutes the drawing for the words. Nor should something said in one source about a particular relationship, for example, the igulim of Atik Yomin, which we will encounter later in the chapter, automatically be transferred to another relationship.[469]

Name in the sentence	The relationship it describes here
Adam Kadmon	The first system in the order of hishtalshelut, described in the image of a stature
The feet of Adam Kadmon	The termination of the order of yosher, reaching the bottom of Asiyah
Yosher	An order of beginning and end and successive levels, imparting and receiving
The igulim of Adam Kadmon	An encompassing relationship of the same system, without division into head and feet
The encompassing Or Ein Sof	A radiance encompassing the worlds equally and shining in relation to the termination
The kav	A measured drawing down that terminates there and also shines from there, from below upward

[469] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2011–2013: "Sovev, the circles of Adam Kadmon, the yosher of Adam Kadmon and the kav are not four names for one thing. Not every relation stated concerning Atik and circles may be transferred to every other relation."

Form Is an Analogy for Order

This is also why sovev must not be identified with a round object, or the kav with a line drawn on paper. Form is an analogy for a spiritual order. An image can be used to remember the relationship, but one must return from the drawing to the words: encompasses, vests itself, shines, terminates and returns. Each verb describes an aspect of the influence. "Encompasses" says that the light is not measured according to the recipient; "vests itself" says that the light contracts according to the vessel; "terminates" says that there is an extremity to the order of extension described; "shines" says that the influence operates, rather than merely being present; "returns" says that the radiance's direction is opposite to that of descent. Keeping these five verbs in mind enables us to read the following sentences without imposing an inappropriate bodily image on them.

The first reason connects the feet of Adam Kadmon with sovev shining beneath them.

The First Reason: Sovev Shines Beneath the Feet

W15-01
source words
1–9

And this is only because the feet of Adam Kadmon end at the bottom of Asiyah,

ואין זאת אלא — "And this is only": a distinctly causal explanation, not merely an indication of place. "This" is the superiority of the revelation of power in earth, the fact explained in the previous chapter: specifically the physical element of earth continually causes growth from nothing, more than the higher elements and the hosts of heaven. "Only because" says that there is no reason for this other than what is about to be stated.

דרגלי א"ק — "because the feet of Adam Kadmon": the feet of Adam Kadmon.

מסתיימים — "end": the order reaches its extremity.

בתחתית עשי' — "at the bottom of Asiyah": at the lowest extremity of the world of Asiyah, not a point on a map. Asiyah is the lowest of the four worlds, and its bottom is the lowest level within the lowest world. This very termination serves as the place of revelation for a higher power.

The reason given here is not "earth is low, therefore it has power." It is more precise: earth is where an order whose beginning is exceedingly lofty terminates. The termination belongs to the entire order, as the feet belong to the same person as the head. Thus, "why specifically below" begins to receive an answer even before sovev and the kav are mentioned: the lowest place is not a region omitted from the spiritual map, but the extremity of a higher system.

W15-02
source words
10–18

and beneath his feet shines the Ein Sof light, blessed be He, which encompasses all worlds,

רגליו — “his feet”: the feet of Adam Kadmon just mentioned.

ותחת רגליו — “and beneath his feet”: beneath the termination of Adam Kadmon’s yosher, in the structural analogy. “Beneath” is not a geographical distance; we will shortly clarify its meaning.

מאיר — “shines”: an active verb whose subject is sovev; in this part of the sentence, sovev is the agent.

אור א”ס ב”ה הסובב כל עלמין — “the Ein Sof light, blessed be He, which encompasses all worlds”: the light of the blessed Ein Sof encompassing all worlds, the light explained in chapter 13. The sentence does not say that sovev is absent elsewhere: its equal presence has already been explained, and now its manner of revelation at the bottom is emphasized.

What Does “Beneath” Mean When Spirituality Is Nonspatial?

In spirituality, there is no above and below measured in meters. “Beneath his feet” describes a relationship to the termination of yosher. Sovev encompasses the entire order of levels equally, and is not measured according to a particular level. In relation to the termination, there are fewer intervening garments, so

the radiance of sovev is emphasized there. This is not the disappearance of every interruption: the Epistle enumerates "only the igulim of Adam Kadmon alone."

W15-03
source words
19–26

without a great interruption between them, only the igulim of Adam Kadmon alone.

בלי הפסק רב — "without a great interruption" is not "without any interruption." Were there no interruption at all, there would be no need to say "great," nor any need to enumerate what stands within the relationship.

ביניהם — "between them": between the termination of the feet and the encompassing light shining in relation to it.

רק — "only": indicates what remains in the description.

עיגולי א"ק — "the igulim of Adam Kadmon": Adam Kadmon's encompassing relationship, which we encountered in the list of names.

לבדו — "alone": limits the interruption enumerated, so that we do not add to it.

The igulim are thus what the sentence enumerates between the termination and sovev. Sovev is what shines, and the igulim are what is enumerated between them; they must therefore not be identified with sovev itself. Nor should worlds not mentioned be added to fill the gap.

Why There Is an Interruption, and Why It Is Small

Here Etz Chaim helps us understand the positive significance of the interruption. It explains that the feet of Adam Kadmon's yosher do not reach the lower end of His igulim, but terminate above them. The reason: if the feet reached the end, the kav would reconnect with the circle of Ein Sof below, and then Or Ein Sof would also shine "from there downward" through the kav, and there would no longer be an aspect of above and below, imparting and receiving.[470]

In other words, the interruption between the termination of the feet and sovev is neither a defect nor an accidental distance. It is the condition for any order of hishtalshelut to exist at all: if the kav touched sovev below as it does above, everything would return to equal unity without levels. On the other hand, the interruption is not "great": only the igulim of Adam Kadmon. They suffice to preserve the distinction between the order and the encompassing light, but do not distance the termination from sovev as much as the intermediate levels, surrounded by garments upon

[470] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 4: "Do not think that this kav likewise continues and extends below as far as the end of all the circles on their lower side, which curve beneath the feet of Adam Kadmon of yosher"; "It continues and extends as far as the end of the feet of the upright Adam Kadmon, as stated above, which is precisely as far as the halfway point of the circles of Atik Yomin that surround beneath his feet; there the feet of the yosher of Adam Kadmon end. For if we were to say that the feet of Adam Kadmon reach and extend downward within his own circles to their conclusion and end, he would thereby reconnect with the circle of Ein Sof in its lower half beneath the feet of Adam Kadmon. If so, Ein Sof would shine into him from there below by way of the straight kav, and there would be no above and below, givers and recipients." The reason in Etz Chaim concerns the very existence of the separation; applying it to the smallness of the separation in the Epistle is a proposed explanation.

garments, are distanced from it. This is the first reason for "this": the lowest place is close to sovev in the sense of having little intervening, and therefore the power of bringing into being, whose source is in the light above hishtalshelut, is evident there "with greater force."

Etz Chaim itself says there that the feet of Adam Kadmon's yosher terminate "as far as the halfway point of the igulim of Atik Yomin that surround beneath His feet."[470] ("Atik Yomin," in the language of Kabbalah, is the inner and higher partzuf within the aspect of Keter, the head of the order of Atzilut.) The Epistle, by contrast, enumerates "only the igulim of Adam Kadmon alone." Are the igulim of Atik included in this enumeration, subsumed within it, or does the Epistle speak of a different order? The sources available to us do not decide, and placing two descriptions next to one another does not reconcile them. We therefore have no complete enumeration of the levels that might stand between the termination and sovev, and must not supply it from our own minds. What the wording does establish is the limit: the interruption the Epistle

[470] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 4: "Do not think that this kav likewise continues and extends below as far as the end of all the circles on their lower side, which curve beneath the feet of Adam Kadmon of yosher"; "It continues and extends as far as the end of the feet of the upright Adam Kadmon, as stated above, which is precisely as far as the halfway point of the circles of Atik Yomin that surround beneath his feet; there the feet of the yosher of Adam Kadmon end. For if we were to say that the feet of Adam Kadmon reach and extend downward within his own circles to their conclusion and end, he would thereby reconnect with the circle of Ein Sof in its lower half beneath the feet of Adam Kadmon. If so, Ein Sof would shine into him from there below by way of the straight kav, and there would be no above and below, givers and recipients." The reason in Etz Chaim concerns the very existence of the separation; applying it to the smallness of the separation in the Epistle is a proposed explanation.

enumerates is not great, and what it enumerates within it is the igulim of Adam Kadmon alone.[471]

Farthest and Closest: Two Axes

A question now arises that a reader studying Etz Chaim will immediately ask. In that same branch, it says that the vessels of yosher of the world of Asiyah are "more external and exceedingly distant from the inward Or Ein Sof, to the utmost degree of distance," and that "likewise in relation to Ein Sof that encompasses all the worlds from without, the vessels of Asiyah are utterly distant from it." That is, they are distant both from the inward Or Ein Sof and from sovev.[472] How, then, does the Epistle say that at the bottom of Asiyah, sovev shines "without a great interruption"?

The plausible answer is that the two descriptions measure two different axes, and Etz Chaim itself hints at this in the same place: from our perspective, we human beings dwelling on earth, the globe of earth is the central point of all worlds, "like the date stone at the

[471] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2016–2018, in the status of the questions: "Beneath His Feet and Little Separation": "A relation of levels, not physical distance; the count of intermediaries requires completion"; "The Feet of Adam Kadmon and the Circles of Atik": "Circles of Atik = circles of Adam Kadmon has not been proven here"; pp. 2019–2022, in the questions' wording: "Separate the body text, Rabbi Chaim Vital's gloss and Rabbi Tzemach's note; proximity must not be turned into a reconciliation."

[472] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 4: "The vessels of the yosher of Asiyah are more external and exceedingly distant from the inner Ein Sof light, at the utmost distance, with no greater distance possible. Likewise, relative to Ein Sof encompassing all the worlds from outside, the vessels of Asiyah are at the utmost distance from it, with nothing more distant"; "The globe of the earth on which we stand is the central point of all the worlds, like a date stone in the middle of the fruit, with the fruit surrounding it on all sides. This is relative to us… who dwell on it. But relative to Ein Sof encompassing everything, on the contrary, the world of Asiyah is the shell covering them all, and the closer something is to Ein Sof, the more inward it is."

center of the flesh"; whereas in relation to the encompassing Ein Sof, "on the contrary, the world of Asiyah is the shell covering them all," and whatever draws closer to Ein Sof is more inward.[472] In the image of igulim, where each world encompasses the one below it, Asiyah is the innermost point, farthest from the circumference. In the image of yosher, where the drawing down descends like a stature from head to feet, the termination of the feet descends close to the bottom of the igulim, and below it, according to the Epistle's enumeration, there is nothing further except "the igulim of Adam Kadmon alone" until sovev. Etz Chaim discusses the distance of Asiyah's vessels in the order of investment; the Epistle discusses the termination of yosher in relation to sovev. According to this proposal, the two sentences describe different relationships. This is a possible reconciliation arising from the wording, not one explicitly stated in either source. In every sentence, we must clarify what is distant from what, and within which order.[473]

[472] Etz Chaim, Gate 1, branch 4: "The vessels of the yosher of Asiyah are more external and exceedingly distant from the inner Ein Sof light, at the utmost distance, with no greater distance possible. Likewise, relative to Ein Sof encompassing all the worlds from outside, the vessels of Asiyah are at the utmost distance from it, with nothing more distant"; "The globe of the earth on which we stand is the central point of all the worlds, like a date stone in the middle of the fruit, with the fruit surrounding it on all sides. This is relative to us… who dwell on it. But relative to Ein Sof encompassing everything, on the contrary, the world of Asiyah is the shell covering them all, and the closer something is to Ein Sof, the more inward it is."

[473] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2054–2056, in the critique of the arguments: the proposal that Atik is already included in "Malchut as Keter from below upward," making its mention redundant, "is insufficient: Arich Anpin itself is an aspect of Keter and is nevertheless enumerated, while Malchut returning as a source is not the same partzuf enumerated as a garment"; "All the possibilities need a source that makes the distinction in this place"; "A change of comparison axis is a worthy hypothesis, not a proven bridge. In every sentence, document what is distant from what and in

The order of yosher terminates at the bottom of Asiyah. In relation to the termination, sovev shines without a great interruption: the Epistle enumerates only the igulim of Adam Kadmon between them. The closeness of the lowest place to sovev is expressed in the small amount intervening. This is the side of the encompassing light; the second reason, beginning with "and also," will address the light within the order.

The Second Reason: The Kav Shines from Below Upward

W15-04
source words
27–34

And the kav from the Ein Sof light, which ends at the endpoint of Adam Kadmon's feet,

וגם — "and also": adds the second side to the explanation, the kav alongside sovev. The first clause was sovev shining beneath the feet; the second is the kav. Both explain "this," the superiority of the power in earth, and they are not one movement.

הקו מאור א"ס — "the kav from the Ein Sof light": "from the Ein Sof light" indicates the kav's source: Or Ein Sof.

המסתיים — "which ends": the termination of its extension in the structure under discussion, not a limit to the Divine Essence.

which configuration." Likewise pp. 2017–2018, in the status of the questions, "The Omission of Atik": open, "the argument from duplication of Keter has been withdrawn."

בסיום רגלי א"ק — "at the endpoint of Adam Kadmon's feet": the same extremity already mentioned in the first reason. The doubled wording, the termination of the kav and the termination of the feet, is not an empty repetition: it establishes the place where the return will be described.

What is the logical role of "and also"? The first reason discussed a light that does not vest itself in the order, and its closeness to the termination. The second discusses the light that does vest itself in the order, the kav, and what happens when it reaches its termination. Without "and also," one might think that earth's entire superiority comes from outside, from the encompassing light, and that the inward order itself merely grows progressively weaker until it is exhausted. "And also" says: from within as well, from the order of drawing down itself, there is a superiority at the termination. The two reasons combine, and the Epistle does not say that sovev pushes the kav to return, or that sovev itself becomes a returning kav. Sovev shines and gives power; the kav returns. Two verbs, two subjects.[474]

[474] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2014–2016: "Proximity to sovev and the kav's return combine in the explanation, but are not the same movement. The sentence does not claim that sovev pushes the kav to return, or that sovev itself becomes a returning kav"; pp. 2054–2056: "The Epistle places it within the reasoning but does not establish that sovev causes the kav's return."

W15-05
source words
35–46

also shines from below upward in the mode of returning light, just as that which is invested in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut

מאיר — "shines": refers to the kav.

ממטה למעלה — "from below upward": the direction of the radiance, from the termination upward, rather than a continuation of the descent.

בבחי' אור חוזר — "in the mode of returning light": a light operating in a returning direction in relation to the descending drawing down. The termination is not where the light goes out; from the termination itself, a radiance shines upward.

כמו — "just as": a parallel, not an identity.

שהמלובש בא"א ואו"א וזו"נ דאצי' — "that which is invested in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut": like the light vested in Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut, the five partzufim in which the kav vests itself in the world of Atzilut. (Arich Anpin is the partzuf of Keter below Atik Yomin.) The partzufim are enumerated here as garments in which the light is vested, not as independent sources of light. Nor is every use of the term "returning light" in Kabbalah being identified with the same mechanism. From

where the light returns in this example will become clear in the continuation of the sentence.

What the Ray Analogy Offers, and What It Does Not

A ray reflected from a surface can illustrate the change of direction: from the termination, from below upward. There the resemblance ends. The Epistle is not describing impact against a surface or movement in time, but the superiority of the termination revealed through the returning radiance.

Why is there a superiority at the termination at all? Here we need to return to the principle we learned in the chapter on Malchut: the purpose of the drawing down lies at its end. The power descending through all the levels did not descend in order to weaken; it descended in order to arrive. When the drawing down reaches its destination, something is revealed within it that was hidden at every stage along the way: the will for whose sake it descended. A radiance from below upward is the language for this revelation. The subject is the kav: it shines from the termination upward, and the light does not return to its source and leave the lower empty. What is revealed is the termination's connection with the beginning, and this is what the ray analogy cannot express; therefore, after the analogy, we return to the words.

What Acts, and What Is Not Said

"Returns" is said of the kav, not of sovev or earth. Earth is not the subject of the verb and does not become a possessor of its own light here. Nor should returning light be identified with "raising mayin nukvin," the arousal rising from the recipient's side, to be discussed in the next chapter in connection with sowing and planting. There, the recipient, the person sowing, arouses from below; here, the kav shines, and the radiance is attributed to it, not to human service or to the seed. Two ascents from below do not become the same thing merely because neither is a descent. Identifying them in advance erases a distinction the Epistle preserves: first it discusses the vegetative power operating spontaneously within earth, and only afterward the fruit that comes through sowing.[475]

From the parallel with Atzilut itself, the Epistle moves to its explanation: why Malchut, which is an end, shines "in returning light." Here the concept "Keter from below upward" enters.

[475] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2017–2018, on "Returning Light and MAN": "No identity has been proven; MAN requires identifying the recipient in each source"; pp. 2021–2022: "The passage first describes an operation in spontaneous growth, then an operation through sowing; two ascents must not be identified merely because both are from below."

“Keter from Below Upward”: What the Parallel Teaches

W15-06
source words
47–58

shines in returning light from Malchut of Atzilut, and Malchut of Atzilut is the aspect of Keter from below upward,

“Shines in returning light” continues the parallel: just as the kav shines from below upward at its termination, so the light vested in the partzufim of Atzilut shines in returning light “from Malchut of Atzilut,” the point of return in Atzilut. Malchut is the end of the order of sefirot, and the returning light is described as coming from that end. The second sentence gives the explanation: “And Malchut of Atzilut is the aspect of Keter from below upward.” (“Keter” is the highest sefirah, the head of the order, preceding all the other sefirot.) “היא” (“is,” literally “it”) refers to Malchut of Atzilut. Malchut remains Malchut: in the descending order, it is the end; read from below upward, it is the aspect of Keter, a head in relation to what receives from the termination. The same named level remains an end in one order and a head in another relationship. This is not a contradiction requiring one description to be erased, but a change in the direction of the relationship.

A simple example can help us see how the same thing is both an end and a beginning. On a ladder, the

bottom rung is the last for someone descending, and the first for someone ascending. The rung has not changed; the direction of movement has changed. The limit of the example: a ladder occupies space, and its bottom rung has no greater connection to the top rung than the intermediate ones do. In what it illustrates, by contrast, the end has a special connection to the beginning, "their beginning is embedded in their end," as we will shortly see. The example explains only the change in direction, not this connection.

This is the same relationship we already learned in the chapter on Malchut. There it said "their beginning is embedded in their end," because Keter is an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated beings, containing the last aspect of Ein Sof in relation to the emanated order, "and therefore Malchut of Atzilut too is called Keter from below upward." In this view, the end touches the beginning: the purpose of the drawing down, the revelation of kingship toward created beings, was present in the first will that set the entire order in motion, and therefore the last aspect is connected to what preceded the order.[476] That chapter also limited the reading: every occurrence of "embedded" should not be read as the same

[476] Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "This is what is written: 'Their beginning is embedded in their end,' for Keter is an intermediary between the Emanator and the emanated, containing the final aspect of Ein Sof. Therefore it is called 'the crown of Malchut,' for there is no crown except for a king; also because the final aspect of Ein Sof is Malchut of Ein Sof, and therefore Malchut of Atzilut too is called 'Keter' from below upward." See above, chapter 8.

correspondence between two fixed levels. In one instance, the root of Malchut is discussed; in another, the special revelation at the bottom will be discussed. Each time, we ask what the beginning is, what the end is, and what is revealed in their connection.

W15-07
source words
59–67

and their beginning is embedded in their end. And likewise at the endpoint of the kav of the Ein Sof light,

"And their beginning is embedded in their end" connects the example to what the Epistle has already explained about Keter and Malchut: Malchut, which is an end, becomes Keter in the ascending relationship. "And likewise" returns from the parallel in Atzilut to the termination in Adam Kadmon: so it is also "at the endpoint of the kav of the Ein Sof light," at the termination of the kav of Or Ein Sof. Without this word, the reader might leave the explanation at Malchut of Atzilut; "and likewise" applies it to the focus of the question, earth.

What Is Similar, and What Retains Its Place

What is similar is the role of the termination. In both places, the end is not merely a remnant: light shines from it in an ascending direction, and it has the relationship of a head toward what receives from the termination. What is not said is that every stage in the example, Arich, Abba and Imma, ZON and Malchut, is

identical to a stage at the termination of Adam Kadmon's feet, or that the entire mechanism has been proved to be one. In Atzilut, the subject of the sentence is Malchut, within the order of the partzufim enumerated; at the termination of the kav, the subject is the kav, at the termination of the feet of yosher, and the destination is the neshamah-light of a level within Asiyah. "And likewise" carries the resemblance across; it does not erase the difference. The Epistle itself makes the parallel, but a complete identity of mechanism is not explicit in it, nor does quoting "embedded" prove it; it must not be supplied from the analogy.[477]

Why Arich, Abba and Imma, and ZON Are Listed, but Not Atik

In the parallel with Atzilut, "Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, and Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva" are enumerated, while Atik Yomin is not mentioned, although earlier in the same Epistle, concerning the root of the drop, "Arich Anpin and Atik Yomin" were mentioned together. This question remains open. One proposal says that Atik is already included in "Keter from below upward," said of Malchut of Atzilut, so mentioning it would be redundant; but Arich Anpin itself is an aspect

[477] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2025–2026: "The comparison between the returning light of Malchut and the radiance of the kav from the end of the feet of Adam Kadmon is clear in the wording, but their complete identity as one mechanism is not explicit. It should be presented as the Epistle's parallel"; pp. 2017–2018, in the status of the questions, "Malchut as Keter from Below": "A role in the returning radiance, not absolute identity."

of Keter and is enumerated, and Malchut returning as a source is not the same partzuf enumerated as a garment. Another proposal distinguishes between the inner and outer dimensions of Keter, or counts only five partzufim. Each proposal needs a source making that distinction specifically here, and no such source was found. We therefore read those whom the Epistle enumerated and do not supply those it omitted.[473]

Two Ways of Following the Same Order

At the opening of the chapter, we already saw that the view of descent alone, in which each stage receives less revelation, is correct but partial, and that the Epistle adds a view from below upward. An analogy from craftsmanship can make the second perspective more accessible without denying the first.

Consider a long process of craftsmanship ending in a simple object. At every stage along the way, there were thought, planning and many powers. The final object does not visibly contain all the intellectual richness present at the beginning, but precisely in it the purpose for which the work was done is tested. When it fulfills its role, it reveals something not realized in the

[473] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2054–2056, in the critique of the arguments: the proposal that Atik is already included in "Malchut as Keter from below upward," making its mention redundant, "is insufficient: Arich Anpin itself is an aspect of Keter and is nevertheless enumerated, while Malchut returning as a source is not the same partzuf enumerated as a garment"; "All the possibilities need a source that makes the distinction in this place"; "A change of comparison axis is a worthy hypothesis, not a proven bridge. In every sentence, document what is distant from what and in which configuration." Likewise pp. 2017–2018, in the status of the questions, "The Omission of Atik": open, "the argument from duplication of Keter has been withdrawn."

planning stages alone. The limit of the analogy: the object does not shine returning light, and the craftsman is not Ein Sof. Furthermore, in the analogy the end merely tests success, whereas in the Epistle's argument the termination has a connection to a higher root; hence Malchut is called Keter from below upward. The analogy illuminates only why reaching the end is part of the explanation, rather than a failure of the path.

From the parallel, Malchut of Atzilut as Keter from below upward, the Epistle returns to our question: toward what does the kav shine at its termination? The next sentence names the destination.

Whom the Radiance Reaches

W15-08
source words
68–75

which ends at the endpoint of the yosher of Adam Kadmon's feet, it shines from below upward

המסתיים — "which ends": refers to the kav.

בסיום היושר — "at the endpoint of the yosher": "yosher" reminds us that the kav is described here in the structure of yosher rather than igulim; the termination under discussion is that of the order of yosher, the order of a stature with head and feet.

דרגלי א"ק — "of Adam Kadmon's feet": of the feet of Adam Kadmon.

מאיר ממטה למעלה — “it shines from below upward”: the verb refers back to the kav, not to earth as a possessor of independent power. The return upward is the causal action through which the power in the final recipient will be explained.

The repetition of “termination” and “Adam Kadmon’s feet” is not superfluous; each time it fulfills a different role. First the place was established: the feet terminate at the bottom of Asiyah. Then the action of returning light was added: the kav terminating there shines from below upward. Then came the example from Atzilut. Now the name “yosher” brings the example back to the system about which we asked, preparing the destination about to be stated. Not every detail of the repetitions has been resolved, but the general direction is clear: each repetition adds information, rather than dividing the explanation into several journeys.[478]

W15-09
source words
76–88

to the aspect of the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, which is actual Divinity, from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut.

לבחי’ — “to the aspect of”: indicates the destination, the recipient, toward whom the kav shines from below upward.

[478] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2017–2018, on “Repetitions of the End of the Kav”: “Place, operation, analogy, destination and order; not every textual detail has been resolved”; pp. 2021–2022: “Does each repetition add information? The direction in the body text is from below upward.”

אור הנשמה — "the neshamah-light": the Divine-vitality aspect of the level about to be named.

דמל' דמל' דעשיה — "of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah": of the Malchut within Malchut of Asiyah; we will shortly unpack the nesting.

שהוא אלקות ממש — "which is actual Divinity": is said of the neshamah-light.

מחיצוניות הכלים דמל' דאצי' — "from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut": the light's origin, from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut.

The destination is stated here before the path to it is detailed; we will return to this when we reach the word "first." Let us first understand what its name means.

Malchut of Malchut: The End Within the End

The name becomes clear step by step. Asiyah is the world under discussion here; Malchut of Asiyah is its last sefirah; and Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah is the last aspect within that sefirah, since every sefirah comprises ten. This is the end within the end. It is not all of Asiyah, nor is it identical with everything later called "Asiyah within Asiyah." Anyone accustomed to asking "the end of what?" will understand why the Epistle does not settle for "Asiyah" alone: it seeks the point where the final recipient terminates, since precisely there the question about earth was raised.

An example can illustrate the nesting. In a multivolume book, the last page of the last chapter of the last volume is "the end within the end within the end." It is not the entire volume, nor is it just any page within it. The limit of the example: a book's pages are arranged one after another in space, whereas the sefirot comprise one another as levels, without space. The example teaches only precision: "Malchut of Malchut" is a very specific point, not a general name for the world of Asiyah.

"Which Is": Of What Is "Actual Divinity" Said?

"שהוא" ("which is") refers to the light. אור, "light," is masculine, and שהוא follows it; מלכות, "Malchut," is feminine. What is said to be "actual Divinity" is therefore the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, not a clod of earth or a physical plant. Earth is the place in which the termination of the vessel will be mentioned later; it is a recipient and does not become Divinity because the light reaches its termination. The emphasis "actual" appears because the discussion concerns the lowest level within the lowest, where one might have thought the light had already become created: the Epistle says that even there the system's neshamah-light is actual Divinity, not merely a distant "radiance."

It is worth keeping four separate names in view here. The neshamah-light is the Divine vitality; the vessel

will later receive strength and force; the vegetative power is what operates in earth; and the plant is the physical result. From the light, through the order to be detailed, the power reaches the termination of the vessel.[479]

A "Neshamah" That Is Not a Human Soul

The word "neshamah" is familiar from human life, while here it denotes a level in the world's vitality. This is not a human soul hidden in earth or stone. As we learned at the beginning of the Epistle concerning "neshamah" and "vessels" in the sefirot, a level's neshamah-light is the aspect in which it lives from Divinity, while the vessel is the aspect in which it defines and receives. We should therefore not automatically transfer to it what is said of the human soul: choice, mitzvot or reincarnation. The context determines the meaning: this is the Divine vitality of the named level.

"From the Outer Dimension of the Vessels of Malchut of Atzilut"

The sentence adds where this light comes from in relation to Atzilut: from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. There are three precise points in one sentence. First, what the light is: the

[479] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2018–2019: "The description 'which is actual Divinity' belongs to the light of the neshamah under discussion. It must not be attributed to physical earth, nor should 'neshamah' here be read as a human soul lying in the earth"; pp. 2017–2018: "The light of the neshamah, not earth and not a human soul."

neshamah-light of the last level within Asiyah. Second, its status: actual Divinity. Third, its origin: from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut, not from earth as a source. We already learned this principle in the chapter on union and coming into being: Malchut of Atzilut is the source of the vitality of the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, and it "becomes Atik of Beriah." In Tanya's wording, the Shechinah, "which is Malchut of Atzilut," "vests itself in the Holy of Holies of Beriah"; "likewise in this manner the Shechinah descended and vested itself in the Holy of Holies of Asiyah," and from the Shechinah vested in each world, light and vitality are drawn to all its created beings.[480] "Outer dimension" does not state that the inner dimension is absent elsewhere; it specifies the origin of the light under discussion here: from the outer side of the vessels of Malchut, which faces the worlds below.

Before turning to the order of investment, let us summarize the second reason in plain language: the kav descends through all the levels and reaches its termination at the bottom of Asiyah. There it does not go out; from there it shines from below upward, toward the Divine vitality of the very lowest level, thereby

[480]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 52: "The Shechinah, which is Malchut of Atzilut... vests itself in the Holy of Holies of Beriah"; "Likewise, in this way, the Shechinah descended and vested itself in the Holy of Holies of Asiyah"; "From the Shechinah vested in the Holy of Holies of each and every world, general or particular, light and vitality are drawn and extend from it to the entire world and its creatures." The Epistle's earlier wording: "From Malchut of Atzilut, which becomes Atik of Beriah."

revealing within it a connection to the beginning. This will shortly explain why there is power in the vessel within earth.

Destination First, Path Afterward

The previous sentence stated whom the radiance reaches: the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah. Now the Epistle details how that same radiance vests itself, and the word “first” opens the account. This explains the path to the destination already mentioned.[465]

W15-10
source words
89–102

And according to what is written in Sefer HaGilgulim, chapter 20, cited in Likkutei Amarim, this radiance of the kav of the Ein Sof light is first invested

ולפמ”ש — “And according to what is written.”

בס’ הגלגולים פ”כ — “in Sefer HaGilgulim, chapter 20.”

הובא בלק”א — “cited in Likkutei Amarim”: cited in Likkutei Amarim, the first part of Tanya. The Epistle refers to something the author himself has already cited in his book.

מתלבשת תחלה — “is first invested”: the first step in the order of investment.

[465] For an examination of the end of the kav and returning light, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2018–2021, in the resolution “Separating Destination, Direction and Order of Vesting”; pp. 2011–2013, at the opening of the issue: “One must distinguish a summarizing sentence from its elaboration.”

האָרה זו של הקו דאור א"ס — "this radiance of the kav of the Ein Sof light": the radiance already mentioned, the radiance of the kav of Or Ein Sof. "This" connects the detailed account to what is already before us and supports continuity: this is not a new light unrelated to the kav.

There is no retreat here from the preceding direct explanation, but a detailing of it according to the cited source.

Sefer HaGilgulim, Chapter 20: What It Says

Sefer HaGilgulim and Shaar HaGilgulim are two different books, both from the teachings of the Arizal as written by his disciple Rabbi Chaim Vital, and both concerned with souls and their reincarnations. The Epistle refers to Sefer HaGilgulim, chapter 20, not to the introductions in Shaar HaGilgulim.

Chapter 20 opens by saying that before explaining the subject of Enoch and Elijah, Cain and Abel, promised in the preceding chapter, several divisions within souls themselves must first be explained. There are five aspects, nefesh, ruach, neshamah, chayah and yechidah, in each of the four worlds, "and all these souls become garments for one another": ruach from Yetzirah vests itself within nefesh of Asiyah, neshamah from Beriah vests itself within ruach of Yetzirah and extends to the end of Asiyah, and likewise nefesh from

Atzilut vests itself within them and extends to the end of Asiyah. Hence the principle that within Asiyah itself there are four parts: "nefesh of Asiyah, and within it ruach of Yetzirah, and within it neshamah of Beriah, and within it nefesh of Atzilut; all this vests itself in Asiyah, one within the other." The book emphasizes that this does not mean the usual division of Asiyah itself into its Chochmah, Binah and ZON, "for all this is Asiyah itself," but rather actual Atzilut as revealed within Asiyah, and likewise the aspects of Beriah and Yetzirah. It continues: "There is an inner dimension within Asiyah, which is the light of Atzilut vested within all the aforementioned parts and garments," and this level is called "nefesh of Atzilut within Asiyah."[481]

The chapter itself addresses a person's acquisition of the levels of the soul and their garments: first a person acquires nefesh from the outer dimension of Asiyah, then ruach from the outer dimension of Yetzirah, and so on; some merit the inward nefesh within Asiyah, namely "nefesh of Atzilut within Asiyah." The order of acquisition is from outside inward; the order of

[481] Sefer HaGilgulim by Rabbi Chaim Vital, chapter 20 (first edition, Frankfurt 5444, folios 16–17). The chapter explains that the five aspects of the soul exist in each of the four worlds and vest themselves within one another: "The nefesh of Asiyah, and within it the ruach of Yetzirah, and within it the neshamah of Beriah, and within it the nefesh of Atzilut; all this is vested in Asiyah, one within another"; "These are not the Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah of Asiyah's own aspects… for all of that is Asiyah itself"; "There is an inner dimension within Asiyah which is the light of Atzilut vested within all the aforementioned parts and garments"; "The nefesh of Atzilut within Asiyah." The quotations follow the printed facsimile, with abbreviations expanded and plene spelling; the remainder of the chapter concerns a person's acquisition of the soul's levels and the souls of Cain and Abel. The lines read contain neither "kav" nor "returning light." This book must not be replaced with Shaar HaGilgulim, which is a different work.

investment described by the Epistle is from inside outward, from the innermost radiance within Asiyah to the aspects outside it. There is no contradiction: the book describes the structure and a person's ascent within it; the Epistle draws on the structure and describes the radiance's descent within it. The transfer from the book's language, which discusses souls, to the radiance of the kav in the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut is not automatic. Three things must be separated: the wording of Sefer HaGilgulim; the principle learned from it, that within Asiyah there are aspects of Atzilut, Beriah and Yetzirah, one within the other; and its application in the Epistle to the radiance of the kav. The book states the principle explicitly; the Epistle states the application.

"Cited in Likkutei Amarim": The Gloss in Chapter 6

Where is this cited in Likkutei Amarim? In the gloss in chapter 6 of Likkutei Amarim, it says of this lower world: "Although within it are the ten sefirot of Asiyah of holiness, as written in Etz Chaim, Gate 43, and within these ten sefirot of Asiyah are the ten sefirot of Yetzirah, and within them the ten sefirot of Beriah, and within them the ten sefirot of Atzilut, within which is the light of the blessed Ein Sof; thus the light of the blessed Ein Sof fills this entire lower earth through its investment in the ten sefirot of the four worlds of

Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, as written in Etz Chaim, Gate 47, chapter 2, and in Sefer Gilgulim, chapter 20."[482] The gloss states precisely the principle: within Asiyah, one inside the other, are the ten sefirot of Yetzirah, Beriah and Atzilut, and within them Or Ein Sof; in this way Or Ein Sof "fills this entire lower earth." There the statement concerns the physical earth on which we stand, and here the bottom of Asiyah, in which the element of earth is situated. The reference thus identifies the source and the principle; it does not by itself prove the entire course of returning light, which is what the Epistle adds of its own.

W15-11
source words
103–109

in the light of Atzilut within Asiyah, and from it into Beriah and Yetzirah within Asiyah,

באור האצי' שבעשיה — "in the light of Atzilut within Asiyah": the radiance first vests itself in the light of the aspect of Atzilut within Asiyah. "Within Asiyah" establishes the frame: this is not Atzilut as a whole, from which we proceeded to the lower worlds, but an inward aspect of the world we have reached.

[482]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 6, in the gloss. Chapter 18 mentions Sefer HaGilgulim on another subject ("Sometimes the transgressors of Israel draw down very lofty souls… as stated in Sefer HaGilgulim"); the reference "cited in Likkutei Amarim" fits the gloss to chapter 6, which explicitly cites "Sefer HaGilgulim, chapter 20" concerning the vesting of the ten sefirot of the four worlds within one another in the lowest earth. The gloss identifies the source and the principle; it does not by itself prove the entire route of the returning light.

וממנה — "and from it": refers to the light of Atzilut within Asiyah; the Hebrew is feminine, like האֹרה, "radiance."

לבריאה ויצירה שבעשיה — "into Beriah and Yetzirah within Asiyah": these too are levels within Asiyah, not a departure to the overall world of Beriah and the overall world of Yetzirah whenever the name recurs.

Without the distinction between a world as a whole and its subordinate levels, an imaginary leap between worlds arises.

A World Within a World

Someone who has studied the four worlds thus far might think the explanation has suddenly returned to the top of the ladder. But "within Asiyah" says that the discussion concerns aspects vested within Asiyah, garment within garment, not Atzilut as it is in its own world. The name of the level alone is insufficient; one must ask both what the source of the light is and in what manner it appears within Asiyah.[481]

[481] Sefer HaGilgulim by Rabbi Chaim Vital, chapter 20 (first edition, Frankfurt 5444, folios 16–17). The chapter explains that the five aspects of the soul exist in each of the four worlds and vest themselves within one another: "The nefesh of Asiyah, and within it the ruach of Yetzirah, and within it the neshamah of Beriah, and within it the nefesh of Atzilut; all this is vested in Asiyah, one within another"; "These are not the Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah of Asiyah's own aspects… for all of that is Asiyah itself"; "There is an inner dimension within Asiyah which is the light of Atzilut vested within all the aforementioned parts and garments"; "The nefesh of Atzilut within Asiyah." The quotations follow the printed facsimile, with abbreviations expanded and plene spelling; the remainder of the chapter concerns a person's acquisition of the soul's levels and the souls of Cain and Abel. The lines read contain neither "kav" nor "returning light." This book must not be replaced with Shaar HaGilgulim, which is a different work.

An example may help. A letter inside an envelope, and the envelope inside a package: all three are in the same place, yet there is an inside and an outside, and the inside is what matters most. Likewise, "Atzilut within Asiyah" is the innermost within Asiyah, not a departure to the world of Atzilut. The limit of the example: the letter, envelope and package are three separate objects, whereas here the discussion concerns light vested in garments, each garment being a manner of reception rather than an object in its own right.

Sefer HaGilgulim adds a precision worth keeping in mind. "Atzilut within Asiyah" can be said in two senses. In the usual sense, every world comprises ten sefirot, and its Chochmah is called "its Atzilut," its Binah "its Beriah," and so on; this is the division of Asiyah itself. In the sense discussed by Sefer HaGilgulim, followed by Likkutei Amarim and the Epistle, the subject is the light of Atzilut vested within Asiyah as an inward garment, not Atzilut as it is in its own world, "garment within garment," until the Or Ein Sof within it also fills the lower earth. Of the usual division, the book itself says: "This is not the Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah of the aspects of Asiyah themselves … for all this is Asiyah itself."[481] The

[481] Sefer HaGilgulim by Rabbi Chaim Vital, chapter 20 (first edition, Frankfurt 5444, folios 16–17). The chapter explains that the five aspects of the soul exist in each of the four worlds and vest themselves within one another: "The nefesh of Asiyah, and within it the ruach of Yetzirah, and within it the neshamah of Beriah, and within it the nefesh of Atzilut; all this is vested in Asiyah, one within another"; "These are not the Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah of Asiyah's own aspects… for all of that is Asiyah itself"; "There is an inner dimension within Asiyah which is the light of Atzilut

beginner need not remember the two senses in all their details; it is enough to know that "Atzilut within Asiyah" denotes the innermost aspect within the lowest world, the side on which the lower world touches the light of the higher world, not a return to the higher world itself. This also explains why the radiance vests itself specifically there "first": the inward receives first, and from the inward it passes to the outward.

W15-12
source words
110–116

and from them into the aspect of the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah.

ומהן — "and from them": from Beriah and Yetzirah within Asiyah.

לבחי' אור הנשמה דמל' דמל' דעשיה — "into the aspect of the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah": returns to the destination already mentioned, the same neshamah-light, not an additional new recipient.

Thus the order of investment reaches the destination already mentioned in the preceding sentence.

vested within all the aforementioned parts and garments"; "The nefesh of Atzilut within Asiyah." The quotations follow the printed facsimile, with abbreviations expanded and plene spelling; the remainder of the chapter concerns a person's acquisition of the soul's levels and the souls of Cain and Abel. The lines read contain neither "kav" nor "returning light." This book must not be replaced with Shaar HaGilgulim, which is a different work.

Reading the Path Without Adding Stations

Let us summarize the order. First it states where the radiance comes: to the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah. Then it states how it vests itself: first in the light of Atzilut within Asiyah, from it into Beriah and Yetzirah within Asiyah, and from them into that same neshamah-light. The destination was not a stop along the way; it was the name of the place to which the path leads. Nor should the order of investment be turned into a physical movement in which light departs from the neshamah and returns to it through distant worlds: the detailed order describes garments, level within level, not a journey.

One question remains that the words do not decide. "This radiance" ensures that the account concerns the same radiance of the kav; but is the detailed account of the same light in all its aspects, now described according to its garments, or of different aspects of the radiance, each with its own garment? The word "this" supports continuity, but does not on its own resolve the tension of direction: on the one hand, the kav is said to shine from below upward; on the other, the radiance is said to vest itself first in the inward and from there in the outward. The two sides can be held together as follows: "from below upward" describes the direction of the radiance in relation to the order of descent, while "first … and from it … and from them" describes

the order of garments in which the radiance is received. Direction and order of garments are two axes, not one map. The Epistle does not describe a departure from the neshamah-light back to Atzilut within Asiyah, or a return to Atzilut as a whole.[483]

Thus far the path: from the kav at its termination, through the garments within Asiyah, to the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah. Now the Epistle says what results from all this, and in these words lies the answer to the question that opened the chapter.

What Receives the Power

W15-13
source words
117–127

And through this there is strength and force in the endpoint of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah within the element of earth,

ועי"ז — "And through this": a causal conclusion from the course described. What preceded, the radiance of the kav from below upward, the neshamah-light and the order of investment, is the means; the result is that there is strength and force in a particular place.

[483] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2054–2056: "One must not invent an emergence from the light of the neshamah back into Atzilut within Asiyah. It remains to be clarified whether this is an elaboration of the same radiance, different aspects of it, or another transition; the word 'this' supports continuity but does not alone resolve the tension of direction. The detailed sequence does not describe physical movement"; pp. 2017–2018: "A destination followed by the route to it; the tension between direction and vesting is retained."

יש כח ועוז — "there is strength and force": the expression returns to the language of sovev's action in the vessels (chapter 13), linking the paragraphs.

בסיום הכלי — "in the endpoint of the vessel": distinguished from the neshamah-light within it; the vessel is the receiving and defining side, and its termination is the extremity of the last level.

דמל' דמל' דעשיה — "of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah": the same Malchut of Malchut whose light was mentioned, now from the side of its vessels.

שביסוד העפר — "within the element of earth": places this vessel's termination within the element of earth, in the reality about which the previous chapter asked.

The power is revealed in the final vessel within the element of earth because of the radiance, not because this vessel is separate from its source.

Vessel and Light: What Receives?

In the sentence's wording, what receives the power is the termination of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah. It is not earth as a creator, nor the neshamah-light as though it itself became earth. The distinction between "the neshamah-light" in the preceding sentence and "the endpoint of the vessel" in this sentence is the distinction that has accompanied us from the beginning of the Epistle: the light is the Divine vitality, and the vessel is what defines and

receives. The radiance reaches the light; the power is given in the vessel. What is the relationship of "the endpoint of the vessel" to the physical earth we see? The Epistle says only "within the element of earth." This can be understood as follows: the vessel's termination is the spiritual aspect of the element of earth, the root from which physical earth and its vegetative power are drawn; physical earth is neither the vessel itself nor Divinity, but the created being in which the power given at the vessel's termination is revealed in actual, manifest action. This is a proposed explanation for the reader, not explicit wording in the Epistle.

"Strength and Force" Here and in the Chapter on Sovev

"Strength and force" is wording we have already encountered. In the chapter on sovev, it said that sovev "shines toward the inward kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of BYA, and through its radiance within the vessels gives them strength and force to create something from nothing," meaning through the vessels of the ten sefirot of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. "Them" there refers to the vessels through which a particular yesh comes into being. The vessel does not become an independent creator; the Divine power operates through it. Here the same expression recurs, with a different object: "in the endpoint of the vessel"

means the termination of one named vessel, Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, situated within the element of earth. The power given there explains what the previous chapter observed: earth continually brings forth something from nothing. The repetition of "strength and force" links the paragraphs and shows that the same kind of empowerment is involved, the power to bring into being; it does not prove that the entire mechanism is identical. There, the discussion concerned giving power in vessels for a yesh to come into being in general; here, it concerns the power at the extremity of the lowest vessel, by virtue of which earth produces growth. In both places, the recipient remains a recipient.[484]

The Termination Does Not Become an Independent Source

When a superiority is revealed at the bottom, one might gain the impression that earth has received a power of its own that no longer needs its source. The Epistle says the opposite, and the sentence itself opens with "And through this." The power is there because of the radiance that descended through the order, shone from below upward toward the neshamah-light, and

[484] Iggeret HaKodesh 20: "Also from the Ein Sof light, which surrounds and encompasses the four worlds of Atzilut–Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah equally, there shines toward the inner kav through the vessels of the ten sefirot of Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah; by shining within the vessels it gives them power and strength to create yesh me-ayin." See above, chapter 13. Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2017–2018: "Giving power to the vessel; repetition of the expression is not identity of the entire mechanism."

from there, through the order, reached the vessel's termination. If the power is disconnected from the radiance, what remains is soil that seems to possess an ability of its own. The entire explanation of the kav, sovev and the neshamah within Malchut shows where the power comes from and how it operates. Earth's superiority reveals its dependence on a lofty root; it is not freedom from dependence.

Thus the question of unity with which the Epistle opened is preserved even where multiplicity and physicality are most conspicuous. Earth produces many particulars, each seemingly existing on its own. The commentary takes us back to one power operating through many orders. Reaching earth is not a descent from that question to another subject; it is a profound test of the same question within the reality close to us.

It remains to name this power. The Epistle does not settle for the description "strength and force," but identifies it with one of the utterances of the work of Creation.

The Utterance Operating Within Earth

W15-14
source words
128–139

and this is the utterance "Let the earth sprout, etc.," to be active within the earth continually, forever and ever

והוא — "and this is": identifies the strength and force at the vessel's termination with an utterance.

מאמר תדשא הארץ — "the utterance 'Let the earth sprout' ": one of the ten utterances in the work of Creation, spoken on the third day: "And G-d said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, seed-bearing grass, fruit trees bearing fruit according to their kind, whose seed is within them, upon the earth.' "[485]

וכו' — "etc.": refers to the continuation of the utterance and does not add another level.

להיות פועל — "to be active": ongoing action; the utterance is not mentioned as a command spoken once and completed on the third day.

בקרב הארץ — "within the earth": inside earth, not merely at its beginning.

תמיד לעולם ועד — "continually, forever and ever": unceasing action.

"Continually, forever and ever" is said of the Divine utterance's action within growth. Later, it will be clarified that the continuity of the action depends on the world's existence.

Ongoing Action, Not a One-Time Beginning

"Let the earth sprout" becomes understandable through this argument. The power is not described as a command that passed and disappeared after the first act of creation. Its action continues in repeated growth. This accords with the principle we learned concerning

[485] Genesis 1:11: "G-d said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing grass, fruit trees bearing fruit according to their kind, with their seed in them, upon the earth.' And it was so."

continual coming into being: the world does not rest on an ancient event that left it independent, but exists through a Divine power operating within it. Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah cites the Baal Shem Tov's teaching on the verse "Forever, O L-rd, Your word stands in the heavens": the words and letters of the utterance "Let there be a firmament" "stand and remain forever within the firmament of heaven … to give them life," "for if the letters were to depart for an instant, G-d forbid, and return to their source, all the heavens would become actual nothingness and naught"; likewise with physical earth and the truly inanimate: if the letters of the ten utterances through which it was created departed from it, "it would return to actual nothingness and naught."[486] Here the Epistle adds a particular aspect of the same principle: not merely the continued existence of what is already present, but a power bringing forth grass and tree time after time, the renewal of vegetation.

The particular fruit is finite, and the particular tree produces a particular number of fruits. The novelty is that the power is not described as a stock exhausted after the first growth. Nor should the utterance be

[486]Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 1: on the verse "Forever, G-d, Your word stands in the heavens," in the name of the Baal Shem Tov, that the words and letters of the utterance "Let there be a firmament" "stand and remain forever within the firmament of heaven, and are vested within all the firmaments forever to give them life"; "Even this physical earth and the truly inanimate, if the letters of the Ten Utterances through which the earth was created during the six days of Creation were to depart from it for an instant, G-d forbid, would return to actual nothingness and naught."

turned into a claim that soil produces growth without any order of seed, water and seasons: the Epistle does not abolish the conditions of growth. It says what operates within them: the utterance, which is the power given at the vessel's termination.

Continuity, Renewal and Condition

The sentence does not end here. After "forever and ever," the Epistle opens a parenthesis explaining in what sense "continually" is said: the aspect of Ein Sof, and not only during the Six Days of Creation. After the parenthesis, the predicate resumes: to cause grasses, trees and fruits to grow from nothing into something continually, year after year, "which is a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof," "for if this world were to endure for myriads upon myriads of years." "Continually, forever and ever" here expresses ongoing action; the renewal each year, the word "likeness" and the condition "if … were to endure" will be explained in their place in the next chapter. Renewal does not contradict continuity: the action may continue, the light may be renewed, and the ability may endure as long as the world exists, and these three aspects are not interchangeable.[487] From there, the Epistle will move to the human part: sowing

[487] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2061–2064: " 'Continually,' renewal year after year, and the ability to continue if the world endures for many years are not the same concept… One must not infer that renewal negates continuity"; pp. 2056–2057: "The continuation of the operation, renewal of the light, and the ability to operate for as long as the world exists are three distinct aspects." See Iggeret HaKodesh 14 on the yearly renewal of the radiance: "This radiance and drawing down, although continuous, nevertheless does not remain in one aspect and level alone from time immemorial; rather, each and every year it is a new supernal light."

and planting as “raising mayin nukvin,” and the difference between what grows of itself from the vegetative power alone and the superior fruit that comes through labor. Here, the power given within earth itself suffices for us. Man is not the source of the light; when his part is discussed, he will be discussed as someone who arouses and reveals within a power already operating, not as someone who has replaced the utterance.[466]

The Two Reasons and the Parallel: What Is Learned, and What Is Not

After reading the words, it is worth gathering the two reasons and the parallel in one place.

Aspect	What the chapter says about it	What should not be inferred from it
The encompassing Or Ein Sof	Shines beneath Adam Kadmon’s feet, without a great interruption; gives strength and force in the vessels	It is not a wall and does not push the kav; it is not absent elsewhere
The igulim of Adam Kadmon	What is enumerated between the termination and sovev	They are not sovev itself; it has not been proved that they are Atik
The kav	Terminates at the termination of yosher; shines from below upward in the mode of returning light	It is not a ray striking a surface; it is not the raising of MAN

[466]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2066–2069, in “Raising Mayin Nukvin and the Human Purpose: The Contribution of Kuntres Acharon 4.”

Aspect	What the chapter says about it	What should not be inferred from it
Malchut of Atzilut	The example: Keter from below upward; their beginning is embedded in their end	There is no complete identity of mechanism; “embedded” is not proof
The neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah	The destination; actual Divinity; originates from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut	It is not a human soul; it is not physical earth
Atzilut, Beriah and Yetzirah within Asiyah	Garments of the radiance, from inward to outward	They are not a return to the overall worlds; they are not stations on a journey
The vessel’s termination within the element of earth	Receives strength and force; this is the utterance “Let the earth sprout,” operating continually	It is not an independent creator; earth is not Divinity

What Does the Reader Gain from All the Names?

One could simply say “there is Divine power in earth” and stop. But then we would lose the question the Epistle works to resolve: how does the point of termination, so distant from lofty revelation, become a place for the manifestation of a special power? Detailing sovev, the kav, the termination, returning light and the neshamah within Malchut shows that this superiority is not a foreign power added to soil. It is

connected to the very structure of influence and to the relationship between beginning and end.[465]

The limited revelation in a low level remains unchanged, yet the termination is connected to the radiance's root. This connection explains the special power revealed in earth. There is a purpose in reaching the last place, and this purpose makes it possible to recognize a high root revealed specifically there. The next chapter will continue the sentence we have already read about the utterance "Let the earth sprout." First we will clarify the word "continually" and the distinction between the power of growth and the utterances that operated in the manner under discussion only during the days of Creation. Then we will ask what sowing and planting add to the power already given in earth. Human service joins this power and changes the quality of its manifestation; it does not invent it.

A Continuous Reading

Let us now read the entire passage in plain language, without abbreviations, so that we can hear it as one continuous whole.

Why does specifically the element of earth continually cause growth from nothing, more than all the elements

[465] For an examination of the end of the kav and returning light, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2018–2021, in the resolution "Separating Destination, Direction and Order of Vesting"; pp. 2011–2013, at the opening of the issue: "One must distinguish a summarizing sentence from its elaboration."

and the hosts of heaven? It is only because the feet of Adam Kadmon, the termination of the first system in the order of hishtalshelut, terminate at the bottom of the world of Asiyah. Beneath His feet shines the light of the blessed Ein Sof encompassing all worlds, without a great interruption: the Epistle enumerates only the igulim of Adam Kadmon between them. Closeness to sovev is expressed in the small number of intervening garments. And also the kav drawn from Or Ein Sof, which terminates at the termination of Adam Kadmon's feet, does not go out there, but shines from below upward in the mode of returning light. This resembles what is said of the light vested in the partzufim of Atzilut, Arich Anpin, Abba and Imma, Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva: this light shines in returning light from Malchut of Atzilut, since Malchut of Atzilut, an end in the descending order, is the aspect of Keter when viewed from below upward, and their beginning is embedded in their end. So it is also at the termination of the kav of Or Ein Sof, terminating at the termination of the yosher of Adam Kadmon's feet: it shines from below upward toward the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, the last level within the last, and this neshamah-light is actual Divinity, originating from the outer dimension of the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut. According to what is written in Sefer HaGilgulim, chapter 20, and cited in Likkutei Amarim, this radiance of the kav first vests itself in the light of

Atzilut within Asiyah, from it into the aspects of Beriah and Yetzirah within Asiyah, and from them into the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah. Through this there is strength and force at the termination of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, situated within the element of earth. This power is the utterance "Let the earth sprout," operating within earth continually, forever and ever.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

What has been clarified: "And this is only because" gives a reason for the fact of the revelation of power in earth, and the reason is twofold. Sovev shines beneath the termination of yosher without a great interruption, in the sense of few intervening garments; the igulim of Adam Kadmon remain the interruption enumerated in the Epistle; the kav shines at its termination from below upward, because the purpose of the drawing down is revealed at its end, as Malchut of Atzilut is Keter from below upward. The radiance reaches the neshamah-light of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, which is actual Divinity, and vests itself in an order of garments within Asiyah, according to Sefer HaGilgulim and the gloss in Likkutei Amarim. Through this there is strength and force at the vessel's termination within the element of earth: the utterance "Let the earth sprout," operating continually.

What remains open: why Arich, Abba and Imma, and ZON were enumerated but not Atik; precisely what the relationship is between "only the igulim of Adam Kadmon alone" and the description in Etz Chaim, where the igulim of Atik surround beneath Adam Kadmon's feet; how "without a great interruption" in the Epistle and the remoteness of Asiyah's vessels in Etz Chaim can be reconciled in all their details, beyond the two-axis proposal; whether "this radiance" in the detailed account is the same light in all its aspects or aspects of it; and why the author repeated the termination of the kav in several formulations.

Three Rules of Reading Learned in This Chapter

Beyond the content, the chapter taught three rules that will serve us later as well. First: when "end" or "termination" is said, ask: the end of what? The bottom of Asiyah, the termination of the feet of yosher, and Malchut of Malchut are three precise "ends," not one name for one thing. Second: when two sources seem contradictory about what is distant from what, examine the order and relationship each discusses. The distinction between igulim and yosher helps formulate the difficulty; in this chapter, it is still not a proven reconciliation of all its details. Third: distinguish between destination and path. When a sentence names the destination before describing the path, do not turn

the destination into an additional station along the path.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

In this chapter, the great temptation is the diagram, and there is also a reference to a source whose name resembles another book's title; the first two exercises address these. The third and fourth return to places where the chapter itself stopped short of a decision: the two-axis reconciliation and the use of "their beginning is embedded in their end." The fifth asks the tool to play the role of a beginning learner, so that we can test whether we ourselves know how to explain why specifically earth reveals the power.

Exercise 1: A Diagram Checked Against the Words

What to ask. Ask the tool to diagram, in words or a table, the argument from "And this is only because" through "continually, forever and ever."

What to check. Check the diagram against the words using four questions. Has it added a station the Epistle did not write, such as a stop at the destination before "first"? Does sovev "push" or "return" the kav in it? To what does it attribute "returning light": the kav, as in the Epistle, or sovev? And of what does it say "actual Divinity": the neshamah-light or earth?

The limit of the conclusion. A correct diagram is a memory aid. Even when it contains no errors, it does

not decide the questions left open, such as the relationship between "this radiance" and its aspects.

Exercise 2: Sefer HaGilgulim and Shaar HaGilgulim

What to ask. Ask the tool to quote the source to which the Epistle refers, "Sefer HaGilgulim, chapter 20."

What to check. Sefer HaGilgulim and Shaar HaGilgulim are two different books whose names are similar enough for an automated tool to confuse them. Check which book is meant, which chapter, and whether the wording matches what was cited in this chapter ("nefesh of Asiyah, and within it ruach of Yetzirah …"). The same applies to the gloss in Likkutei Amarim, chapter 6: open Tanya and read it yourself.

The limit of the conclusion. Even when the source is found, it discusses souls and their acquisition by a person. The application to the radiance of the kav belongs to the Epistle. If the tool presents Sefer HaGilgulim as though it itself describes returning light, it has confused the source with its use.

Exercise 3: Two Axes

What to ask. Present the difficulty to the tool: Etz Chaim says that Asiyah's vessels are exceedingly distant from sovev, while the Epistle says that at the bottom of Asiyah, sovev shines "without a great interruption." Ask for a reconciliation.

What to check. Does the tool distinguish between the image of igulim and the image of yosher, as we did in the chapter? Does it present the reconciliation as the explicit wording of one of the sources?

The limit of the conclusion. We stated explicitly in the chapter that this is a proposed reconciliation, plausible from the wording, rather than a written bridge between the texts. An answer that turns it into a certainty goes beyond what is known.

Exercise 4: "Their Beginning Is Embedded in Their End" Everywhere?

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain "their beginning is embedded in their end" and give additional examples of its use.

What to check. Does the tool read every occurrence of "embedded" as the same correspondence between two fixed levels? In the chapter on Malchut and in this chapter, we saw that each time one asks what the beginning is, what the end is, and what is revealed in their connection.

The limit of the conclusion. Quoting "embedded" does not prove a mechanism. This is a parallel the Epistle itself makes, and a complete identity of mechanism is not explicit.

Exercise 5: Explaining to a Beginner

What to ask. After studying the chapter, ask the tool: “Play the role of a beginning learner. Ask me, one question at a time, why specifically earth reveals the power of growth. Do not explain it yourself; after each answer I give, ask one question about the point that seems unclear to you.” Answer yourself, without looking at the chapter.

What to check. Where did you get stuck? Return to the section of the chapter addressing that point, and check whether your answer rests on the Epistle’s wording. Pay attention to the tool’s questions too: a question assuming something unwritten, for example that earth itself “apprehends” the power, is an opportunity to correct the assumption rather than accept it.

The limit of the conclusion. Here the tool merely organizes the practice. Understanding is measured by what we can explain without a ready-made answer in front of us; what we could not explain is recorded as a question for further study.

Chapter 16 | From Producing Growth to Human Service

What We Already Know

This chapter asks what is added by the action of the person who sows and plants, and therefore needs only what has been clarified about the power within earth itself. The power to create something from nothing, which belongs to the Creator alone, is revealed "with greater force" specifically in the element of earth, while earth itself remains a lowly created being (chapter 14). The mazal enlarges rather than brings forth: sprouting comes "from the vegetative power within it," which is "ayin and spiritual" in relation to the plants (chapter 14). The superiority comes from sovev shining beneath the termination of the feet of Adam Kadmon's yosher, and from the kav shining at its termination from below upward in the mode of returning light; through this, there is strength and force at the vessel's termination within the element of earth, namely the utterance "Let the earth sprout," operating continually (chapter 15).

The Chapter's Question: If Earth Produces Growth, What Does the Sower Add?

A small seed can be the beginning of a large tree, but a seed lying on a table produces nothing. It must enter the soil and receive the conditions for growth there. On

the other hand, earth does not receive its power of growth only when a person sows in it: grasses and trees grow in places where no one has sown as well. We have two sides before us: a power already given within earth, and a human action that arouses the power and directs its manifestation.

The previous chapter addressed the first side, asking why specifically the element of earth continually causes growth from nothing, more than all the elements and the hosts of heaven. The Epistle answered in one explanatory sentence containing the two reasons studied in chapter 15: beneath the termination of Adam Kadmon's feet, the encompassing Or Ein Sof shines without a great interruption; and also the kav, which terminates there, shines from below upward in the mode of returning light. Through this there is strength and force at the vessel's termination within the element of earth, and this power is the utterance "Let the earth sprout," operating continually within earth.

The passage we will now study adds two things. First, it explains in what sense this power operates "continually, forever and ever": it distinguishes it from other utterances of the days of Creation, which operated in this way only at the time of creation, and describes growth renewed "year after year" from a power that is "a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof."

Second, it distinguishes among the plants themselves: some grow of themselves, while others come through sowing and planting. These too are "like something from nothing," and are "very, very superior." From this distinction, the Epistle draws a conclusion about man: his service draws supernal lights into all the worlds, "which is the purpose of the creation of the human being."

Thus the chapter's question takes shape. If the power is already within earth, what does the sower add? And if he adds something, does this not contradict the statement that all the power is given from above? The previous chapter already indicated the direction of the answer: man is not the source of the light, but someone who arouses and reveals a power already operating. The Epistle itself establishes a contrast here: in the days of Creation, a radiance shone through "gratuitous kindness," without any arousal from below, whereas what is sown and planted comes specifically through such an arousal.

One Continuing Sentence

The passage before us does not begin a new sentence. It continues a sentence that began at the end of the preceding chapter: "And this is the utterance 'Let the earth sprout, etc.,' to be active within the earth continually, forever and ever." Let us briefly recall its

words. “And this is”: the strength and force at the vessel’s termination within the element of earth. “The utterance ‘Let the earth sprout’ ”: the utterance creating plants on the third day, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, seed-bearing grass, fruit trees.” “To be active within the earth”: the utterance was not spoken once and finished; it continues to operate within earth.

A parenthesis now opens. Within it, the Epistle explains “continually” and distinguishes between “Let the earth sprout” and two other utterances of the days of Creation. Once the parenthesis closes, the main sentence resumes and completes its content: “to cause grasses, trees, and fruits to grow from nothing into something continually, year after year.” Whoever reads the parenthesis as an independent subject loses the line of the sentence, and whoever skips it loses the distinction it provides. The parenthesis is not the commentator’s addition; it is part of the Epistle’s own wording.[488]

Here is the sentence’s structure, with abbreviations expanded and punctuation added for reading:

- **The main sentence:** And this is the utterance “Let the earth sprout, etc.,” to be active within the earth

[488] The parentheses appear in the vocalized Kehot edition; the English translator notes: “Brackets appear in the text”. On reading the sentence continuously, from “power and strength at the end of the vessel” through “it is the utterance ‘Let the earth sprout’ ” to “to bring forth,” see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2022–2023, in the question about the referent of “it is the utterance,” and pp. 2061–2064, in the continuous explanation “Let the Earth Sprout, Continually, and a Likeness of Ein Sof.”

continually, forever and ever, to cause grasses, trees and fruits to grow from nothing into something continually, year after year, which is a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof …

- **Within the parenthesis:** (An aspect of Ein Sof, and not only during the Six Days of Creation, like the utterance "Let the waters swarm" and the utterance "Let the earth bring forth a living soul," from Chochmah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah, for during the Seven Days of Creation a radiance of Or Ein Sof shone in this world through gratuitous kindness, without any raising of mayin nukvin at all).

"An Aspect of Ein Sof," and Not Only in the Days of Creation

W16-01
source words
140–147

(an aspect of Ein Sof, and not only during the six days of Creation,

The parenthesis opens by describing the character of "continually." בחי׳ abbreviates בחינת, "an aspect of." The action of "Let the earth sprout" within earth is "an aspect of Ein Sof." This does not mean that earth or the tree is Ein Sof. It means the manner of the power operating within them: it is not a stock of plants prepared in advance and gradually depleted, but an ability not exhausted by any of its manifestations. After the parenthesis, the Epistle will return to this and say

"a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof"; there we will examine it closely.

"And not only during the six days of Creation" adds the dimension of time. The utterance "Let the earth sprout" operated when earth first brought forth vegetation and fruit trees, and continues operating afterward. The word "only" teaches both sides: it operated during the Six Days of Creation too, but its action is not limited to them.

Two Utterances That Operated This Way Only in the Days of Creation

W16-02
source words
148–159

like the utterance "Let the waters swarm" and the utterance "Let the earth bring forth a living soul," from Chochmah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah,

"כמאמר" ("like the utterance") means as was the case with the utterance. The Epistle brings two utterances of the days of Creation to show how "Let the earth sprout" differs from them: they operated in this manner only in the days of Creation, whereas "Let the earth sprout" continues to operate to this day.

"Let the waters swarm" is the utterance of the fifth day: "Let the waters swarm with a swarm of living creatures, and let birds fly over the earth." On that day the waters swarmed with fish and swarming creatures, and the

birds were also created. “Let the earth bring forth a living soul” is the utterance of the sixth day: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, cattle, creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” “נפש חיה” (“a living soul”) here is Scripture’s expression for animals. It should not be confused with what is said of man, “and man became a living soul,” which Onkelos renders “a speaking spirit.”

What is the difference between the utterances? In the days of Creation, the fish emerged from water and cattle and beasts from earth through the power of the utterance itself, without parents preceding them. Since then, animals reproduce from one another, each according to its kind; the fish and birds were then also given the blessing “Be fruitful and multiply.” Earth, however, through the power of “Let the earth sprout,” continues to bring forth from itself grasses, trees and fruits year after year. This is the distinction sharpened by the parenthesis: “Let the earth sprout” is not like the animal utterances, which operated once and thereafter continued through procreation; it operates “within the earth continually.” This does not diminish the superiority of procreation, nor should one infer that the power of Ein Sof does not operate within it. The

subject here is repeated growth from earth itself, from the lowest place.[489]

The learner may ask here: do not plants too come from seeds, as animals come from their parents? The Epistle will discuss the seed's place later, when it distinguishes between what is sown and planted and what grows of itself, and says that the planted seed is utterly incommensurate with the fruit. For now, it is enough to note to what it attributes the repeated production of growth here: the utterance operating within earth.

We must also guard against confusing the wording. "Let the earth bring forth a living soul" in the Epistle is the animal utterance on the sixth day (Genesis 1:24). On the third day it says of plants, "And the earth brought forth vegetation" (1:12), thereby fulfilling "Let the earth sprout." The same word, two different utterances. This distinction will help later in the chapter when we encounter Rashi, who also writes "Let the earth bring forth," referring to plants.

"מחכמה דמל' דמל' דעשיה" means from Chochmah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah. "Malchut" is the last

[489]Thus the English translator in the Kehot edition interprets the parentheses: "and not during the six days of creation only [as is the case with the fiat"—meaning that the utterances concerning animals operated in this manner only during the six days of Creation. The blessing "Be fruitful and multiply": Genesis 1:22 (to the swarming creatures of the water and the birds) and Genesis 1:28 (to humanity). The Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2061–2062, summarizes that the Epistle "contrasts the continuing operation of 'Let the earth sprout' in bringing forth vegetation with the utterances creating animals." On why specifically vegetation was chosen rather than reproduction, and the fact that revelation of the power of Ein Sof in reproduction must not be ruled out, see ibid., pp. 2022–2023, and the question's status on pp. 1986–1987.

sefirah in each system. "Malchut of Malchut" is the Malchut within Malchut, the lowest level within the lowest level. "Of Asiyah" means of the world of Asiyah. Within this level there is "Chochmah," an inward aspect of it. According to the word order, the expression indicates the source from which the two utterances mentioned operated. Concerning the power of "Let the earth sprout," the Epistle said, as we learned in the previous chapter, that it is "in the endpoint of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah within the element of earth." Both sources are thus within the same low level, but in two of its aspects: the animal utterances, which operated in this way in the days of Creation, come from its Chochmah; the utterance operating continually comes from the termination of its vessel, within the element of earth.

Why specifically this way? The Epistle does not explain, but a direction for thought may be proposed. In Kuntres Acharon 4, "the drop drawn from the vessel of supernal Chochmah" is described as possessing "the power that begets and brings into being something from nothing." "Begets" is the language of procreation, and animals are those that, since the days of Creation, are born from one another; there may be a connection here between the aspect of Chochmah and their creation. This is a hypothesis, not a decision. What emerges from the wording itself, without

deciding the reason, is that the ongoing action is attributed specifically to the vessel's termination, the very lowest place, and this accords with what we learned in the preceding chapter about the superiority of the termination.[490]

Wording	Torah source	Subject of the utterance	Its manner of action according to the Epistle
Let the earth sprout	Genesis 1:11–12	Grass, seed and fruit trees	Operates continually within earth, producing growth year after year; its power is at the vessel's termination of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah
Let the waters swarm	Genesis 1:20	Water creatures and birds	Brought animals forth from water in the days of Creation; from Chochmah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah
Let the earth bring forth a living soul	Genesis 1:24	Cattle, creeping things and beasts of the earth	Brought animals forth from earth in the days of Creation; from Chochmah of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah

[490]The attribution to Chochmah appears within the parentheses themselves; "at the end of the vessel of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah in the element of earth" is the Epistle's wording before the parentheses. The Research Book, vol. III, records that the attributions are explicit but their precise reason was not found (pp. 1986–1987; the question itself on pp. 2022–2023; see pp. 2061–2062). Kuntres Acharon 4: "The drop drawn from the vessel of supernal Chochmah contains the power that begets and brings into being yesh me-ayin." Connecting this source with the utterances concerning animals is a hypothesis of the present commentary, not a conclusion of the Research Book.

Six and Seven: Both Numbers Remain

W16-03
source words
160–171

for during the seven days of Creation a radiance of the Ein Sof light shone in this world through gratuitous kindness,

“שבז׳ ימי בראשית” means during the Seven Days of Creation. Earlier it said “during the six days of Creation,” and here “the seven days of Creation.” Both numbers appear close together in the Epistle, within the same parenthesis. They also appear in the vocalized text of the Epistle, and the translator into English in the Kehot edition preserved both. We have no textual witness in which either is absent, so a number must not be corrected to reconcile the count.[491]

A reading that respects both numbers may be proposed. “The Six Days of Creation” are the days of work, when the utterances were spoken, including “Let the waters swarm” and “Let the earth bring forth.” “The Seven Days of Creation” are the entire week of Creation, including Shabbat, and are the period in which the radiance of gratuitous kindness is described here. This is a proposal suited to the sentence’s order,

[491] The vocalized Kehot text reads “not only during the six days of Creation” and “which during the seven days of Creation shone in this world”; the English translation there reads “not during the six days of creation only” and “during the Seven Days of the Beginning”. The Research Book, vol. III, records that the page of He’arot VeTikkunim examined there contains no correction of “six” or “seven” (pp. 1916–1917); that the note marked there as note 48 concerns the opening “Moreover” rather than this sentence (pp. 1986–1987, 2061–2062); and that no emendation should be made without a witness (pp. 2022–2023). A distinction between the time of the acts of creation and the scope of freely bestowed kindness is offered there only as a proposed reading (pp. 2022–2023; see pp. 2111–2112).

not an explicit source. The question of why the number changes in the middle of the parenthesis remains open for further study.

"A radiance of the Ein Sof light shone in this world." What shone was a "radiance," a contracted light coming from a higher source, not the Essence itself. "Of the Ein Sof light" indicates the radiance's source. "In this world" means in the physical world, where the fish and cattle emerged into existence.

"Through gratuitous kindness" means as a gift. "Kindness" is giving; "gratuitous" means without recompense, without the recipient having done anything to earn it. This is how the radiance at the beginning of creation is described here; the words closing the parenthesis will explain what did not precede it from the recipient's side.

Gratuitous Kindness: What Exactly Was Given Without Arousal?

W16-04
source words
172–176

without any raising of mayin nukvin at all),

"Mayin nukvin" means female waters, abbreviated מ"ן (or, in another spelling, מ"נ). This is a term from the books of Kabbalah, rooted in the Sages' words about rain: "The upper waters are male and the lower waters female," and "not a handbreadth descends from above without the earth rising two handbreadths to meet it."

Just as earth "answers" the descending rain and raises some of its moisture toward it, so in every relationship of giver and recipient there is an arousal rising from the recipient, in response to which influence descends from the giver. The arousal from below is called "raising mayin nukvin." The influence descending in response is called "mayin duchrin," male waters, abbreviated מ"ד. In Iggeret HaKodesh 4, the Alter Rebbe writes: " 'An arousal from above' comes specifically through 'an arousal from below,' in the mode of raising mayin nukvin, as our Sages of blessed memory said, 'No drop descends from above, etc.' " That is, arousal from above, itaruta de-le'eila, comes specifically through arousal from below, itaruta de-letata. Physical waters are not intended. Water is an analogy for the relationship between recipient and giver.[492]

"Without … at all" means without any such arousal. The radiance of the days of Creation did not come in response to anything, since there was not yet anyone to arouse it. This is precisely the picture in Iggeret HaKodesh 5, which says of the act of creation: "But then this drawing down and descent took place without any arousal from below at all, for 'there was no man to

[492] Bereishit Rabbah 13:13: "Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: Not a handbreadth descends from above without the earth rising two handbreadths to meet it"; "Rabbi Levi said: The upper waters are male and the lower waters female." Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 4 ("Israel is redeemed only through charity"). The Kehot English translation of our Epistle explains the term as "The initial stimulus of an appropriate act by man", that is, the initial arousal of a fitting act on the human being's part, referring to Epistle 4. See the glossary at the end of the book, "Raising Mayin Nukvin."

work, etc.,' but solely because 'He desires kindness' and 'the world is built through kindness.' " It continues: "But after the creation of man 'to work it, etc.,' every arousal from above to awaken the attribute of supernal kindness comes through an arousal from below." There are two orders here. Before man: kindness that does not await arousal. Since man was created to serve: influence aroused by action from below.[493]

What, then, is said, and what is not? It says that the radiance shining during the Seven Days of Creation, through which the utterances brought the world and animals into existence, was given through gratuitous kindness, without any preceding arousal from the recipient. It does not say that every growth in the present comes without any condition, nor that arousal from below is no longer needed. The opposite is true: immediately afterward, the Epistle will say that "some of them come through raising mayin nukvin." Nor does "gratuitous kindness" abolish the order of creation. The utterance, earth, water and times remain. Only one thing is denied: that the first radiance came as a reward for, or response to, a recipient's service.

This contains an important principle for understanding the relationship between gift and service. For a person

[493]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 5 ("ויעש דוד שם"). On "without any raising of mayin nukvin" in our Epistle, the English translator in the Kehot edition likewise refers to Epistle 5: "See above, Epistle 5".

to be able to arouse, he must first be given existence and powers. There is no circle here in which each side waits for the other and nothing begins. Kindness establishes the possibility, within which the recipient's service develops. The very ability to serve was given before the service.

An example from family life may make the idea more accessible. Parents teach a child to speak, and only afterward can he ask them for something. The request is genuinely his, yet the very ability to ask was given to him beforehand. The limit of the example: the child existed before learning to speak, whereas in what it illustrates, kindness also establishes the recipient's very existence. And the parents worked to teach him, whereas here the kindness depends on nothing. The example teaches only the order: giving first, arousal afterward.

Rashi on "There Was No Man to Work the Soil": A Difficulty to Examine Carefully

On the verse "No shrub of the field was yet on the earth and no grass of the field had yet sprouted, for the L-rd G-d had not caused rain upon the earth, and there was no man to work the soil" (Genesis 2:5), Rashi writes: "On the third day, when it says 'Let the earth bring forth,' they did not emerge, but stood at the opening of the soil until the sixth day"; "And why had He not caused rain? Because there was no man to work the

soil, and no one recognized the benefit of rain. When man came and knew that it was needed for the world, he prayed for it; it fell, and the trees and grasses grew." The source is in the Gemara: "This teaches that the grasses emerged and stood at the opening of the soil until Adam, the first man, came and requested mercy for them; rain fell and they grew, teaching you that the Holy One, blessed be He, desires the prayers of the righteous."

At first glance, there is prayer here, meaning arousal from below, within the days of Creation, and growth depended on it. Does this contradict "without any raising of mayin nukvin at all"? To clarify the difficulty, let us compare the two sources in three respects: subject, time and the meaning of the condition.

The subject. Rashi discusses the third day's plants, of which it says "And the earth brought forth vegetation," and the question of when they emerged from the opening of the soil and grew. The Epistle discusses the radiance of the seven days, which within the parenthesis is explicitly connected with the animal utterances, "Let the waters swarm" and "Let the earth bring forth a living soul." Here the distinction made earlier is useful: "Let the earth bring forth" in Rashi refers to plants, not to "Let the earth bring forth a living soul" in the Epistle.

The time. Rashi distinguishes between the third day, when the plants reached the opening of the soil, and the sixth day, when man was created and prayed. The prayer came after man's creation. In the Epistle, "the Seven Days of Creation" is a general framework, and it does not enter into what changed at the moment man was created.

The meaning of the condition. Rashi speaks of rain and the prayer of a person who recognizes its benefit. The Epistle speaks of "raising mayin nukvin," a general term for arousal from below. Prayer is certainly such an arousal. Kuntres Acharon 4 says that prayer is "drawing down Or Ein Sof … to change created beings from what they are, so that the sick person will recover and rain will fall from heaven to earth, causing it to yield and sprout"; it also says there that "this is impossible without raising mayin nukvin specifically from below." The difficulty therefore does not disappear merely because Rashi does not use the kabbalistic term.

After the comparison, a reasonable reading emerges, resting on Tanya itself. Iggeret HaKodesh 5 uses the same verse, "there was no man to work," to say that at the time of creation there was no arousal from below, and that "after the creation of man to work it," every arousal from above to awaken the attribute of supernal kindness comes through arousal from below. On this

reading, Adam's prayer is not an exception within the gratuitous gift; it is the beginning of the new order that started with man's creation. The first gift, bringing created beings into existence and bringing plants to the opening of the soil, was given freely. The rain and growth that came after man's prayer already belong to the order of arousal from below. This is a reasoned reading, fitting the details of Rashi and Epistle 5; it is not written explicitly in our Epistle, so it must not be presented as the Epistle's wording. One further point: Rashi does not establish that every plant today requires human sowing. Rashi speaks of rain and prayer, not sowing, and the Epistle itself says that some plants grow of themselves.[494]

Producing Growth "Year After Year"

W16-05
source words
177–186

to cause grasses, trees, and fruits to grow from nothing into something continually, year after year,

After "at all," the parenthesis closed, and the sentence returns to its main predicate. "To cause … to grow" completes "to be active" before the parenthesis: the utterance operates within earth to produce growth.

[494] Rashi on Genesis 2:5; Chullin 60b. The Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2112–2114, establishes that Adam's prayer is "a genuine difficulty of application," and that Rashi's not using the Kabbalistic term MAN "does not remove the difficulty"; the alternatives proposed there—creation versus appearance and continued growth, or a limited application of freely bestowed kindness—"require a source." See ibid., pp. 1986–1987 and 2022–2023. This chapter's reading supplies a source for the second alternative from Tanya itself, Iggeret HaKodesh 5; it remains a reasoned reading, not the wording of our Epistle.

“Grasses, trees, and fruits” are three kinds of results: the small plant, the tree and what the tree gives. “From nothing into something” means from ayin to yesh.

Here, where earth’s power itself is discussed, the Epistle says “from nothing into something” without “like.” Chapter 14 already said that the element of earth “continually causes something to grow from nothing, namely grasses and trees,” and that the vegetative power within it “is ayin and spiritual, whereas they are physical.” The perspective here is that of the power: what comes into being is not a rearrangement of fruit that was lying ready-made in earth, but a new manifestation originating in the Divine power within the utterance. Later, when the Epistle discusses a seed already placed in the soil, it will add “like.” It is worth preserving the difference: each expression in its place, each looking at growth from a different side.

“Continually, year after year” gives “continually” a concrete meaning. The preceding sentence said “continually, forever and ever”; here it says “continually, year after year.” These are not two expressions for the same thing. “Forever and ever” emphasizes that the action does not cease; “year after year” emphasizes that the manifestation is renewed in the annual cycle. The Epistle does not say that every leaf grows ceaselessly at every moment and in every

place. It says that the power repeatedly produces growth, year after year.

Continuity and renewal are not opposites. At the end of Iggeret HaKodesh 14, the Alter Rebbe writes of the supernal radiance in each year: "Although it is continual, it is nevertheless not in one aspect and level alone from the days of old, but in each and every year it is a new, higher light." The comment cited in the Rebbe's name on our Epistle also refers on this subject to that passage in Epistle 14. Epistle 14 discusses the radiance renewed on Rosh Hashanah; for our purposes, its principle suffices. We thus obtain three aspects that are not interchangeable: the action continues; its manifestation is renewed each year; and its ability is not exhausted as long as the world exists, which is already the subject of the next unit.[495]

"A Likeness" and "If": Power That Is Not a Stock

W16-06
source words
187–200

which is a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof, for if this world were to endure for many myriads of years, they would grow year after year.

[495] Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 14 ("לעורר את האהבה הישנה"), near its end. The note cited in the Rebbe's name is marked in the Research Book as note 58. On the three aspects, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2056–2057: "The continuation of the operation, renewal of the light, and the ability to operate for as long as the world exists are three distinct aspects"; see pp. 2022–2023 and 2061–2064.

“שהוא” (“which is”) refers to the manner of growth just mentioned. “מעין” (“a likeness”) means an example, a resemblance. “בחי’ א”ס” means the aspect of Ein Sof. “שאם יתקיים עוה”ז” means if this world were to endure. “ריבוי רבבות שנים” means very many myriads of years (a “myriad” is ten thousand). “יצמיחו מדי שנה בשנה” means they would continue producing growth every year.

The argument is simple. A stock diminishes as it is used. Had earth received a fixed quantity of plants at creation, that quantity would run out after a long time. The Epistle says: if this world were to endure for many myriads of years, they would still produce growth year after year. The power is not consumed or worn out by its manifestations. It is therefore “a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof.”

Two words preserve precision: “a likeness” and “if.” “A likeness” expresses resemblance, not identity with the Essence of Ein Sof, nor an assertion that earth is Ein Sof. “If” introduces a condition. The Epistle does not predict how long the world will endure, nor say that infinitely many years have already passed or infinitely many plants have already grown. It describes an

ability: as long as the world exists, the power will continue to operate.[496][497]

Why did it say earlier, within the parenthesis, “an aspect of Ein Sof,” and here “a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof”? The Epistle does not explain. One may propose that within the parenthesis it describes the power according to its root, while here, describing its manifestation in years and plants that are always finite, it says “a likeness”: the resemblance to Ein Sof as evident within a finite order. This is only a proposal, and the question remains open.

Every result remains finite. Even a very large tree is not infinite: its fruits can be counted and its trunk measured. Precisely for that reason, the example illuminates the Epistle’s central subject: a power whose source is not in finitude is revealed through finite results. There is no need to blur the fruit’s finitude in order to marvel at the power producing it again and again.

[496]The Epistle’s wording explaining growth “year after year,” studied in chapter 16: “Which is a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof: if this world were to endure for multitudes of myriads of years, they would sprout year after year.” “A likeness of” qualifies the comparison: resemblance, not identity. “If” makes it conditional on the world’s existence. These expressions do not assert that the world has already existed for infinitely many years, or that infinitely many fruits have already grown in actuality.

[497]For an examination of continuity conditional on the world’s existence and the meaning of “a likeness of Ein Sof” as an inexhaustible ability, not infinitely many years already past or an infinite number of fruits, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1868–1870, on the limits of the infinity expressions in the discussion of earth; pp. 2061–2064, in the continuous explanation “Let the Earth Sprout, Continually, and a Likeness of Ein Sof”; and pp. 1986–1988 and 2022–2025, in the questions concerning “continually” and “year after year,” the condition “if it endures,” the difference between yesh me-ayin and “like yesh me-ayin,” and the seed’s “no commensurability” with the fruit and tree, and in the status of those questions.

The Sown and Planted: Here, Raising MAN Is an Action

W16-07
source words
201–209

Except that some of them come through raising mayin nukvin, namely those that are sown and planted.

“אלא” (“except”) is a qualification within what has been said. “שיש מהן” means some of the plants. “ע”י העלאת מ”נ” means through raising mayin nukvin. “והם הזרועים והנטועים” means these are the plants that are sown and planted. Sowing means burying seeds in soil, such as wheat and vegetables; planting means placing a seed, sapling or branch in soil so that a tree will grow from it.

After describing earth’s power to produce growth year after year, the Epistle adds a distinction: not all plants come in the same way. Some come through arousal from below, and it immediately explains which: the sown and planted. Later, when it turns to the quality of the fruit, it says this explicitly: “raising mayin nukvin, namely sowing and planting.” In this passage, then, MAN has concrete content: a human action placing a seed or kernel in soil.

How is the act of sowing “raising mayin nukvin”? MAN, as we saw, is arousal from the recipient’s side. Earth is the “recipient”: within it is vested the power of growth given through the utterance. The seed buried within it “calls” to this power and draws its

manifestation in a particular form: wheat from wheat, an apple from an apple seed. Thus Iggeret HaKodesh 8 says: "The seeds sown in earth are only akin to an 'arousal from below,' called 'raising mayin nukvin' in the writings of the Arizal." Note "akin to": even the analogy itself is careful, saying that the seed resembles arousal from below. Kuntres Acharon 4 says: "The seed arouses the vegetative power within earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout, etc.' … through raising mayin nukvin to its root."[498]

Not every occurrence of MAN should be turned into one thing. In the passage from Or HaTorah (Bamidbar, Discourses for Shavuot, p. 196) cited in the research book, the same term describes something else: growth itself, rising "from below upward" through the vegetative power vested in the grass, is compared to raising MAN, while the mazal striking the grass and telling it "Grow!" is compared to the mayin duchrin that arouse it. Rain is also mentioned there, bringing the vegetative power "from concealment into revelation." There the term describes the recipient's response, not the sower's hand. Thus, not every place

[498]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 8 ("זורע צדקות מצמיח ישועות"): the ear of grain and the tree and its fruits "are not the nature and essence of the seed and kernel at all," and the vegetative power "does not bring forth and reveal its power outward, from potential to actuality, except through the seed and kernel"; the sown kernels "are only like an arousal from below, called raising mayin nukvin." The referent of the analogy there is the mitzvah of charity, ascending "as raising mayin nukvin to the root of their souls above," and "the kindness of G-d" descending and shining during prayer. See Kuntres Acharon 4, and the explanation of the discourse "כי כארץ תוציא צמחה" in Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim: "The sown seed is only a raising of mayin nukvin to draw from the hyle-like vegetative power, to bring forth this particular species in accordance with the seed sown."

where MAN is mentioned should be identified with sowing. Or HaTorah cannot establish whether there is MAN, in our Epistle's sense, in plants growing of themselves as well; the question of applicability remains open. If we try to reconcile the two passages through a temporal division, one MAN "before germination" and another "afterward," we will add something written neither in the Epistle nor in Or HaTorah. What stands in the Epistle's wording is the distinction between the sown and planted and what grows of itself.[499]

For a first-time learner, it is enough to retain two things from this paragraph. First: the same name, MAN, is used in different sources to describe different things; in our Epistle it describes the act of sowing, while in the cited passage from Or HaTorah it describes growth rising from the grass. Second: similarity of name does not establish that the passages discuss the same thing. Each time we must ask what the term describes there. Nevertheless, these are not two unrelated meanings, but two applications of the same relationship between

[499] Or HaTorah, Bamidbar, Discourses for Shavuot, p. קצו [196], as the paragraph is transcribed in the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1962–1965: "This is an analogy for bringing the aspect of drawing down mayin duchrin to arouse the raising of mayin nukvin, for growth from the vegetative power from below upward resembles the raising of mayin nukvin ascending from the recipient, and a drawing down of mayin duchrin from the mazal is needed to arouse this ascent"; there also: "Likewise, drawing rain into the earth also brings the vegetative power within the earth from concealment to revelation." On the two applications of the term, and the fact that the source does not establish a division between MAN before germination and MAN afterward, see ibid., pp. 1987–1988 ("Two applications; no proven botanical division in time"), 2065–2066 and 2114–2117.

recipient and giver: their connection should not be denied, but neither should it be turned into identity.

A Seed on the Table, a Seed in the Soil

Let us return to the seed on the table with which we opened the chapter. Alone, it produces no growth. Earth alone produces growth, but what grows within it of itself is not what the person sought. Sowing joins the two: the seed enters earth, arouses the power within it and directs its manifestation toward a particular species and result. If we attribute everything to the seed, we miss the vegetative power within earth. If we attribute everything to earth and leave no place for sowing, we miss the addition human labor brings. The Epistle joins both: the power is given from above, and the action from below arouses its manifestation in a richer, more excellent manner.

The two Aramaic terms we encountered in Iggeret HaKodesh 4, itaruta de-letata and itaruta de-le'eila, describe this relationship in general: a person acts with powers he has received, and through his action an additional revelation is drawn from above. These are not two independent partners, each creating part of reality. All a person's power is given to him, but it is given so that he will work with it.

Or HaTorah, on the same page mentioned above, formulates this clearly: "For the lower to be able to

raise MAN, strength and force must first be drawn from the higher to the lower so that it can raise MAN." Hence an order of three stages: mayin duchrin, mayin nukvin, and mayin duchrin. First the higher gives power, then the lower arouses, and then new influence descends in response. The ability to arouse was itself given from above, just as gratuitous kindness gave the ability to serve before the service; yet the arousal genuinely belongs to the lower.

An analogy from learning can make the three stages more accessible. The teacher teaches, and from what he has learned, the student knows how to ask. When he asks a serious question, he opens the possibility of an explanation that would not have been given in the same form had he remained indifferent, and the teacher answers with a new explanation. The student does not create his teacher's wisdom, but his effort changes the manner of receiving it. The human analogy does not measure Divine drawing down; it only helps us understand how it can be said at once that the power is not ours and that our action has decisive significance. The Epistle itself will make the transition from the field to human service at the end of the passage; before that, it returns to the seed.

“Like Something from Nothing”: The Seed Is Incommensurate with the Fruit

W16-08
source words
210–222

And nevertheless, they are like something from nothing, for the planted seed is utterly incommensurate with the fruit,

“ואעפ”כ” means nevertheless. Although the sown and planted come through raising MAN, meaning that there is a prior seed and a human action here, “they are like something from nothing.” “שהגרעין הנטוע” means the seed that was planted; “אין לו ערך כלל לגבי הפרי” means it has no commensurability, no proportion of measure, at all in relation to the fruit.

Why “like”? Because here something precedes the result: seed, soil, water and growing conditions. This is not creation of something from nothing in the full sense stated at the beginning of the Epistle, creation from nothing and absolute naught. “Like” preserves the resemblance: the novelty is so great in relation to what was manifest in the seed that it resembles bringing forth something from nothing. The translator into English in the Kehot edition commented here: this is not actual something from nothing, since there is prior material; strictly speaking, it could be called something from something, but the result is so far

beyond all proportion to its source that the growth resembles creation of something from nothing.[500]

"Utterly incommensurate" describes the gap between what was manifest in the seed and what appears from it: size, form, taste and multiplicity. The discussion here concerns the power of renewal revealed in growth. Iggeret HaKodesh 8 says that the ear of grain, tree and fruits "are not at all the nature and essence of the seed and kernel, for their nature and essence are consumed and decay in earth, and the vegetative power in earth itself [עצמה; variant: עצמו] is what brings forth and causes growth." The seed arouses; the vegetative power brings forth. Thus, there is no common measure between them. In Likkutei Torah for Nitzavim, in the discourse "כי כארץ תוציא צמחה" ("For as the Earth Brings Forth Its Growth"), it says of the fruit: "It possesses good taste and delight that were not at all in the seed, for the seed has no taste at all."

The three expressions we have seen now become clear. Earlier it said "from nothing into something" without "like": there the perspective is that of the power, of the utterance bringing the thing into existence. Here it

[500] In the Kehot English translation, in the note on "like yesh me-ayin": "Not truly yesh meayin, for there is some initial substance. Thus strictly speaking it is yesh meyesh (as opposed to ayin, naught). But the final product is so inproportionate to its source that the vegetative process is somehow analogous to creatio ex nihilo". The wording of Likkutei Torah concerning the fruit: Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim, discourse beginning "כי כארץ תוציא צמחה." The Research Book, vol. III, records the distinction "prior seed versus relative incommensurability with the product" (pp. 1986–1987), and, concerning "it has no commensurability at all," "a difference in quantity and quality, not mathematical zero" (pp. 1987–1988); the questions themselves appear on pp. 2022–2025.

says “like something from nothing”: the perspective is that of the seed, something preceding the result yet incommensurate with it. When it says “a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof,” the perspective concerns the power’s continuity over the years. The three expressions complement one another, but are not one claim.

Not Only the Fruit: The Entire Tree

W16-09
source words
223–233

and also with the entire tree, with its branches and leaves; likewise with varieties of seeds and vegetables,

“And also with the entire tree, with its branches and leaves”: the seed is also incommensurate with the entire tree, including its branches and leaves. “Likewise with varieties of seeds and vegetables”: likewise with garden plants and vegetables growing from small seeds.

Why does the Epistle enumerate the details? Because what emerges from the seed is not a copy of itself, but many forms of development: trunk, branches, leaves and fruits. The enumeration shows the size of the gap rather than building a diagram; there is no need to map every branch and leaf to a sefirah.

Hundreds of Kernels from One Kernel

W16-10
source words
234–245

and also with varieties of grain, for hundreds of kernels to come into being from one kernel is like something from nothing,

“And also with varieties of grain”: with cereals too, such as wheat and barley. “For hundreds of kernels to come into being from one kernel”: that hundreds of kernels should come into being from a single one. “Is like something from nothing”: here too the word “like” explicitly recurs.

Here the argument is quantitative: from one kernel a plant grows, with many kernels in its ears. “Hundreds” illustrates the many emerging from the one. Even in very great multiplicity, a numerical relationship remains between the kernel and its results: one kernel against a hundred is still one in a hundred. Already in chapter 2, we saw that a difference in measure, however enormous, is not the distance of which creation speaks. The multiplicity illustrates that the result is not proportionate to the source, and “like” reminds us that this is not actual creation of something from nothing.

The Straw and Ears of Grain, and from There to Quality

W16-11
source words
246–256

and all the more so the straw and ears of grain. Now, the fruits produced through raising mayin nukvin, namely sowing and planting,

This unit contains the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next.

“And all the more so the straw and ears of grain”: the hundreds of kernels are at least kernels like the one sown, yet they are not proportionate to it; all the more so the straw and ears, which are no longer kernels at all, but entirely new forms of which there was no trace in the kernel. Here the series of comparisons between the kernel and what emerges from it closes. In the vocalized text of the Epistle, the sentence ends here and a new paragraph begins.

“והנה” (“now”) opens a new inquiry, into quality. “The fruits produced through raising mayin nukvin”: the fruits coming through raising mayin nukvin. “Namely sowing and planting”: that raising of MAN is sowing and planting. Thus the Epistle itself explains what raising MAN means in this analogy. Whoever identifies it with the moment the seed decays or another stage in growth, presenting this as though it is said here, adds to the Epistle’s wording.

“Very, Very Superior”: An Advantage in Quality

W16-12
source words
257–266

are very, very superior to those growing on their own from the vegetative power in the earth alone.

“הם” (“are,” literally “they”) refers to the fruits coming through sowing and planting. “משובחים” (“superior”) means better and more excellent, an expression of praise and quality. “מאד מאד” (“very, very”): the doubling emphasizes the size of the difference. “מהעולים מאליהן” (“to those growing on their own”) means the plants growing of themselves. “מכח הצומח לבדו שבארץ” means from the vegetative power in earth alone. “Alone” defines the side of the comparison: earth’s power without the act of sowing and planting.

What has changed? Until now, the seed was compared to its results: fruit, tree, hundreds of kernels, straw and ears. Now two kinds of fruits are compared: those coming through human sowing and those growing of themselves. The Epistle says the former are very, very superior. This is a claim about quality, and the heart of the passage: human participation does not create the power, but changes the quality of its manifestation.

This distinction prevents two mistaken conclusions: that everything depends solely on man, or that his actions are meaningless because everything comes

from G-d. Man does not create earth, seed or the vegetative power, yet within the order established by the Creator, his action has real significance.

The sentence should not be turned into an agricultural rule. The Epistle does not say that every cultivated fruit is superior in every respect to every wild fruit. It speaks within the analogy it is building: fruit coming through the act of sowing, compared with what grows from earth's power alone.

What about the doubled "very, very"? In Likkutei Torah for Shelach, in the discourse "ויאמרו אל כל עדת בני ישראל... טובה הארץ מאד מאד" ("And They Said to the Entire Congregation of the Children of Israel ... The Land Is Very, Very Good"), the doubling is explained as corresponding to two kinds of worlds, "hidden worlds" and "revealed worlds," "for in these two kinds of worlds, the supernal lights break through, descend and are revealed below," through the performance of mitzvot. The subject is close: action and the revelation of lights below. But there is no proof that the doubled "very" in our Epistle means precisely those two kinds of worlds; here it is read as emphasizing the superiority. The comment cited in the Rebbe's name on our Epistle asks what place the superiority of sown fruits has here, and proposes a connection to the superiority of practical mitzvot and of what comes through a mitzvah and prayer over what is given through gratuitous kindness,

referring to that discourse in Likkutei Torah. This is a proposal indicating the direction of study, not a decision on every detail.[501]

"On Their Own": Without Sowing, Not Without a Cause

"Those growing on their own" stands opposite "those that are sown and planted." The word states what is absent on this side of the comparison: the act of sowing and planting, and no more. It does not say that these plants grow without seeds, without a mazal, without influence from above or without natural conditions. In chapter 14, we studied the Sages' words, "There is no blade of grass that does not have a mazal in the firmament that strikes it and tells it, 'Grow!'," and the Epistle's wording, "and the mazal that strikes and says, 'Grow!' "; rain, soil and seasons also retain their place. Equally, the contrast should not be used to infer anything about watering, care or prayer, as though

[501] Likkutei Torah, Shelach, discourse beginning "ויאמרו אל כל עדת בני ישראל לאמר כו' טובה הארץ מאד," in the section "ואחר כל הנ"ל": "The two occurrences of me'od correspond to the concealed worlds that are not revealed, which are the heichalot of Abba and Imma, and the revealed worlds, which are the heichalot of ZON, etc. In these two kinds of worlds, the higher lights pierce through, descend and are revealed below"; earlier: "This can be aroused only specifically through action, not through thought, because 'their beginning is embedded in their end.' " Already in the preceding discourse there, "שלח לך אנשים," "me'od me'od" is connected with practical mitzvot and a dwelling in the lower realms: "Specifically through the Land of Israel below, specifically through practical mitzvot, the Ein Sof light, the aspect of me'od, without limit, will be drawn into concealed worlds and revealed worlds; this is me'od me'od"; "For in truth His principal intention is specifically to have a dwelling in the lower realms." The note cited in the Rebbe's name is marked in the Research Book as note 59; on its wording as a proposal rather than a determination, see ibid., vol. III, pp. 1967–1969 and 2105–2107. On the fact that the repetition of me'od concerning the fruits does not automatically carry the discourse's two levels, see ibid., pp. 1987–1988 and 2068–2069.

they had no place: it is directed at the particular action of sowing and planting.

This is also how the matter was understood in Chassidic discourses. In Likkutei Torah for Bechukotai, in explaining the difference between grass and human food, it says: "Grass does not grow as a result of sowing, but solely of itself, meaning from the vegetative power within earth," with a parenthetical reference there to our Epistle. "Of itself" means not because of human sowing; the cause is the vegetative power within earth. Likkutei Torah for Nitzavim gives an example: "Grasses growing of themselves, and likewise forest fruits, such as apples on forest trees that grow and sprout of themselves without sowing."[502]

Quantity Separately, Quality Separately

We have seen two different additions here. One is quantitative: from one kernel, hundreds, as well as the straw and ears. The second is qualitative: sown fruits are superior to those growing of themselves. The comparisons too are different. In quantity, the seed is compared to its results; in quality, sown fruit is compared to fruit growing of itself.

[502] Likkutei Torah, Bechukkotai, discourse beginning "אסור לאדם שיטעום עד שיתן מאכל לבהמתו": "The difference between grass and human food lies only in the fact that grass does not grow as a result of sowing, but only by itself, namely from the vegetative power in the earth (see what is written in the discourse beginning 'כי כארץ תוציא צמחה' and in Iggeret HaKodesh, at the end of 'Ihu vechayohi'), whereas human food grows only through sowing." Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim, discourse beginning "כי כארץ תוציא צמחה וכגנה זרועיה תצמיח." Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2069–2070: "The term 'on their own' is not an instruction to formulate a botanical theory of growth without seed"; see ibid., pp. 2065–2066.

This deserves attention, since in Iggeret HaKodesh 8, both superiorities, multiplicity and superiority of nature, are measured against the seed: “in very great multiplicity in a single ear … and also the nature and essence of the fruits are superior by a great and immense elevation, far, far above the nature and essence of the planted seed.” Our Epistle adds another comparison: between fruit coming through sowing and fruit growing of itself. It is specifically this comparison that teaches the addition made by human service.

The distinction is useful in what the analogy illustrates as well. Additional revelation is not measured solely by a greater number of actions or recipients. There may be a change in how the light is received, in the depth of the connection and in the excellence of the result. Thus, the example of superior fruit gives the analogy greater richness than numerical multiplicity alone. Human service is not described merely as multiplying what was already manifest in the seed, but as arousing a more excellent manifestation of the power.

Before moving from the field to man, let us pause over another source using the same analogy, so as not to confuse the two subjects.

Iggeret HaKodesh 8: The Same Image, a Different Subject

Iggeret HaKodesh 8 opens with the verse "He sows acts of righteousness and causes salvations to sprout," and asks why the mitzvah of charity is described as sowing. Its subject is Or Ein Sof shining in the higher worlds, and its radiance descending to "those who fear G-d and contemplate His name," who serve through "the service of the heart, which is prayer." This descent is called there "the kindness of G-d," designated "water," "which descends from a high place to a low place." It continues: "But everything depends on an arousal from below."

Within this subject comes the analogy of sowing. The ear of grain, tree and fruits are not the nature of the seed and kernel, since the seed is consumed and decays, and the vegetative power within earth brings them forth and causes them to grow. Then comes the wording: "It is only that it does not bring forth and reveal its power outward, from potential to actual, except through the seed and kernel that decay in earth, all their power being consumed within the vegetative power in earth, and they unite and become one." From this union emerge great multiplicity and superiority of nature. The sown seeds are called "akin to an arousal from below, called raising mayin nukvin." What the analogy illustrates: the act of charity ascends "in the

mode of raising mayin nukvin to the root of their souls above," and through this elevation, "the kindness of G-d" is aroused to descend and shine upon the souls of Israel, "at least during prayer." "Causes salvations to sprout": the salvation growing "from sowing the charity sown in the higher earth."

Our Epistle's subject in this passage is different. It explains the power of "Let the earth sprout," operating continually within earth, distinguishes between spontaneous growth and sowing and planting, and from the superiority of sown fruit gains understanding of the drawing down of lights in all the worlds. The imagery is close: seed, earth's power, multiplicity, superiority and raising MAN. But the closeness does not make the two subjects one.

There is a difficulty here that must not be hidden. Epistle 8 says that the vegetative power does not actualize its power "except" through the seed. Our Epistle says there are plants "growing on their own." Before declaring a contradiction, we must clarify the subject of the comparison in each place. In Epistle 8, the analogy was brought to explain charity and prayer, and concerns sown growth; "except" describes what happens in that situation. A reading limiting Epistle 8 to the sown growth it discusses fits the context, but is a reading of the context, not a qualification written there. We will therefore leave each source in its own wording:

we will not add to Epistle 8 an unwritten condition, nor erase "on their own" from our Epistle to make it conform. Whether every growth requires MAN remains an open question; each source teaches its own subject.

From the Field to Man: How the Analogy Opens Its Application

Thus far, we have seen two sides within earth itself: a vegetative power given within it, and an act of sowing that arouses a superior manifestation of that same power. The seed does not create earth's power; it enters earth and directs its revelation. From here opens the connection to human service: the Epistle first shows the superiority that human action brings to growth, then concludes, "And from this we can understand."

What exactly do we learn from the field? Earth's power is given to it from above, as a gift; sowing is an action from below, "raising MAN"; and the superior fruit is an added revelation that would not have come from earth's power alone. Likewise, in the application, human service in Torah and mitzvot draws down "supernal lights," a revelation not described as an action of the source alone. This lesson does not negate the power given from above, nor turn every natural growth into an obligation to sow. It teaches that within what has been given, human action has a decisive place.

We must take care not to find more correspondences in the analogy than the Epistle itself indicates. We should not say that a plant growing of itself is "thought" and a sown one "action," or that every detail of plant growth corresponds to a stage in the higher order. There are three related distinctions worth keeping each in its own place: the superiority of what comes through service over bounty given without it; the superiority of action over thought; and the explanation given in the Likkutei Torah discourse for Shelach to the doubling of "very, very," corresponding to two kinds of worlds. The first distinction can be seen, for example, in Or HaTorah for Chukat: there an explicit distinction is made between the bounty given in Gan Eden in measure and allotment, and the light mitzvot add, "for through the mitzvot, 'to work it and guard it,' light is added in Gan Eden beyond Gan Eden's own aspect." This is a clear distinction in its place; applying it to the fruit analogy is an interpretive step.[503]

[503] Or HaTorah, Bamidbar, Chukkat, pp. תשפה–תשפו [785–786], as these pages are described and quoted in the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 1964–1965. On p. תשפו [786]: "Concerning what is stated in section 1, that through the mitzvot 'to work it and guard it,' light is added in the Garden of Eden beyond the intrinsic aspect of the Garden of Eden"; later: "This drawing down from the aspect of 'above Havayah' is drawn through engagement in Torah and mitzvot below." According to the Research Book, these pages contain neither an identification of "elsewhere" in the Epistle nor an explanation of the doubled me'od concerning the fruits. For the distinction between the different superiorities, see ibid., pp. 2114–2116.

“And from This We Can Understand”: Drawing Lights into All the Worlds

W16-13
source words
267–278

And from this we can understand the drawing down of supernal lights into ABYA (which is the purpose of the creation of the human being), as written elsewhere.

“And from this” means from this matter: from the superiority of fruits coming through sowing and planting. “נשכיל” (“we can understand”) means we will understand, apprehend through inquiry and inference. “המשכות” (“the drawing down”) means revelations drawn from above downward. “Supernal lights” means lights whose source is above. “Into ABYA” means into Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, the four worlds. “(Which is the purpose of the creation of the human being)”: the parentheses are in the source;[504] they define these drawings down as the purpose for which man was created. “כמ”ש במ”א” means as written elsewhere; in the vocalized text: “as explained elsewhere.”

What does “which is” refer back to? To the drawing down just mentioned: that through human service, supernal lights are drawn down. Man was created so that his actions would draw light. This is not an

[504] On these parentheses too, the English translator in the Kehot edition notes: “Brackets appear in the text”. The vocalized text there reads: “(Which is the ultimate purpose of the creation of man), as explained elsewhere.”

additional, separate purpose placed alongside the drawings down without connection to them.

The statement is very broad. An action performed here, in this world, is not an isolated matter whose influence ends where it was performed. It is connected to a process passing through the entire order of worlds, from Atzilut to Asiyah.

Drawing Down in All Worlds and a Dwelling in the Lower Realms: Two Sides of One Service

A question arises here. Tanya, chapter 36, says that "the purpose of the chainlike descent of the worlds and their descent from level to level is not for the sake of the higher worlds … rather, the purpose is this lowest world," and also that "the Holy One, blessed be He, desired a dwelling for Himself in the lower realms."[505] Chapter 37 says: "For this is all of man, and the purpose of his creation and descent to this world: so that He, blessed be He, should have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms." Why, then, does the Epistle describe the purpose of man's creation specifically as "the drawing down of supernal lights into ABYA," into all the worlds?

The Epistle does not resolve the question here; the answer is learned from parallel passages in Tanya and requires a distinction between two things: the scope of

[505] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 36: the ultimate purpose of creation and a dwelling in the lower realms.

service's action and the place where its purpose is fulfilled. Human service effects drawings down and unions throughout the stature of the worlds. Chapter 41 describes "the supernal union within Atzilut, effected through arousal from below, through the union of the Divine soul … with the light of G-d vested in the Torah and mitzvot in which it engages." But the intention does not stop at revelation in the higher worlds; it is fulfilled in the revelation of Divinity within the lowest world. Chapter 37 says that through performing a mitzvah, "a person draws the revelation of the light of the blessed Ein Sof from above downward, to vest itself in physicality."

The sharpest formulation is in Kuntres Acharon 4. There the Alter Rebbe distinguishes between elevation, "the aspect of elevation from below upward," and "the aspect of drawing down from above downward … specifically through practical mitzvot, to draw light into vessels," and concludes: "Both are a need on high, elevation and drawing down … and this is the purpose of hishtalshelut: that supernal light be revealed below, not that the lower ascend above, for that is only temporary." Elevation is necessary and is "a need on

high," but is not the final purpose. The purpose is revelation below.[506][507]

Thus there is one purpose here, not two. "Drawing down into ABYA" and "a dwelling in the lower realms" are action and result: service draws light through the entire order of worlds, and the revelation reaches its destination in the lowest world. Ascent too, although "a need on high," is not the whole of service, as though the best thing were to take everything out of the physical world and return it above. The drawing down passes through all the worlds and illuminates them, yet remains directed toward its manifestation in the lowest world; what changes along the way in the higher worlds does not negate the place where the purpose is realized.[508]

[506]Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening "To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer." Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot "over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love"; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is "from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon," in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah "which have already been rectified through Mah"; the human being who "lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him"; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses "the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout,' etc.," and thus "the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels"; and elevation and drawing down, "both of which are a supernal need," "and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above."

[507]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2065–2070: the opening of "Sowing, Water, Raising Mayin Nukvin and the Human Purpose" (pp. 2065–2066); the discussion "Raising Mayin Nukvin and the Human Purpose: The Contribution of Kuntres Acharon 4" (pp. 2066–2069); and the resolution "Arousal from Below and the Limits of the Water Analogy" (pp. 2069–2070).

[508]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapters 36, 37 and 41; Kuntres Acharon 4, and at its end: "For this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: that the higher descend below and He have a dwelling in the lower realms, in order to elevate them, 'to be one within one.' " Likkutei Torah, Shelach, discourse beginning "שלח לך אנשים": "For in truth His principal intention is specifically to have a dwelling in the lower realms." On "which is the ultimate purpose of the creation of man," the Kehot English translator refers to Likkutei Torah, Devarim, folio 2a, in the discourse "ציון במשפט תפדה"; that discourse states: "The ultimate purpose is to draw the blessed Ein Sof, the sovev, below, namely

"A dwelling" is not merely an indication of place. Chapter 36 describes the purpose as "when the sitra achra is subdued and darkness is transformed into light," when the "other side," the powers of concealment, is subdued and darkness turns to light, as the light of G-d shines specifically in the place that concealed it. This is the content of "a dwelling in the lower realms": the revelation of Divinity within lower reality, not departure from it.

Parchment, Etrog and Seed

In Kuntres Acharon 4, the Alter Rebbe asks: how do the etrog and the parchment of tefillin, physical things not yet refined, draw light into supernal vessels that have already been rectified? He answers with our analogy: "The analogy for this is sowing and planting, for the seed arouses the vegetative power within earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout, etc., fruit trees, etc.,' through raising mayin nukvin to its root; likewise, the parchment and the etrog arouse up to the highest heights." The same image, seed, "Let the earth sprout" and MAN, appears there to explain the power of practical mitzvot.[509]

through Torah and mitzvot." On the distinction between the scope of the operation of Divine service and the place where its purpose is realized, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2065–2066 and 2122–2124; ibid., pp. 2119–2120, states that this is "a reasoned combination of the parallels, not an explanatory sentence found on the parentheses" in the Epistle.

[509]Tanya, Kuntres Acharon 4: "But one must understand: how can the etrog, which is of the 288 [sparks] not yet refined, and likewise the parchment of the tefillin, draw light into the vessels of Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva of Atzilut, which have already been refined and rectified through the name Mah to become an aspect of Divinity?" At the end of the analogy: "To the very highest levels, which is the name Sag before the shattering, the nature and essence of the lights in Adam Kadmon, not

The parchment and etrog remain defined, finite objects. The mitzvah does not make their dimensions unlimited. But a person fulfills the will of G-d through them, thereby arousing a root not measured according to the material alone, just as a small seed arouses a power incommensurate with it. The result is not ascent alone: it is light drawn into vessels. The lowest world remains the place of action, and specifically there revelation is sought.

We must only beware of identifying terms too quickly. In the same sentence in Kuntres Acharon 4, the Alter Rebbe continues by explaining that "the highest heights" means "the Name Sag before the shattering," that is, before the "shattering of the vessels" described in the writings of the Arizal, a higher root of things still requiring refinement; the "Name Mah," by contrast, is the Name through which rectification takes place. There these designate specific levels and roots. They add to our understanding of the argument, but are not synonyms for "the kav" and "returning light," which we studied in the preceding chapter. Nor is the kav's returning light, shining from the termination of Adam Kadmon's feet, another name for the person sowing. Each conceptual system describes a different side of the connection between lower and higher.

a mere radiance like the name Mah from its forehead." Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2066–2068: "A seed arouses the earth's power; parchment and an etrog arouse a higher root; the result is light drawn into vessels"; there also, the importance of the parallel "does not consist in identifying Sag with returning light."

“As Written Elsewhere”: Where Does the Epistle Refer?

“As written elsewhere”: the Epistle refers to a place where the matter is explained, without saying which. Several passages are close to it in content and are worth knowing:

- **Kuntres Acharon 4** is closest in its components: food from the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders; refinement; a root in the Name Sag; the analogy of sowing and planting with “Let the earth sprout”; arousing a higher root through parchment and etrog; elevation and drawing down together; and establishing the purpose as revelation below.
- **Likkutei Torah for Nitzavim**, in the discourse “כי כארץ תוציא צמחה וכגנה זרועיה תצמיח” (“For as the Earth Brings Forth Its Growth, and as a Garden Causes Its Seeds to Sprout”), gives almost the same wording: “The fruits produced through sowing and planting are very, very superior to those growing of themselves, etc.” It also explains there why sowing is needed although the power is within earth: “Because blessing rests only when there is an aspect of a vessel below in which the blessing can dwell,” and the application is to mitzvot and their intention. However, the explanation of that discourse contains an explicit reference to “Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning ‘איהו וחיוהי’,” namely our Epistle. The

discourse may reflect how the Epistle was studied rather than the source to which it refers.

- **Iggeret HaKodesh 8**, **Tanya, chapters 36–37 and 41**, and **Likkutei Torah for Shelach** provide parallels for the connection between service below and the revelation of lights.

None of these passages is proved to be the reference's destination. Closeness in content helps explain the parenthesis "which is the purpose of the creation of the human being"; it does not establish where the author intended to refer. Even when the question remains open, the wording of the Epistle and its parallels illuminate the content.[510]

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

This chapter moved from the power within earth to human action. We learned that the utterance "Let the earth sprout" operates continually within earth, differing in this from the animal utterances, which brought animals forth from water and earth only in the days of Creation. We learned that the radiance of the days of Creation was given through gratuitous

[510] The English translator in the Kehot edition compares ("Cf.") Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim, 50d–51a, and Iggeret HaKodesh 8 with this passage; this is a comparison, not an identification. The explanation of "כי כארץ תוציא צמחה" in Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim, states: "As this matter is explained in Iggeret HaKodesh, beginning 'Ihu vechayohi,' in the statement 'Moreover,' etc., 'it displays its power and ability in the element of earth,' etc., 'which continually brings forth yesh me-ayin,' etc.; see there." Research Book, vol. III: " 'Elsewhere' was not identified" (pp. 1987–1988; see pp. 2068–2069 and 2119–2120).

kindness, without any arousal from below, and that since man's creation there is also an order of influence coming in response to action. We learned that earth's power is "a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof": it is not a stock, and will continue producing growth as long as the world exists. And we learned the heart of the passage: sowing and planting are "raising MAN," and the fruits coming through them are "very, very superior" to those growing of themselves. From this, the Epistle gains understanding that human service draws supernal lights into all the worlds, "which is the purpose of the creation of the human being." According to the parallel passages in Tanya cited in this chapter, that purpose is fulfilled in revelation within the lowest world.

The following questions remain open. Why the animal utterances come specifically "from Chochmah" of Malchut of Malchut of Asiyah. Why it says "six" and then "seven" days of Creation. Whether plants growing of themselves have MAN in another sense, as in Or HaTorah. How "except through the seed" in Epistle 8 is reconciled with "on their own" in our Epistle. Why the parenthesis says "an aspect of Ein Sof" and the continuation "a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof." And exactly where "as written elsewhere" refers.

Sowing Something Small

A person does not create the vegetative power when he places a seed in soil. The power has already been given within earth. Yet human action is not superfluous: sowing and planting arouse superior growth. This is the heart of the transition from contemplating nature to human Divine service.

From here we can learn how to regard a small action. Giving charity, putting on tefillin or studying with a child seem very defined actions. They occur at a particular time, with a particular object and a limited capacity. Precisely the defined action can be the place where a higher will is revealed. One need not cease to be a finite human being in order to serve G-d.

The sowing analogy can also help us think about the way we study. The commentary gives the reader a beginning, from which he can ask for himself, open another source and understand something he did not see on the first reading. The quality of learning also depends on what the learner brings: a precise question, checking the source and persistence in understanding. This is a use of the analogy to describe learning, not an additional interpretation of the Epistle's words about sowing.

Toward the Next Chapter: From Earth That Produces Growth to Man Who Is Nourished by It

The next words in the Epistle are "And from this will be well understood the order of the levels of the inanimate, vegetative, animal, and speaking." Although the animal is above the vegetative and the speaking above the animal, the animal is nourished by the vegetative, and the speaking receives its vitality from both, "and also Chochmah and Daat." After seeing a lofty power operating in the lower, and seeing human service arouse a superior manifestation of that power, we can move from the question of growth to that of nourishment: what happens when the higher receives vitality from the lower? Does food merely sustain the human body, or is there a further revelation here of the relationship between lower and higher?

According to the reading we will propose in the next chapter, "And from this" in the next sentence rests on the entire preceding argument: earth's power, the termination of the kav and returning light, and also what we learned here about sowing. It should therefore not be limited to the sowing sentence alone. The transition from earth producing growth to man nourished by it is not a move to an unrelated subject: after learning to see a lofty power in the lower, we will examine how the lower adds vitality to the higher.

Chapter 17 will establish the order of levels, and chapter 18 will clarify the reception of vitality from food. The connection to a dwelling in the lower realms, already mentioned here, will be gathered at the Epistle's end into the overall conclusion concerning practical mitzvot.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter contains several places where it is easy to "close" a question too quickly: Rashi on "there was no man to work the soil"; MAN, used in several senses; the three expressions "from nothing into something," "like something from nothing" and "a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof"; and an analogy that is easy to map too extensively.

Exercise 1: A Contradiction, or Three Questions?

What to ask. Present the tool with the Epistle's wording, "without any raising of mayin nukvin at all," and Rashi's words on "there was no man to work the soil," and ask whether they contradict one another.

What to check. A hasty answer will declare a contradiction or resolve it in one sentence. Ask the tool to compare three things, as we did in the chapter: subject, time and the meaning of the condition. Check particularly whether it distinguishes between "And the earth brought forth vegetation" concerning plants (Genesis 1:12) and "Let the earth bring forth a living

soul" concerning animals (1:24). Confusion between the two is exactly the sort of mistake such a tool may make because the words are identical.

The limit of the conclusion. The reconciliation we proposed rests on Iggeret HaKodesh 5 and is not written in our Epistle. Even a good reconciliation from the tool should be described as such: a reasoned reading, not the author's wording.

Exercise 2: One MAN, Several Senses

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain what "raising mayin nukvin" means in the Epistle and what it means in Or HaTorah for Shavuot.

What to check. Does the tool distinguish that in the Epistle, MAN means sowing and planting, a human action, whereas in Or HaTorah it means growth rising from the vegetative power within the grass? Does it invent a temporal boundary, MAN "before germination" and MAN "afterward," unwritten in either source?

The limit of the conclusion. The question of whether plants growing of themselves have MAN in our Epistle's sense remained open in the chapter. An answer deciding it needs an explicit source.

Exercise 3: Three Expressions

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain the difference between “from nothing into something,” “like something from nothing” and “a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof” in the passage.

What to check. Does the tool distinguish the three perspectives: the power, the seed, and the power’s continuity over the years? Does it turn “like” and “a likeness” into verbal ornaments, or ignore the condition “if this world were to endure”?

The limit of the conclusion. The chapter’s explanation of the three expressions rests on the sentence’s order. The difference between “an aspect of Ein Sof” in the parenthesis and “a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof” afterward remains a proposal, and should remain so in the tool’s answer as well.

Exercise 4: Analogy and Application, Without Overmapping

What to ask. Ask the tool to map the sowing analogy onto human service: what corresponds to earth, the vegetative power, the seed, sowing and the superior fruit?

What to check. Mark every correspondence the Epistle itself states (sowing is raising MAN; the superior fruits teach about drawings down of lights), and every correspondence the tool has added on its own, such as

"the plant growing of itself is thought." We saw in the chapter that such a mapping is not written.

The limit of the conclusion. A good analogy illuminates its application at the points the author chose. Further correspondences may be ideas for inquiry, but are not the Epistle's interpretation.

Part Four: Food, Sacrifice, and Mitzvah

Chapters 17–20

Part Four takes the principle clarified in Part Three, a lofty power revealed specifically in the lower, and superior growth aroused by human action, and examines it in relationships in which what is lower in the order gives to what is above it, each relationship more difficult than the last.

In chapters 17–18, the higher receives from the lower: man, possessing knowledge and choice, is nourished by the vegetative and animal orders, receiving from them not only vitality for his body but "also Chochmah and Daat." In chapter 19, the recipients are "the supernal angels of the chariot," who derive enjoyment from the spirit of the animal and bird rising from the sacrifice, even though the animal itself was drawn from

their root. In chapter 20, the Epistle draws its conclusion: "the great superiority of practical mitzvot, which are the purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world." Returning to action is not a departure from inquiry: it reveals why drawing down, vessels and created existence were discussed in the first place. After the final chapter come brief concluding words, returning to the question with which the book opened.

One distinction will accompany us throughout this part: between a thing's manifest level, what is evident in it now, and the root of the power within it. Man is higher than bread in his manifest level, and his level need not be negated to explain his dependence on food; we need to clarify in which respect each superiority operates.

So the reader will not be stopped midway, let us briefly recall several terms studied in earlier parts that will recur here. **The kav**: the drawing down of Or Ein Sof in order and measure (chapters 7, 12). **Sovev**: light not received according to the measure of its recipients (chapter 13). **Adam Kadmon**: the level for whose lower part the entire world of Atzilut is merely a garment; His "feet of yosher" terminate at the bottom of Asiyah, the lowest extremity of the entire order (chapter 12). **Returning light**: a radiance shining "from below upward"; in our passage this is said of the kav at its termination (chapter 15). Additional terms,

refinement, Tohu and Tikkun, and the chariot, will be explained in their places in this part.

Chapter 17 | The Human Being Is Nourished by What Is Lower: Order and Root

The preceding chapter concluded with the superiority of fruits coming through sowing and planting, from which we learned about the drawing down of supernal lights and the purpose of man's creation. Now the Epistle takes another step. Until now, we looked at earth producing growth; from here onward, we will look at man eating. The question changes: not only what is revealed in the lower, but what the lower gives to what stands above it.

What We Already Know

In chapters 14–16, we saw that the power of growth, a lofty power, shows its ability specifically in the element of earth, the lowest of the elements, and that sowing and planting arouse superior growth within earth. Hence the distinction mentioned at this part's opening: a thing's manifest level is not the whole picture. We will now examine the order of inanimate, vegetative,

animal and speaking, in preparation for asking how the lower gives vitality to the higher.

A Question Life Poses Every Day

A person studies, speaks, chooses and understands. He has manifest superiorities entirely absent from a plant. Yet he needs food from the vegetative and animal orders. This dependence is familiar to everyone, and precisely because it is familiar, it is easy to pass over without asking. The Epistle pauses here and seeks to understand: how does a lower level give vitality to the level above it?

The answer "this is the way of nature" describes the fact without explaining it. Nature is a name for the order we see, not an explanation of that order. The Epistle does not address how the body digests its food, but what this relationship teaches about the structure of creation already explained before us.[511]

To approach the answer, let us separate two perspectives. The first asks what is revealed in a thing now: growth in a plant; vitality and movement as well in an animal; knowledge and speech in man. The second asks what the root of the power within it is. The order of superiorities from the first perspective need not be identical with the order of roots from the second.

[511]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2157–2160, in "Higher in Revelation, Receiving from Below."

Precisely what has fallen lower may carry a power whose root is lofty in relation to what receives from it.

We already saw this distinction in earth producing growth. Here it is tested where it is more difficult: there the lower revealed power, while here it gives vitality to what is above it.

What Does "And from This" Rest On?

The word opening the sentence before us is "ומזה" ("And from this"), requiring clarification: from this, from what exactly?

The answer lies in the Epistle's own wording. Before our sentence stand the words "as explained elsewhere," closing the discussion of drawings down of lights and the purpose of man's creation. If we attended only to the proximity of the words, we would understand "And from this" to refer solely to sowing and planting, yielding a very narrow transition: from agricultural action to human nutrition.[512]

But the continuation of the sentence itself, which we will read in the next chapter, reveals what it rests on. After the two proofs from the Sages' words, the Epistle explicitly returns to the bottom of Asiyah, the

[512]The words immediately preceding "From this one can thoroughly understand" are the end of the preceding sentence, "כמ"ש במ"א," expanded in the digital text as "as explained elsewhere." Proximity of wording alone does not establish the scope of the reference; see the continuation in the next note. In the same vocalized digital text, this unit's abbreviations are also expanded: דצח"מ as "inanimate, vegetative, animal, speaking," and בח' as "aspects." This is a difference between editions, not a textual variant; the unit's wording has been retained as it stands in this book. Only the digital text was read; it was not compared with the printed edition.

encompassing light and the kav's termination in the mode of returning light (chapter 15), adding "as mentioned above." This is evidence from the text itself: what the Epistle explicitly returns to is the structure of light, not only the superiority of cultivated fruit.[513]

There is further evidence here, closer still. In the paragraph preceding ours, the Epistle already spoke in the language of elements. It said that the power of growth shows its ability in the physical element of earth in an immense revelation, "with greater force than in the elements higher than it." Thus, an order within the four elements had already been established there, and it was said that the lowest reveals more power than those above it. Now, when the Epistle turns to "the order of the levels" and those same four elements, the connection appears direct: the same principle moves, as it seems to us, from the elements to the levels of created beings.[514]

Sowing belongs to the wider context preparing an understanding of the place of human service. "Will be well understood" does not open a new inquiry into

[513] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2148–2150, in "From What Is the Order of Nourishment Learned?"

[514] The preceding paragraph in the Epistle says of the power of bringing forth vegetation that it "displays its power and ability in the element of physical earth with immense revelation, with greater force than the elements above it." The superiority of the lower is stated there concerning the elements, hence the direct connection with "the order of the levels of the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking, which are the aspects of earth, water, fire and air." The expression "with greater force" also recurs later in our sentence. Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20, solely in the vocalized digital text; not compared with print. The precise limits of the reference "from this" remain interpretive.

nutrition. It indicates an application: the explanation already given also illuminates another phenomenon.

W17-01
source words
1–13

And from this will be well understood the order of the levels of the inanimate, vegetative, animal, and speaking, which are the aspects of earth, water, fire, and air:

"And from this will be well understood": from the superiority of the lowest already explained, the following order too will become clear. "The order of the levels": the general ladder of created beings. דצח"מ is an abbreviation for דומם, צומח, חי, מדבר, the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking; "speaking" means man, so called for his power of speech and intellect. "Which are the aspects of earth, water, fire, and air" sets the four levels against the four elements in order: inanimate–earth, vegetative–water, animal–fire, speaking–air.

Four Levels and Four Elements: What Does "Aspects" Mean?

Two conceptual systems stand before us, and their connection must be read precisely.

Inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking are four general levels in the manifestation of life. In the inanimate, we see no spontaneous growth; in the vegetative, growth and development are evident; in the

animal, movement and an additional kind of vitality appear; and in the speaking, knowledge and the power of speech are revealed. Each level also includes what precedes it: man is not knowledge without a body, and contains aspects of life, growth and matter as well.

Earth, water, fire and air are four elements in the language of the sources. These are names for modes of action and roots, not a list of chemical substances. As we will see in Etz Chaim, every created being is described as composed of all four together.

The word connecting the two systems is "aspects," and this is the sentence's important word. "An aspect" indicates correspondence and characterization, not material identity. The physical created being may include several elements together, and the correspondence points to the aspect characterizing it in this argument.[515] We will see below that Etz Chaim too, which arranges the pairs differently, is careful about precisely this point.

From Where Is This Correspondence Learned?

The question is not only whether the correspondence is understandable, but whether a source gives all four pairs together. Each pair can be separately connected through a fine explanation: earth as stability, water as growth, fire as heat and movement, air as speech. But fine explanations do not prove that this is the system

[515] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2150–2153, in "Four Levels and Four Elements."

the Epistle uses. A single witness presenting the levels and elements together is needed.

Such a witness exists. In Likkutei Torah for Pinchas, in the discourse beginning "צו את בני ישראל" ("Command the Children of Israel"), section ג [3], all four pairs are given together, and three are explicitly explained:

Level	Element	Reason given in the source
Inanimate	Earth	Given without a separate reason
Vegetative	Water	"For water causes growth," supported by "those who sow upon all waters"
Animal	Fire	"For His ministers are flaming fire": the face of the lion and the face of the ox in the chariot, from which animal souls descend
Speaking	Air	"And man became a living soul," and Onkelos's translation: "a speaking spirit"

The reasons point to a root and manner of action: water to growth, fire to the root of animal souls in the chariot, and air to the power of speech, in the Targum's wording. Thus the meaning of "aspects" becomes clear.[516]

And earth? The source says "earth is inanimate" without adding "because," as it did for fire. Stability and the absence of self-motion are a possible conceptual explanation, not a reason given there. The source thus gives four pairs and three reasons. The

[516] Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, "צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם את קרבני לחמי לאשי," the first of the two discourses opening this way, sections 1–4; the correspondence between the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking orders and the four elements appears at the beginning of section 3, within the discussion of sacrifice.

reason for the correspondence of earth to the inanimate remains to be clarified.[517]

The correspondence's place within the discourse is instructive too. The discourse gives it while explaining sacrifice: a sacrifice comes from the animal order and is therefore from the element of fire. Thus, the mapping adopted by the Epistle is precisely the mapping it will need later when it turns to sacrifice and the angels of the chariot (chapter 19). The order before us is not a self-contained list; it serves the argument.

Nor does this correspondence appear in only one discourse. In Likkutei Torah for Ki Tetze, at the beginning of "כי תצא למלחמה" ("When You Go Out to War"), it says again that the aspect of fire is the aspect of the animal soul and the aspect of air is the aspect of the speaking, again alongside the translation "a speaking spirit." Two discourses using the same correspondence teach that this is not an isolated wording that might be suspected.[518]

[517] Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, "צו את בני ישראל," section 3: all four pairs are given together; water is explained through growth and the verse "sowing beside all waters"; fire through the root of animals' souls in "His ministers, blazing fire," and in the vision of the chariot; air through "man became a living soul" and Onkelos's translation, "a speaking spirit." Earth is given without a separate explanation. The correspondence appears in an explanation of sacrifice from the animal order. The discourse is named for its opening and belongs to Parashat Pinchas, not Parashat Tzav. Only the digital text was read; it was not compared with the printed edition.

[518] Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, "כי תצא למלחמה," section 1: "The aspect of fire is the animal soul, and the aspect of air is the speaking order," near the translation "a speaking spirit." The elements are mentioned there by the acronym ארמ"ע: fire, air, water, earth. Thus the discourse is familiar with the elements' hierarchy, but the correspondence does not follow it. Together, the two discourses show that the Epistle's order is not an isolated formulation. Only the digital text was read; it was not compared with the printed edition.

Why Does the Order in Etz Chaim Look Different?

To continue, we need to identify the principle by which each map is arranged; there is no need to force a reconciliation of the difference between the two maps in order to continue studying the Epistle.

Etz Chaim, Gate 50, chapter 10, describes the composition of created beings from the four elements. The inanimate is created from the earth component within each element; the vegetative from the water components; the animal from the air component; and the speaking from the fire component. In the two lower pairs, the order matches the Epistle; in the two higher pairs, it is reversed.[519][520]

Level	In the Epistle and Likkutei Torah	In Etz Chaim
Inanimate	Earth	Earth
Vegetative	Water	Water
Animal	Fire	Air
Speaking	Air	Fire

To understand the difference between the two orders, let us examine what each source seeks to describe and by what criterion it arranges the levels.

Etz Chaim arranges them according to inwardness. It repeatedly says of each level that it is “more inward”

[519] Etz Chaim, Gate 50, chapter 10: the four elements and the composition of the inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking orders.

[520] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2152–2155, in “The Reversed Order in Etz Chaim.”

than the preceding one, meaning subtler and deeper, up to “the speaking, which is more inward than all of them”; each level is constructed “from a component” within all four elements. There is a ladder of subtlety among the elements themselves, on which the levels are arranged in order: earth for the lowest, followed by water, air and fire. The same chapter also gives this order in relation to the worlds: Atzilut corresponding to fire, Beriah to air, Yetzirah to water and Asiyah to earth, thus clarifying that this is a uniform ladder of levels.[521]

Within this same description, Etz Chaim is careful about the point we discussed above. Of the inanimate it says that it is created “from the earth component within every element,” immediately adding: “but it is not actual earth.” Even a source arranging according to composition rules out an understanding of literal earth. In this respect, the two sources agree: the correspondence is an aspect, not a material.[521]

[521]Etz Chaim, Gate 50, chapter 10: the inanimate “from the portion of earth in each of the four elements,” explicitly stating “but it is not actual earth”; the vegetative “from the portions of water in each element”; the animal “from the portion of air in all four elements”; the speaking “from the portion of fire in each of the four elements.” The presentation proceeds through “more inward” to “more inward than all of them”; the same chapter also gives the scale in the worlds: Atzilut, fire; Beriah, air; Yetzirah, water; Asiyah, earth. Thus its organizing principle is composition and degree of inwardness. This provides neither an explicit reconciliation of the two maps by the Epistle’s author nor evidence for a solution through yosher and igulim. The digital text, which the website marks as not yet checked, was read; it was not compared with print.

[521]Etz Chaim, Gate 50, chapter 10: the inanimate “from the portion of earth in each of the four elements,” explicitly stating “but it is not actual earth”; the vegetative “from the portions of water in each element”; the animal “from the portion of air in all four elements”; the speaking “from the portion of fire in each of the four elements.” The presentation proceeds through “more inward” to “more inward than all of them”; the same chapter also gives the scale in the worlds: Atzilut, fire; Beriah, air; Yetzirah, water; Asiyah, earth. Thus its organizing principle is composition and degree of inwardness. This provides neither an explicit reconciliation of the two maps by the

In Likkutei Torah, we can see a principle of characterization. There, as we saw, each pair receives its own reason: producing growth, the root of souls in the chariot, the power of speech. One precision deserves notice: the second discourse, in Ki Tetze, which repeats the same correspondence, itself refers to the elements by the abbreviation אר"מ, fire, air, water, earth. It thus knows the elements' ladder of levels, yet does not make its correspondences according to it. From this we can understand that the discourse does not correlate two ladders, but assigns to each level the element characterizing it.

According to this reading, the difference is between two perspectives: Etz Chaim addresses composition and degree of inwardness, while Likkutei Torah characterizes each level according to its action and root.

Nevertheless, the limit must be preserved. Both sources use the same names for levels and elements, and both address the connection between them. The distinction between composition and characterization explains how two orders are possible, but does not prove that this is what each source intended in all its details; no statement by the Epistle's author explicitly reconciling the two maps was found. This difficulty

Epistle's author nor evidence for a solution through yosher and igulim. The digital text, which the website marks as not yet checked, was read; it was not compared with print.

remains even after the distinction, and it is right to tell the reader so.

A comment should be added about a possible solution one might seize upon. The Epistle itself mentions “igulim” and “yosher,” two modes of describing the same system, explained in chapter 5 and revisited in chapter 15. It is tempting, therefore, to say that one source discusses igulim and the other yosher. But the mere appearance of these terms in the Epistle is not evidence. For such an explanation to stand, a source must apply this distinction specifically to the interchange of fire and air in the two maps; no such source was found in the material examined. This proposal should therefore not be presented as a proven solution.

What has the reader learned from all this? That the Epistle’s order is explained in its source and recurs in several discourses; that Etz Chaim describes composition and an order of inwardness; and that a complete comparison of the two still requires clarification. These are three clear points, and there is no need to decide an unresolved question in order to study the chapter.

Manifestly Higher, Yet Receiving from Below

Let us return to the main discussion. Eating does not prove that bread is wiser than man. Man possesses knowledge and choice, while bread understands nothing. Yet specifically bread enables man to continue living and revealing his powers.

We must therefore distinguish two things easily confused: what the giver reveals within itself, and what it has the power to give the recipient. A person teaching his fellow gives him knowledge that he himself possesses. Bread is different. It gives a power not manifest within itself, and the explanation must therefore turn to its root.[511]

From the Chassidic explanations to be cited in the following chapters, the explanation can be set out in three stages: a high root, descent and refinement. What has a lofty root can appear in a low state; from there it reaches man; and man elevates it through his use of it. "Refinement" is a term that will recur frequently from now on: in Chassidic language, it is the service through which a person brings the good power hidden within a physical thing out of concealment and elevates it to holiness and to its purpose. Combining these three stages is our explanation, built from several sources, not a list given in one place.

[511] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2157–2160, in "Higher in Revelation, Receiving from Below."

All three stages are needed together. If we say only "food's root is high," we have a heading rather than an explanation: we still do not understand how the power reaches man. If we describe only physical eating, we lose the question for whose sake the statement was made.

A qualification in the opposite direction is needed here too. "Low in revelation" is not a rule teaching that everything lower nourishes what is above it. The Epistle brings particular relationships and explains them; it does not give a formula replacing examination of each connection. The useful generalization is measured: a power may be revealed in a lower level that is not measured according to its manifest rank, but its application in each case must rest on wording and a source.

Growth, Nourishment, Refinement and Drawing Down: Related but Not Identical

Thus far, we have encountered several actions resembling one another, which might give the impression that they are all one thing. It is worth setting them side by side.

Producing growth concerns coming into being: the vegetative power brings forth a plant. Sowing adds arousal from below and changes the quality of the manifestation. Nourishment concerns the relationship

between two levels already in existence: the lower gives vitality to the higher. Refinement is the human action elevating the power within food to its purpose. Drawing down is revelation drawn from above following the service.

Each has a different recipient and a different action. They can be integrated into one process, as the Epistle indeed does, without being the same action. The general statement "everything is drawn from the higher root" still does not explain how each action occurs.[522]

This distinction is particularly necessary here. The preceding chapter addressed producing growth and sowing; our chapter addresses nourishment. These are two different relationships, both teaching the same point: a thing's power is not measured by its manifest position alone.

The Superiority of Knowledge Within Dependence

Man's superiority does not mean independence from everything around him. An animal is nourished and acts according to its powers; man can also contemplate the source of his food and the purpose of the power he

[522] Bringing forth vegetation, sowing, nourishment, refinement and drawing down differ in recipient, operation and time. Separating them is necessary to examine their shared structure. Root, Tohu, sovev and returning light must not be presented as interchangeable terms without a source connecting them. For further discussion, see the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2148–2150 and 2173–2177.

receives, and use it with awareness and choice: give thanks for it, direct it, and include it in study and a mitzvah. Knowledge does not abolish dependence; it gives it conscious meaning. Nor does the food become the learner in his place: the person learns, and the power he received participates in his service.

There is also an aspect of responsibility here. The higher is not merely the one receiving service from the lower: through his service, he brings that which nourishes him to its purpose and elevates it. This is the refinement defined above. Such understanding does not remain inquiry alone; it leads to Divine service within bodily life.

The Chapter's Limit

The sentence before us opens rather than closes. Immediately afterward, the Epistle will say that the higher are nourished by the lower, the animal by the vegetative and the speaking by both, adding "and also wisdom and knowledge." This addition broadens the question: not only the body receives from the lower, but also the power in which man's superiority as a speaking being is revealed.[523]

This chapter explained the order of levels and its correspondence to the elements, and established the distinction between manifest level and root. In the next

[523] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2158–2162, in " 'Is Nourished and Lives' and 'Receives Its Vitality from Both.' "

chapter, we will read the Epistle's wording on nourishment and the two Talmudic proofs, the infant and grain, the sage and meat, and ask whether each proof corresponds to a different word, wisdom or knowledge.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

According to the reading we proposed, "And from this" rests on the argument concerning earth's power, sovev, the termination of the kav and returning light, not on the sowing sentence alone. The precise scope of the reference is not enumerated in the Epistle. "The order of the levels of the inanimate, vegetative, animal, and speaking, which are the aspects of earth, water, fire, and air" sets four levels against four elements; "aspects" means characterization and root, not matter. This correspondence is written in Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, with three explicit reasons, and recurs in Ki Tetze; in Etz Chaim, the order of the two upper pairs is reversed, and the levels are described according to their composition and order of inwardness. Above all, we must distinguish between manifest level and root, and between producing growth, nourishment, refinement and drawing down.

Two matters remain open.

The first is the relationship between the maps. The distinction we proposed between composition and inwardness on the one hand, and characterization and root on the other, helps explain how both orders are possible. What is missing is a source applying the distinction specifically to this interchange: no statement explicitly reconciling the two maps was found, and the solution through yosher and igulim was not proved.

The second is the reason for earth. The source gives "earth is inanimate" without a reason, whereas the other three pairs are explained. A conceptual reason can be proposed, but should not be presented as a reason given in the source.

What is not open is the chapter's central point: the higher can receive from the lower without ceasing to be higher, since the manifest level is not the whole picture. This is what we learned here, and what prepares the continuation of the Epistle.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

Three places in this chapter invite mistakes: the scope of the reference "And from this"; two maps of elements that an automated tool tends to merge into one; and the difference between producing growth, nourishment, refinement and drawing down, which such a tool tends to blur into a general formula.

Exercise 1: "And from This," from What?

What to ask. Ask the tool to say what "And from this" at the opening of the sentence refers to, and to justify its answer from the Epistle's wording.

What to check. Does the answer refer only to the nearby sowing sentence, or also to the explicit return at the sentence's end to "the bottom of Asiyah," sovev and the kav "as mentioned above," and to the paragraph containing "with greater force than in the elements higher than it"? Compare with this chapter's section "What Does 'And from This' Rest On?"

The limit of the conclusion. The scope of the reference remains an interpretive judgment. An answer stating with certainty "only sowing" or "the entire Epistle" says more than the source does.

Exercise 2: The Map of Elements and Its Source

What to ask. Request a table of inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking opposite earth, water, fire and air, with the precise source beside each pair.

What to check. Does the tool refer to Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, "צו את בני ישראל," section ג [3]? Does it mention that in Etz Chaim, Gate 50, chapter 10, the two upper pairs are reversed, or does it merge the two maps into one? Does it invent a reason for the earth–inanimate pair, which the source gives without explanation?

The limit of the conclusion. Three explicit reasons are not four. A reason the tool proposes for earth is a conceptual proposal, not a reason given in the source.

Exercise 3: Four Actions, Not One Slogan

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain how bread gives vitality to man, according to the Epistle and Chassidic explanations.

What to check. Does the answer distinguish between producing growth, nourishment, refinement and drawing down, the recipient in each and the action involved, or settle for a general formula such as "everything is drawn from the higher root"? Does it preserve the manifest order, or write as though bread is higher than man? Compare with this chapter's section "Growth, Nourishment, Refinement and Drawing Down: Related but Not Identical."

The limit of the conclusion. The combination of three stages, a high root, descent and refinement, is an explanation constructed in this chapter from several sources. An answer presenting it as a list given in the Epistle's wording says more than is written.

Chapter 18 | From Food to Chochmah and Daat

From Bread to the Ability to Understand

It is relatively easy to understand that food gives a person strength to walk and work. The connection between eating and wisdom and knowledge is harder to understand. The Epistle seeks to understand how power coming from food also enables the activity of man's intellectual powers.[524]

What We Already Know

The preceding chapter established the ladder of levels, inanimate, vegetative, animal, speaking, and its correspondence to the four elements, and taught two distinctions: between manifest level and root, and between producing growth, nourishment, refinement and drawing down. It also defined "refinement": the service that brings the good power in a physical thing out of concealment and elevates it to its purpose.

What We Will Study in This Chapter

The Epistle now uses the ladder. First it recalls the manifest order: the animal is above the vegetative, and the speaking above the animal. Immediately afterward, it points to the reverse dependence: the animal is

[524] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2166–2170, in "Chochmah and Daat without Binah."

nourished by the vegetative, and the speaking receives vitality from both, not only vitality but also wisdom and knowledge. Two teachings of the Sages are brought as evidence: the infant who does not know how to call his father and mother until he tastes grain, and Rav Nachman, who said he had not yet eaten ox meat. Finally, the reason is given: "for it is the aspect of returning light from below upward, from the bottom of Asiyah," where the radiance is revealed "with greater force," from the encompassing Or Ein Sof and from the kav terminating at the endpoint of the feet of Adam Kadmon's yosher.

The two proofs present very different images: a child at the beginning of awareness calling "father" and "mother," and a sage analyzing an argument within a Talmudic discussion. Both clarify that the power of human intellect does not operate apart from bodily life: understanding is spiritual and food physical, yet the understanding person receives vitality from it.[525]

Three rules will accompany us throughout the chapter. First: the manifest order is not abolished. The Epistle does not say that bread is wiser than man, but that man, remaining a speaking and knowing being, receives an addition from what is below him in the manifest order. Second: the two examples from the Sages show how food assists human powers. Third: the source of the

[525] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2170–2174, in "Why an Ox, and Why Two Proofs?"

power and the content of knowledge are not one thing. Chassidut explains why food can contain a lofty power in relation to its recipient, but this does not mean the eater apprehends the food's spiritual root: a child receives the power to recognize his parents without knowing anything about that power's source.[526]

For the same reason, eating, understanding and refinement are not three words for the same action. Eating gives life; understanding operates through human powers; and in Divine service, the power can be elevated to its purpose. The distinction leaves room both for the gift given to man and for his responsibility, and we will return to it in detail later in the chapter. Thus the argument moves from earth to human life and prepares us to understand sacrifice.[527]

"Above" in What Sense?

W18-01
source words
14–21

although the animal is above the vegetative, and the speaking above the animal,

"שאף" ("although") introduces the paradox; "above" here describes a manifest level of vitality and knowledge. "The speaking" means man in respect of his power of speech and intellect, not merely someone speaking at a particular moment. Manifest superiority

[526] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2165–2168, in "Two Parents in the Quotation, Abba in the Parallels."

[527] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2173–2177, in "Tohu, Refinement and Returning Light: What Is Connected?"

must not be confused with a hidden root: precisely the difference between them makes it possible to explain the dependence.

"Although" begins a complete structure: "although … nevertheless." The Alter Rebbe first establishes the familiar side: there is a ladder, with higher and lower within it. Only afterward does he add the puzzling side. Both stand together, and without both there would be no question at all: if the animal were not above the vegetative, there would be nothing novel in its being nourished by it.

"Above" here is not an obscure kabbalistic term. It measures the level of vitality and revelation. The vegetative possesses the power of growth; the animal has vitality and movement of another kind, sensation and will; the speaking has knowledge and speech. This is a ladder of what is evident in the reality before us, visible to anyone. The Epistle's question is not about this ladder, but about a relationship within it.

There is a further precision in this word: the animal's superiority to the vegetative is not only in what is evident in it now. In the explanations in the edition "Marei Mekomot, Likkut Peirushim, Shinuyei Nuschaot" ("Source References, Collected Explanations, Textual Variants," Kehot), the following is cited here in the Rebbe's name concerning "above": "Also with regard to its coming into being, and

nevertheless it is nourished, etc." That is, the animal is higher than the vegetative also in respect of its manner of coming into being, yet is nourished by it. This precision strengthens rather than weakens the wonder.[528]

Two reading errors are prevented here. One is to say that food is "really" higher than man and therefore there is nothing surprising; such a statement erases the first sentence. The second is to say that dependence on food is purely bodily, unrelated to man's superiority. The Epistle itself will close this possibility later when it adds "and also wisdom and knowledge."

Why This Is Puzzling Within the Epistle's Argument

That the higher receives from the lower seems self-evident in our world: a person eats bread and meat. Precisely for that reason, we skip over the wonder. But within the Epistle's argument, which has constructed an order of hishtalshelut from level to level, this situation calls for explanation. The order

[528] Likkutei Amarim Tanya—Iggeret HaKodesh, with "References, Collected Commentaries, Textual Variants," Kehot; the page on which the words of our unit are printed, whose running header in the facsimile is תעה [475]. The lemma there reads "אעפ"כ החי ניזון וחי מהצומח והמדבר מקבל חיות משניהם" [nevertheless the animal is nourished and lives from the vegetative, and the speaking receives vitality from both]: חיות [vitality], whereas our digital text reads חיותו [its vitality]. The textual variants state: " 'וחי' [and lives]: this word is absent from the first edition, Avodat HaLevi, and manuscript 2068"; on כנ"ל [as stated above] at the end of the unit: "In Avodat HaLevi: כו' [etc.]." In the explanations there, in the Rebbe's name, on "higher": "Also with regard to its coming into being—and nevertheless it is nourished, etc." The reading was made from a facsimile of the printed edition. A later printed edition and reported textual witnesses are not evidence of the author's own reading.

describes influence from above downward; suddenly a relationship is revealed in which the higher receives from the lower.

The answer already prepared in the preceding chapters (14–15) is that a power is revealed at the bottom that is not measured according to its place on the ladder. In earth, we saw this through the power of growth: earth, the lowest of the elements, brings forth something from nothing "with greater force." Now the Epistle applies the same principle to another relationship, not bringing a new thing into the world, but nourishing an existing level through a level below it. This application is not self-evident, so the description of the place of termination and the direction of the radiance will recur at the end of the Epistle's sentence.[529]

The Reverse Dependence

W18-02
source words
22–30

nevertheless the animal is nourished by and lives from the vegetative, and the speaking receives its vitality from both,

"אעפ"כ" means nevertheless; "is nourished by and lives from" describes existence sustained through food; "from both" means from the vegetative and the animal. The chain demonstrates dependence between levels, rather than listing all human foods.

[529] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2157–2160, in "Higher in Revelation, Receiving from Below."

“Nevertheless” is the sentence’s hinge. It says: know that the order remains in place, and now contemplate what happens within it. Two cases follow. In the first, only the animal is mentioned: it is nourished by and lives from the vegetative. In the second, the speaking is mentioned: it receives its vitality from the two sources mentioned, the vegetative and the animal.

“Is nourished by and lives from” can be read as a pair describing one thing: existence continues through nourishment. Some wish to assign “is nourished” to the body and “lives” to the soul, or divide each verb into a different kabbalistic level. Such a division can be imagined, but no source for it was found. In ordinary language, two verbs may detail the same relationship, and an unstated map should not be loaded onto them.

The change of wording for the speaking, “receives its vitality” instead of “is nourished by and lives from,” is also simply explained by the syntax: here there are two sources (“from both”), and immediately afterward an intellectual result will be added (“and also wisdom and knowledge”). A comprehensive formulation suits the continuation better than repeating the same two verbs.[530]

There is another reason not to build too much on this pair: the word “וחי” (“and lives”) does not appear in all

[530] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2158–2162, in “ ‘Is Nourished and Lives’ and ‘Receives Its Vitality from Both’ ”: dependence for existence, preparation for the two proofs, and the distinct addition in “also Chochmah and Daat.”

textual witnesses. According to the textual variants in the edition mentioned above, it is missing from three of the witnesses listed there: the first printed edition, the book Avodat HaLevi and one manuscript. There is another small difference: the lemma itself, the Epistle's words as cited in that edition, prints "מקבל חיות משניהם" ("receives vitality from both"), whereas our digital text has "מקבל חיותו משניהם" ("receives its vitality from both"). These differences do not change the main point, but an entire explanation cannot depend on a single word absent from some witnesses. We must also remember: what a later edition records is information about the transmission through copying and printing, not direct testimony to the author's reading.[528]

What About Water, Salt and the Inanimate?

A person drinks water and seasons food with salt, both inanimate. Does the Epistle exclude them from his food? It says that man receives from the vegetative and animal, not that he receives *only* from them. "From both" refers back to the two levels just mentioned, and two corresponding examples will follow: grain and

[528] Likkutei Amarim Tanya—Iggeret HaKodesh, with "References, Collected Commentaries, Textual Variants," Kehot; the page on which the words of our unit are printed, whose running header in the facsimile is תעה [475]. The lemma there reads "אעפ"כ החי ניזון וחי מהצומח והמדבר מקבל חיות משניהם" [nevertheless the animal is nourished and lives from the vegetative, and the speaking receives vitality from both]: חיות [vitality], whereas our digital text reads חיותו [its vitality]. The textual variants state: " 'וחי' [and lives]: this word is absent from the first edition, Avodat HaLevi, and manuscript 2068"; on כנ"ל [as stated above] at the end of the unit: "In Avodat HaLevi: כו' [etc.]." In the explanations there, in the Rebbe's name, on "higher": "Also with regard to its coming into being—and nevertheless it is nourished, etc." The reading was made from a facsimile of the printed edition. A later printed edition and reported textual witnesses are not evidence of the author's own reading.

meat. There is thus no need to exclude water and salt from the overall explanation of human food.[531]

Explicit evidence from the Alter Rebbe's own words supports this. Kuntres Acharon, section 4, says: "This is the reason man lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, refining them through the Mah within him and living through them, for they are from Sag." We encountered the names Sag and Mah at the end of chapter 16 and will return to them later in this chapter; for our purposes, what matters is only that the inanimate is explicitly enumerated there among human foods. Water and salt are thus included in the broader explanation of human food.[532]

Why, then, does the Epistle's example begin with the vegetative and not mention the inanimate? One explanation was found, printed near our lemma in the same Kehot edition, in the Rebbe's name: "Accordingly, it is understood why earth is not mentioned here, for everything came from earth, and it may be said that therefore even after coming into being, it needs and is

[531] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2154–2158, in "The Inanimate Left outside the Examples."

[532] Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening "To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer." Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot "over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love"; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is "from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon," in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah "which have already been rectified through Mah"; the human being who "lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him"; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses "the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout,' etc.," and thus "the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels"; and elevation and drawing down, "both of which are a supernal need," "and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above."

nourished by it." That is, earth is not enumerated here as another link in the chain because everything originally came into being from it, and it may be said that for this reason, after coming into being too, the created being continues to need and be nourished by it. The comment concerns earth and does not specify water and salt; its wording "וי"ל," "it may be said," teaches that it is proposed rather than conclusive.[533]

A simple contextual reason may be added: the earth paragraph was already central to the preceding chapters, and here the argument needs to move through the animal and speaking toward knowledge. Grain and meat provide precisely the two proofs needed. This explains the economy of the argument without claiming to be the author's only motive.[531]

Two Small Precisions, Both Necessary

First, "from both" does not mean "without them a person cannot live." Turning "from both" into a necessary condition would create an entirely different, unwritten claim. Second, the fact that the list is not exhaustive does not authorize emptying it of meaning: there is a difference between a partial list with an order

[533] The note in the Rebbe's name, as printed in the aforementioned edition, in square brackets: "On this basis it is understood why earth is not mentioned here, for everything came from the earth; it may be said that therefore even after coming into being it needs it and is nourished from it." The note concerns earth and does not specify water and salt; "it may be said" marks it as a proposal. The precise reference to the source from which the note was taken was not opened here.

[531] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2154–2158, in "The Inanimate Left outside the Examples."

and a list with no role at all. As we will see, each of the two sources will receive its own proof.[530]

“And Also Wisdom and Knowledge”: The Addition That Changes the Question

W18-03
source words
31–39

and also wisdom and knowledge, for an infant does not know how to call “father” and “mother”

“And also” adds intellectual power to bodily vitality. “For” introduces a proof; “לקרות” means to call or address by the names father and mother. The Epistle preserves both parents in the Sages’ wording.

Had the sentence ended with “receives its vitality from both,” the entire matter could have been read as describing bodily needs. The body is the lower part of man, and it is unsurprising that it needs material lower than itself. “And also wisdom and knowledge” closes that opening. The dependence also concerns the powers in which the speaking being’s superiority is evident. Something lacking manifest knowledge supports the knowledge of the one who eats it.

What exactly is claimed here? Not that food thinks in man’s place, but that the power received from food enables man’s intellectual powers to act and be revealed. A student who has eaten has not thereby

[530] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2158–2162, in “ ‘Is Nourished and Lives’ and ‘Receives Its Vitality from Both’ ”: dependence for existence, preparation for the two proofs, and the distinct addition in “also Chochmah and Daat.”

received the answer to a question in the Gemara; he must still read, listen, ask and exert himself. Yet his bodily life and added strength participate in his ability to learn. This is the distinction between giving vitality and giving particular content of knowledge, established at the chapter's opening.

Since the addition concerns intellect, the proofs immediately following are also chosen from the realm of awareness and inquiry, rather than bodily strength. This is a direct connection between the words and the examples, not an accidental juxtaposition.[530]

Low in Appearance, High in Root

To understand this, let us recall the distinction between manifest level and root, central to the preceding chapter. In revelation, man understands and food does not. In root, food may contain a power originating higher than the level from which man's manifest power is constructed. When this power is received within man and incorporated into him, it adds vitality. Food gives power, and man uses the power according to his level and service.[529]

Nourishment thus joins what we learned about earth: in it too, the power of the lower is revealed, its root

[530] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2158–2162, in " 'Is Nourished and Lives' and 'Receives Its Vitality from Both' ": dependence for existence, preparation for the two proofs, and the distinct addition in "also Chochmah and Daat."

[529] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2157–2160, in "Higher in Revelation, Receiving from Below."

higher than its manifest level. Later, the Epistle will explain this connection through returning light.[527]

The Infant Who Tasted Grain

The first proof comes from the Gemara in Berachot, from the discussion of the Tree of Knowledge. Rabbi Yehudah identifies the tree as wheat, explaining this through the connection between tasting grain and the infant's ability to call father and mother. From this entire discussion, the Epistle takes only the connection between food and the emergence of knowledge.[534]

What Exactly Is Written There?

Berachot 40a discusses the laws of blessings: if someone recited "Who creates the fruit of the ground" over tree fruit, he has fulfilled his obligation; if he recited "Who creates the fruit of the tree" over produce of the ground, he has not. The Gemara asks what the Mishnah has taught us, and answers: "It was needed only according to Rabbi Yehudah, who says that wheat is a kind of tree." The baraita is then cited: "The tree from which Adam, the first man, ate: Rabbi Meir says it was a vine … Rabbi Nechemiah says it was a fig tree … Rabbi Yehudah says it was wheat, for an infant does not

[527] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2173–2177, in "Tohu, Refinement and Returning Light: What Is Connected?"

[534] Berachot 40a: Rabbi Yehudah's opinion concerning the Tree of Knowledge, tasting grain, and an infant's recognition of its father and mother.

know how to call ‘father’ and ‘mother’ until it tastes the taste of grain.”

What is the direction of the argument there? Rabbi Yehudah is not setting out to teach about child development. He brings a familiar fact about the beginning of knowledge in an infant to explain why specifically wheat is the Tree of Knowledge: the food through which knowledge opens is suited to the tree named for it. The discussion then continues to the blessing: if wheat is considered a tree, perhaps “Who creates the fruit of the tree” should be recited over it? The Gemara rejects this through another rule unrelated to our subject.[535]

The Epistle takes the same fact and uses it in the opposite direction. In the Gemara, the fact about the beginning of knowledge teaches something about a food: which tree was the Tree of Knowledge. In the Epistle, the food teaches something about knowledge: the vegetative adds to human knowledge as well. The quotation’s role changes, while the teaching itself does not change in content. This is a common method in

[535] Berachot 40a, the context of the discussion: the Mishnah on Berachot 40a and the Gemara’s discussion, “It was necessary only according to Rabbi Yehudah, who says wheat is a species of tree.” After the baraita about the Tree of Knowledge, the discussion proceeds to the blessing: “Since Rabbi Yehudah says wheat is a species of tree, let one recite over it ‘Who creates the fruit of the tree,’ ” and rejects this. The Epistle takes from the baraita the link between food and knowledge; it determines neither the identification of the tree nor the law of the blessing.

Chassidic teachings, neither altering the Talmudic discussion nor deciding it.[536]

"Father and Mother": Wording and a Parallel

Our text in Berachot writes "אבא" and "אמא," while the Epistle has "אבא ואימא," with a yud in אימא. The same baraita also appears in Sanhedrin 70a–70b, within the discussion of Noah and wine, where our text reads: "Rabbi Yehudah says: It was wheat, for an infant does not know how to call אבא ואימא, father and mother, until it tastes the taste of grain," precisely the expression in the Epistle. The Epistle's wording is thus known from the Gemara: the same teaching appears in two places and two contexts.[537]

There is another small difference: Berachot has לקרות, while Sanhedrin has לקרוא, both meaning "to call." The Epistle uses לקרות as in Berachot and אבא ואימא as in Sanhedrin. Such a combination of two familiar wordings is a normal mode of quotation, and should not be taken as deciding between the discussions. What the Epistle needs from the teaching, knowledge awakened through food, is shared by both.[537]

[536] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2161–2164, in "Grain and the Tree of Knowledge in the Berachot Discussion."

[537] Sanhedrin 70a–70b: the same baraita within the discussion of Noah and wine; the text before us there reads: "Rabbi Yehudah says: It was wheat, for an infant does not know how to call 'Father and Mother' until it tastes grain." In Berachot 40a: "לקרות 'אבא' 'ואמא'," as against Sanhedrin's "לקרוא אבא ואימא." Differences of spelling and wording between the two passages are not evidence of a deliberate change in the Epistle's wording.

[537] Sanhedrin 70a–70b: the same baraita within the discussion of Noah and wine; the text before us there reads: "Rabbi Yehudah says: It was wheat, for an infant does not know how to call 'Father and Mother' until it tastes grain." In Berachot 40a: "לקרות 'אבא' 'ואמא'," as against Sanhedrin's

What Is the Knowledge in the Example?

Recognizing father and mother is not merely knowing two words. It expresses the ability to identify a relationship, remember, and address someone familiar to the child. The example thus brings "Daat," knowledge, close to what everyone knows: not merely a collection of information, but awareness in which the thing is received within the knower.

From "knows how to call," one should not infer that the infant understands an abstract concept of parenthood. On the contrary: Chassidic discourses using this teaching emphasize that it is knowledge preceding apprehension. In Likkutei Torah, in the discourse "ששת ימים תאכל מצות" ("Six Days You Shall Eat Matzot"), it says of this calling: "This knowledge in him is not in the mode of understanding, reason and complete knowledge, for he does not know how he is his father or why he should love him; nevertheless, he calls him his father … and it is a state of very great smallness, below reason and knowledge." Such awareness is attachment, not explanation.[538]

"לקרוא אבא ואימא." Differences of spelling and wording between the two passages are not evidence of a deliberate change in the Epistle's wording.

[538] Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "ששת ימים תאכל מצות," sections 2–3; the discourse begins at יג ע"א [13a]. The two proofs appear together: "Therefore Rav Nachman said, 'The reason I did not tell you last night was that I had not eaten ox meat' (Bava Kamma, folio 72). It follows that food adds vitality also to a person's faculty of Chochmah and intellect. Likewise the Sages said that an infant does not know how to call 'Father' until it tastes grain. This is for the aforementioned reason: the root of foods is above, in the world of Tohu, which is above Chochmah of Tikkun"; on the infant's knowledge there: "It is an exceedingly small state, below reason and knowledge."

A tension arises here, and it is good to present it openly: the Epistle brings the teaching as proof of "wisdom and knowledge," while the discourse describes the infant's knowledge as something below reason and knowledge. There is no contradiction, since the two passages address different questions. In the Epistle, the subject is what food *enables* in man: the opening of the power of awareness. In the discourse, the subject is the character of that knowledge itself, used there as an analogy. Grain participates in opening a new ability in the child; the degree of apprehension within that ability is another matter.[539]

A Note on "Etc." After "The Taste of Grain"

The Epistle writes "until it tastes the taste of grain, etc.," as though the quotation continues. On this "etc.," the Rebbe commented in the Notes and Corrections to Tanya: "[Etc.] is seemingly superfluous." Indeed, in our Gemara text, Rabbi Yehudah's words end with "until it tastes the taste of grain," and what follows belongs to another discussion. The comment notes a textual precision; it does not change the content of the proof.[540]

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[539] Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "להבין מ"ש בהגדה מצה זו," section 2; the discourse begins at יא ע"ג [11c]: "Matzah is the mochin of Abba, for an infant does not know how to call 'Father' until it tastes grain… Above Daat is the aspect of Abba, except that it is drawn in a state of katnut."

[540] He'arot VeTikkunim to Tanya, in the Rebbe's name, as printed in the aforementioned edition, on the two expressions before us: on "until it tastes grain, etc."—"[Etc.] is seemingly superfluous"; on "ועדיין לא אכילנא בישרא דתורא כו'" [and I have not yet eaten ox meat, etc.]—"With a change of wording from the Talmud, Bava Kamma 72a." The notes record a precise observation about the text and reference; they do not explain the reason for the change.

The Sage Who Did Not Examine the Reason Precisely

W18-04
source words
40–50

until it tastes the taste of grain, etc., and “I had not yet eaten ox meat,” etc.,

“Until” describes a threshold at the beginning of awareness; “grain” is the Gemara’s term and should not automatically be replaced by any bread or identified in every detail with the five species. The words before the first “etc.” close the infant proof, and “and … not yet” begins the second proof: “ועדיין לא אכילנא בישרא דתורא,” “and I had not yet eaten ox meat.” “Etc.” marks an abbreviated quotation; concerning the first, the Rebbe noted that it is seemingly superfluous, as we saw.

The Incident in the Gemara

The second proof appears in Bava Kamma, at the end of 71b and the beginning of 72a. Rava asked Rav Nachman: what is the law concerning someone who stole an ox belonging to two partners, slaughtered it, and admitted the theft to one of them? Of a thief who slaughtered or sold, the Torah says, “He shall pay five oxen in place of the ox.” This is the fine of fourfold and fivefold payment: four for a sheep, five for an ox. The question is whether “five oxen” means five whole oxen, so that fourfold and fivefold payment does not apply to half an ox, or whether five half-oxen are also included.

Rav Nachman answered in the evening: “The Merciful One said five oxen, not five half-oxen.” Rava objected from a baraita: “If he stole from his father, slaughtered or sold, and his father subsequently died, he pays fourfold and fivefold payment.” Yet there, since the father has died, it resembles someone who admitted to one of the partners, and nevertheless we learned that he pays. Rav Nachman answered that the case is one in which his father had brought him to court, and the discussion continued.

The next morning, “לצפרא,” Rav Nachman retracted and told Rava the opposite: “The Merciful One said five oxen, even five half-oxen.” He added an explanation of why he had not said this the previous evening: “והאי דלא אמרי לך באורתא,” “and the reason I did not tell you in the evening,” “דלא אכלי בשרא דתורא,” “was that I had not eaten ox meat.” The sentence spans two folio sides: its first half is at the end of 71b, and its second at the beginning of 72a.[541]

Three details of this story are easily confused, in a learner’s memory and in an AI tool’s summary (see Exercise 1 at the end of the chapter): the subject under discussion is an ox belonging to two partners, whereas the theft “from his father” is Rava’s objection, not the

[541] Bava Kamma 71b–72a: “Rava asked Rav Nachman: If someone stole an ox belonging to two partners, slaughtered it, and confessed to one of them, what is the law?”; “In the morning he told him: The Merciful One said ‘five oxen,’ even five half-oxen”; across the folio break: “The reason I did not tell you last night” (end of 71b), “was that I had not eaten ox meat” (beginning of 72a). Rashi there: “I did not carefully examine the rationale of the matter”; Tosafot there: “He was fasting.”

original question; the speaker is Rav Nachman, addressing Rava; and the retraction is from the evening answer to the morning answer, not the reverse.[542]

What the Commentators Say

Rashi there explains "דלא אכלי בשרא דתורא": "I did not examine the reason for the matter precisely." That is, the deficiency concerned the quality of inquiry: he had not reached precision in the reason for the law. Tosafot add a circumstance: "He was fasting." The two explanations do not contradict each other; one describes the result in the inquiry, the other the person's state at that time.[541]

This also defines the limit of the proof: these are a sage's words about himself, in a witty turn of phrase, attributing his lack of precision that evening to his bodily state. The Epistle takes from them the point it needs: food participates in the quality of inquiry.[542]

The Difference in Wording, and Who Noted It

Our Gemara text reads "דלא אכלי בשרא דתורא"; the Epistle quotes "ועדיין לא אכילנא בישרא דתורא כו'." The difference is not hidden: the Rebbe recorded it in the

[542] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2169–2172, in "What Happened on the Night without Ox Meat?"

[541] Bava Kamma 71b–72a: "Rava asked Rav Nachman: If someone stole an ox belonging to two partners, slaughtered it, and confessed to one of them, what is the law?"; "In the morning he told him: The Merciful One said 'five oxen,' even five half-oxen"; across the folio break: "The reason I did not tell you last night" (end of 71b), "was that I had not eaten ox meat" (beginning of 72a). Rashi there: "I did not carefully examine the rationale of the matter"; Tosafot there: "He was fasting."

[542] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2169–2172, in "What Happened on the Night without Ox Meat?"

Notes and Corrections to Tanya: "With a change of wording from the Talmud, Bava Kamma 72a." The comment does two things: it identifies the Gemara's location precisely and records the change itself. It does not explain the reason, so we too will not build an interpretation on it.[540]

It is known from modes of quotation in Chassidic works that expressions are sometimes transmitted in abbreviated form and with slight changes. The difference therefore does not establish that the Alter Rebbe sought to change the plain meaning of the discussion. What is proved is the use: the same teaching is brought here as evidence that food adds to intellectual power.[542]

What Is New About Inquiry in This Example?

In the study hall, one can know the details of a Talmudic discussion and even remember the reasoning, yet still need strength to examine the reason precisely and present matters clearly. Clarification requires concentration, discrimination and placing details in their proper relationship, and every learner knows hours when his powers do not come together. Rav Nachman's words reveal that wisdom does not

[540] He'arot VeTikkunim to Tanya, in the Rebbe's name, as printed in the aforementioned edition, on the two expressions before us: on "until it tastes grain, etc."—"[Etc.] is seemingly superfluous"; on "ועדיין לא אכילנא בישרא דתורא כו'" [and I have not yet eaten ox meat, etc.]—"With a change of wording from the Talmud, Bava Kamma 72a." The notes record a precise observation about the text and reference; they do not explain the reason for the change.

[542] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2169–2172, in "What Happened on the Night without Ox Meat?"

operate in a person as though he had no body: food can add strength for inquiry, and inquiry uses that strength to clarify something that is not physical material.

Even a person of great wisdom thus receives vitality from the lower, and his spiritual loftiness does not make him an independent source of his powers. Bodily life is not a layer that can be erased from the life of learning, and the Epistle gives this dependence depth: spiritual ability too receives an addition through a physical thing whose manifest level is lower than its own.[529]

Why Are Two Proofs Needed?

Had the Epistle settled for grain, it would have proved that the vegetative adds to human knowledge, but nothing would have been proved about the animal. Meat supplies precisely the second side, and the two proofs together fulfill what was said earlier: "receives its vitality from both," from the vegetative and the animal. Why specifically ox meat? That is the Gemara's wording, and the Epistle gives no reason. An echo of the face of the ox in the chariot, to be discussed in the next chapter, is possible and thought-provoking, but similarity of words is not evidence.[525]

[529] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2157–2160, in "Higher in Revelation, Receiving from Below."

[525] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2170–2174, in "Why an Ox, and Why Two Proofs?"

The two proofs can also be seen as offering further breadth. The first concerns an infant at the beginning of awareness; the second, a sage within a Talmudic discussion seeking precision in its reason. The distance between the two situations teaches that the addition is not confined to one stage of life: it is evident both in the opening of knowledge and in its deepening. This interprets the examples' contribution, rather than asserting that the Epistle describes two developmental stages.[543]

Does Grain Give Knowledge and Meat Give Wisdom?

Placing "wisdom and knowledge" alongside two proofs invites a table: grain corresponding to knowledge, meat to wisdom. The proposal has an appeal: the infant begins to recognize, while the sage refines his reasoning. But a numerical pairing is not proof, and no such division appears in the sources before us.[524]

The decisive source here is Likkutei Torah, in the discourse "ששת ימים תאכל מצות" ("Six Days You Shall Eat Matzot"). Both proofs are given there together, in the reverse order, meat before grain, and both are explained by one reason: "Therefore Rav Nachman said: 'And the reason I did not tell you in the evening

[543] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2172–2173, in "Why an Ox, and Why Two Proofs?": the shared function of the two proofs and the infant–sage distinction as an explanation of their rhetorical contribution.

[524] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2166–2170, in "Chochmah and Daat without Binah."

was that I had not eaten ox meat' (Bava Kamma 72), from which it is understood that food also adds vitality to man's power of wisdom and intellect. Likewise, our Sages of blessed memory said that an infant does not know how to call father until it tastes the taste of grain; this is for the above reason, since the root of foods is above, in the world of Tohu, which is above the Chochmah of Tikkun, and therefore they have the strength and ability to strengthen and add to man's power of wisdom as well."[538]

This quotation returns to a pair of terms briefly encountered in chapter 9, concerning gestation, which will accompany us from here onward: "Tohu" and "Tikkun." These name two levels in the order of hishtalshelut: "the world of Tohu" is described here as "above the Chochmah of Tikkun," meaning loftier in its root than the rectified order within which man's intellectual powers operate. In the parallels we will see later in this chapter and in the next, it also says that within foods "are vested … the 288 sparks of Tohu," and that the animal's spirit "fell in the shattering of the vessels," while the work of refinement elevates it to its

[538] Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "ששת ימים תאכל מצות," sections 2–3; the discourse begins at יג ע"א [13a]. The two proofs appear together: "Therefore Rav Nachman said, 'The reason I did not tell you last night was that I had not eaten ox meat' (Bava Kamma, folio 72). It follows that food adds vitality also to a person's faculty of Chochmah and intellect. Likewise the Sages said that an infant does not know how to call 'Father' until it tastes grain. This is for the aforementioned reason: the root of foods is above, in the world of Tohu, which is above Chochmah of Tikkun"; on the infant's knowledge there: "It is an exceedingly small state, below reason and knowledge."

root. These are the aspects of the concept needed for our argument.[544]

Three things emerge from that passage. First, the two proofs serve a common claim rather than two separate keys. Second, the expression used there for both is "the power of wisdom and intellect," not a division between knowledge and wisdom. Third, meat precedes grain there, reversing the Epistle's order, so no correspondence can be built on the proofs' sequence. The Epistle's own order does not support the table either: "wisdom" precedes "knowledge," while grain precedes meat; anyone matching grain to knowledge and meat to wisdom must therefore cross the order at the outset.[524]

One may still say that grain particularly illuminates the side of knowledge, for which there is a specific reason we will shortly see, provided a positive statement about one case is not turned into a negation concerning the other. The fact that wheat's root is called "Daat of Tohu" does not imply that meat does not add knowledge.[524]

[544]The definition of Tohu and Tikkun in the chapter's body combines only wording already cited in this book: Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "ששת ימים תאכל מצות" ("The world of Tohu, which is above Chochmah of Tikkun"; "Within them are vested the 288 sparks of Tohu"); Likkutei Torah, Emor, explanation of "והניף הכהן אותם," section 4 ("The animal's spirit that fell in the shattering of the vessels," in chapter 19); and Kuntres Acharon, section 4, on Sag before the shattering and Mah through which rectification takes place (chapters 16 and 18–19). The definition rests only on these sources.

[524]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2166–2170, in "Chochmah and Daat without Binah."

[524]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2166–2170, in "Chochmah and Daat without Binah."

Why Is Binah Not Mentioned?

Chochmah, Binah and Daat, whose initials form Chabad, are three aspects of the power of apprehension, discussed in detail in many places. Here the Alter Rebbe uses only "Chochmah and Daat," and no focused source explaining Binah's omission was found. One may propose that the phrase here denotes intellect and awareness without enumerating all the powers, or leave the matter as a question. What must not be done is to force Binah into the Epistle's words merely to complete the familiar triad.[524]

Wheat, Daat and Tohu: A Specific Reason Within a General Principle

The general reason we saw, that the root of foods is above, in the world of Tohu, opens a direction but does not yet explain why grain is connected specifically to knowledge. A particular source addresses this, also in Likkutei Torah. In the additional explanation of "וידעת היום" ("And You Shall Know Today") in Vaetchanan, section ה [5], it says: "This is like … food, which gives man life and adds knowledge within him, for an infant does not know how to call father until it tastes the taste of grain; this is because wheat's root is in the aspect of Daat of Tohu, above man, etc., and therefore although

[524] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2166–2170, in "Chochmah and Daat without Binah."

it has descended below man, it nevertheless gives man life and draws knowledge into him."[545]

This sentence is built from two ends that must be held together. On one hand, wheat's root is "in the aspect of Daat of Tohu," the aspect of Daat within the world of Tohu, and this Daat is "above man." On the other, in its manifest state, wheat descends below him and becomes food. "Therefore" teaches the order of the reasoning: the power to give man life and draw knowledge into him derives from the lofty root, and the descent does not negate it. The first end alone would lead to thinking that food possesses a lofty intellect; the second alone would lead to a description of metabolism. Only both together provide the explanation.[546]

The Particular Reason for Grain

The source gives a particular reason why grain serves as proof concerning knowledge: wheat's root is in "Daat of Tohu." This explanation concerns wheat. The infant gains a power to recognize; the source of the power and the content of his awareness are two different things. Just as a person need not know the roots of light to see through it, so a power's

[545]Likkutei Torah, Va'etchannan, additional explanation of "וידעת היום," section 5: the root of wheat in Daat of Tohu. "The food that gives life to a person and adds knowledge within him—for an infant does not know how to call 'Father' until it tastes grain—is so because the root of wheat is in Daat of Tohu, above the human being, etc. Therefore, although it has descended below the human being, it nevertheless gives him life and draws Daat into him."

[546]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2162–2166, in "Wheat, Grain, Bread and Matzah."

manifestation does not depend on apprehending its entire source.[546]

One further detail: the explanation in Vaetchanan quotes the teaching as "to call father" alone, without "mother," as do the discourses "ששת ימים תאכל מצות" and "מצה זו," which we will shortly cite. The Epistle, by contrast, includes both parents, following the baraita's wording. This difference matters as a finding, not as a homiletic interpretation: each discourse takes from the quotation the part its argument needs.[526]

Why Not Immediately Translate "Father and Mother" into Chochmah and Binah?

The names Abba and Imma, father and mother, are also familiar as names of partzufim in Kabbalah, making the temptation to match two words to two levels strong here. Three points limit that temptation.

First: the Epistle first says "Chochmah and Daat," not "Chochmah and Binah." Had it wished to point to Abba and Imma as partzufim, the familiar pairing was available. This fact does not disprove every possible allusion, but prevents an easy matching of two names to two sefirot.[526]

[546] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2162–2166, in "Wheat, Grain, Bread and Matzah."
[526] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2165–2168, in "Two Parents in the Quotation, Abba in the Parallels."
[526] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2165–2168, in "Two Parents in the Quotation, Abba in the Parallels."

Second: in the parallel where Abba is indeed explained as a partzuf, the discourse "להבין מ"ש בהגדה מצה זו" ("To Understand What Is Said in the Haggadah, 'This Matzah' "), only Abba is discussed, in an entirely different context. It says there: "Matzah is the mochin of Abba, for an infant does not know how to call father until it tastes the taste of grain; for this knowledge to be present in the infant, it is drawn from above apprehended Daat … and above Daat is the aspect of Abba, except that it is drawn in smallness." The subject there is matzah, faith and the smallness of the intellectual faculties; "Abba" is interpreted because the infant calls "father," not because there is a pair of partzufim there. Proving the meaning of "Abba" in that discourse does not prove the double expression in the Epistle.[539]

Third: no discourse applying the two partzufim together to this sentence in the Epistle was found in the material before us. An echo may be noted, and a question may be left open; a hypothesis must not be presented as a proven decoding. The reverse is not true either: absence of evidence does not prohibit inquiry.[526]

[539] Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "להבין מ"ש בהגדה מצה זו," section 2; the discourse begins at יא ע"ג [11c]: "Matzah is the mochin of Abba, for an infant does not know how to call 'Father' until it tastes grain… Above Daat is the aspect of Abba, except that it is drawn in a state of katnut."

[526] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2165–2168, in "Two Parents in the Quotation, Abba in the Parallels."

We will therefore tell the reader simply: first and foremost, we hear the language of human recognition closest to the child, who calls those connected with his life. The quotation shows the emergence of knowledge through grain. The parallels open further discussion, each contributing something of its own: one explains "Abba," another the added wisdom from grain and meat, and the third wheat's particular quality.[546]

Added Power and Human Service

Thus far, we have discussed what food gives. Now we ask where a person directs what he has received. Here too the Epistle does not stand alone: Tanya itself, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 7, describes eating with an intention for the sake of Heaven: "For example, one who eats fatty ox meat and drinks fragrant wine to broaden his mind for G-d and His Torah … then the vitality of the meat and wine, which had flowed from kelipat nogah, is refined and ascends to G-d like a burnt offering and a sacrifice."[547]

Two terms in this quotation need a brief explanation. "Kelipat nogah," in Tanya's language, is the source of vitality in permitted things, which can be refined and elevated to holiness when used for the sake of Heaven,

[546] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2162–2166, in "Wheat, Grain, Bread and Matzah."

[547] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 7: elevating the power of food to Divine service. "For example, one who eats fatty ox meat and drinks fragrant wine to broaden his mind for G-d and His Torah… then the vitality of the meat and wine, which had been imparted from kelipat nogah, is refined and ascends to G-d like a burnt offering and sacrifice."

as explained there; "is refined" is the refinement defined in the preceding chapter. Now note: in Tanya itself, ox meat is the example of eating that broadens the mind for Torah. This parallel does not say why specifically this species was chosen in the Epistle's proof, but shows that ox meat appears in the Alter Rebbe's teachings not only in the wake of the Gemara's wording. Furthermore, the end of that sentence, "and ascends to G-d like a burnt offering and a sacrifice," already anticipates the transition the Epistle will reach in the next chapter.[547]

Likkutei Torah states the matter in greater detail. After bringing the two food proofs, it continues: "Likewise this can be understood in Divine service … the aspect of strength and vitality added within him through eating for the sake of Heaven is included in 'One' and 'You shall love,' and adds strength to contemplation and the arousal of love for G-d … for the above reason, since within them are vested the 288 sparks of Tohu, which are above the aspect of Tikkun." The power added through eating for the sake of Heaven is included in the Shema and prayer, "in 'One' and 'You shall love,' " adding to contemplation and love of G-d. The reason: the sparks of Tohu, "רפ"ח," numbering

[547]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 7: elevating the power of food to Divine service. "For example, one who eats fatty ox meat and drinks fragrant wine to broaden his mind for G-d and His Torah… then the vitality of the meat and wine, which had been imparted from kelipat nogah, is refined and ascends to G-d like a burnt offering and sacrifice."

288 there, are vested in foods, their source above the aspect of Tikkun.[548]

Hence three distinctions that must not be confused:

Nourishment is a fact within the order of creation. A person receives vitality from food even without a special intention; our Epistle describes nourishment without any condition of intention.

Understanding is the activity of human powers. Food gives strength; the learner clarifies the reasoning. Even when the strength assists, the intellectual act remains his own.

Refinement and elevation are an additional layer, in which human service reveals the power's root and elevates it to its purpose. The parallels expand on this layer, and the Epistle will touch on it in the chapter on sacrifice. The conditions of the third layer should not be implanted in every sentence of the first; nor should one say there is no refinement at all in the first layer, since refinement is mentioned in the sources even before the transition to Divine service.[548]

[548]Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "ששת ימים תאכל מצות," following the two proofs: "Likewise this may be understood in Divine service... the power and vitality added to him through eating for the sake of Heaven are included in 'One' and 'You shall love,' adding power to contemplation and the arousal of love for G-d... because within them are vested the 288 sparks of Tohu, which is above Tikkun."

[548]Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "ששת ימים תאכל מצות," following the two proofs: "Likewise this may be understood in Divine service... the power and vitality added to him through eating for the sake of Heaven are included in 'One' and 'You shall love,' adding power to contemplation and the arousal of love for G-d... because within them are vested the 288 sparks of Tohu, which is above Tikkun."

What This Gives the Reader

The resulting picture is richer than the question with which we began. Man does not stand alone at the top of a ladder, nourished only by what is above him. Within the lowly thing is a power he needs, which he can elevate through his service. Descent, reception, refinement and drawing down combine in one process.[549]

Moreover, dependence is not a defect in man's superiority. Precisely a being possessing knowledge can recognize what he receives, give thanks for it and dedicate his strength to a purpose. When he studies or performs a mitzvah through the power given to him, the food's power too is included in his service.[547][529]

The Reason: "For It Is the Aspect of Returning Light"

W18-05
source words
51–59

for it is the aspect of returning light from below upward, from the bottom of Asiyah,

"For" gives a cause, not merely an address on the map of worlds. "Returning light" is a radiance from below

[549]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2185–2187, in "Good Reason and Knowledge as a Transitional Sentence."

[547]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 7: elevating the power of food to Divine service. "For example, one who eats fatty ox meat and drinks fragrant wine to broaden his mind for G-d and His Torah… then the vitality of the meat and wine, which had been imparted from kelipat nogah, is refined and ascends to G-d like a burnt offering and sacrifice."

[529]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2157–2160, in "Higher in Revelation, Receiving from Below."

upward, from the termination, as we learned in chapter 15. “From the bottom” indicates the place of the returning radiance.

From the parallels, let us return to the Epistle’s wording. Thus far it has brought a fact and two proofs; now comes the reason. Everything described, that the higher receives from the lower, even in its intellectual powers, is explained through what has already been learned about the place of termination. This is not a move to a new subject, but an application of a familiar explanation to another relationship.[550]

What Does “It” Refer To?

“For it is the aspect of returning light”: what is “it”? The word comes after the two proofs and before the explanation, and two reasonable readings stand before us.

The preferred reading: “it” summarizes the entire phenomenon described; the higher’s receiving from the lower is an aspect of returning light. This reading has a double advantage. First, it includes both kinds of food and the intellectual addition together, without selecting one as the exclusive subject. Second, it continues precisely the causal explanation already given in the earth paragraph, where the kav was said to

[550] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2185, in “A Repetition That Activates the Explanation.”

shine from below upward in the mode of returning light.[551]

The alternative reading: "it" refers to food; the lower that nourishes is an aspect of returning light. Its advantage is a concrete subject close to the examples; its difficulty is that the word "food" is not written in the sentence and must be supplied.

One grammatical argument sometimes heard is not decisive here: that הוא, "it," is masculine and therefore excludes הזנה, "nourishment," which is feminine. That argument examines a word we have added, "nourishment," not a word written in the sentence. When הוא summarizes a whole matter, like "this is," it does not decide grammatical gender. The decision comes from context.[551]

One further distinction: deciding what "it" refers to does not automatically determine the scope of "in the mode of returning light" at the end of the sentence. One can take "it" to refer to food while still attributing the final "returning light" to the kav. The sentence contains several local syntactic relationships, each to be examined in its own right.[551]

[551]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2176–2178, in "To What Does 'For It Is' Refer?"
[551]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2176–2178, in "To What Does 'For It Is' Refer?"
[551]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2176–2178, in "To What Does 'For It Is' Refer?"

“From Below Upward, from the Bottom of Asiyah”

The direction is explicit: from below upward. The place is explicit: the bottom of Asiyah, the same bottom discussed in the preceding chapters. This expression explains the paradox. What is at the bottom is not merely the weakest place in the order; it is where the order reaches its extremity, and where something is revealed that was not evident in the same manner at the intermediate stages.[550]

Thus, this is not an accidental transfer of an image from earth to the plate: the same bottom is under discussion, and the same place of termination provides the explanation. What remains constant between the two passages and what has changed will be seen later in the chapter.[550]

“With Greater Force”: What Exactly Is Revealed?

W18-06
source words
60–70

where a radiance of a radiance, etc., is revealed with greater force from the Ein Sof light encompassing all worlds,

“Is revealed” refers to the radiance, and “where” to the bottom of Asiyah. “With greater force” returns to the

[550]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2185, in “A Repetition That Activates the Explanation.”

[550]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2185, in “A Repetition That Activates the Explanation.”

language of earth's superiority. כ"ע abbreviates כל עלמין, "all worlds."

Syntactically, what is revealed is explicitly named: the radiance. The feminine verb מתגלית agrees with it, and שם, "there," refers back to the bottom of Asiyah. There is no need to make the verb refer to man's knowledge or the act of eating.[552]

This distinction is needed precisely here, because the words resemble those said about earth, but the subject matter has changed. In the earth unit, the radiance's strength and ability were seen in producing growth; here nourishment and knowledge are explained through it. The same description, "with greater force," participates in two sentences with different results. The vegetative power, human knowledge and an angel's enjoyment, which we will encounter in the next chapter, are not one thing.[552]

An important qualification follows: one should not infer that the recipient consciously apprehends the source of the light. The teaching about Rav Nachman does not say that he contemplated the termination of Adam Kadmon's feet while examining the Talmudic discussion. The kabbalistic explanation of the addition's source does not describe what passes through the recipient's mind. A result can appear

[552] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2183–2186, in "What Is Revealed with Greater Force?"

[552] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2183–2186, in "What Is Revealed with Greater Force?"

within a person without its entire cause becoming conscious content for him.[552]

The superiority described by "with greater force" lies in the radiance revealed at the bottom. In this way, we can understand food's superiority while preserving the distinction between the revelation of power and apprehension.[529]

"A Radiance of a Radiance, Etc.": Is There a Fourth Level Here?

The abbreviation "etc." does not leave us without a path. Chapter 12 detailed the levels of radiance, "a radiance of a radiance of a radiance," so the Epistle can mention the beginning of the description and rely on the learner to return to the continuation already explained. In this way, a short sentence carries within it an entire paragraph of earlier study.[553]

There is no need to add a fourth level merely because an abbreviation appears. "Etc." can abbreviate content already stated, so an undocumented stage should not be added to the count of radiances. Conversely, one should not determine that the abbreviation necessarily covers just one word: it may include the continuation

[552] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2183–2186, in "What Is Revealed with Greater Force?"
[529] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2157–2160, in "Higher in Revelation, Receiving from Below."
[553] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2182, in "What Does 'Etc.' Abbreviate?"

of the entire description. The degree of detail retained here serves the application to nourishment.[553]

The difference in length within the sentence explains itself in context. The description of the radiance has just been given and can be recalled briefly, whereas the kav's place of termination and the direction of its return are again needed in full, since they are precisely what explain how the lower adds to the higher.[553]

Sovev: The Source of the Radiance

"From the Ein Sof light encompassing all worlds" indicates the source from which the radiance is revealed there. In chapter 13, which addressed sovev, we learned that this does not mean a light surrounding something from outside like a wall, but a radiance not measured according to each world's definition. Here it says that specifically at the bottom, a radiance from it is evident "with greater force."

This sentence alone does not say that sovev returns from below upward. It says that sovev is a source for the radiance revealed there. We will read the attribution of the return in the next words, where it is said of the kav.[554]

[553] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2182, in "What Does 'Etc.' Abbreviate?"
[553] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2182, in "What Does 'Etc.' Abbreviate?"
[554] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2177–2181, in "Two Occurrences of Returning Light."

Sovev Shines, and the Kav Returns

W18-07
source words
71–81

and from the kav of the Ein Sof light at the endpoint of the feet of yosher of Adam Kadmon, in the mode of returning light, as above.

“And from the kav” adds another source for the same radiance. “At the endpoint” recalls the reason already given concerning earth. In the preferred reading, the final “in the mode of returning light” attaches to the kav; “as above” is the anchor, since there it was explicitly said to shine from below upward.

The sentence mentions “returning light” twice, and between the two occurrences enumerates two sources: sovev and the kav. The question is not whether both sources participate; they do. It is what role is described for each.

The answer lies in the earth paragraph (chapter 15), to which “as above” refers. Two different things were said there: beneath Adam Kadmon’s feet the encompassing Or Ein Sof shines, and the kav terminating at the endpoint of the feet of yosher shines from below upward in the mode of returning light. When the ending here repeats both sources and adds “as above,” the earlier context is the key to the scope of “returning light.”[554]

[554] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2177–2181, in “Two Occurrences of Returning Light.”

According to this reading, sovev is a source of the radiance, and the kav shines in the mode of returning light. These are the two roles described in the sentence before us.[554]

The difference between light and the source of creation should also be preserved. Elsewhere in the Epistle, the Essence and creation of something from nothing were discussed; here the subject is a radiance from sovev and the kav. The superiority of the bottom is indeed explained within the Epistle's broader context, yet the account must not be shortened to "the Essence returns": the levels of revelation remain different.[554]

"As Above," and Another Wording

This section concerns the text. On a first reading, one may proceed to the next section and return here on a second reading.

"כנ"ל," "as mentioned above," is what connects the sentence to the preceding paragraph and enables the reading we proposed. It is worth knowing that in Avodat HaLevi, "כו'" ("etc.") is recorded here instead of "כנ"ל" ("as above"), according to the textual variants in the same edition. The difference does not invalidate the reading: even without "as above," the reference to the earth paragraph emerges from the content itself, the same sources of radiance, the same place of

[554] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2177–2181, in "Two Occurrences of Returning Light."

[554] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2177–2181, in "Two Occurrences of Returning Light."

termination, the same direction. But it does teach care in formulation: we will say “as explained above,” without presenting the reference as though explicitly written in every witness.[528]

Returning Light Within Life

“Returning light” may sound remote, but here it explains an everyday fact: the lower gives life to the higher, and a superiority revealed specifically at the extremity of descent is evident in human life too. This also opens the way to sacrifice: if a physical thing adds vitality to man, we can ask how it also adds to its spiritual root when sacred service is performed with it.[549]

The Sentence Summarized in Plain Words

The lower nourishes the higher because at the bottom, where the order reaches its extremity, a radiance is revealed “with greater force”: from Or Ein Sof encompassing all worlds, and from the kav terminating there, shining from below upward in the mode of

[528] Likkutei Amarim Tanya—Iggeret HaKodesh, with “References, Collected Commentaries, Textual Variants,” Kehot; the page on which the words of our unit are printed, whose running header in the facsimile is תעה [475]. The lemma there reads “אעפ”כ החי ניזון וחי מהצומח והמדבר מקבל חיות משניהם” [nevertheless the animal is nourished and lives from the vegetative, and the speaking receives vitality from both]: חיות [vitality], whereas our digital text reads חיותו [its vitality]. The textual variants state: “ ‘וחי’ [and lives]: this word is absent from the first edition, Avodat HaLevi, and manuscript 2068”; on כנ”ל [as stated above] at the end of the unit: “In Avodat HaLevi: כו’ [etc.].” In the explanations there, in the Rebbe’s name, on “higher”: “Also with regard to its coming into being—and nevertheless it is nourished, etc.” The reading was made from a facsimile of the printed edition. A later printed edition and reported textual witnesses are not evidence of the author’s own reading.

[549] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2185–2187, in “Good Reason and Knowledge as a Transitional Sentence.”

returning light. This is the reason for everything described at the beginning of the sentence, including the addition of wisdom and knowledge in man.

Why Does the Epistle Repeat the Description?

Seemingly, it could have said briefly: "So too concerning food." The Alter Rebbe chose to repeat the bottom of Asiyah, sovev, the termination of the feet of yosher and the kav. Why?

Because the repetition here is not empty duplication; it puts the explanation to work. The first time, we learned about the termination and the radiance at the bottom in the context of producing growth. Here we use them to understand another phenomenon: how a lowly thing gives strength to what is higher, even in its intellectual powers. Earlier knowledge becomes a tool for understanding life.[550]

It is therefore worth reading the two passages side by side and asking: what remains constant? The source of the radiance and the superiority of the bottom. What is added? Nourishment, knowledge and the relationship between two existing levels. Once the change is grasped, we understand why the author returns to terms already stated: he does not settle for presenting a map, but leads us to see what it explains.[550]

[550]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2185, in "A Repetition That Activates the Explanation."

[550]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2185, in "A Repetition That Activates the Explanation."

Furthermore, the addition of knowledge increases the need for detail. Not only the body receives vitality from food; the very power in which the speaking being's superiority is evident is presented as receiving from the lower. Detailing the light prevents the reader from treating dependence as a bodily compromise unrelated to man's superiority.[550]

Tohu and Refinement Alongside Sovev, the Kav and Returning Light

A reader opening the parallel passages will find a different language. Likkutei Torah explains the matter through foods' root in the world of Tohu and their refinement. Kuntres Acharon explains it through the Names "Sag" and "Mah": Sag is the Name before the shattering, the root of things still requiring refinement, while Mah is the Name through which rectification takes place. Our Epistle explains it through the termination of the kav and the radiance of sovev. Are these three ways of saying the same thing?

The careful answer is: these are parallels with a shared structure and different details. The shared structure is that something low in revelation carries a power with a lofty root, and that bringing it to the recipient adds something within the recipient. The details differ: who

[550] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2180–2185, in "A Repetition That Activates the Explanation."

receives, what the source of the power is, what the action is and when it occurs.[527]

Kuntres Acharon 4 says explicitly: "The refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah from the 288 … are higher in their root than the nefesh, ruach and neshamah within man, for they are from Sag within the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon; the nefesh, ruach and neshamah have already been rectified through Mah, which emerges from the forehead as a mere radiance … and this is the reason man lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, refining them through the Mah within him and living through them, for they are from Sag." In plain language: what still needs refinement is higher in its root than the nefesh, ruach and neshamah within man, since its root is in Sag, while they have already been rectified through Mah; man therefore lives from foods, refines them through his Mah and lives through them. This is a full, explicit explanation, yet it contains no sentence identifying Sag or Daat of Tohu with the kav's return at the termination of Adam Kadmon's feet.[532]

[527]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2173–2177, in "Tohu, Refinement and Returning Light: What Is Connected?"

[532]Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening "To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer." Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot "over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love"; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is "from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon," in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah "which have already been rectified through Mah"; the human being who "lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him"; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses "the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout,' etc.," and thus "the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels"; and

Thus, "Tohu," "returning light," "Sag" and "Mah" are not four names for one thing. Tohu and Tikkun describe systems and relationships; Sag and Mah designate particular aspects; returning light describes a mode of radiance. We can study how they combine in a particular source, but cannot exchange them without explanation. A plain explanation must preserve both connection and difference.[532][555]

Distinguishing the terms makes it possible to examine how the sources complement one another.[527]

Why Does Man Need Food at All, If His Own Root Is Lofty?

A natural question arises here: the human body's root too is lofty, so why does it need food? The collection of comments printed with the Epistle cites an answer from later Chassidic teachings: "Although the human body's root too is in the aspect of sovev kol almin,

elevation and drawing down, "both of which are a supernal need," "and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above."

[532]Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening "To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer." Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot "over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love"; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is "from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon," in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah "which have already been rectified through Mah"; the human being who "lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him"; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses "the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout,' etc.," and thus "the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels"; and elevation and drawing down, "both of which are a supernal need," "and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above."

[555]Discourse beginning "ונגלה כבוד ה'," 5722, sections 3–8 and notes 49, 54, an unreviewed transcript: food and sovev.

[527]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2173–2177, in "Tohu, Refinement and Returning Light: What Is Connected?"

nevertheless the aspect of the power of sovev kol almin within the body is concealed, and vitality cannot come from this aspect, for vitality must come specifically from revealed light." That is, the root's existence is insufficient; vitality is drawn specifically from what is in a state of revelation.[556]

This is a later explanation, not the Epistle's wording, so the entire argument should not be built on it. But it is very helpful for understanding the direction: dependence on food does not indicate a deficiency in man's root, but follows from the manner of revelation. This is precisely the principle the Epistle applies: where and how a power is revealed, not merely where it is present in concealment.[556]

A Continuous Reading

Let us now read the entire unit continuously in plain language, to see the complete progression.

Although the animal stands at a higher level than the vegetative, and the speaking above the animal,

[556] Among the Chassidic teachings cited in the aforementioned edition on the words of the unit: discourse beginning "סמוכני," 5660, p. פד [84]: "Although the human body too has its root in sovev kol almin, the power of sovev kol almin within the body is concealed, and vitality cannot come from this aspect, for vitality must specifically come from revealed light"; the Hemshech "וככה," 5637, chapter 91, is also cited there. A facsimile of the collected commentaries was read; the printed discourses were not checked. These are later explanations of the Epistle.

[556] Among the Chassidic teachings cited in the aforementioned edition on the words of the unit: discourse beginning "סמוכני," 5660, p. פד [84]: "Although the human body too has its root in sovev kol almin, the power of sovev kol almin within the body is concealed, and vitality cannot come from this aspect, for vitality must specifically come from revealed light"; the Hemshech "וככה," 5637, chapter 91, is also cited there. A facsimile of the collected commentaries was read; the printed discourses were not checked. These are later explanations of the Epistle.

nevertheless the animal is nourished by and lives from the vegetative, and the speaking receives its vitality from both. Not only vitality, but wisdom and knowledge too. There are two proofs. First, the Sages' teaching that an infant does not know how to call "father" and "mother" until it tastes the taste of grain: thus food from the vegetative participates in the opening of knowledge. Second, Rav Nachman's words that he did not examine the reason for the matter precisely in the evening because he had not eaten ox meat: thus food from the animal participates in the quality of a sage's inquiry.

The reason is that this is an aspect of returning light from below upward, from the bottom of Asiyah. There, at the extremity of the order, the radiance is revealed with greater force: a radiance of a radiance, etc., from Or Ein Sof encompassing all worlds, and from the kav of Or Ein Sof terminating at the endpoint of the feet of Adam Kadmon's yosher, in the mode of returning light, as explained above.

The Passage's Expressions: What Is Learned, and What Is Not

Let us gather the unit's expressions in order, noting alongside each what is learned and what is not.

What the Epistle says	What is learned from it	What is not learned from it
“Although the animal … and the speaking above the animal”	There is a manifest ladder of vitality and knowledge, and it remains in place	That the ladder is abolished or food understands more than man
“Is nourished by and lives from … receives its vitality from both”	The levels’ dependence on one another; two sources for man	An exhaustive list of foods; a division of the verbs among sefirot
“And also wisdom and knowledge”	The addition concerns intellectual power too	That food conveys content of knowledge
“For an infant … the taste of grain”	The vegetative participates in the emergence of knowledge	A complete account of child development, or an interpretation of father and mother as partzufim
“I had not yet eaten ox meat”	The animal participates in the quality of inquiry	Dietary instruction, or a reason for choosing the ox species
“For it is the aspect of returning light … from the bottom of Asiyah”	The reason: the radiance is revealed at the bottom	That the recipient apprehends the source of the radiance
“From the Ein Sof light encompassing … and from the kav … in the mode of returning light, as above”	Two sources; the return is attributed to the kav	That sovev itself returns, or the two names are interchangeable

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

Several things have been clarified. “Above” in the Epistle measures a manifest level of vitality and knowledge, and this order is not abolished. “From

both” refers back to the two sources mentioned and does not exclude the inanimate; Kuntres Acharon 4 explicitly says that man lives on food from the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders. The two proofs are not two maps of powers, but two proofs for one claim; that is how they are presented in Likkutei Torah, in reverse order and with the expression “the power of wisdom and intellect.” Wheat has a specific reason of its own, a root in Daat of Tohu, which does not become a general theory about every food. The Bava Kamma discussion was read in context: Rava’s question about an ox belonging to partners, the evening answer, the baraita’s objection, and Rav Nachman’s retraction in the morning. In the preferred reading, “for it” summarizes the phenomenon; “is revealed” refers to the radiance; and the return at the sentence’s end is attributed to the kav, while sovev is mentioned as the radiance’s source.

Several questions remain open.

Why “Chochmah and Daat” are mentioned without Binah: no focused source explaining this was found. The expression can be read as indicating intellect and awareness without a complete enumeration, but this is a proposed reading.

Why specifically ox meat, beyond the fact that this is the Gemara’s wording: no additional reason was found. The example of ox meat in Likkutei Amarim, chapter 7,

does not explain its selection here either, and the verbal connection to the face of the ox in the chariot is possible and thought-provoking, not proof.

Whether “father and mother” in the quotation also carries an echo here of the partzufim Abba and Imma: it can be heard, but no discourse applying both together to this sentence was found.

What exactly “etc.” after “a radiance of a radiance” abbreviates: certainly the continuation already explained; whether one word or an entire sequence is undecided. A fourth level must not be added.

The precise relationship between the language of Tohu and refinement and that of sovev, the kav and returning light: the parallels show a shared structure, and no statement identifying them was found.

Why earth is not enumerated in the chain of nourishment: the comment in the Rebbe’s name proposes a reason with “it may be said,” and the question is not entirely closed.

From the Taste of Food to “Good Taste and Knowledge”

The next chapter opens with “And through this will be well understood, with good taste and knowledge.” The expression comes from Psalms 119:66: “Teach me good taste and knowledge, for I have believed in Your commandments.” In its place in the Epistle, it presents

a reasoned understanding, an understanding with a reason, of what will be explained there about the angels' enjoyment of the sacrifice.[557]

An echo can be heard here: previously "the taste of grain," now "good taste and knowledge"; previously the "knowledge" man receives, now "and knowledge." The echo is pleasing and adds to the continuity of reading. But this is an observation, not a proven literary design: the Epistle does not quote the continuation of the verse here or say that it alludes to it. The source of the wording is explained; an intention to allude to the entire verse is not proved.[549] We treated the echo between "ox meat" and "the face of the ox" in the chariot, which we will encounter in the next chapter, in the same way; two such echoes together do not accumulate into proof.[525]

What Will Be Said in the Next Chapter

What was explained here about nourishing the speaking makes it possible to understand the chariot as well. There a sharper question will be asked: if the animal itself was drawn from a higher root, what can it add to that root through its elevation? The same distinctions already learned will be needed: revelation and root, nourishment and refinement, the source of

[557] Psalms 119:66: "Teach me good reason and knowledge, for I have believed in Your commandments."

[549] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2185–2187, in "Good Reason and Knowledge as a Transitional Sentence."

[525] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2170–2174, in "Why an Ox, and Why Two Proofs?"

power and the action revealing it. Here it is enough that the lower bears a relationship to a root from which the higher too may receive.[549]

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter contains two proofs from the Gemara and one sentence whose syntax requires care. An AI tool, like a hasty learner, may recount the proofs with details interchanged, divide them into an unwritten symmetry, decide by a grammatical rule a question that context decides, or build upon a spelling difference. The following four exercises test these four traps in order.

Exercise 1: What Happened in Bava Kamma?

What to ask. Ask the tool to tell the story of "דלא אכלי בשרא דתורא": who asked whom, about which law, and what changed between evening and morning.

What to check. Compare with Bava Kamma 71b–72a: Rava asked Rav Nachman about an ox belonging to two partners; "from his father" is Rava's objection, not the subject of the question; the retraction is from the evening answer to the morning answer. Check Rashi too ("I did not examine the reason for the matter precisely") and Tosafot ("He was fasting").

The limit of the conclusion. A tool's summary is not a source. If one detail in the story has been

[549] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2185–2187, in "Good Reason and Knowledge as a Transitional Sentence."

interchanged, do not rely on the others until you open the Gemara.

Exercise 2: Does Grain Give Knowledge and Meat Wisdom?

What to ask. Ask the tool whether "wisdom and knowledge" are divided between the two proofs.

What to check. Does it bring Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "ששת ימים תאכל מצות," where both proofs are given together, in reverse order and with one reason, "the power of wisdom and intellect"? Does it distinguish wheat's specific reason ("Daat of Tohu," Vaetchanan) from a general division?

The limit of the conclusion. A positive statement about grain is not a negation concerning meat. An attractive symmetrical table is not evidence.

Exercise 3: What Does "It" Refer To?

What to ask. Request a syntactic analysis of "כי הוא בחי' אור חוזר" ("for it is the aspect of returning light"): what does "הוא" ("it") refer to?

What to check. If the tool rejects a reading because הזנה, "nourishment," is feminine, note that הזנה is not written in the sentence. Check whether it presents both readings, the entire phenomenon or the food, and the contextual reason.

The limit of the conclusion. There is a preferred reading here, not a grammatical decision. Deciding what "it" refers to does not automatically determine the scope of "in the mode of returning light" at the sentence's end either.

Exercise 4: Did the Epistle Change the Gemara's Wording?

What to ask. Ask why the Epistle writes אבא ואימא, whereas the Gemara in Berachot has אבא and אמא.

What to check. Does the tool know the parallel in Sanhedrin 70a–70b, where אבא ואימא appears? Does it notice that the Epistle uses לקרות as in Berachot, not לקרוא as in Sanhedrin, thus combining wordings from both places? Does it attribute a "special intention" of the author to the spelling difference?

The limit of the conclusion. A spelling difference between two passages is not evidence of deliberate change. The Rebbe's comment "with a change of wording," recorded about the quotation of Rav Nachman's words from Bava Kamma, not about אבא ואימא, also records the change without explaining its reason.

Chapter 19 | The Sacrifice and the Living Creatures of the Chariot

The Epistle now takes the final step in the chain that began with earth, the boldest of them all. Until now, we remained in the visible world: earth produces growth, and man eats. From here onward, the recipients are angels in the chariot, and the giver is the spirit of an animal and bird offered upon the altar.

In this chapter, we will clarify who receives and what exactly ascends to them, answering the sharp question the preceding chapter left for here: what can the lower add to the root from which it itself was drawn? We will then examine precisely the Zohar's wording on which the Epistle rests.

What We Already Know

We bring four things from the preceding chapter. Food adds wisdom and knowledge to man too, and the reason is returning light from the bottom of Asiyah. The source of the power and the content of knowledge are not one thing: receiving power does not mean apprehending its root. Nourishment, understanding and refinement are three layers, and in the third, human service elevates the power to its purpose. In the Chassidic parallels, we encountered another language,

Tohu and Tikkun, Sag and Mah, which touches the Epistle's language without being identical to it.

A Question That Looks Like a Circle

The animal is not its own source. Already in chapter 2, we saw that according to the Epistle, the animal's spirit descends from "the face of the ox" in the chariot. Yet here the Epistle says that the angels in the chariot, including the face of the ox, receive vitality from the sacrifice, from the spirit of that very animal. Seemingly, a closed circle is formed: what descended from above ascends and returns above, and nothing is added.

If so, what is added nevertheless? This is the chapter's question, not a marginal objection. The Epistle does not say that the angels know something was done below; it says that they derive pleasure, are nourished and are supplied. Such language describes actual reception, not knowledge alone.[558]

The answer will be built from the distinction that already served us in earlier chapters: between visible level and root, and between a proximate source and a still higher root. In chapters 14–15, we learned that earth reveals power with greater force than the elements above it; in the preceding chapter, that food adds knowledge to man. Here the same principle is

[558] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2393–2396, in "A Spirit That Descends, a Spirit That Returns."

tested at the most difficult point: when the recipient is itself the source from which the giver was drawn.

W19-01
source words
1–10

And through this will be well understood, with good taste and knowledge, how the supernal angels in the chariot,

“And through this will be well understood”: what has been explained thus far makes it possible to understand the following matter too. “Through this” points backward to the reason the Epistle has just given, returning light from the bottom of Asiyah, where the radiance is revealed with greater force, not to the mere fact that man is nourished by the lower. “Good taste and knowledge” is the wording of Psalms 119:66, discussed at the end of the preceding chapter; the Epistle takes only the expression, without “teach me,” and does not request understanding but presents it.[559] Here it means a reasoned, well-grounded understanding: not merely knowing that it is so, but tasting its reason. There is no necessity to see the two words as names of two sefirot; the expression functions here as language of understanding.

The discussion concerns “the supernal angels in the chariot” and their reception of vitality from the sacrifice.

[559] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2423–2426, in “Echoes That Can Be Heard but Not Proven.”

The Chariot in Ezekiel's Prophecy

The concept "chariot" rests on the prophetic vision in Ezekiel's first chapter and its explanation in Kabbalah and Chassidut. In the analogy, a chariot carries its rider and moves according to his will; it does not act of its own mind. Hence the emphasis on nullification in the spiritual chariot: its powers carry revelation and do not stand independently.

The prophecy says that each of the living creatures has four faces, specifying: "The likeness of their faces was a human face, and the face of a lion on the right for all four, and the face of an ox on the left for all four, and the face of an eagle for all four." The four faces are not four separate creatures standing alongside one another; they are four faces in each one.[560]

Two opposite mistakes must be avoided. The first is imagining large physical animals in heaven. These are names of aspects and roots, not a description of bodies. The second is turning the names into empty words. The name indicates which aspect predominates in that face and serves as the root of a particular branch below; it does not say that nothing else is there.[561]

A further distinction, preserved by Scripture itself: "the human face" among the four faces is not the "likeness

[560] Ezekiel 1:5, 6, 10, 26: the four chayot, the four faces of each, and the likeness of a human appearance upon the throne.

[561] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2389–2392, in "The Ox for All Animals, the Eagle for Birds."

as the appearance of a man" upon the throne. The former is mentioned in the description of the living creatures; the latter is mentioned afterward, above the firmament. If we call both "the man in the chariot," we lose a written distinction. This matters for our subject: when it is said that the animal's spirit ascends to the faces in the chariot, it must not be transferred without reason to the human likeness upon the throne.[562]

W19-02
source words
11–18

the face of the ox and face of the eagle, greatly derive pleasure, are nourished, and are supplied

"The face of the ox" and "the face of the eagle" are two of the four faces, and their selection here corresponds to the animal and bird about to be mentioned in the continuation of the sentence. "Derive pleasure" means receive delight; "are nourished" means receive vitality; "are supplied" means receive the fulfillment of their need. "Greatly" intensifies the enjoyment. We will examine the difference among the three expressions later in the chapter.

Ox and Eagle: Names of Roots, Not a List of Sacrifices

Whoever reads "the face of the ox and face of the eagle" as though they were a list of species fit for sacrifice will immediately encounter a difficulty: the eagle is not

[562] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2385–2388, in "The Human Face and the Human Being upon the Throne."

among the birds offered, while turtledoves and young pigeons, the birds offered, are not eagles.

The difficulty arises from a mistaken assumption, as though a spiritual root were an enlarged copy of a physical species. In the Zohar itself, in Pinchas, the matter is arranged differently: from the faces in the chariot, a spirit extends to the kinds of lower beings. Of the bird it says there, "פני נשר אתפשט לעופא רוח מניה," "from the face of the eagle, a spirit extended to the bird." In the same sequence, it explicitly says that bird offerings come from pigeons and turtledoves. Thus, the source calling the root "eagle" is the same source listing turtledoves and pigeons as sacrifices. There is no contradiction here, but two different things: the root's name and the law of the sacrifice.[563]

The same applies to animals. "The face of the ox" is the name of a root from which spirit is drawn to the kinds of domestic animals, not a restriction to oxen alone. There is therefore no difficulty in a sheep being offered although it is not an ox.

There is an explicit discourse about sheep, but it follows another path: rather than grouping them with cattle, it contrasts them. Likkutei Torah for Emor says: "Cattle are the face of the ox on the left, the aspect of Gevurot; the ox also gores with its horn, and goats too are an aspect of Gevurot; sheep, however, are in the

[563] Zohar, vol. III, Pinchas, 240b–241a: sacrifices and the chayot of the chariot; the wording yesoda ve-ikkara [foundation and root] occurs in the first lines of 241a, in the context of the bird offering.

aspect of mercies." The reason: "Sheep have a piteous voice that arouses mercy, because their source and root are from a higher level."[564]

Note two points. First: "the face of the ox on the left" is the verse's own wording, "and the face of an ox on the left," on which the discourse directly rests. Second: here too the distinction between visible level and root recurs. The discourse attributes the sheep's piteous voice, which arouses mercy, to their root, "because their source and root are from a higher level."

Yet a limit must be preserved. The contrast in Likkutei Torah, cattle and Gevurot against sheep and mercies, is not the same discussion as the Zohar's sequence enumerating kinds of domestic animals under a single extension. These are two arguments, which must not be merged into one system as though they were stated together. Each is useful in its own place.

The Place of the Lion and the Human

If the Epistle selects the ox and eagle, should we say that the other two faces have no part in the sacrificial service?

[564] Likkutei Torah, Emor, folio 37: "For cattle are the ox's face on the left, the aspect of gevurot; an ox also gores with its horn, and goats too are of the aspect of gevurot. Sheep, however, are in the category of mercy… for sheep have a plaintive voice that arouses mercy, because their source and root are from a higher level." The wording "פני שור מהשמאל" follows the verse "ופני שור מהשמאול" [and the ox's face on the left] (Ezekiel 1:10). This contrast between cattle and sheep is an argument of the discourse, not the same discussion as the sequence in the Zohar listing animal species under one extension; the two must not be merged.

No. In the Zohar, immediately after the sentence from which the Epistle quotes (we will reach it later in the chapter), both the lion and the human are discussed, each in its role: the lion is connected with the fire descending and consuming the sacrifice, and the human with the spirit and soul of the person offering it. The complete picture of sacrifice is broader than the two examples the Epistle brings.[565]

Why, then, were ox and eagle selected? Because they fit the question the Epistle asks. It does not present the entire teaching of sacrifice here; it clarifies how the ascending lower adds vitality to its root. For this, precisely the faces from which the animal's spirit and the bird's spirit are drawn are needed, those recipients whose giver is their own branch. The lion, where the subject is descending fire, and the human, where it is the offerer's spirit, do not serve this example.

This is how the choice of ox and eagle can be understood from context, although the Epistle does not explicitly give its reason.

What Exactly Ascends?

W19-03
source words
19–26

from the spirit of the animal and bird rising over them (עליהם) from the sacrifices upon the altar,

[565] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2391–2394, in "The Lion and the Human Being Do Not Disappear from the Zohar."

“From the spirit” is the decisive expression. It is neither flesh nor blood that ascends, but spirit. “Rising over them” gives the direction toward the higher recipients. שע”ג המזבח means “upon the altar”; the altar establishes that this concerns sacrificial service, not the slaughter of an ordinary animal for food.

Our text of the Epistle reads “העולה עליהם” (“rising over them”), whereas the standard Kehot printing reads “העולה אליהם” (“rising to them”). In both wordings, the spirit ascends to the recipients, and the difference does not change the substance.[566]

The distinction between spirit and body is not merely verbal precision; the Zohar itself provides it. There it says that the fat and blood of the sacrifice are “לבושא דרוחא דלהון,” “the garment of their spirit.” The material is a garment; what ascends is what is vested within it.[563]

“Are nourished” describes receiving vitality and influence. In our language too, we say that a person is nourished by encouragement or friendship, and the nourishment is real, without it he weakens, although he eats nothing. The example shows only that the language of nourishment need not imply flesh and

[566] The text of the Epistle before us reads “העולה עליהם” [ascending upon them]; the printed Kehot edition and its digital text read “העולה אליהם” [ascending to them], with no textual variant recorded there for this word. The meaning is the same: the spirit ascends to the higher recipients. The book’s wording has been retained; on the significance of this variation for the working method, see Case Studies, case 5.

[563] Zohar, vol. III, Pinchas, 240b–241a: sacrifices and the chayot of the chariot; the wording yesoda ve-ikkara [foundation and root] occurs in the first lines of 241a, in the context of the bird offering.

digestion; it does not say what exactly the angels receive.

Why Returning to the Root Adds Something New

We can now return to the difficulty with which we opened and answer it in three stages.

The first stage is to distinguish two senses of "root." Saying that the animal was drawn from the face of the ox refers to its proximate source in the order of hishtalshelut. But this does not mean that every power within it comes from there and nowhere else. In reality's descent and fall, powers are present whose root is lofty and which are not evident in their manifest state.

The Alter Rebbe explains this in Kuntres Acharon. He speaks there in the language of Sag and Mah, the two Names explained in the preceding chapter: the Name before the shattering and the Name through which rectification takes place. He says that the refinements within Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, meaning the powers in the lower worlds still requiring refinement, "are higher in their root than the nefesh, ruach and neshamah within man, for they are from Sag within the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon; the nefesh, ruach and neshamah have already been rectified through Mah, which emerges from the forehead as a mere

radiance." Immediately afterward: "This is the reason man lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, refining them through the Mah within him and living through them, for they are from Sag."[567]

This is precisely the principle we need, in the Epistle's author's own words. What has not yet been refined is not low in its root; on the contrary, its low state is connected to its root being higher than the rectified order. What has already been rectified is "a mere radiance" in relation to that root. Hence there is no contradiction between an angel's being higher and ordered and its receiving an addition from what is below it.[568]

The second stage is the service: refinement reveals the power and elevates it to its root. Here the wording of the Likkutei Torah discourse is very precise: the kohen "refines the animal's spirit, which fell in the shattering of the vessels, and elevates it to its root from the face of the ox in the chariot, until it is included in Malchut of

[567]Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening "To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer." Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot "over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love"; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is "from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon," in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah "which have already been rectified through Mah"; the human being who "lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him"; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses "the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, 'Let the earth sprout,' etc.," and thus "the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels"; and elevation and drawing down, "both of which are a supernal need," "and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above."

[568]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2401–2405, in "The Angels Too Are from Ban: What Is Added to Them?"

Atzilut, and this is called the altar's eating."[569] "The shattering of the vessels" is the fall of the sparks of Tohu mentioned in the preceding chapter; "Malchut of Atzilut" is the last sefirah of the world of Atzilut.

The third stage is what is revealed. In the same place, the discourse continues: "Through this, the lights of Tohu are revealed, and therefore the angels derive pleasure from the sacrifices through the revelation of the lights of Tohu, from which their root derives." Note the final words: "from which their root derives," the angels' own root is in those lights. Nothing foreign has been added to them. Their own root, previously unrevealed, has been revealed to them. The discourse's "therefore" links revelation with enjoyment. The Epistle says that the angels derive pleasure, are nourished and are supplied: reception of vitality, not knowledge alone. The revelation is thus an added revelation within vitality they already possess. The angel has not come into being anew, nor has the animal's vitality in the field been transferred to it unchanged.

A related argument is developed at length in the discourse "פקודא ליתן מחצית השקל" ("The Commandment to Give the Half-Shekel") from 5723 [1963]. This is another reference for further study.[570]

[569] Likkutei Torah, Emor, explanation of "והניף הכהן אותם," sections 1–6, especially section 4.

[570] Discourse beginning "פקודא ליתן מחצית השקל," 5723, sections 6–8 and note 37, an unreviewed transcript: roots and refinement. Cited as an additional reference; the chapter's explanation rests on Kuntres Acharon and Likkutei Torah.

It thus becomes clear that the circle is not as closed as it first appeared. The animal returns to its source after refinement. Through its passage through the lower and its refinement, a power is revealed within it whose root is higher than the receiving level, and that revelation is the addition.[571]

Two qualifications must be preserved. First: there is no claim here that every animal is higher than every angel in every respect. The discussion concerns a particular relationship clarified specifically through the act of elevation, not a new general ranking. Second: the giver of nourishment should not be described as though it ascends in its unrefined state. The addition is connected with refinement and service, not with transferring a raw thing to the higher.

Interinclusion, Refinement and Addition Are Not One Word

A question rightly arises here: if the angels in the chariot are interincluded, since each living creature has four faces, perhaps there is no longer any room in them for refinement and addition?

The answer begins by separating three easily confused concepts. “Interinclusion” means that one power also

[571]The progression “root—descent—refinement—revelation” is assembled here from three passages, each contributing its part: Kuntres Acharon 4 supplies the principle (what has not yet been refined is higher in its root than what has already been rectified); the explanation of “והניף הכהן” supplies the priest’s action and its result in the revelation of the lights of Tohu; the Zohar supplies the wording of enjoyment and affiliation. No single source enumerates all these stages together; the combination is explanation, not quotation.

carries aspects of other powers within it and does not operate in isolation. "Refinement," as we defined it, is the service through which the good power is brought out of concealment and elevated to holiness. "Addition" is the result. These are three separate questions, and an answer to one is not an answer to the other.

The evidence is explicit. In Likkutei Torah for Pinchas, in the first discourse beginning "צו את בני ישראל," a world already refined is described, containing "the camp of Michael in love and the camp of Gabriel in awe," each in its own attribute and place. If a fixed attribute indicated a lack of refinement, this could not be said.[572] A particular role and a refined state are thus compatible.[573] This also bears on our question: the manner in which the powers are connected to one another does not alone decide whether their refinement is complete or whether there remains room for addition.

A human analogy can bring this closer, within its limits. A person giving out of love can also set a boundary for the recipient's benefit; the boundary does not negate the love, but participates in its rectified

[572] Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, "צו את בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם את קרבני לחמי לאשי," the first of the two discourses opening this way, section 1: "Likewise, by way of analogy, throughout the order of hishtalshelut, Michael's camp is specifically in love and Gabriel's camp in fear"; later in the section: "In the World to Come, which is a clarified world, already refined, where everything is in its place."

[573] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2387–2390, in "Mutual Inclusion Does Not Abolish the Role."

form. We thus see that distinct powers need not remain isolated, and even when connected, they do not become one undifferentiated power. The analogy illustrates only the relationship and does not measure the chariot's levels.

One should therefore not construct a rigid ladder in which every angel is already rectified in every respect and every animal lacks any superiority. The Epistle examines a particular relationship of receiving vitality: the higher root is a source in relation to the creature, and the creature elevated through service can reveal additional power in relation to that same root.

Three Expressions of Reception

"Derive pleasure," "are nourished" and "are supplied": three expressions concerning one reception. What does each add?

Three cumulative aspects can be heard in them: not only delight, but also vitality; not only vitality, but also fulfillment of need. Together they teach what we said at the chapter's opening: the reception is real, not merely external knowledge.[574]

This is a plain reading, and it suffices. What should not be done is to assign each verb to a separate sefirah: no source making such a division was found, and such a division would appear precise without being grounded.

[574] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2396–2398, in "Enjoyment, Nourishment and Sustenance."

“מסתפקים” here derives from the language of supply and provision: they receive enough for their needs. This is how the word should be read, not in today’s common sense of doubting or making do with little.

One final verbal precision: in the Zohar’s sequence in Pinchas, to which the Epistle immediately refers, the first two expressions, enjoyment and nourishment, appear, whereas מסתפקים does not. This does not establish that the Alter Rebbe originated the word, since its absence from one place does not imply its absence everywhere; but neither can we say that all three expressions are quoted from there.

A Little Below, Light for Many

Another question arises naturally: one sacrifice is a defined, small thing, one animal or one bird. How does it become a source of influence for many higher recipients?

The Zohar itself makes this accessible through an analogy: one slender lamp can be lit and illuminate many. The same light can shine for many people. This opens a way to understand influence that is not a distribution of material.[575]

The analogy’s limit: it answers the quantitative puzzle but does not explain where the addition comes from; inquiry into root and refinement explains that, not the

[575] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2404–2406, in “A Small Sacrifice and Many Recipients.”

lamp analogy. It teaches just one thing: a thing's visible size alone does not measure the scope of revelation coming through it.

The Zohar's Wording and Its Precision

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27–33

and as is precise in the holy Zohar's wording: "And they derive pleasure from their foundation and root."

"וכדקדוק" means according to the precision of the wording. The Alter Rebbe does not cite the Zohar merely as evidence that the angels derive pleasure; he points to the choice of words. זוה"ק means the holy Zohar. The Aramaic means: and they derive pleasure from their foundation and root. What the choice of words teaches will be seen after we establish the sentence in its place in the Zohar.

Where is the passage? In Zohar, Part III, Pinchas, 241a, in the opening lines, within the discussion of the bird offering. The printing there says: "ונחתי ומתקרבי אינון רוחין קדישין. ואתהניין מיסודא ועקרא דלהון," "and those holy spirits descend and draw near, and derive pleasure from their foundation and root." The context begins earlier, at the end of 240b, where the extension of spirit from the faces in the chariot is described.[563]

Two textual comments for anyone opening the Zohar. First: the printed spelling we saw has ועקרא דלהון,

[563] Zohar, vol. III, Pinchas, 240b–241a: sacrifices and the chayot of the chariot; the wording yesoda ve-ikkara [foundation and root] occurs in the first lines of 241a, in the context of the bird offering.

whereas our text of the Epistle has ועיקרא דילהון. The difference is between fuller and more defective spelling, not a change in substance. Second, and more importantly: later on the same folio side, in the discussion of the four likenesses, a similar expression appears in reverse order, "עיקרא ויסודא," "root and foundation." This is another sentence, not another wording of ours; the two occurrences on the same folio side do not establish that copyists had a different reading of our line.[576]

"Their Foundation and Root": What Is the Foundation of What?

Here lies the depth of the precision, and here too the temptation to oversimplify.

The temptation is to translate "foundation" everywhere as "hidden higher root," and read the sentence as: the angels derive pleasure from their high root. This reading is essentially correct, since we saw in Likkutei Torah "from which their root derives," but it erases a second side stated by the Zohar itself. The same sequence also speaks of "יסודא דהאי עלמא," "the foundation of this world," and of the fat and blood as the spirit's garment. Thus, "foundation" functions there in two relationships: the source from which the spirit is drawn above, and its basis and garment below.[577]

[576] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2397–2401, in "The Same Line or Another Place?"
[577] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2400–2402, in "What Does 'Precisely as Worded' Teach?"

There is no contradiction, provided we state in each occurrence what the subject is and on what it is founded. The higher gives spirit to the lower branch; and the branch, after being elevated through service, becomes the place from which the higher receive. This is a twofold movement, and it is a mistake to conceal either side. If we erase the lower, we lose the wonder the Epistle comes to explain; if we erase the higher, we lose the causality of hishtalshelut.

One final limit in this matter: the possessive דילהון, "their," does not on its own decide which direction is meant. Each occurrence must be read according to its sentence. What is clear is that this is not an accidental gift coming from something foreign: there is a connection between the recipients and that from which they receive, and the precision rests on this connection.

Two References from Likkutei Torah to the Epistle

Two references to our Epistle are printed in Likkutei Torah, both identifying it by its opening, "איהו וחיוהי."

The first is in the explanation of "והניף הכהן אותם" ("And the Kohen Shall Wave Them") in Emor, section ד [4]. There, after the description cited above of refining the animal's spirit and elevating it, it says: "This is what is said in the holy Zohar (Pinchas, 241a), 'ואתהניין מיסודא

ועקרא דילהון’ [‘and they derive pleasure from their foundation and root’], as cited in Iggeret HaKodesh toward the end of the discourse beginning ‘איהו וחיוהי.’ ”[578]

Notice what this one sentence does. It gives the Zohar reference, Pinchas, 241a, precisely as we established above. It quotes the very same words. It refers to the Iggeret HaKodesh beginning “איהו וחיוהי,” the Epistle we are studying, and to its end: סד”ה means “the end of the discourse beginning,” and our sentence stands in the Epistle’s final part. Together, these three things closely connect the discourse to our passage.

The second appears in Likkutei Torah for Pinchas, in the second discourse beginning “צו את בני ישראל,” section א [1]: “And to be absorbed into the body of the King Himself (and see what is written in Iggeret HaKodesh toward the end of the discourse beginning ‘איהו וחיוהי’ …).”[579]

[578] Likkutei Torah, Emor, explanation of “והניף הכהן אותם,” section 4, on folio 38: “This is what is stated in the holy Zohar (Parashat Pinchas, folio 241a), ‘They derive enjoyment from their foundation and root,’ as cited in Iggeret HaKodesh, at the end of ‘Ihu vechayohi.’ ” There also is the language of refinement: the priest “refines the animal’s spirit, which fell in the shattering of the vessels, and elevates it to its root in the ox’s face in the chariot, until it is included in Malchut of Atzilut; this is called the altar’s eating”; later: “Therefore the angels derive enjoyment from the sacrifices through the revelation of the lights of Tohu, from which is their root.” The folio was read in a facsimile of the printed edition. The column letter ג [c] is a conventional reference; it does not appear as a separate letter in the facsimile before us.

[579] Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, the second discourse opening “צו את בני ישראל,” section 1: “To be absorbed into the very body of the King (see what is written in Iggeret HaKodesh, at the end of ‘Ihu vechayohi,’ and what is written in the explanation of ‘כי כאשר השמים החדשים’ and in the discourse beginning ‘כה אמר,’ etc., ‘ונתתי לך מהלכים בין העומדים’).” This is a second reference, distinct from the one in Emor. The passage was read in a facsimile; the folio number and column letter are not visible in the facsimile itself, and come from the reference supplied with it.

What the references do not prove is who wrote them. Their presence in print does not establish whether they belong to the author's own words or to the editing. There is no need to decide this to benefit from the explanation: the discourse explains the matter in either case, and the reference shows that the two passages were already connected in print. We will therefore say, "A reference to the Epistle is printed in Likkutei Torah," without attributing it to a particular writer unless authorship has been proved.

The same explanation is also printed in Or HaTorah for Naso, as a parallel version of the same discourse.[580]

Tohu and Refinement, Kav and Sovev: Comparing Without Merging

In the preceding chapter, we discussed how the language of Tohu, refinement, Sag and Mah in the parallels and that of sovev, the kav and returning light in the Epistle touch one another without being synonyms. In this chapter, the tension returns more sharply, since our explanation of the addition within sacrifice rests on the parallels: Kuntres Acharon speaks of Sag and Mah, while Likkutei Torah speaks of refinement and the revelation of the lights of Tohu. Yet the Epistle itself explains the higher's receiving from the lower through returning light, and no sentence

[580]The explanation in Likkutei Torah, Emor, is also printed in Or HaTorah for Parashat Naso. This is the same discourse in two works, not two independent pieces of evidence.

explicitly identifying Sag with the kav's return was found.

The similar structure enables comparison between the sources but does not prove identity between their concepts. By distinguishing the terms, we can see what each source adds to the explanation.

So too with the verbal echoes discussed in the preceding chapter: "ox meat" in Rav Nachman's words and "the face of the ox" here, "the taste of grain" and "good taste and knowledge." They are pleasing and sharpen attention, but the connection the author explicitly makes is written in other words: "And from this," "for it," "And through this will be well understood," and "And after these words." These lead the argument; the echo accompanies it and does not replace the explanation.[559]

What Human Service Adds

One point needs emphasis, lest it be lost among the levels: a sacrifice is not merely an animal transferred from the field to the altar. It is part of a service commanded to us, at a defined time, through a kohen, upon the altar and in a fixed order. The command and the service place the thing within holiness. The discourse we saw therefore attributes refinement to the kohen and the offering, not to the animal's mere existence.

[559] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2423–2426, in "Echoes That Can Be Heard but Not Proven."

What we learned through the sowing analogy in chapter 16 thus returns: power given from above does not make the recipient's action superfluous. Man is not the source of the sacrifice's power, yet his service participates in its revelation. The reverse is also true: service does not create the root, but actualizes what was hidden.

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

This chapter clarified the following: "the face of the ox and face of the eagle" are names of roots from which spirit is drawn to animal and bird, not a list of species offered; the lion and human are not erased from the picture of sacrifice, but do not serve this example. What ascends is "the spirit of the animal and bird," and the material is its garment. The addition received by the angels is not a deposit returned unchanged: according to Kuntres Acharon, what has not yet been refined is higher in root than what has already been rectified; according to Likkutei Torah, the kohen's refinement reveals "the lights of Tohu, from which their root derives," the root of the angels themselves. "Derive pleasure, are nourished, and are supplied" describes actual reception, and מסתפקים means provision. "Their foundation and root" appears in Zohar, Pinchas, 241a, and two references in Likkutei Torah connect it to the Epistle.

The main point in all this: what has not yet been refined bears a root not measured according to its manifest state, and the work of refinement reveals it. The angels can therefore receive an addition from the sacrifice without ceasing to be higher.

Three questions remain open.

First: who wrote the references in Likkutei Torah to the Epistle? Their presence in print is certain; their attribution is undecided.

Second: why did the Epistle choose these two faces specifically? The contextual explanation we proposed is strong, but is not a reason the author wrote.

Third, carried over from the preceding chapter: are "Sag" in Kuntres Acharon and "returning light" in the Epistle two names for one thing? The structure of the argument is similar, but no explicit statement identifying them was found.

From the Chariot to Mitzvot

The learner may feel that the chariot is remote from his life. But the question clarified through it is very close: how a defined action in the world operates beyond its apparent measure.

This is precisely what the Epistle is about to say concerning practical mitzvot. Thus far, the argument has been built in three stages: earth produces growth through a higher power revealed at the bottom; food

gives man vitality and even knowledge; and sacrifice adds to the roots within the chariot. At each stage, we learned not to measure superiority by what is manifestly visible.

The Epistle's next words begin "And after these words and this truth," from which it draws its conclusion concerning the great superiority of practical mitzvot and the purpose of the soul's descent into this world. That conclusion belongs to the next chapter, and we will not anticipate it here. It is enough to know where what we have learned is leading.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

This chapter contains a question about "the face of the eagle" that looks like a contradiction, a verb easily mistranslated, and two questions of attribution and identity left open.

Exercise 1: An Eagle on the Altar?

What to ask. Ask the tool how the Epistle can mention "the face of the eagle" when the eagle is not a bird offered as a sacrifice.

What to check. Does the answer distinguish the root's name from the law of sacrifice? Check Zohar, Pinchas, 240b–241a, where the same sequence says "פני נשר אתפשט לעופא רוח מניה" and enumerates turtledoves and young pigeons as bird offerings.

The limit of the conclusion. Do not accept a solution that changes the Epistle's wording or assumes a "scribal error." Nor should the Zohar's sequence be merged with the cattle–sheep contrast in Likkutei Torah, Emor; these are two arguments.

Exercise 2: "מסתפקים"

What to ask. Request an English or Russian translation of "נהנים מאד וניזונים ומסתפקים."

What to check. Was מסתפקים translated as doubting? The meaning here is provision: receiving enough for their needs.

The limit of the conclusion. Even if the translation is correct, do not accept a division of the three verbs into three sefirot without a source.

Exercise 3: Who Wrote the References?

What to ask. Ask the tool who wrote the references in Likkutei Torah, "וכמובא באג"ה סד"ה איהו וחיוהי."

What to check. Does the tool confidently assert "the Alter Rebbe" or "the editor"? Check whether it distinguishes the reference's presence in print, which is certain, from its attribution, which is undecided. Also check whether it counts the printing of the same explanation in Or HaTorah, Naso, as a second witness.

The limit of the conclusion. A parallel version of the same discourse is counted once. Who wrote it remains an open question.

Exercise 4: Sag and Returning Light

What to ask. Ask whether "Sag" in Kuntres Acharon and "returning light" in the Epistle are two names for one thing.

What to check. Request an explicit sentence in a source identifying them, and open it. Compare with "Tohu and Refinement Alongside Sovev, the Kav and Returning Light" in chapter 18 and "Tohu and Refinement, Kav and Sovev: Comparing Without Merging" in this chapter.

The limit of the conclusion. A shared structure of argument is not an identity of concepts. "They touch and illuminate one another" is the formulation the sources allow here.

Chapter 20 | The Purpose of the Descent: Torah and Mitzvot in This World

From the Sacrifice to the Conclusion

The Epistle has traveled a long path. It opened with "He and His lights are one; He and His vessels are one," asking how finite vessels are united with Or Ein Sof. In the preceding chapter, the question reached the angels in the chariot. Now the Epistle arrives at its conclusion. Its own connecting words have led us here, "And from this," "for it," "And through this will be well understood," and the next word, "And after," announces that we have reached the conclusion.

What We Already Know

The preceding chapter clarified that the angels in the chariot receive an addition from the spirit of the animal and bird ascending from the altar, and that the addition is the revelation of their own root, coming through refinement. It also clarified that the sacrifice becomes a sacrifice because we were commanded in it, with a kohen, an altar and an order, not because of the animal's superiority alone. These two points, together with the distinction between manifest level and root accompanying this entire part, are the ground on which the conclusion will stand.

Before us is a long concluding sentence, followed by a short note from those who transmitted the text to us. The sentence contains the conclusion concerning "the great advantage of practical mitzvot," the statement that they are "the purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world," a verse from the Torah and a Mishnah from Pirkei Avot. The questions we will clarify are: what is included in "all the aforementioned"; in precisely what respect practical mitzvot have great superiority; what becomes possible specifically through descent; how Torah study and mitzvah performance stand together; what the verse "today, to perform them" and the Mishnah "One hour … is better" measure; which "World to Come" is meant; and what the final line, not the author's words, teaches.

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And after these words and this truth, knowledge comes easily to the discerning, to understand through all the aforementioned

"And after these words and this truth" opens the conclusion, presenting the preceding explanation as its basis. "Knowledge comes easily to the discerning": someone who has understood the premises will easily understand what is now to be said. "All the aforementioned": everything said above. It is plausible that these words also encompass the body of the Epistle: the power of creation, the command to

separate beings, the root of mitzvot and revelation at the bottom; we will discuss the limit of this reading below.

What Does "All the Aforementioned" Encompass?

The two opening expressions are drawn from biblical language. "After these words and this truth" is the wording of Chronicles, where it opens the account of Sennacherib's arrival after Hezekiah's good deeds; the Epistle takes the expression as transitional language, not its historical context. "Knowledge comes easily to the discerning" is from Proverbs: for one who understands, knowledge is easy. The Epistle thus says: after what has been clarified, the conclusion is easy for someone who has followed the path. It does not say that the conclusion is self-evident to someone who has not followed it. "Discerning" here is the learner who has joined the premises, not someone possessing a special spiritual level.[581]

What is included in "all the aforementioned"? "All" invites us to read back through the entire Epistle, not only the paragraph on sacrifice. The conclusion about mitzvot rests on several links learned along the way. The lights and vessels of Atzilut are one with Ein Sof,

[581] II Chronicles 32:1: "After these things and this faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came" (Sefaria); Proverbs 14:6: "A scoffer seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge is easy for a person of understanding" (Sefaria). The Epistle borrows the expressions only as transitional wording; it contains no allusion to the historical context of the Chronicles verse.

"He and His vessels are one." The vessels are "in the aspect of limit and finitude," yet "they are Divinity, to create something from nothing like Ein Sof": the power to create a new existence belongs to the Creator alone, and operates through finite vessels. The created yesh becomes "a separate thing," and here the Epistle says why: "So that the blessed Emanator should be King over all separate beings, through their fulfilling His mitzvot that He commands them." Mitzvot are "the essential core of the Torah and its root," although the mitzvah is physical and Torah is wisdom. The Divine radiance "shows its strength and ability in the physical element of earth, in an immense revelation," specifically in the lower. Human sowing and planting produce fruits superior to those growing of themselves, "and from this we can understand," in the Epistle's wording, the drawing down of supernal lights through human service, "which is the purpose of the creation of the human being." From the bottom of Asiyah rises "returning light," in which a radiance is revealed with greater force, reaching as far as the angels' enjoyment of the sacrifice's spirit.[582]

[582] Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, according to the Kehot text on Sefaria (Sefaria), in the passages studied in the preceding chapters of this book: "He and His lights are one; He and His vessels are one"; "The vessels are in the category of limit and finitude... However, the intention is to say that they are Divinity to create yesh me-ayin like Ein Sof"; "Only, the yesh should be a thing separate from Divinity, so that the blessed Emanator may be King over all separate beings through their fulfilling His mitzvot, which He commands them; the end of the deed is first in thought"; "So too the mitzvot are the essence and root of Torah, although the mitzvah is physical and the Torah is wisdom, only this is in the outer dimension and that in the inner dimension"; "Although above, in Arich Anpin, the mitzvot are in the gulgalta... and the root of Torah, which emerges from supernal Chochmah, is in the mocha setimaah of Arich Anpin... but it is like an inverted seal"; "All

If we join these links, we see why the conclusion is not a moral appendix added after a kabbalistic discussion. It reveals why the discussion was necessary. Ein Sof's unity with the vessels, the creation of finite yesh, a command to separate created beings, power revealed in the lower, and human action elevating the lower: all combine in one assertion. Physical action performed according to a command is where the purpose of coming into being is fulfilled. Had the conclusion rested on sacrifice alone, we could say only that mitzvot resemble sacrifices. The Epistle says more: the very structure of creation gives mitzvah performance its superiority.[583]

This broad reading too has a limit. "All the aforementioned" does not turn every kabbalistic detail mentioned earlier into proof concerning a particular mitzvah. Some paragraphs explain how coming into being is effected, and others why; the conclusion rests on both together, on the power, root and purpose. Our decision that the words also encompass the body of the Epistle is a contextual judgment, since the Epistle does not enumerate precisely which paragraphs are included in "all." Someone reading the words as

the aforementioned displays its power and ability in the element of physical earth with immense revelation"; "From this we may understand the drawing down of higher lights into Atzilut–Beriah–Yetzirah–Asiyah (which is the ultimate purpose of the creation of man)"; "For it is the aspect of returning light from below upward, from the bottom of Asiyah, where it is revealed with greater force."

[583]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2405–2409, in " 'All the Above' Refers the Conclusion Back to the Entire Epistle."

directed chiefly to the final sequence, earth, food and sacrifice, is offering a reasonable reading. Yet that reader too will need the link concerning the command to separate beings to move from sacrifice to every mitzvah, and this link is written in the body of the Epistle.[583]

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the great advantage of practical mitzvot, which are the purpose of the souls' descent into this physical world,

"The great advantage" is the heart of the conclusion, and its content is positive: specifically the commanded action in the lower draws down and reveals a higher power. "Which are" refers to the mitzvot. "תכלית" here means purpose, not finitude as in "limit and finitude." The souls' descent is intended for service in this physical world.

"The Great Advantage of Practical Mitzvot": In What Lies Their Greatness?

Three aspects of the superiority of practical mitzvot emerge from the Epistle: root, place and purpose.

The first aspect is the root. Mitzvot are the Emanator's will, and in the body of the Epistle their root is described far above, in "gulgalta," the skull, an analogy for the supernal will. Torah's root, since Torah is wisdom, is described in "mocha setimaah," the

[583] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2405–2409, in " 'All the Above' Refers the Conclusion Back to the Entire Epistle."

concealed brain, an analogy for hidden wisdom. Below, the order appears reversed: mitzvot are in Malchut, and Torah in Ze'ir Anpin, the system of emotional attributes, "like a seal that is reversed."

The second aspect is place. The mitzvah is performed with a physical thing, at the bottom, where the Divine radiance "shows its strength and ability … in an immense revelation."

The third aspect is purpose. Separate beings were created to fulfill "His mitzvot that He commands them"; the commanded action is what separate existence was created for. Greatness in root, place and purpose.[584]

Here it is important to distinguish between an object's root and the command to use it. An object's high root does not make its use a mitzvah. Bread has a root and earth has power, but eating is not a mitzvah in every manner a person eats, and not every contact with earth is Divine service. The Epistle does not say "sanctify matter"; it says that created beings were created "through their fulfilling His mitzvot that He commands them." The command determines which action is desired, with which object, in what manner and at what time. The animal in the preceding chapter was not a sacrifice because it had a root in the chariot, but because we were commanded to offer it according to an order and laws. So too with every mitzvah: the

[584] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2408–2410, in "The Superiority of Matter and Commanded Action."

superiority of the material explains why physical action can carry such significance; the command places it within Divine service.[584]

Tanya, chapter 37, states this through concrete examples: things "that are pure and permitted, with which the practical mitzvah is performed, such as the parchment of tefillin, a mezuzah and a Torah scroll," "an etrog that is not orlah," and "charity money that is not stolen"; "now that he fulfills through them the mitzvah of G-d and His will, their vitality ascends, is nullified and is included in the light of the blessed Ein Sof, which is His blessed will vested within them." Parchment lying in a cupboard and parchment on which tefillin have been written according to halachah are not identical in terms of service, though the material is the same. Human power itself is also included: "The power of the vital animal soul in the bodily limbs of the person performing the mitzvah likewise vests itself in this action, ascends from the kelipah and is included in the holiness of the mitzvah." It ascends from the kelipah, meaning from the state in which the power was covered and distant from holiness. Take giving charity: money is a defined thing into which a person has invested time and strength; when he gives it according to G-d's will, powers from his physical life are included in an act of holiness. One

[584] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2408–2410, in "The Superiority of Matter and Commanded Action."

can see a small sum passing from hand to hand, and one can study the connection being made here between a higher will and an object and power within the lowest world.[585]

A person need not understand every level mentioned in the Epistle at the time of the action for the mitzvah to be a mitzvah. The command determines it, and the action is fulfilled even without contemplation. Yet study adds vitality to service: it reveals that a simple action is not empty of meaning merely because it does not immediately arouse a lofty experience. What is effected through it may be far deeper than the manifest feeling when it is performed. Knowledge of the root should illuminate the action, not exempt one from precision in it.

[585]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 37: the purpose of descent, the refinement of the world, and Torah study in relation to a mitzvah. The passages cited in this chapter, according to the Kehot text on Sefaria (Sefaria): “Rather, its descent into this world to vest itself in a body and vital soul is solely to rectify them”; “For this is the whole of man and the ultimate purpose of his creation and descent into this world: that He, blessed be He, have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms”; “For example, the parchment of tefillin, a mezuzah and a Torah scroll… and money for charity that is not stolen… Now, when one fulfills with them G-d’s commandment and will, their vitality rises, is nullified and included in the blessed Ein Sof light”; “By contrast, when it can be performed by others, one does not interrupt Torah study… and through engaging in it, one draws upon oneself the blessed Ein Sof light with infinitely greater force and radiance”; “This ultimate perfection of the days of Mashiach and the Resurrection of the Dead, which is the revelation of the blessed Ein Sof light in this physical world, depends on our actions and Divine service throughout the entire period of exile. For what causes the reward of the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself.”

The Purpose of the Souls' Descent: Concealment, and Possibility Within It

"Descent" denotes concealment and distance from revelation; "purpose" asks what becomes possible through it. Both assertions stand together. Bodily life conceals, and within it an action of particular superiority can be performed. This understanding does not negate the difficulty, but changes its meaning: man is not merely waiting to leave the world; he is called to serve within it. This does not mean that difficulty itself is the purpose; the purpose is the service and revelation possible here. Tanya, chapter 37, does not minimize the descent. It calls it "a great descent and a state of actual exile," saying that even a completely righteous person does not reach in this world "the levels of his attachment to G-d … before his descent." In the same breath, it states why the soul descended: "Rather, his descent to this world to vest himself in a body and vital soul is solely to rectify them": to rectify the body, animal soul and their portion in the world, meaning to refine them, to bring their powers out of concealment and place them within holiness through observing and fulfilling mitzvot.[586][585]

[586]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2409–2413, in "The Descent of Souls and Revelation Below."

[585]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 37: the purpose of descent, the refinement of the world, and Torah study in relation to a mitzvah. The passages cited in this chapter, according to the Kehot text on Sefaria (Sefaria): "Rather, its descent into this world to vest itself in a body and vital soul is solely to rectify them"; "For this is the whole of man and the ultimate purpose of his creation and descent into this world: that He, blessed be He, have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms";

What becomes possible specifically here? First, action with a physical object according to a command. A soul without a body cannot put on tefillin or give a coin to a poor person. Likkutei Torah, in "צו את בני ישראל" in Pinchas, adds a second aspect: "Specifically this world is the world of action, and in it man is given the choice to choose good; moreover, even if he has already committed a transgression, he can repent and return to Divine service." In the World to Come, by contrast, "man does not have free choice in his hands; rather, as he was drawn in this world, so he remains in the World to Come." The discourse compares the World to Come to a body whose formation is complete, in which one cannot "make a head from a foot," and this world to an embryo that can still change. A third aspect: what is drawn down in this world through Torah and mitzvot comes from "sovev kol almin," the light not measured according to the recipient's level, and is higher than the revelation apprehended in Gan Eden. Choice, repentance and the drawing down of higher light all depend on man's standing in a world where things are still being made.[587]

"For example, the parchment of tefillin, a mezuzah and a Torah scroll… and money for charity that is not stolen… Now, when one fulfills with them G-d's commandment and will, their vitality rises, is nullified and included in the blessed Ein Sof light"; "By contrast, when it can be performed by others, one does not interrupt Torah study… and through engaging in it, one draws upon oneself the blessed Ein Sof light with infinitely greater force and radiance"; "This ultimate perfection of the days of Mashiach and the Resurrection of the Dead, which is the revelation of the blessed Ein Sof light in this physical world, depends on our actions and Divine service throughout the entire period of exile. For what causes the reward of the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself."

[587] Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, the first discourse "צו את בני ישראל," sections 1–2, according to the Kehot digital text (Sefaria). Section 1: "To understand what is stated, 'Today to perform them,

Tanya, chapter 36, states the purpose in the Sages' language: "The Holy One, blessed be He, desired a dwelling for Himself in the lower realms," explaining that "the purpose is this lowest world," where Or Ein Sof will shine "in the place of darkness … with greater dignity, greater force, and the superiority of light from darkness." Darkness is not a reason to flee; it is where the light emerging from it is greater. Chapter 37 concludes: "For this is all of man, and the purpose of his creation and descent to this world: so that He, blessed be He, should have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms." Thus, "the purpose of the souls' descent" in the Epistle and "a dwelling in the lower realms" in Tanya speak of the same thing from two sides: the Epistle from the descending soul's side, Tanya from the higher will's side.[588][585]

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and not tomorrow to perform them': specifically this world is the world of action, in which the human being is given the choice to choose good. Moreover, even if he has already committed a transgression, he can repent and return to the service of G-d. By contrast, in the World to Come a person does not have free choice; rather, as he was drawn in this world, so he remains in the World to Come." There: "The drawing down of the blessed Ein Sof light in this world is through Torah and mitzvot… this drawing down is from sovev kol almin… far, far above the revelation of apprehension in the Garden of Eden." The analogy of the fetus: "By contrast, this world, which is prior to refinement and is the world of action and refinement, is like the fetus before its formation is completed." On the Garden of Eden: "The Garden of Eden is the delight of souls that delight in G-d through their apprehension and understanding of the blessed Ein Sof light drawn to them in revelation and apprehension." Section 2: "This is 'One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come,' for the life of the World to Come is the revelation of memale kol almin, drawn from His blessed attribute of Malchut… whereas repentance and good deeds are from sovev kol almin."

[588]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 36: the ultimate purpose of creation and a dwelling in the lower realms.

[585]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 37: the purpose of descent, the refinement of the world, and Torah study in relation to a mitzvah. The passages cited in this chapter, according to the Kehot text on Sefaria (Sefaria): "Rather, its descent into this world to vest itself in a body and vital soul is solely to rectify them"; "For this is the whole of man and the ultimate purpose of his creation and descent into this world: that He, blessed be He, have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms";

This answer changes how life is measured. It does not mean that the soul lacked superiority before descending; on the contrary, precisely its superiority sharpens the question of why descent is needed. The answer is not that this world is more pleasant or that apprehension within it is higher. It concerns action and purpose. If we measure every state solely by immediate spiritual feeling, we will struggle to understand the value of effort within concealment. The Epistle gives another measure: what the action effects, and with which will it connects. An action may be simple outwardly and unaccompanied by excitement, yet fulfill a role in the purpose of creation.[586]

Hence also the relationship between the soul's ascent and the dwelling in the lower realms. When a person dedicates an object and power to a mitzvah, he elevates what is in the world to its purpose, while the Divine will is fulfilled and revealed below. Elevation and drawing down are not competing purposes. The soul's ascent is part of the result, but the explicit purpose is revelation below; the physical world should therefore not be abandoned as worthless. Kuntres Acharon emphasizes

"For example, the parchment of tefillin, a mezuzah and a Torah scroll… and money for charity that is not stolen… Now, when one fulfills with them G-d's commandment and will, their vitality rises, is nullified and included in the blessed Ein Sof light"; "By contrast, when it can be performed by others, one does not interrupt Torah study… and through engaging in it, one draws upon oneself the blessed Ein Sof light with infinitely greater force and radiance"; "This ultimate perfection of the days of Mashiach and the Resurrection of the Dead, which is the revelation of the blessed Ein Sof light in this physical world, depends on our actions and Divine service throughout the entire period of exile. For what causes the reward of the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself."

[586] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2409–2413, in "The Descent of Souls and Revelation Below."

that “the superiority of practical mitzvot, and likewise their study, is exceedingly great and lofty,” and the same section also says of study: “When a person studies, he draws the light of the blessed Ein Sof into this world.” Drawing down below is thus the concern of action and study alike, and in action it reaches the physical object itself.[589]

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as written: “today, to perform them,” and “One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better

“As written” joins “today, to perform them” and the Mishnah “One hour … is better.” “Today” indicates the time of service; א means one; בעוה”ז means in this world. “Repentance and good deeds” is the Mishnah’s wording, and there is no proof that “repentance” was selected here for a special interpretation. Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, explains both quotations through sovev’s superiority over the revelation of memale (the terms will be explained below). In the first printing, according to a later record, “כמ”ש” (“as written”) is absent; this will be discussed at the chapter’s end.

[589]Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening “To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer.” Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot “over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love”; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is “from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon,” in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah “which have already been rectified through Mah”; the human being who “lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him”; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses “the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, ‘Let the earth sprout,’ etc.,” and thus “the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels”; and elevation and drawing down, “both of which are a supernal need,” “and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above.”

“Today, to Perform Them”: The Time of Action, Not a Ranking of Torah and Action

The verse from which the words are taken says: “You shall observe the commandment, the statutes and the laws that I command you today, to perform them.” The Gemara in Eruvin interprets in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: “ ‘Today, to perform them,’ not tomorrow to perform them; ‘today, to perform them,’ tomorrow to receive their reward.” The interpretation distinguishes the time of action from the time of receiving reward. “Today” is when one can act; “tomorrow” is when one receives. It contains no comparison between Torah study and action, nor any ranking of them. Anyone seeking to derive “action is preferable to study” from this verse alone loads onto it what it does not contain.[590][591][592]

What does the Epistle do with the verse? It brings it as support for this world’s being the time of action, and therefore for the souls’ descent into it being for practical mitzvot. This use is faithful to the interpretation: a time and place for action. Tanya, chapter 37, uses it in the same direction, where its limit is also visible. The chapter says: “Nevertheless, our Sages of blessed memory said: Not exposition but

[590] Deuteronomy 7:11: “You shall keep the commandment, the statutes and the ordinances that I command you today, to perform them” (Sefaria).

[591] Eruvin 22a: “ ‘Today to perform them,’ and not tomorrow to perform them; today to perform them, tomorrow to receive their reward,” in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (Sefaria).

[592] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2418–2421, in “Today to Perform Them.”

action is the essential thing, and it is written 'today, to perform them'; Torah study is interrupted to fulfill a practical mitzvah when it cannot be done by others." The verse is mentioned alongside "Not exposition but action is the essential thing," as support for action being the essential thing and purpose, "a dwelling specifically in the lower realms"; hence the law that Torah study is interrupted for a mitzvah no one else can perform. This is not a rule that action always takes precedence; immediately afterward: "Not so when it can be done by others: Torah study is not interrupted," since through engaging in Torah a person "draws upon himself the light of the blessed Ein Sof with greater force and an infinitely greater radiance." Thus, in Tanya, the Epistle's author himself brings the verse as support for action's superiority while preserving study's superiority.[585]

In "צו את בני ישראל," already cited, the distinction opens from another side. The discourse begins with our verse, "today, to perform them, not tomorrow to

[585]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 37: the purpose of descent, the refinement of the world, and Torah study in relation to a mitzvah. The passages cited in this chapter, according to the Kehot text on Sefaria (Sefaria): "Rather, its descent into this world to vest itself in a body and vital soul is solely to rectify them"; "For this is the whole of man and the ultimate purpose of his creation and descent into this world: that He, blessed be He, have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms"; "For example, the parchment of tefillin, a mezuzah and a Torah scroll… and money for charity that is not stolen… Now, when one fulfills with them G-d's commandment and will, their vitality rises, is nullified and included in the blessed Ein Sof light"; "By contrast, when it can be performed by others, one does not interrupt Torah study… and through engaging in it, one draws upon oneself the blessed Ein Sof light with infinitely greater force and radiance"; "This ultimate perfection of the days of Mashiach and the Resurrection of the Dead, which is the revelation of the blessed Ein Sof light in this physical world, depends on our actions and Divine service throughout the entire period of exile. For what causes the reward of the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself."

perform them," and immediately sets two worlds against each other. The World to Come is described there as a world already refined, where everything is in its place, while this world is "before refinement": the world of action and refinement, where good and evil remain mixed and human service separates them and elevates the good. Therefore change is still possible within it, like an embryo whose formation is not complete. On this reading, "today" is not merely a time designation; it is a state in which things are still being made. This is precisely the state the Epistle calls "the souls' descent into this physical world."[587]

For the learner's life, this has a simple conclusion: "today, to perform them" becomes an invitation to responsibility. The present is not merely a waiting period for a better state; it is the time when man has been given the possibility to act, choose and overcome within a reality still needing refinement. The

[587] Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, the first discourse "צו את בני ישראל," sections 1–2, according to the Kehot digital text (Sefaria). Section 1: "To understand what is stated, 'Today to perform them, and not tomorrow to perform them': specifically this world is the world of action, in which the human being is given the choice to choose good. Moreover, even if he has already committed a transgression, he can repent and return to the service of G-d. By contrast, in the World to Come a person does not have free choice; rather, as he was drawn in this world, so he remains in the World to Come." There: "The drawing down of the blessed Ein Sof light in this world is through Torah and mitzvot… this drawing down is from sovev kol almin… far, far above the revelation of apprehension in the Garden of Eden." The analogy of the fetus: "By contrast, this world, which is prior to refinement and is the world of action and refinement, is like the fetus before its formation is completed." On the Garden of Eden: "The Garden of Eden is the delight of souls that delight in G-d through their apprehension and understanding of the blessed Ein Sof light drawn to them in revelation and apprehension." Section 2: "This is 'One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come,' for the life of the World to Come is the revelation of memale kol almin, drawn from His blessed attribute of Malchut… whereas repentance and good deeds are from sovev kol almin."

interpretation sets action today against reward tomorrow; it does not say that every experience in this world is higher than every experience in the World to Come. It teaches the special value of the possibility to act.[592]

"One Hour … Is Better": The Mishnah's Two Halves and Two Measures

The Mishnah in Avot, in Rabbi Yaakov's name, says two things: "One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come; and one hour of contentment in the World to Come is better than all the life of this world." The Epistle quotes the first half. The second does not contradict it, because the Mishnah measures two different things. In terms of the power of action, attachment and return, an hour in this world has superiority. In terms of felt delight and revelation, the contentment of the World to Come has superiority. If the two sentences measured the same thing, they would be difficult to understand together; because they measure different things, both are true.[593][594]

Tanya, chapter 4, explains the first half, and the explanation reveals what is measured in it. "For the

[592] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2418–2421, in "Today to Perform Them."

[593] Avot 4:17: "He would say: One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come; and one hour of bliss in the World to Come is better than all the life of this world" (Sefaria).

[594] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2420–2423, in "The Two Halves of 'One Hour Is Better.' "

World to Come consists of enjoying the radiance of the Shechinah, which is the delight of apprehension": enjoyment of a radiance, however great. "But the Holy One, blessed be He, in His glory and Himself, no thought grasps Him at all, except when it grasps and vests itself in the Torah and its mitzvot; then it grasps and vests itself in the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself." Torah and mitzvot in this world make possible attachment to the King Himself, although He is clothed in garments, "like embracing the king"; life in the World to Come is enjoyment of a radiance. It is important to note that Tanya locates this superiority in vesting oneself "in the Torah and its mitzvot," both together. In its reading, the Mishnah does not diminish Torah relative to action; it raises the service of this world, study and fulfillment, above the enjoyment of the World to Come.[595]

In "צו את בני ישראל," the Epistle's two quotations, the verse and the Mishnah, appear in the same place, where they are explained through the distinction between "memale kol almin" and "sovev kol almin." "Memale" is the light vested within each world according to its level and measure, like a soul in a body; "sovev" is the light not measured according to the recipient. The discourse says: "This is why one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than

[595]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 4: Torah and mitzvot, and enjoyment of the radiance of the Shechinah.

all the life of the World to Come, for the life of the World to Come is in the aspect of revelation of memale kol almin … unlike repentance and good deeds, which are from the aspect of sovev kol almin." Life in the World to Come is measured revelation; repentance and good deeds draw light beyond measure. This compares the quality of the connection, not only time.[587]

Why does the Mishnah mention repentance specifically? The simple positive explanation is written in the same discourse: this world is the world of choice; "even if he has already committed a transgression, he can repent," whereas in the World to Come, "as he was drawn in this world, so he remains." Repentance is the clearest example of what only the world of action permits: changing direction. Good deeds add; repentance repairs and returns. Both are possible only where things are still being made. The Epistle quotes the Mishnah's wording as it stands, and we have no

[587] Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, the first discourse "צו את בני ישראל," sections 1–2, according to the Kehot digital text (Sefaria). Section 1: "To understand what is stated, 'Today to perform them, and not tomorrow to perform them': specifically this world is the world of action, in which the human being is given the choice to choose good. Moreover, even if he has already committed a transgression, he can repent and return to the service of G-d. By contrast, in the World to Come a person does not have free choice; rather, as he was drawn in this world, so he remains in the World to Come." There: "The drawing down of the blessed Ein Sof light in this world is through Torah and mitzvot… this drawing down is from sovev kol almin… far, far above the revelation of apprehension in the Garden of Eden." The analogy of the fetus: "By contrast, this world, which is prior to refinement and is the world of action and refinement, is like the fetus before its formation is completed." On the Garden of Eden: "The Garden of Eden is the delight of souls that delight in G-d through their apprehension and understanding of the blessed Ein Sof light drawn to them in revelation and apprehension." Section 2: "This is 'One hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all the life of the World to Come,' for the life of the World to Come is the revelation of memale kol almin, drawn from His blessed attribute of Malchut… whereas repentance and good deeds are from sovev kol almin."

source saying that the author chose “repentance” to allude to a particular hidden matter. A discourse of the Rebbe to be mentioned below says that the superiority revealed in the future also concerns repentance, but this is an extension in the discourse, not an explanation of the word in the Epistle.[594]

What follows from this for the learner’s life? The Epistle does not negate the superiority of spiritual delight; the Mishnah’s second half preserves it. But it teaches that action has value in terms of what it effects and the will fulfilled within it, even when it is not the most pleasant action at that moment, and even when it demands effort, endurance of difficulty or giving something up. A person can do what is right through acceptance of the yoke, thereby connecting with the will even before the reason becomes understood and felt; this knowledge can also give vitality to a quiet action unaccompanied by great excitement.[594]

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66–68

than all the life of the World to Come.”

“Than all” sharpens the superiority; עוה”ב means the World to Come. In the context of Tanya, chapter 4, the subject is enjoyment of the radiance of the Shechinah, as against the attachment within Torah and mitzvot. But “World to Come” in every source should not be

[594] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2420–2423, in “The Two Halves of ‘One Hour Is Better.’ ”

[594] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2420–2423, in “The Two Halves of ‘One Hour Is Better.’ ”

identified with Gan Eden or with resurrection; context decides, as we will shortly see.

"Than All the Life of the World to Come": Which Future Is Meant?

"World to Come" and "the future" are not names for one state. The sources before us mention four periods that must not be confused: the present, the world of action; Gan Eden, where souls enjoy the radiance of the Shechinah after bodily life; the days of Mashiach; and the resurrection of the dead. When Tanya, chapter 4, explains the Mishnah, "World to Come" there means enjoyment of the radiance of the Shechinah, "the delight of apprehension"; in "צו את בני ישראל," this delight is described as the concern of Gan Eden: "Gan Eden is the delight of souls taking delight in G-d through their apprehension." When the Gemara in Eruvin says "tomorrow to receive their reward," "tomorrow" is the time of reward in general. When Tanya, chapter 37, says "this ultimate perfection of the days of Mashiach and the resurrection of the dead, the revelation of the light of the blessed Ein Sof in this physical world, depends on our deeds and service throughout the duration of exile," it speaks of perfection to be revealed within this world itself. Three sources, each with a different "future." Yet the periods are connected, since Tanya, chapter 37, immediately continues: "For what causes the reward of the mitzvah

is the mitzvah itself." The action performed now draws down the revelation that will be revealed then.[596][585]

In the discourse "ציון במשפט תפדה" ("Zion Shall Be Redeemed Through Justice"), delivered on Shabbat Parashat Devarim, Shabbat Chazon, 5735, the Rebbe cites as known from earlier Chassidic discourses: "Study is greater now, but in the days of Mashiach action will be greater. Now, study and action resemble the vegetative and inanimate, and in the future action will be greater, because then the superiority of the inanimate will be revealed." In the next section, the discourse explicitly connects this to our Epistle: "Although study is greater now, nevertheless there are several matters, even now, in which action has superiority over study, such as interrupting Torah study for a mitzvah that cannot be performed by others. The content of Iggeret HaKodesh beginning 'איהו וחיוהי' … concerns the superiority of practical mitzvot. The reason that action's superiority is

[596]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2416–2419, in "Four Times, Not One 'Future.'"

[585]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 37: the purpose of descent, the refinement of the world, and Torah study in relation to a mitzvah. The passages cited in this chapter, according to the Kehot text on Sefaria (Sefaria): "Rather, its descent into this world to vest itself in a body and vital soul is solely to rectify them"; "For this is the whole of man and the ultimate purpose of his creation and descent into this world: that He, blessed be He, have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms"; "For example, the parchment of tefillin, a mezuzah and a Torah scroll… and money for charity that is not stolen… Now, when one fulfills with them G-d's commandment and will, their vitality rises, is nullified and included in the blessed Ein Sof light"; "By contrast, when it can be performed by others, one does not interrupt Torah study… and through engaging in it, one draws upon oneself the blessed Ein Sof light with infinitely greater force and radiance"; "This ultimate perfection of the days of Mashiach and the Resurrection of the Dead, which is the revelation of the blessed Ein Sof light in this physical world, depends on our actions and Divine service throughout the entire period of exile. For what causes the reward of the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself."

emphasized even now may be said to be that all future revelations depend on our deeds and service throughout the duration of exile; since action will be greater in the future, action's superiority is therefore emphasized even now." The discourse thus reads the entire Epistle as an explanation of the superiority of practical mitzvot, and explains why it is already emphasized now: because present service brings the revelation in which "action is greater."[597]

We must be precise about what the discourse gives and what it does not. It gives a reason for emphasizing action in the present based on what will be revealed in the future, and attests to a reading of the Epistle as addressing the superiority of practical mitzvot. It does not say that the Epistle's final sentence discusses only the days of Mashiach; the Epistle itself says "the purpose of the souls' descent into this world," which is the present. Nor should "action will be greater" in the future lead to the conclusion that Torah will no longer be studied then: the sources speak of revealing action's superiority, not of Torah ceasing. With the same care: "World to Come" in the Mishnah and Tanya

[597] Discourse beginning "ציון במשפט תפדה," Shabbat Parashat Devarim, Shabbat Chazon, 5735, sections 14–16: study and action now and in the future. Other discourses opening with the same verse were delivered that year; the reference here is to the Shabbat Chazon discourse. Printed in Sefer HaMaamarim Melukkat, vol. IV, pp. קלה–קלז [135–137], from which the quotations in this chapter are taken. Note 18 there, on the Sages' statement "Study is greater": "Kiddushin 40b"; note 27, on "which the Alter Rebbe wrote in the village of Piena in the days before his passing": "Sefer HaMitzvot of the Tzemach Tzedek, 170a"; note 28, on "depend on our actions and Divine service throughout the entire period of exile": "Tanya, beginning of chapter 37." Section 16 goes on to apply the superiority revealed in the future to repentance as well.

4 is not necessarily “the days of Mashiach” in the discourse. In “ונגלה כבוד ה׳” (“And the Glory of G-d Shall Be Revealed”), 5722, an unreviewed transcript, a distinction is also made between reward in Gan Eden and reward at the resurrection, as recorded in the research book. Each source is read according to its subject, and distinguishing the periods prevents transferring a conclusion from one period to another.[596]

What does looking toward the future give today’s learner? When Chassidic discourses speak of action’s superiority in the future, they open a perspective on what may be revealed in the service we perform now. Contemplating future revelation strengthens the recognition that present action carries more than is currently visible within it. Hope for redemption does not make service within the world superfluous; it adds meaning to it, since revelation “depends on our deeds and service.”[596]

Torah and Action: Not One Ladder

The reader may ask: if the Epistle so elevates action, what is the place of the study over which we have labored until now? This question already arose in chapter 10, after “And likewise, mitzvot are the essential core of the Torah and its root.” Here it returns because the entire conclusion rests on action’s

[596]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2416–2419, in “Four Times, Not One ‘Future.’ ”

[596]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2416–2419, in “Four Times, Not One ‘Future.’ ”

superiority; we will revisit some of the sources seen there and add others. The Gemara in Kiddushin recounts: "Rabbi Tarfon and the elders were once reclining in the upper room of the house of Nitza in Lod. This question was posed before them: Is study greater, or action greater? Rabbi Tarfon answered: Action is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered: Study is greater. They all answered: Study is greater, for study leads to action." Already this sentence contains two superiorities: study is greater, and its greatness is explained through what it leads to. The Gemara in its own context does not distinguish between "now" and "the future"; that distinction comes in the Chassidic tradition, and in the Rebbe's discourse we saw, it is cited as something "known," with references to Or HaTorah and an earlier discourse. Alongside this stands the Mishnah in Peah: "And Torah study is equivalent to them all."[598][599][600]

Tanya, chapter 5, says things about apprehending Torah that must not be erased in order to elevate action: "This is an exceedingly great, wondrous and infinitely surpassing superiority of the mitzvah of knowing and apprehending Torah over all practical

[598] Kiddushin 40b: study is greater because it leads to action. "This question was asked before them: Is study greater or action greater? Rabbi Tarfon answered: Action is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered: Study is greater. They all answered: Study is greater, for study leads to action" (Sefaria).
[599] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2413–2417, in "Study Is Greater, Action Is Greater."
[600] Pe'ah 1:1: "Torah study is equivalent to them all" (Sefaria). In Tanya, chapter 5, in the gloss, this statement is explained through the superiority of food over clothing (Sefaria); Tanya, chapter 4, on "One hour is better," attributes grasping the King Himself to vesting "in Torah and its mitzvot" together (Sefaria).

mitzvot," since through apprehension a "wondrous union, unlike any other union," takes place between man's intellect and the wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He. The gloss there says: "The food is the aspect of inward light, and the garments are the aspect of encompassing lights. Our Sages of blessed memory therefore said that Torah study is equivalent to all the mitzvot, because mitzvot are garments alone, while Torah is food and also a garment for the intellectual soul." Torah is food and garment; mitzvot are garment. This is a superiority in the manner of reception within the soul.[601]

And our Epistle? It does not ignore this side; it states it in one sentence: "And likewise, mitzvot are the essential core of the Torah and its root, although the mitzvah is physical and the Torah is wisdom, except that this is in the outer dimension and this in the inner dimension." Mitzvot are essential core and root; Torah is wisdom and inwardness. Two axes in one sentence, not competitors. We have already seen in this chapter that the sources elevating action themselves preserve the dignity of study: Kuntres Acharon places the superiority of practical mitzvot "and likewise their study" above intellectual love and awe, while Tanya 37, which interrupts Torah study for a mitzvah that cannot be done by others, does not interrupt it when it can,

[601]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 5: the unity effected through apprehending Torah.

because study draws “an infinitely greater radiance.”[589][585]

“Greater” therefore becomes understandable only when joined to the question “in what respect?” Several axes can be enumerated. In root: mitzvot are in the higher will, Torah in wisdom. In the manner of reception within the soul: Torah is inward nourishment, mitzvot an encompassing garment. In the quality of attachment: through both, man is “like one embracing the king” through his garments, in Tanya 4’s wording. In practical decision: halachah determines when study is interrupted to act. In purpose: the dwelling in the lower realms is made through action, and study leads to and illuminates it. If

[589]Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4, opening “To understand what is written in Pri Etz Chaim, that in this time the principal refinement is specifically through prayer.” Its subjects include: the superiority of practical mitzvot “over the superiority of the mochin, which are intellectual fear and love”; the refinements in Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, whose root is “from Sag in the inner dimension of Adam Kadmon,” in contrast to nefesh, ruach and neshamah “which have already been rectified through Mah”; the human being who “lives on foods of the inanimate, vegetative and animal orders, and refines them through the Mah within him”; the analogy of sowing and planting, in which the seed arouses “the vegetative power in the earth, which is the word of G-d, ‘Let the earth sprout,’ etc.,” and thus “the parchment and the etrog arouse the very highest levels”; and elevation and drawing down, “both of which are a supernal need,” “and this is the ultimate purpose of hishtalshelut: for supernal light to be revealed below, not for the lower to ascend above.”

[585]Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 37: the purpose of descent, the refinement of the world, and Torah study in relation to a mitzvah. The passages cited in this chapter, according to the Kehot text on Sefaria (Sefaria): “Rather, its descent into this world to vest itself in a body and vital soul is solely to rectify them”; “For this is the whole of man and the ultimate purpose of his creation and descent into this world: that He, blessed be He, have a dwelling specifically in the lower realms”; “For example, the parchment of tefillin, a mezuzah and a Torah scroll… and money for charity that is not stolen… Now, when one fulfills with them G-d’s commandment and will, their vitality rises, is nullified and included in the blessed Ein Sof light”; “By contrast, when it can be performed by others, one does not interrupt Torah study… and through engaging in it, one draws upon oneself the blessed Ein Sof light with infinitely greater force and radiance”; “This ultimate perfection of the days of Mashiach and the Resurrection of the Dead, which is the revelation of the blessed Ein Sof light in this physical world, depends on our actions and Divine service throughout the entire period of exile. For what causes the reward of the mitzvah is the mitzvah itself.”

we turn every axis into one ladder, each source emphasizing another side will seem to contradict the others. Distinguishing them lets us hear what each explains. “Study is greater, for it leads to action” does not set the two as rivals: a person must understand the mitzvah to fulfill it, and within understanding itself there is a special attachment; action is the result to which study must lead.[602][599]

On the practical side: action’s superiority does not exempt one from the need to study. To fulfill a will, one must know the action commanded to us. Torah clarifies the mitzvah’s details, and understanding it also illuminates the meaning of fulfillment. Without instruction, one can act with good intentions yet fail to do what is desired. Someone studying a mitzvah’s reason does not thereby perform the commanded action, and someone fulfilling it is not exempt from study. The distinctions make possible a life containing study and action together, each giving what only it can give.[602]

[602]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2412–2415, in “The Superiority of Action Is Not a Single Scale.”
[599]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2413–2417, in “Study Is Greater, Action Is Greater.”
[602]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2412–2415, in “The Superiority of Action Is Not a Single Scale.”

Inward and Encompassing, Elevation and Drawing Down, Root and Revelation

To avoid confusing the axes, let us separate three pairs commonly mentioned together. The first is inward and encompassing, concerning how light is received within the soul. When a person understands a Torah teaching, its content becomes understood within his intellect: inward reception, nourishment. When he fulfills a mitzvah, he attaches himself to the higher will even where its reason is not apprehended by him: an encompassing garment. This is the language of the gloss in Tanya, chapter 5, and the basis of its reading of "Torah study is equivalent to them all." This distinction says nothing about what is higher in root.[601]

The second pair is elevation and drawing down, precisely where it is easy to err and construct a fixed pattern: "Torah descends, mitzvot ascend." Already in chapter 10, we saw that the Likkutei Torah discourse "כי תצא למלחמה" does not fit such a pattern, and we now return to it. The discourse says: "Therefore Torah is compared to water descending from a high place to a low place, and this is 'their beginning is embedded in their end'; the aspect of mitzvot is 'their end in their beginning.' " Torah, like water, descends from above to the learner: "their beginning is embedded in their end," the beginning is held within the end; the mitzvah

[601] Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 5: the unity effected through apprehending Torah.

is last in action but first in thought: "their end in their beginning," the end is held within the beginning. Hence: "Therefore the Sages of blessed memory sometimes said, 'Study is greater, for it leads to action,' implying that action is preferable, and sometimes said, 'Torah study is equivalent to them all,' for both are true."

Yet in that very section, the opposite picture also appears. Torah arouses "ratzo," the soul's running upward through contemplation of its root, while "shov," return, occurs "through the performance of mitzvot, whose end is in their beginning," through which "the power of the fire above will be drawn and spread below … reaching the animal soul." Torah descends like water and also arouses ascent; mitzvot are a return below and also elevate to the highest heights and draw fire from above. In the same source, both directions are said of both, so no uniform rule should be established that "Torah always goes downward, mitzvot always upward"; each context must be studied in its own right.[603][604]

[603] Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, "כי תצא למלחמה," sections 1 and 4: the root of the animal order, and Torah and mitzvot as ratzo and shov.

[604] Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, the first discourse "כי תצא למלחמה," section 4, according to the Kehot digital text (Sefaria): "For this reason Torah is likened to water descending from a high place to a low place; this is 'their beginning is embedded in their end.' The mitzvot are 'their end in their beginning,' for the end of the deed is first in thought… Therefore the Sages sometimes said, 'Study is greater, for it leads to action,' implying that action is superior, and sometimes said, 'Torah study is equivalent to them all.' Both are true: in the aspect of 'their beginning is embedded in their end,' Torah study is greater; in the aspect of 'their end in their beginning,' action is greater. Both must be present in a person, for what a person draws down through Torah is to bring about ratzo… 'If your heart runs, return to the One': this is through performing the mitzvot, whose end is in their

The third pair is root and revelation, written in the body of the Epistle. Above, mitzvot are in "gulgalta" and Torah in "mocha setimaah"; below, mitzvot are in Malchut and Torah in Ze'ir Anpin, the system of emotional attributes, "like a seal that is reversed." What is high in root appears low in revelation, and vice versa. A statement about root does not decide revelation, nor does a statement about revelation decide root. Calling the mitzvah "physical" speaks of its revelation; calling it "essential core and root" speaks of its source. The three pairs ask different questions, and only by answering each in its place does the superiority of practical mitzvot become clear without diminishing Torah.[602]

What Have We Gained from the Journey?

We can now see the argument connecting the Epistle's parts: Divine unity is not erased by multiplicity; the vessels are not an independent source of the power of creation; the created being is finite and continually exists through the Creator's power; and the lower thing can reveal a connection to a high root not evident in its outward superiority. The conclusion emerges from

beginning, and one is elevated and included in their root far, far above… Through this the power of the fire above in the supernal chariot will be drawn and extend below, reaching the animal soul." Section 1 of the same discourse concerns the root of the animal soul in the element of fire and in the chariot, "the lion's face, the ox's face"; this bears on the Epistle's account of "the animal's spirit" coming from "the ox's face," studied at the beginning of this book. The two sections do not prove the same thing.

[602]See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2412–2415, in "The Superiority of Action Is Not a Single Scale."

this: a mitzvah is performed specifically with a finite thing, in time and place. Finitude is not an obstacle that must be abolished to reach the purpose; it is part of the world in which the Divine will is fulfilled. Ein Sof does not become a measure, and a defined action can be a place of attachment and revelation.[605]

A new contemplation of the world grows from this understanding. Soil is not merely what we tread on, food is not merely an incidental means before service, and a physical object is not merely an obstacle to spirituality. Within each is a power that can be recognized and directed to its purpose. Performing a mitzvah connects these powers to G-d's will, and study gives a person knowledge and vitality in the action he performs.

W20-05
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69–71

(Thus far we have found in his holy handwriting):

ע"כ means "thus far"; מכיה"ק means "from his holy handwriting." This is a note by the transmitters or printers, marking how far the manuscript in their possession extended.

The Last Words Transmitted to Us

The line "Thus far we have found in his holy handwriting" was transmitted by those holding the manuscript, the copyists or printers. It attests to how

[605] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2426–2430, in "The Complete Argument and Its Limits."

far the material they found extended and belongs to the history of the Epistle's transmission. It contains no date or decision about whether the author intended to end here or a continuation of his words failed to reach us. The conclusion preceding it is a complete sentence supported by a verse and a Mishnah.[606]

Later sources add testimonies to this line, and it is worth separating them into three layers. The first is a note transmitted with the text and printed in Kitzurim VeHearot LeTanya, also present in a manuscript: according to it, the Epistle was written in the Alter Rebbe's handwriting "a week before his illness," shortly before his passing on the night following the holy Shabbat of Parashat Shemot, 5573. The second layer is the words of his grandson, the Tzemach Tzedek, in the explanation of "ושבתה," as printed in Derech Mitzvotecha. There, within a discussion of the vessels as finite yet Divinity for creating something from nothing, the subject with which we opened the book, he writes: "However, in Iggeret HaKodesh … in the discourse 'איהו וחיוהי,' etc., it appears explicitly that the vessels are in the aspect of actual finitude, yet they are Divinity for creating something from nothing … and one should rely more on the aforementioned discourse, for it is from the actual holy handwriting of my master and teacher, whose soul is in Eden, who wrote it in the

[606] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2425–2427, in "Thus Far We Have Found: The Limit of Transmission."

days before his passing in the village of Piena." Three points emerge. The Tzemach Tzedek relies on the Epistle because it is from the actual handwriting of his teacher and grandfather; he reports that it was written in the days before his passing, in Piena; and he cites it concerning the vessels, with which the Epistle opens. Thus, the testimony about its composition concerns the entire Epistle, not only its ending.[607]

The third layer is the Rebbe's quotation and reference. In "ציון במשפט תפדה," seen above, the Epistle is described as one "which the revered and holy Alter Rebbe wrote in the village of Piena in the days before his passing," and a note refers the reader to the Tzemach Tzedek's Sefer HaMitzvot, namely Derech Mitzvotecha, 170a. In his notes to Tanya, as printed in Likkut Peirushim, he writes: "Note the explanation of 'ושבתה,' 5562, end of chapter 2 (printed at the end of

[607] Derech Mitzvotecha (Kehot, 5766 edition), Discourses of the Tzemach Tzedek, explanation of "ושבתה," 170a, at the end of the explanation's first chapter, according to the facsimile: "However, in Iggeret HaKodesh… in the discourse 'Ihu vechayohi,' etc., it appears explicitly that the vessels are actually finite, and nevertheless they are Divinity, to create yesh me-ayin; see there at length. One should rely more on the above discourse, for it is from my master's own holy handwriting, of blessed memory, which he wrote in the days before his passing in the village of Piena. He also said so in the explanation of the Zohar passage in Parashat Pinchas, folio 249, on 'As a hart longs,' etc." The note about "a week before his illness" and his passing "on the night following Shabbat Parashat Shemot 5573" is from Kitzurim VeHe'arot LeTanya, p. מ [40], as cited in Likkut Peirushim LeTanya (References, Collected Commentaries, Textual Variants), on Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. תפ [480], where it is noted that this is also the reading in a manuscript. The Rebbe's quotation and the reference "end of chapter 2": ibid., p. תפ [480], from his notes on Tanya: "Note the explanation of 'ושבתה,' 5562, end of chapter 2 (printed at the end of Derech Mitzvotecha, 170a), as follows: 'It (this Iggeret HaKodesh) is from my master's own holy handwriting, of blessed memory, which he wrote in the days before his passing in the village of Piena' "; likewise in the discourse "ציון במשפט תפדה," 5735, section 15 and note 27 (Sefer HaMaamarim Melukkat, vol. IV, p. קלו [136]). In the aforementioned printed edition of Derech Mitzvotecha the passage stands at the end of the explanation's first chapter; the discrepancy with "end of chapter 2" was not resolved.

Derech Mitzvotecha, 170a), which states: It (this Iggeret HaKodesh) is from the actual holy handwriting of my master and teacher, whose soul is in Eden, who wrote it in the days before his passing in the village of Piena." The reference says "end of chapter 2." In our printing of Derech Mitzvotecha, the passage stands at the end of the explanation's first chapter. The discrepancy is unresolved. It may result from a different division into chapters in manuscripts and editions, but this has not been determined. All three layers postdate the Epistle itself, and "Thus far we have found" says none of these things.[607]

One further detail concerns our text. In the list of textual variants in Likkut Peirushim, the word כמ"ש is annotated: "In the first printing and in Avodat HaLevi, this word is absent." In the text on which this book is based, כמ"ש appears; knowledge of its absence in the

[607] Derech Mitzvotecha (Kehot, 5766 edition), Discourses of the Tzemach Tzedek, explanation of "ושבתה," 170a, at the end of the explanation's first chapter, according to the facsimile: "However, in Iggeret HaKodesh… in the discourse 'Ihu vechayohi,' etc., it appears explicitly that the vessels are actually finite, and nevertheless they are Divinity, to create yesh me-ayin; see there at length. One should rely more on the above discourse, for it is from my master's own holy handwriting, of blessed memory, which he wrote in the days before his passing in the village of Piena. He also said so in the explanation of the Zohar passage in Parashat Pinchas, folio 249, on 'As a hart longs,' etc." The note about "a week before his illness" and his passing "on the night following Shabbat Parashat Shemot 5573" is from Kitzurim VeHe'arot LeTanya, p. מ [40], as cited in Likkut Peirushim LeTanya (References, Collected Commentaries, Textual Variants), on Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. תפ [480], where it is noted that this is also the reading in a manuscript. The Rebbe's quotation and the reference "end of chapter 2": ibid., p. תפ [480], from his notes on Tanya: "Note the explanation of 'ושבתה,' 5562, end of chapter 2 (printed at the end of Derech Mitzvotecha, 170a), as follows: 'It (this Iggeret HaKodesh) is from my master's own holy handwriting, of blessed memory, which he wrote in the days before his passing in the village of Piena' "; likewise in the discourse "ציון במשפט תפדה," 5735, section 15 and note 27 (Sefer HaMaamarim Melukkat, vol. IV, p. קלו [136]). In the aforementioned printed edition of Derech Mitzvotecha the passage stands at the end of the explanation's first chapter; the discrepancy with "end of chapter 2" was not resolved.

first printing comes from this record. For understanding, the difference is small: with or without the word, the verse and Mishnah are brought as support for the conclusion.[608]

What should we do with the boundary of transmission? It reminds us of the preciousness of the words we possess. We do not know what was not transmitted, but can delve into what was transmitted and give it a place in our study. What was transmitted is a complete concluding sentence, needing no continuation to be understood.[606]

Summary: What Has Been Clarified and What Remains Open

Several things were clarified in this chapter. “And after these words and this truth” opens a conclusion resting on “all the aforementioned,” and, according to our contextual judgment, on the entire Epistle rather than only the sacrifice paragraph. “The great advantage of practical mitzvot” is measured in three respects: their root in the higher will, their place in the lower, and their purpose, for which separate beings were created; the command, not the superiority of matter alone,

[608] Textual variants in Likkut Peirushim LeTanya, on Iggeret HaKodesh, section 20, p. תפ [480]: “ ‘כמ”ש’ [as stated]: this word is absent from the first edition and Avodat HaLevi.” The text underlying this book, which includes כמ”ש, has been retained; the information about the first edition and Avodat HaLevi comes solely from this record. There also are references on “Today to perform them”: Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 50b; Korach 55a; Torah Or 63d.

[606] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2425–2427, in “Thus Far We Have Found: The Limit of Transmission.”

places the action within Divine service. The souls' descent is a real descent, whose purpose is the service possible only here: action with a physical object, choice and repentance, and drawing down light not measured according to the recipient. "Today, to perform them" distinguishes the time of action from the time of reward rather than ranking Torah and action; "One hour … is better" measures the power of action and attachment, while the Mishnah's second half preserves the superiority of contentment in the World to Come. "World to Come" in the Mishnah, the days of Mashiach and the resurrection are not one name. Torah and action are not one ladder: the sources speak from different perspectives, root, manner of reception within the soul, quality of attachment, practical decision and purpose. The line "Thus far we have found in his holy handwriting" is the transmitters' testimony to the boundary of the material, not a continuation of the author's words.

Five questions remain open. Precisely how far "all the aforementioned" extends: the Epistle does not enumerate. Whether the author intended something special by "repentance" in the Mishnah: we have no decisive source. The verbal echoes discussed in the preceding chapter, such as "the taste of grain" and "good taste and knowledge," or "ox meat" and "the face of the ox," remain a proposed hearing, not proof. The

details of the Epistle's composition, the days before the passing, Piena, the first printed text, are later testimonies, each to be checked in its source; the discrepancy between the reference ספ"ב, "end of chapter 2," and the passage's location in the printed Derech Mitzvotecha is unresolved. The precise relationship between action's superiority to be revealed in the future and the superiority the Epistle discusses now remains a matter for inquiry.

Studying the Chapter with AI Tools

In the final chapter, the question already raised in chapter 10 returns: which is greater, Torah or action? Alongside it stand a question about the "World to Come," easily identified too hastily with a single period, and two questions about the boundary of the material itself: the Epistle's final line and the reference ספ"ב.

Exercise 1: Which "World to Come"?

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain "than all the life of the World to Come" in the Mishnah.

What to check. Does it distinguish Gan Eden (Tanya, chapter 4; Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, "the delight of souls") from the days of Mashiach and the resurrection (Tanya, chapter 37)? Does it also bring the Mishnah's second half, "and one hour of contentment in the World to Come is better"?

The limit of the conclusion. Do not transfer a conclusion from one period to another. Even a discourse speaking of "action is greater" in the future does not say that the Epistle's sentence addresses only the future.

Exercise 2: "ע"כ מצאנו מכיה"ק"

What to ask. Ask the tool what the final line teaches: was the Epistle cut short? Did the author intend to end here?

What to check. Does the tool distinguish the transmitters' note from the author's words, and the line itself from later testimonies, "a week before his illness," the Tzemach Tzedek's words in Derech Mitzvotecha, the Rebbe's quotation?

The limit of the conclusion. The line attests to the boundary of the material found, and no more. From it alone, neither truncation, design nor a date can be inferred.

Exercise 3: A Discrepancy Left Open

What to ask. Ask the tool to reconcile the reference ספ"ב, "end of chapter 2," in the Rebbe's notes with the passage's location in the printing of Derech Mitzvotecha, at the end of the explanation's first chapter.

What to check. If the tool proposes a reconciliation, such as a different chapter division in editions, ask for a specific edition in which the passage indeed stands at the end of chapter 2, and check it.

The limit of the conclusion. Until such a source is found, the proposal remains a hypothesis, and the discrepancy remains recorded.

Exercise 4: "Greater" in What Respect?

What to ask. Ask the tool to decide: which is greater, Torah study or performing mitzvot?

What to check. Does the tool distinguish the axes, root, manner of reception within the soul (Tanya, chapter 5), quality of attachment (Tanya, chapter 4), practical decision (Tanya, chapter 37) and purpose, or build one ladder? Does it bring "for both are true" from Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze?

The limit of the conclusion. A question that does not say "in what respect" invites a one-sided answer. Reformulating the question is part of the exercise.

After the Twenty Chapters: Returning to the First Question

At the beginning of the journey, we sought to understand how unity and finite vessels can be spoken of together: "He and His lights are one; He and His vessels are one." At the journey's end, we stand before a person performing a mitzvah with a physical thing. The distance between the two images seems great, but it is the Epistle's own argument: the question about the relationship between Creator and creation also becomes a question about the meaning of human service within creation. In the summary of chapter 1, we said that the distinction learned there, that finitude does not necessarily mean separation, would accompany the Epistle all the way to the physical act of a mitzvah. We have now reached that action. This does not mean that the physical action is a vessel of Atzilut; but a particular time and object do not distance the action from Divinity simply by being defined, and precisely in such action, when performed according to a command, the Epistle found the purpose.

The Entire Argument

We can now state the argument in a few sentences, following the book's four parts. In Part One, the difficulty opened: the vessels of Atzilut are "in the aspect of limit and finitude," yet are one with Ein Sof.

The beginning of the answer was that the vessels "are Divinity, to create something from nothing like Ein Sof": Ein Sof's power creates a finite yesh through them without thereby becoming finite. On this basis, the language for speaking of created yesh, souls and palaces was built.

In Part Two, it was explained that the power to create something from nothing belongs to the Creator alone. The discussion passed through Malchut and the letters, gestation and birth, and reached the purpose: the created yesh becomes "a separate thing," "so that the blessed Emanator should be King over all separate beings, through their fulfilling His mitzvot that He commands them." There we also learned that mitzvot are "the essential core of the Torah and its root," although in revelation the order reverses, "like a seal that is reversed."

In Part Three, we saw how vitality is drawn through the worlds, and how specifically earth, the lowest of the elements, reveals the power "in an immense revelation," because at the bottom of Asiyah sovev shines, and the kav terminating there shines from below upward in the mode of returning light. Human service, sowing and planting, arouses growth superior to what grows of itself.

In Part Four, the same principle was examined in food, which adds wisdom and knowledge to man too, and in

sacrifice, from which the angels in the chariot derive enjoyment. From there came the conclusion: the practical mitzvah, performed in this physical world according to a command, is the purpose of the soul's descent. "Today, to perform them" gives it its time, and "One hour … is better" gives it its measure.

The finite world does not compete with its source; it is where His will can be fulfilled.[605]

Presenting the Epistle as one argument directed from beginning to end is our understanding of its structure, as we already said in chapter 1, not a sentence the author wrote. Nor does it establish that the author intended to conclude where his writing has reached us: as we saw in chapter 20, "Thus far we have found in his holy handwriting" attests to the boundary of the transmitted material, and no more.

What Remains Open

Not every difficulty was resolved along the way. Some comparisons require further clarification, some references need identification, and in some places proposed readings must not be presented as the author's own words. In the final part alone, we encountered several: the relationship between the Epistle's map of elements and that in Etz Chaim; "Chochmah and Daat" without Binah; precisely what "etc." abbreviates; who wrote the references in

[605] See the Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2426–2430, in "The Complete Argument and Its Limits."

Likkutei Torah to the Epistle; and how far "all the aforementioned" extends. Each chapter's open questions can be found in its closing summary. Such questions do not undermine the argument; they mark the boundary of knowledge within it. There is also an achievement in learning here: we have learned to distinguish. The power of bringing into being, the vitality spreading through the worlds, and the added revelation in human service are connected, yet what has been clarified about one does not automatically prove something about another.

What We Learned About How to Study

The book has two aims, and the summary is incomplete without the second: what we learned about how to study. Across twenty chapters, several habits recurred, worth formulating explicitly because they apply to every inquiry, with or without new tools.

Distinguish layers. The Epistle's wording; the sources it quotes, such as the verse and Mishnah at its end; the Chassidic explanations illuminating it; our commentary, joining everything into continuous study; and the transmitters' note, "Thus far we have found in his holy handwriting." Each layer is read as it is, and what is said in one does not automatically transfer to another.

Be precise about what was and was not found. "Not found in the material examined" is a different conclusion from "there is no source." The first leaves the question open for further inquiry; the second closes it too soon.

Count witnesses correctly. A parallel version of the same discourse elsewhere is not a second witness; a digital text is not a facsimile of a printed edition; and a later edition teaches about the tradition of copying and printing, not the author's own reading.

Compare without merging. A shared structure between two conceptual systems, Tohu and Sag on one side, sovev, kav and returning light on the other, is not identity of concepts; a verbal echo, such as "the taste of grain" and "good taste and knowledge," is an observation, not evidence.

State each analogy's limit immediately. The teacher and student in chapter 2, dough and molds in chapter 13, the ladder in chapter 15, the lamp illuminating many and the loving person setting a boundary in chapter 19 helped understanding, and each was immediately accompanied by what it does not teach.

Leave a proposal a proposal. "It may be said" remains a proposal, and a solution for which no source was found remains a possible solution, however appealing.

Many of these habits were not set in advance. The introduction related how the book grew out of seven

principal investigations, each with several rounds of questions, sources, criticism and corrections; the examples given there showed how such rules became sharper during the investigation itself, when a seemingly persuasive proposal was checked against the source's wording and found to need correction. The next part, "Studying Further," expands on this: it shares methods of research and study, and the possibility of using new tools, including artificial intelligence, without surrendering the learner's responsibility.

There is no need to wait for it: already now, one can choose a sentence of the Epistle that remains difficult, formulate the difficulty precisely and check its sources.

From the Book to the Mitzvah

At the book's opening, we said that the Epistle is short: 1,640 Hebrew-source words. That number has not grown along the way: we followed it passage by passage, each with a small, defined word range, to its end. But what opened within these words kept expanding. "Vessels" is no longer a name for objects; "neshamah" is not always a human soul; "end" is not merely where less remains; and "action" is not merely an external activity after thought is finished. This is the purpose of the book's expansion: each word receives a place within a question and an answer, and the details

join into an argument one can return to. As understanding grows, new questions also emerge. The commentary does not seek to end inquiry, but to give the reader a faithful way to continue it.

There is no need to choose between depth and action. Depth of understanding can illuminate action, and action brings understanding to its purpose. A person can finish the book and return to the same mitzvah fulfilled yesterday, yet fulfill it with a new awareness of its importance: the bread giving strength, the soil producing growth and the object used for a mitzvah are not merely a background to spiritual service occurring elsewhere. Knowledge of the power given within them leads to responsibility, to directing it to its purpose, and adds knowledge and vitality to the action. This is the fruit of study, not measured by the number of pages read.

We can now return to the first words, “He and His lights are one; He and His vessels are one.” They are no longer a distant opening unrelated to the learner’s day: from them began the path reaching the mitzvah performed with the hands. Whoever, following the commentary, opens one source, attends closely to one word or adds vitality to one mitzvah has already added growth from the seed sown here. May this study contribute to spreading the wellsprings and preparing the world for the true and complete redemption.

Studying Further: Research Tools and Artificial Intelligence

This part concerns the way of learning and the tools that assist it. The introduction mentioned the method briefly; here it receives a broad place of its own, in three stages. First we will ask what Torah sources, especially the Rebbe's talks and letters, say about new tools and their purpose. Then we will relate how the tools served this commentary project and what we learned from using them. In the third stage, we will turn to the learner: a working method one can follow today, one continuous example from the research, and prompts that can be copied; followed by ways to check a source, distinguish digital text from a printed facsimile, distinguish a parallel from evidence and leave a question open as long as it remains open; and finally general exercises applicable to any chapter. We will close the part with a vision of broad Torah knowledge reaching even the youngest learners.

This part can be studied continuously or revisited whenever a question from the commentary calls for further investigation. Anyone wishing to begin practical work immediately can open "Studying with a Readily Available Partner: Where to Begin," then return to the first sections, which explain why it is fitting to work this way. Eight case studies follow this

part, testing the same approach in practice, and at the book's end are a glossary and source index.

Begin Today, with One Passage

Choose a short passage from the Epistle that you have already studied in this book and copy it into the conversation tool. Ask: "Explain the passage in plain language, and indicate what it says explicitly and what you are adding as explanation. Do not add new sources." Read the answer alongside the passage, marking one sentence that clarified something for you and one that still needs investigation. Try explaining the passage again in your own words. If a difficulty remains, bring it to your study partner or rabbi in a focused formulation. This is a small beginning of the method that will be explained at length here.

From Gold to Intellect, and from Intellect to Learning Tools

We encountered the example of gold in the introduction, in the talk of 17 Kislev 5741. Here we will examine its source. In Shemot Rabbah, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says: "The world was not worthy of using gold. Why was it created? For the Mishkan and the Beit HaMikdash." He derives this from "And the gold of that land is good," connecting "good" with "this good

mountain and the Lebanon," the Beit HaMikdash.[609] From this perspective, the question does not end with a thing's existing in the world and being available for use: we must ask why it was created and through what action its purpose is revealed.

In the talk of Shabbat Parashat Mishpatim, 24 Shevat 5734, the Rebbe applies the idea to the power of intellect too. Intellect is among the most precious things given to man, and like gold intended for the Sanctuary, it was **"given solely for understanding and apprehension in Torah."** Hence a demand to realize the full capacity for understanding, resting on the foundation of receiving Torah from Sinai: the aspiration to understand as much as possible is joined to recognition of the Torah's Divine source.[610]

From these words, we can proceed to the tools developed in our time. Human intellect builds devices expanding its ability to search, compare, process information and propose explanations. If intellect itself is intended for understanding Torah, it is natural to ask the question of purpose about what it builds as well: how can these powers assist understanding and apprehension in Torah? On this basis we say, as our

[609] Shemot Rabbah 35:1: "Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: The world was not worthy to use gold. Why, then, was it created? For the Tabernacle and for the Temple, as it is said, 'The gold of that land is good,' as in 'This good mountain and the Lebanon.'" Text on Sefaria. A parallel appears in Bereishit Rabbah 16:2, where only "for the Temple" is stated. This source is also cited in the Mishpatim 5734 talk discussed below.

[610] Talk of Shabbat Parashat Mishpatim, 24 Shevat 5734, section 14, Torat Menachem, in the unreviewed text. The wording there: "It was given only for understanding and apprehension in Torah."

application to our times, not a quotation from the Rebbe, that artificial intelligence too should serve Torah and Divine service. This does not negate other uses or other people's work; it establishes a purpose for our study. Investing in a structured commentary is a practical way to dedicate the new capability to this purpose.

The gold analogy adds an understanding here: for the material to serve the Sanctuary, it must be given form and worked. A broad technological capability likewise needs direction and work: putting worthy questions to it, using it to locate sources, examining its proposals and arranging conclusions to benefit the learner. This is the application we seek to realize in the book: dedicating research tools to the work of clarification, and the results of clarification to understanding Torah.

Joined to the analogy of the dwarf on the giant's shoulders, seen in the introduction, the working method becomes clear. The dwarf sees far through the height he has received, and whoever has been placed on the shoulders is required to use what he has been given. So too with us: the great Torah scholars have placed a treasury before us; new tools help us reach further parts of it; and we must labor so that additional access becomes understanding. Responsibility grows with possibility. Every gate opened invites us to add to our learning, make our explanations more precise and

give even a beginner a way into matters that previously seemed closed.

The Computer: Saving Calculation, Deepening Inquiry

In the talk of Shabbat Parashat Shelach, 28 Sivan 5735, the Rebbe explicitly discusses the computer. He describes a device greatly shortening calculations and emphasizes the condition: a functioning device supplied with correct data. From this he moves to an analogy in Divine service: a person need not postpone fulfilling mitzvot until he has reconstructed for himself all the clarification over which the Sages of the generations labored. He can begin acting and study the reason. Within the analogy it says: **"It is a pity to waste time on matters over which sages greater than he have already labored."** Talents should be directed toward further, higher apprehensions.[611]

For our purposes, the analogy opens a practical question about the allocation of effort. Searching for a source, for example, involves repeated operations a tool can help shorten. Once the source is found, another kind of work begins: reading it, understanding to whom it refers and examining how it illuminates the Epistle. Time saved can become more inquiry, more comparison and more explanation. This is how we seek

[611]Torat Menachem, vol. LXXX, pp. 350–351, sections 14–15, an unreviewed transcript; the printed publication on the Lahak website.

to work in this book: dedicating our powers to questions that information alone does not yet resolve. We will return to the analogy's condition, a functioning device and correct data, when we reach systems that formulate answers.

From Radio to New Devices: What Do We Examine?

This approach to working tools joins the Rebbe's words about broadcasting Torah. In a letter to Rabbi Pinchas Mordechai Teitz, dated Rosh Chodesh Shevat 5714, he blesses the "Daf HaShavua" radio lesson and its expansion "both in quantity and in quality." Radio is described there as "a hidden and wondrous power in nature that finds its rectification only by becoming a means, a vessel and a sanctuary for Him, blessed be He": a hidden and wondrous natural power whose rectification comes only when it becomes a means, vessel and sanctuary for G-d. Here too, as with gold, the language of the Sanctuary appears. In the same letter, the Rebbe asks "to emphasize and strengthen matters of fear of Heaven and the actual fulfillment of practical mitzvot."[612]

This also concerns Tanya directly, the book of which Iggeret HaKodesh is one part. On 11 Nisan 5719, the

[612] Igrot Kodesh, vol. VIII, pp. קלו–קלז [136–137], letter 2,377. Its wording: "A hidden and wondrous power in nature that finds its rectification only through becoming a means, a vessel and a sanctuary for Him, blessed be He"; "To emphasize and strengthen fear of Heaven and the actual fulfillment of practical mitzvot."

Rebbe wrote to R. Yonah Eidelkop: **"It is self-evident that broadcasting Tanya on radio is proper and good."** In a letter to Binyamin Tzvielli, dated 16 Kislev 5720, he asks: "Is there a greater dissemination than through radio waves that break through all boundaries and barriers?"[613]

At the farbrengen of 10 Shevat 5736, the Rebbe responded to opposition to radio on the grounds of its novelty. He pointed to the actual increase in Torah and mitzvah observance resulting from studying Chassidut by broadcast. At the same time, he clarified that where there is a prohibition, a positive result does not abolish it: a mitzvah achieved through a transgression does not become permitted because of its results.[614] What, then, do we examine? A particular use and its benefit in Divine service, within halachic boundaries.

In this commentary project, we seek to extend this direction of action to preparing learning material as well. A text can be disseminated far and wide, and effort can also be invested in an explanation bringing it closer to the reader's understanding. Both efforts are needed: opening access to the book and opening a path within it. For someone who already has the book

[613]The letter to Rabbi Yonah Eidelkopf, 11 Nisan 5719, is cited in "Dissemination over the Airwaves," Hiskashrut 660. The letter to Binyamin Tzivieli: Igrot Kodesh, vol. XIX, letter 7,121, 16 Kislev 5720 (p. צה [95], according to Hiskashrut); Hiskashrut cites the letter in abridgment.

[614]Sichot Kodesh 5736, vol. I; the remarks are cited in the aforementioned article "Dissemination over the Airwaves," together with the qualification that where a prohibition applies, one must not take the results into account, for this is a mitzvah accomplished through a transgression.

before him but still finds its language remote, clarifying one concept opens a gate.

Eikev 5748: Novelty Itself Is No Reason to Abstain

In the talk of Shabbat Parashat Eikev, 23 Menachem Av 5748, the Rebbe directly addresses the emergence of new devices and bodies of knowledge in recent generations. He connects them with preparing the world for redemption and rejects the claim that their mere absence in earlier generations justifies abstaining from them. His criterion is: **"Do these things add to Torah and mitzvot?"** The possibility of misusing a tool does not preclude dedicating it to good; the Rebbe gives the example of gold, with which we began, used for the calf yet still required for the Mishkan, and adds that care must be taken to prevent harm arising from the use. The practical instruction is to dedicate the possibilities revealed to spreading Torah and Judaism.[615]

A clear criterion emerges from this talk, and we propose applying it to the work of commentary: does the tool make it possible to reach a source difficult to locate? Does it help reveal that a particular explanation confuses two levels? Can it help prepare a clearer explanation? When its use genuinely yields such an

[615] Divrei Mashiach 5748, talk of Shabbat Parashat Ekev; the printed passage on the HaGeulah website.

addition, there is a real reason to invest in and develop it. What decides is not the tool's novelty, but the fruit of learning it produces.

The Inner Dimension of Torah and Worldly Wisdom

In Likkutei Sichot, volume 15, in the second talk for Noach, the Rebbe explains the connection between the revelation of the inner dimension of Torah and the development of worldly wisdom, on the basis of the Zohar's words about opening "תרעי דחכמתא לעילא ומבועי דחכמתא לתתא," "the gates of wisdom above and the wellsprings of wisdom below." Worldly wisdom fulfills its purpose when it serves G-d and His Torah. The talk's opening also mentions the printing of Torah Or and Likkutei Torah, and the study of the inner dimension of Torah through understanding and explanation.[616]

We see a profound correspondence here to the work on Iggeret HaKodesh 20. Opening the treasury of books and expanding explanation join together: the source must be made accessible, and effort devoted to understanding it. The chief achievement we seek is that a learner can explain to himself why a particular word is written, how it connects to the preceding one

[616] Likkutei Sichot, vol. XV, p. 42 and following, sections 1–2; printed Hebrew translation. The body of the talk appears there in translation into Hebrew, with the notes in their original language. The Zohar passage: Zohar I, 117a: "In the six-hundredth year of the sixth [millennium], the gates of wisdom above and the wellsprings of wisdom below will open."

and what becomes clear from the sources surrounding it. Progress in research tools thus receives a defined goal within Torah study.

Artificial Intelligence in the Work of Commentary

From these sources, we learn an approach combining responsibility with a demand for action: powers given to man can and should serve his Torah work. **The connection to artificial intelligence is an application we propose today of the principles in the talks.** The quoted talks contain no direct discussion of these systems, nor an instruction that everyone must use them. They provide a strong basis for examining useful, directed use and for a willingness to devote effort to it when it broadens learning and dissemination.

In this project, using new tools became an essential part of the working method. Hundreds of records, questions and interpretations were set up for comparison; initial proposals were reexamined; matters scattered across several works were gathered around a single expression in the Epistle. It became possible to propose several ways to understand a sentence, ask for the difficulty in each to be examined, and return to the source with a more precise question.

This multiplicity of operations also explains why the labor behind a simple paragraph may be so great.

Working with a system that proposes formulations and interpretations requires a further distinction. A clear-sounding answer may contain a mistaken attribution or an unproved connection between sources. The assumption in the calculating-computer analogy, that correct data and a functioning device give the correct result, therefore cannot be transferred to it. In Torah commentary, one must open the source, read the context and examine the conclusion. This checking is part of the method and editorial responsibility; the following sections will show how each learner can do it independently.

This also clarifies the practical necessity we see in the new tools: at the scale of research this project seeks, they help sustain repeated investigation, gather parallels and edit large amounts of material in a manner very difficult for one person to maintain at the same scale. This opportunity obligates us to try to use it well. As assistance grows, more can be demanded of the commentary: more precision, more opening of books, more clarification of difficult questions and more investment in the reader's understanding.

There is no greater achievement than the moment when wide-ranging effort becomes something simply grasped by the learner. A sealed term becomes

understandable; an apparently disconnected sentence finds its place; a question troubling the reader receives an explanation that can be followed. This is the measure by which we seek to assess the use of these tools in the present book. The result must be found in the learning itself, in each and every word.

What Does the Scale of This Work Teach?

In the introduction, we saw the sequence: seven principal investigations, each in several rounds; working material of approximately 3,200 pages;[617] three research volumes; and twenty chapters of commentary. The material is arranged in the research volumes, and the commentary before you presents its fruits in language intended for a beginner. Here the question is different: what does this scale teach about working with the tools?

The time needed to generate an answer is not the time needed to prepare a book. As I related in the preface, the research advanced quickly, while preparing the book required reading, waiting and repeated checks. Rapid formulation enabled further inquiry and

[617] The figure of approximately 3,200 is given here according to the research initiator's description. The Research Book, vol. I, pp. 2–3, describes the scale as follows: "The book is based on a database of 670 files originating in rounds of questions, answers, collection, criticism and source corrections. Its earlier documentary production extended over 3,200 pages in eight volumes. This total includes repetitions, working instructions and facsimiles." The figure concerns the documentary material.

correction; responsibility for presenting the material to the reader remained mine.[1]

In the research, ChatGPT coordinated the work, formulated questions for rounds and preserved decisions. Grok proposed lines of explanation and connections to examine; Claude assisted with classification, comparison and criticism. Grok Bot focused on locating sources and opening them as printed facsimiles or digital text. I passed the answers between tools, requested further checks and decided among proposals. In editing the book too, the roles of writing, expansion and criticism were divided, while decisions remained in my hands. Every tool contributed, and errors were found and corrected in every one.[618]

I also tried Gemini, but in this work it did not suit my needs and did not become a central tool. I used tools

[1] The time estimates and description of the working environment are the research initiator's personal testimony, supplied for this book: approximately six hours for the seven principal investigations and approximately sixty hours to prepare the book from the collected material. In the early stages he reported using Grok 4.6, Claude Opus 5 and a little Opus 5.5 and Fable, and Astra in the ChatGPT environment. For the concluding stages he added: Astra at Medium, High, Extra High and the maximum level; Sol 6.1; Grok Heavy, Grok 4.7 and Grok Bot; and, in Claude, Sonata, with which, he reports, the last final check was conducted. The tool names are given as reported. Version details and response times were only partially preserved in the research volumes (Research Book, vol. I, pp. 97–99, 105–107; vol. III, pp. 2866–2867).

[618] Research Book, vol. I, pp. 69–71: "ChatGPT coordinated the research and documentation, while Grok and Claude submitted answers and critiques relayed by the head of the study house. This describes working tools and their roles, not three holders of Torah authority"; vol. III, pp. 2863–2864 ("A role must not be permanently identified with a model name"), 2888–2891 and 2902–2905. For the detailed assessments, see ibid., pp. 2866–2867 and 2889–2892.

that enabled me to advance the investigation, check sources and complete the work.[619]

The Partners in the Final Stage and What I Learned from Them

In the final stages, ChatGPT served as the principal editing tool, with Astra and later Sol 6.1; Grok and Claude participated in readings and criticism. Responsibility for decisions remained mine. In my work, I encountered stalls and long waits, especially with Astra, whereas the final review in Sonata progressed continuously and quickly. This is personal experience, from which I learned to examine a tool's suitability for the task: depth of investigation matters, as do textual precision, consistency and completing the work.[1]

[619]The research initiator's testimony was supplied for this book. On the documentation: Research Book, vol. I, pp. 105–107: "In the four research rounds, Gemini was mentioned only in the opening preparations and did not participate in the documented active rounds" (referring to the rounds investigating the question about Moses); there also, on improvement reports from Grok and Gemini during the editing of the booklets. Vol. I, pp. 295–297: a critique of a focused investigation listed "corrections that must be examined explicitly" in the answers of each tool. For Gemini, it recorded, for example, "confusion of the thirty-two paths, thirty vessels and thirty-four vessels; claims of exclusivity and of checking all printed editions without documentation," with points to examine in the answers of Claude, Grok, Grok Bot and ChatGPT in the same list. Vol. III, pp. 2904–2905: "A brief is not an answer."

[1]The time estimates and description of the working environment are the research initiator's personal testimony, supplied for this book: approximately six hours for the seven principal investigations and approximately sixty hours to prepare the book from the collected material. In the early stages he reported using Grok 4.6, Claude Opus 5 and a little Opus 5.5 and Fable, and Astra in the ChatGPT environment. For the concluding stages he added: Astra at Medium, High, Extra High and the maximum level; Sol 6.1; Grok Heavy, Grok 4.7 and Grok Bot; and, in Claude, Sonata, with which, he reports, the last final check was conducted. The tool names are given as reported. Version details and response times were only partially preserved in the research volumes (Research Book, vol. I, pp. 97–99, 105–107; vol. III, pp. 2866–2867).

We gathered the detailed comparison of proposals, examples, decisions and limits of reading in the final chapter of Research Volume III. There one can see what each check added, why overlapping comments are not redundant, and how even a reasonable proposal may ultimately receive a different formulation.[620]

The principal lesson is not the name of the fastest version. Moving from a first answer to a book requires good questions, returning to the source and critical examination of the explanation. Saving time in initial generation can permit more of all these. The models' names and versions testify to how the work was done while preparing the book; the tools may change and improve, and we do not attach the guidance to a particular interface or a promise that soon every investigation will finish in minutes. Even if different systems are available to the learner at the time of reading, the investigative method documented in the book can continue to serve: asking, learning, opening a source, comparing, examining and adding understanding.

[620] Research Book, vol. III, the concluding chapter "From Draft to Book: Comparing the Models' Editorial Work," p. 2924 and following. The chapter compares the review reports on the book's final text, documents the decisions, and distinguishes them from working notes on an earlier text. The number of proposals and the extent of reading are not general measures of the models' quality.

A Tool That Expands Ability and Requires Learning How to Use It

To draw a comparison from another field, in 1816 the French physician René Laennec listened to a young woman's heart through a tube of rolled paper. From that experiment, he went on to build wooden versions of the instrument, and thus the stethoscope developed. The device expanded the ability to hear, but the meaning of the sounds heard also had to be learned. A good tool opens access; understanding a finding requires a method of learning.[621]

The example illuminates our situation through both resemblance and difference. Before us is a sea of books, while every learner's hours and memory are limited; an AI tool may help locate a distant expression, compare explanations and propose another approach to a question. But as with the computer analogy, here too one must know where resemblance ends: a listening tube transmits sound, while a system formulating an answer may attribute a sentence to a source that did not say it, even referring to a nonexistent source. Learning the tool therefore includes, from the outset, the habit of opening the book and reading.

[621] Science Museum Group, catalogue entry for Laennec's stethoscope (A106078): in 1816 Laennec listened to a young woman's heart through a tube of rolled paper, and subsequently made wooden versions of the instrument. Museum catalogue. The comparison with Torah study is our analogy, not part of the source.

The needed working method is already familiar in the study hall: where do these things come from? Who said them? Is this the source's wording or an interpretation of it? What challenges it? What remains for further study? The purpose of the initiative described here, named YeshivahAI, is to place the new capability at this method's service. When the tool finds another source, we receive an opportunity to study it; when it proposes an explanation, we receive a proposal to examine. Thus it can expand the learner's work.

One aim of the book is therefore to teach Chassidim and learners how to work with these tools in practice. Someone unfamiliar with the possibilities may spend hours on a search that could be shortened, or miss a parallel that could open the subject. There is a real need to learn how to use them: define a question, ask for evidence, distinguish alternatives and return to the source. In the research behind the book, this was a central working skill; for every learner, it can be an opening to independent study.

The term "superintelligence" is used in discussions of future systems whose capabilities would exceed those currently available. We regard it as a vision and possible direction, reminding us that possibilities may develop further, not as a proven capability. The book's hope does not depend on it, and certainly no technology should be identified with redemption itself.

The possibility already available of opening another source and explaining it well is a great opportunity.

Three Examples from Personal Acquaintance

How do experts integrate such tools into their work? Three examples from people I know illustrate this. To draw a comparison from another field, a heart surgeon with more than forty years of experience uses personalized heart mapping and computerized analysis of treatment possibilities. His seniority does not negate the tool's benefit; it enables the expert to examine the result through knowledge and experience. An attorney with more than forty-five years of experience uses additional AI analysis before forming his position. Here too, responsibility for the conclusion remains his; the tool broadens the material and possibilities he considers.

In Torah, I know prominent rabbis who use tools to locate and compare sources, and decide through their own study.[622]

Another example from a different field was published by Johns Hopkins University: computerized heart models, "digital twins" tailored to the patient, were integrated with an AI method accelerating prediction of the heart's electrical-signal propagation. In testing on one thousand models, this particular computation

[622] Personal accounts from the research initiator about an expert's use of an auxiliary tool.

was shortened from several hours to a few seconds on a personal computer.[623]

The conclusion we seek to draw from these examples is simple: precisely someone who knows the value of expertise should also know the tools able to assist it. In Torah study, the opportunity is to add inquiry, precision and understanding within the time given to us.

Studying with a Readily Available Partner: Where to Begin

Thus far, we have described what was done in the book and why. Now we turn to the learner. The goal is that anyone reading these lines can try today, without prior technical knowledge, to study one sentence of the Epistle with an AI tool, and also know how to verify that the source received is real.

The beginning is simple: open a conversation with such a tool, write a question in the language comfortable for you, and include the wording of the source you are asking about. If the explanation is difficult, say so. If a term is unclear, ask for its meaning before continuing. If the analogy did not help, ask for another. There is no test and no one before whom to feel embarrassed; progress is measured by what the learner understands, not how quickly he understood it.

[623] Marc Shapiro, A Digital 'Twin' for Individualized Cardiology, Johns Hopkins Medicine, 23.5.2025 (25 Iyar 5785). The method is called DIMON; according to the report, it was applied to 1,000 digital twins, reducing prediction of electrical-signal propagation from several hours to a few seconds on a personal computer. Institutional report.

Someone unfamiliar with names such as sefirot, Atzilut or partzuf can begin precisely here: request an explanation of each name the first time it appears.

This has always been the way of a chavruta, a study partnership, in the study hall: one raises a difficulty, the other answers, and both open the book. The new tool can fulfill part of the study partner's role: explain, question, propose a source, compare. But it is not a rabbi, a halachic authority or a witness who can be trusted without checking: even a very confidently written answer may attribute something to a book that is not written there. The entire method we will describe therefore includes checking, and checking is part of the learning itself, as in every good study partnership.

Anyone seeking a ready-made starting point will find it at the end of each commentary chapter, in "Studying the Chapter with AI Tools": several exercises connected to the chapter's wording, each stating what to ask the tool, what to check independently in the source and where the conclusion's limit lies.

What Can Conversation Add for the Learner?

Alongside searching sources, conversation with an AI tool has an educational value one can test in practice. One can ask it to change its mode of explanation: first explain the words, then give an example, and finally show where the example ceases to fit. The learner need

not settle for the first answer. The benefit is evident when he can explain the matter without looking at the answer.

The direction of work can also be reversed: the learner writes his explanation and asks the tool to find an unjustified transition. For example: “I wrote that earth is low and therefore cannot reveal a lofty power. Show which assumption of mine is examined in chapters 14–15.” The tool thus helps expose the question, and the book supplies the material for checking the answer. There is no need to open a new search each time; sometimes the greatest improvement is to read carefully what is already before us.

A third way is to practice conveying understanding to another. Ask the tool to question on behalf of a beginning reader: what does “vessel” mean here? If the neshamah gives life to a created thing, is it created too? Why is the next chapter needed? Try answering yourself. When the answer stalls, the place needing further study is revealed. Here the tool is useful as an organizer of practice; the ability we seek to build is the learner’s.

Sometimes, the best use is to stop. Once two possibilities have been formulated and the necessary source opened, further answers may repeat the same difficulty in new words. Then it is worth writing what is known and what is missing, and continuing in the book

or bringing the question to a study partner and rabbi. A fruitful conversation is measured by understanding acquired, not the number of messages sent.

The Working Method at a Glance

Before the example, here is the entire method in seven stages. These are the same stages proposed in the introduction's "How Do We Study This Book?" Beside each stage is what to check. A beginner can work through them slowly, on one sentence of the Epistle.

1. **Include the passage.** Copy the Epistle's own wording into the conversation, not only the question about it, preferably including what precedes and follows the sentence. **What to check:** that the included passage is indeed the one being asked about, and that its textual source is known.
2. **Ask for an explanation.** Request a word-by-word explanation, assuming no prior knowledge, with every term explained before use. **What to check:** that the explanation addresses the words before us, rather than a similar general idea.
3. **Ask what remains difficult.** Request the strongest objection to the explanation received. **What to check:** whether the difficulty with which we began was genuinely resolved or merely given a smoother formulation.

4. **Open the source.** Independently open every reference the tool gives. **What to check:** that the book, section and page exist and match; and which witness was seen, a facsimile of a printed page or digital text.
5. **Check the quotation in context.** Read the paragraphs before and after it. **What to check:** what the paragraph discusses, who speaks, and whether the sentence is said about our subject.
6. **Compare.** Set two proposals or two sources side by side. **What to check:** what each proposal resolves and leaves difficult; and whether the cited source is evidence for the matter itself or only a close parallel.
7. **Record the conclusion and its limit.** Write what has become clear, what supports it and what remains unproved. **What to check:** that every sentence in the conclusion rests on an opened source, and that what remains open is written as open.

The continuous example below shows these stages in practice and in greater detail. It begins with a preliminary step, formulating and narrowing the question, and adds a special step concerning a source claimed not to exist; it therefore has nine steps. Copyable prompts follow, then sections expanding the stages needing greater attention: checking the source, distinguishing digital text from a printed facsimile,

distinguishing a parallel from evidence, and leaving a question open.

A Continuous Worked Example: How Did Moses Apprehend, If "My Face Shall Not Be Seen"?

Let us follow one example from the research behind chapter 2 of this book. It is documented in Research Volume I, from the first question to the conclusion, and its path can be retraced.[624] The chapter explains the subject itself and its terms in plain language, word by word; here we will focus on the investigative method: how a question becomes sharper, how an answer is tested and what opening the books adds. The investigation advanced in rounds: in each round, questions were sent to AI systems, and the answers were preserved and critically examined.

The sentence. At the Epistle's opening, the Alter Rebbe explains that the sefirot of Atzilut, in the aspect of their vessels, "are called belimah in Sefer Yetzirah, for they are not in the category of yesh and an apprehensible nature, like Ein Sof, whom no thought grasps at all, and as written, 'My face shall not be seen.' " He immediately adds: "The prophecy of Moses

[624] The investigation is documented in the Research Book, vol. I, pp. 53–115, especially in the booklet "Apprehension and Coming into Being in Atzilut" on pp. 68–111: the opening question, four rounds, the register of hypotheses and conclusions. The research quotations in the example are taken from there (pp. 69–71, 82–88, 105–107). The Epistle's wording: Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20.

our teacher, peace be upon him, and his apprehension were from the upper segment of Netzach of Ze'ir Anpin."

The question. A difficulty arose in reading. Tanya's Epistle 19 says of Moses our teacher that his apprehension was not in the inner dimension of supernal Chochmah: "Above Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut, he had no apprehension of the inner dimension, but only of the back-aspect of Chochmah vested in Binah, which is vested and extends within the inner dimension of Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut." The verse "You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen" is cited concerning this. Thus, in Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut, NeHYM, Moses had apprehension of the inner dimension.[625] But Netzach is one of the ten sefirot of Atzilut, and its vessels are included among those said to be "not in the category of yesh and an apprehensible nature." How can the same sefirot be said to have no apprehensible nature while prophetic apprehension of their inner dimension is described? A further question arises in the same paragraph: the discussion concerns the sefirot of Atzilut, and suddenly angels and "the animal's spirit

[625]Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 19: "The apprehension of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was not in the inner dimension of supernal Chochmah, called Abba of Atzilut"; "But above Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut, he had no apprehension of the inner dimension, only of the back-aspect of Chochmah vested in Binah, which is vested and extends within the inner dimension of Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut..."; "As it is written, 'You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.' " The text; also on Wikisource.

from the face of the ox" are brought in. Why does an example from a different level explain the subject?

Step one: formulate and narrow. The first important step was separating the two questions. One concerns apprehension: how can Moses' apprehension be discussed within a treatment of sefirot outside the category of "yesh and an apprehensible nature"? The second concerns coming into being: how does a physical body emerge from a spiritual order? A good answer to the second does not automatically decide the first. The first question was also narrowed: not "how can man apprehend Divinity?" in general, but how the very same sefirot apparently fall on both sides of the contradiction.

Step two: include the passage. The question was presented together with the Epistle's own wording, from the opening through "the animal's spirit from the face of the ox," and the Rebbe's notes relevant to the passage. Including the text is not a technical detail. Someone answering without the text before him answers what he remembers, not what is written.

Step three: a first explanation. In the first round, quick answers were proposed: Netzach is lower than Chochmah, so there is no difficulty; "inner dimension" here means only the inside of a channel. The possibility that Moses knew only that a spiritual source existed, without actual revelation, was also examined.

One answer confidently stated that the question had already been decided. For the second question, an a fortiori argument was constructed: angels are closer to matter than the sefirot, and if a body cannot be formed from them, all the more so from the sefirot.

Step four: what remains difficult? The criticism did not let the objection disappear. A "low level" within Atzilut is still a level of Atzilut. A channel too is a vessel of Atzilut, and the inner dimension of a low aspect still needs explanation. Epistle 19 describes prophecy as actual revelation, so it cannot be reduced to knowledge that something exists. For the second question, it became clear that the a fortiori argument rested on an unproved assumption, that descent in spiritual level brings one closer to matter's coming into being through the same mechanism, and also on the assumption that the angels in the example are the lowest spiritual level.

Step five: open sources. At this stage, books were opened. In Pardes Rimonim, the Ramak distinguishes the prophets' drawing sustenance from the sefirot from their apprehension within the palaces; a sentence locating prophecy in a sefirah thus does not alone prove that the prophet saw the sefirah itself. In Shaarei Kedushah by Rabbi Chaim Vital, Moses is described as ascending to Atzilut and seeing "actually" from there, through investment in Beriah "by way of passage

alone," whereas the other prophets "would see in Atzilut through complete investment in the lights of Beriah." This source does not permit saying that there was no actual seeing, and locates the distinction between Moses and other prophets in the manner of investment.[626] In Chanah Ariel by Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil, two close parallels were found: the discourse for Naso discusses the "likeness of belimah of the vessels of Atzilut" apprehended by Moses, and the discourse for Behaalotecha describes the partzuf of Netzach, Hod and Yesod revealed to Moses, "which is also belimah," connecting its reception to Moses' nullification.[627]

Step six: check the quotation in context. In one round, a sentence from Chanah Ariel denying the seeing of a sefirah's vessel was presented as the strongest evidence concerning Moses. Reading the paragraphs before and after it showed that the sentence belonged to another section, discussing Chochmah and the soul's drawing sustenance, and that immediately

[626] Pardes Rimmonim, Gate 6, chapter 6: "None of this means that they actually apprehended the sefirot, but that from there they drew sustenance. Their intellectual apprehension, however, was in the heichalot"; near the chapter's end, the analogy of "the sun's ray united with the sun." Shaarei Kedushah by Rabbi Chaim Vital, part III, Gate 6: Moses' prophecy "only by way of passage," and the other prophets "through complete vesting in the lights of Beriah." These were read during the research in digital transcriptions: Pardes Rimmonim 6:6; Shaarei Kedushah 3:6. The wording cited here was checked again in the digital transcription on Sefaria: Pardes Rimmonim 6:6; Shaarei Kedushah 3:6. Research Book, vol. I, pp. 81–82, 108–111.

[627] Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil, Chanah Ariel, Parashat Naso, discourse beginning "וישלחו מן המחנה"; Parashat Behaalotecha, discourse beginning "והאספסוף" (fixed version). The wording is cited as read in the transcription during the research; the transcriptions were not compared with print. Research Book, vol. I, pp. 81–88, 102–103, 110–111.

afterward the author explicitly turns to the prophets' vision. The application to Moses was withdrawn, and the participant who proposed it retracted; the source itself remained valid for what it says. The research summarized this as follows: "The most important correction was not always finding another book, but reading the paragraph before the quotation."

Step seven: failure of access is not evidence. At that stage, one participant claimed that the page in Behaalotecha did not exist at all and proposed replacing the reference with Naso. A check found the page, a stable version of it and the expression itself within it. The methodological conclusion was recorded simply: "Failure of access is not evidence of nonexistence."

Step eight: compare proposals. In later rounds, two proposals stood side by side. One distinguished two axes: in the aspect of revelation, an inner dimension within a partzuf that is outer in relation to a broader structure; in the manner of reception, revelation in nullification rather than reception by an independently standing yesh. The second proposed a sharper reading: "belimah" means there is no nature in the vessels to apprehend, and "inner dimension" means the light vested in them, so there is no contradiction at all. Comparison showed that the second proposal goes beyond what the sources prove: Epistle 19 says that

NeHYM themselves are revealed, with the light vested within them, not that apprehension concerns the light alone; “My face” is not merely a list of all levels above NeHYM, since face and back are also aspects within a sefirah; and Chanah Ariel’s wording still does not say that there is no apprehensible nature there at all. It also became clear that three apparently identical points are three distinct matters: that the thing is not independent, that the recipient is nullified, and that the nature is not grasped. Rejecting one does not resolve the others.

Step nine: a conclusion with a source and a limit. A directly supported resolution was found for the question of coming into being: the transition from sefirot to angels examines what spiritual drawing down can bring into being. The animal’s spirit can be drawn from the angels, “from the face of the ox”; its body is not formed in this way. No a fortiori argument is needed, nor any determination that angels are the link closest to matter. For the question of apprehension, a plausible direction was found: the inner dimension of a particular level is not necessarily the “face” whose apprehension is denied; the revealed partzuf of Netzach, Hod and Yesod remains in Atzilut and remains “belimah”; and Moses’ reception is described in nullification. But it has still not been proved why apprehension of NeHYM’s inner dimension does not

fall within the “apprehensible nature” the Epistle denies. The research defined precisely what is missing: a source or valid inference defining the scope of the negation. Locating the exact reference in the Arizal’s writings for “the upper segment of Netzach,” or checking printings of Chanah Ariel, would help, but would not by themselves resolve the question.

What changed in our understanding? At the investigation’s beginning, it seemed that the difficulty could be resolved in one sentence: Netzach is lower than Chochmah. At its end, the question is much sharper: Netzach remains in Atzilut, prophecy was actual revelation, and therefore precisely what is denied and what was apprehended must be clarified. Along the way, inadequate answers were removed; one supported answer was separated from a proposal still needing proof; a genuine source cited in the wrong context was restored to its place; and a “nonexistent” page was found. The investigation concluded: “Ending the rounds means that the present work has been exhausted and documented; it does not mean that every difficulty has been decided.” Chapter 2 explains the matter in plain language, word by word.

One thing was not preserved in the documentation: the exact wording of every prompt sent to the systems. The research records how many questions were sent in each round and their subjects, and preserves the

answers and criticisms; the prompts themselves are not reproduced there. The prompts in the next section are therefore not copies of what was sent in the project. They are a proposed practice exercise based on the investigation described here.

Six Prompts You Can Copy

Here are six short prompts adapted to the example we studied. They can be copied as written, replacing the sentence with another from the Epistle, to begin; anyone moving to another sentence should also replace the difficulty in the second prompt and the two interpretations in the fifth. The prompts form one sequence: send them consecutively in the same conversation, reading each answer before the next prompt. Include the Epistle passage with the first prompt, as in the example's second step; the quotations in the sixth prompt will be checked against it.

1. "This is a sentence from Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh 20: 'The prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, and his apprehension were from the upper segment of Netzach of Ze'ir Anpin.' Explain it to me word by word, without assuming I know Kabbalah. Explain every term before using it."
2. "What remains difficult in your explanation? If Netzach is a sefirah of Atzilut, and the Epistle says that the sefirot are not 'yesh and an apprehensible

nature,' how can it say that Moses apprehended within it? Formulate the strongest objection to your answer."

3. "Show me the precise source: the book's name, the section or chapter, and an accessible link. Copy the sentence itself, the sentence before it and the one after it, and state what the entire paragraph discusses."
4. "What exactly does the source's wording say, and what interpretation are you proposing? Write them separately: first the wording as it stands, then the interpretation, and finally what is only a hypothesis."
5. "Compare this interpretation with another, for example 'Moses apprehended a lower level' versus 'an inner dimension within an outer partzuf.' What does each interpretation resolve, and what does it leave difficult?"
6. "Recheck all the quotations you brought against the text I provided, marking every quotation you have not seen yourself. Then write a continuous explanation with notes, ending with a list of what was and was not checked."

These prompts are not magic formulas. They teach a habit: ask for a substantive explanation, ask for the opposing difficulty, request a source that can be opened, separate wording from interpretation, compare, and check again. Whoever practices them on

one sentence will find himself formulating better prompts for the next.

When the Tool Cannot Access a Book, and How to Preserve What Was Learned

Not every book is open to every tool. Sometimes the tool cannot reach a particular site, and sometimes the book is not online at all. A tool that cannot see the book may answer, as we saw in the example's second step, from what it remembers rather than what is written. In that case, provide the wording yourself: copy the passage from a reliable site containing the book, or photograph the page in the printed book and attach the image, specifying the edition and page. You can write: "You cannot access this book, so I am providing its wording. Rely only on what I have provided; if you need more, tell me what is missing and do not supply it from memory." Such a prompt reduces the risk of the tool inventing what it has not seen, and also teaches us to notice exactly what is before us.

What do we do at the end of a study conversation? Request a short summary and save it: "Summarize what we learned: the question, sources with links, the conclusion and what remains open." The summary too is a tool-generated answer, so read it before saving and mark beside each source whether it was opened and checked. Copy the summary to a document or

notebook, with a date. Next time, include it in the new conversation and continue from where you stopped. Most tools also keep a conversation history, but a personal study notebook does not depend on a particular interface and is not lost when the tool changes. This, incidentally, is also how this book's research volumes arose: from questions, sources and conclusions preserved so they could be revisited.

How to Check That a Source Is Real

This is the heart of the matter, and there is nothing complicated about it. Checking is what every good learner does with a book, only with greater care.

Open the link yourself. Check that the book's name, section or chapter, and even the page match what was stated. Find the quoted sentence within the page and compare its wording word by word, especially the words supporting the argument. Then read what comes before and after the quotation: what does the paragraph discuss? Is the sentence said about our subject or an adjacent one? In the example's sixth step, precisely this stage saved the investigation from false evidence.

Separate source from interpretation. Many pages combine the source's wording with its explanation. In Lessons in Tanya, for example, Rabbi Yosef Weinberg's explanation is printed alongside marked additions by

the Rebbe; anyone quoting a sentence from the page must know whose it is. Nor does “Tanya” at the top of a page make every sentence on it the Alter Rebbe’s wording, as we saw in the introduction’s example of Tanya LaAm.

Mark what has not been checked. There is no shame in writing “I have not seen the page myself” or “read in transcription, not in print.” This marking is not a weakness; it enables others, and ourselves next time, to continue from the right place. A negative result also needs a limit: “not found in the books I checked” is not “does not exist.” Failure to access a site is not evidence that a page does not exist, as the example’s seventh step taught; a search covering particular books does not establish anything about the entire literature. Anyone correcting a mistaken reference must check the new source as carefully as the old; replacing an incorrect reference with a nearby one does not complete the investigation.

Agreement is not checking. When two or three tools agree on a quotation that none has shown us on an open page, no evidence has been added. So too with a rumor: three people repeating it do not make it testimony while none has seen the matter with his own eyes. The image does not mean that the tools copy one another; it teaches only that the number repeating something does not replace the open page. Agreement

can signal that a particular direction is worth checking; the checking itself is opening the source. This is how we proceeded in the research: an answer from a model, the system behind the tool, is not evidence, and agreement among models is not verification either.[628]

Digital Text and Printed Facsimile: What Exactly Did We See?

When we say "I checked the source," it is worth asking what exactly was before us. One book can reach the learner in several forms, each with a different evidential weight. We will call the form in which we saw the source's wording a "witness," because it testifies to what is written in the book.

- **A facsimile of a printed page.** An image of a page from a particular book in a particular edition. This is the witness closest to the book itself, but it too testifies only to the edition photographed. Another edition may differ in spelling, abbreviations or even a word.
- **A digital transcription.** Typed text on a website, searchable and copyable. It is very convenient for locating and reading, but someone typed it and sometimes also processed it. The Kehot digital text of the Epistle, for example, expands most

[628] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2840–2841: "A model's answer is not evidence, nor is agreement among models verification"; pp. 2895–2897, in the distinctions table: "Do not turn 'not found' into 'does not exist' "; pp. 2872–2874: "When a source is 'corrected,' the new source must be checked with the same rigor." On "failure of access is not evidence of nonexistence," see vol. I, pp. 86–88.

abbreviations: someone searching it for דצח"מ will not find the abbreviation, but "inanimate, vegetative, animal, speaking."

- **Machine-generated text from an image.** On some sites, the text is generated automatically from the page image. Such text may substitute similar letters, skip a line or incorporate the page heading into the text. It is useful for locating; for quotation, return to the image.
- **Testimony through an editor.** Something known only because an editor or compiler wrote that this is what was found in a book. This is important testimony, but it is the editor's testimony and is recorded in his name.

How do we know what is before us? Ask three simple questions. Am I seeing the actual page, with its layout and printed letters, or lines of text that can be selected and copied? Do I know the edition and page? If it is text, is processing evident, such as expanded abbreviations or added punctuation?

Above all, record it. "Seen in a printed facsimile, edition …, page …"; "Read in a digital transcription at …, not compared with print"; "Known from the editor's statement in …; the source was not opened." This record is not a technical matter. It shows what remains to be checked and prevents the check from appearing stronger than it was. Nor should a check be

“upgraded”: what was read in transcription remains “read in transcription” even after proving correct, until the page itself is seen. The case studies following this part show what happens when this distinction is forgotten: in Case 5, two digital witnesses give two different readings; in Case 6, a word is said to be “absent from the Epistle” because the search used only one spelling and a text that expanded abbreviations.

Here too the tool can help if asked explicitly: “For every quotation you brought, state which witness it comes from, a printed facsimile, digital transcription or quotation by another author, and which website or edition. If you have not seen the wording yourself, say so.” If the tool answers that it “saw the page,” this is not evidence. The evidence is what the learner sees with his own eyes when opening the link.

A Parallel and Evidence

An AI tool excels at finding parallels: other places where something similar is said, in the same or nearly the same words. This is a major contribution, and many sources in this book were found this way. But a parallel is not yet evidence. A parallel shows that a similar matter was discussed elsewhere; evidence shows that what we claim is indeed stated, or follows necessarily from what was stated.

Three questions help distinguish them:

1. **Is it the same subject?** Similar words are insufficient. Check that the source discusses the same thing, at the same level and in the same context.
2. **Does the source state the claim itself?** It may say something close, from which we infer our claim. If there is an inference, write it as our inference.
3. **Who says it, and what is its status?** The author's wording, the quoter's wording and the editor's wording are three different voices. Two parallels with one origin, such as two versions of the same discourse, are not two witnesses.

We encountered these questions in the continuous example. In Pardes Rimonim, the Ramak distinguishes where the prophets draw sustenance from where they apprehend. This is an important distinction, but anyone bringing a sentence locating prophecy in a sefirah as proof that the prophet saw the sefirah itself will load onto it more than it says. When a sentence from Chanah Ariel was presented as the strongest evidence, reading the surrounding paragraph showed that it discussed another subject: it failed the first question. In Case 1 of the case studies, the second and third questions arise. The reference in Likkutei Torah teaches how Likkutei Torah read the Epistle's end, not what the Epistle itself says; the parallel passage in Or

HaTorah is a version of the same discourse, so adds no second witness.

You can ask the tool to make this distinction: “For each source you brought, state separately whether it addresses precisely the same subject; whether it says the claim explicitly or you infer it; and who wrote the sentence, the author, a later quoter or an editor. If two sources depend on each other, say so.”

How to Leave a Question Open

Sometimes an investigation reaches a point where the available sources do not decide. This is not a failure. The temptation then is to close the question anyway: choose the most plausible explanation and write it as though proved. An AI tool is especially prone to this because it seeks to give a complete answer. A well-recorded open question is worth more than a closed answer without a basis, because it enables the next learner to continue from the right place.

To record an open question, write four lines:

1. **What is known:** what has become clear and which source supports it.
2. **What is missing:** precisely what has not been proved. Not simply “the matter requires further study,” but the specific point.
3. **What could decide it:** which source, page or check might change the conclusion.

4. **What we are not saying:** which conclusion must not be drawn from the finding.

The end of the continuous example can be written in these four lines. What is known: a directly supported resolution was found for coming into being, and a plausible direction for apprehension. What is missing: a source or valid inference defining the scope of the negation. What could decide it: such a source or inference; locating the reference in the Arizal's writings and checking the printings of Chanah Ariel would help, but would not by themselves resolve the question. What we are not saying: that the difficulty has been decided, or that apprehension concerned the light alone, a proposal found to exceed what the sources prove. Case 4 of the case studies gives a smaller example: it is unknown why ספ"ב, "end of chapter 2," was written when in the printing examined the passage stands at the end of chapter 1. There may be another division in a manuscript or earlier printing; that possibility was recorded as an unchecked possibility, not an answer. (The levels "directly supported" and "plausible" are explained in the next section.)

This too can be requested from the tool: "Do not decide if the sources do not decide. Write separately what is known and what supports it; exactly what is missing; which source or check could decide; and which

conclusion must not be drawn from the findings. If you propose a hypothesis, mark it as a hypothesis."

A Few More Habits of a Learner

Narrow a large question. "How can man apprehend Divinity?" is too large to check against a single sentence. "What exactly is denied by 'yesh and an apprehensible nature,' and what exactly is said of Moses?" can be checked; this narrowing occurred in the example's first step. A good question is anchored in the source's wording and permits knowing what would decide it.

Ask again, without embarrassment. "Explain again with another analogy"; "Give me an example"; "What is the difference between the two concepts you mentioned?"; "To whom does 'in them' refer in this sentence?" All are entirely proper prompts. A good study partner does not tire of explaining, and the learner need not pretend to understand.

Distinguish quotation, explanation and hypothesis. In every answer, one can ask: what here is the source's wording? What is an explanation resting on it? What is a hypothesis not yet proved? The research behind the book used simple levels: "explicit," what the source itself says; "directly supported," what the source and context directly support; and "plausible," an inference supported by sources whose precise connection still

needs proof. In the continuous example, we saw the difference in practice: a directly supported resolution for coming into being, but only a plausible direction for apprehension. The learner too can mark what he studies with these levels.

Preserve a question, source and conclusion. What is not preserved is forgotten. Three lines in a notebook with a link are worth more than a general memory of an "interesting conversation."

Use another tool, without a majority vote. The same focused question can also be presented to another tool. It is worth doing this first without including the first tool's answer, to receive an independent reading rather than an echo, and comparing only afterward.[629] If the answers differ, the question is what supports each, not how many tools supported it. The decision is made according to the sources.

Know when to stop. Before continuing to another round, ask what finding could change the conclusion. If no such finding can be identified, it is better to record clearly what is missing and stop than to repeat the same quotations again and again. This is also how the continuous example ended: the research defined precisely what was missing, and the rounds concluded.

[629] Research Book, vol. III, pp. 2858–2860: "To preserve the independence of the examination, it is advisable first to receive their answers without sending them the other models' answers. Then bring all of them back here for comparison." For the complete practical method, see ibid., pp. 2891–2893; for the levels "explicit," "directly supported" and "plausible," see vol. I, pp. 88–89; for defining a finding that could change a conclusion, see vol. III, pp. 2888–2889.

Deciding to stop does not decide that the question has been resolved; it honestly recognizes the state of knowledge.

These are not dry rules. They are a form of respect for Torah, for books and for those who learn from us. They are also a source of joy: nothing is more satisfying than opening an old book, reading the entire paragraph and seeing with one's own eyes what is really written there.

General Exercises for Any Chapter

The exercises at the end of each chapter rest on that chapter's wording. Here we gather several more general exercises, independent of a particular chapter. Each is given with an example from one chapter and can be applied to any other.

An Analogy and Its Limit (Example from Chapter 1)

What to ask. "Give an analogy explaining how the sefirot are many yet one with the Creator, and write explicitly what the analogy does not explain."

What to check. Compare the analogy received with the king's hands analogy brought by the Tzemach Tzedek. Did the tool state its limits: that above there is no body, that a human limb is created, and that the human soul has no power to create something from nothing? An analogy without explicit limits will teach the reader more than it actually teaches.

The limit of the conclusion. An analogy brings understanding closer but proves nothing. Even a good analogy does not replace the word "one" and the Epistle's own explanation.

This exercise can also be repeated in other chapters: chapter 3 (an analogy for the utter incommensurability between a created being and the power bringing it into being), chapter 11 (an analogy for "less revelation is not less power"), and chapter 13 (an example of unlimited power operating through vessels).

A Diagram Checked Against the Sentence (Example from Chapter 4)

What to ask. Include the sentence's four units, from "Now the beginning of the created yesh" through "and these are the thirty vessels of Malchut of Atzilut," and ask: "Arrange the sentence in a diagram: what is created, from what, and what is Divinity?"

What to check. Does the diagram distinguish Atzilut's source vessels from BYA's own vessels? Has it added boxes, such as "the neshamah-light" as a separate station, that are only another description of the same relationship? Does it present the neshamah as a cause from which the vessels "emerged," contrary to what we learned about "were created from …"?

The limit of the conclusion. A good diagram shortens the path to the sentence. A diagram adding entities

replaces it, in which case it is better to return to the wording. Even a correct diagram does not explain why the boundary falls between neshamah and ruach.

A Quotation the Tool Brings from Memory (Example from Chapter 13)

What to ask. Ask the tool for the Tzemach Tzedek's wording on "sovev within memale," or on "G-d's desire" and "G-d's word," with a precise reference.

What to check. Open the book at the indicated place and compare word by word with the references in the chapter's notes. Pay particular attention to initialisms and abbreviations such as ממכ"ע and סוכ"ע: such a tool tends to expand them, sometimes changing the wording in the process.

The limit of the conclusion. If the tool claims a particular source does not exist, remember the rule learned while working on this book: failure of access is not evidence of nonexistence. Even a quotation found in its place proves only the wording; what the Tzemach Tzedek adds to the Epistle remains his words, not the Epistle's wording.

An Explanation in Plain Language (Example from Chapter 17)

What to ask. Ask the tool to explain to a twelve-year-old the words "which are the aspects of earth, water, fire, and air."

What to check. Does the explanation fall into material identity: water belongs to the vegetative, meat is fire, man is made of air? Does it preserve the distinction between characterization and root on the one hand and matter on the other, which Etz Chaim also preserves in "but it is not actual earth"?

The limit of the conclusion. A good analogy for a child must come with its limit. If the tool does not say what the analogy does not teach, supply this yourself.

Even Boys and Girls: A Vision of Broad Torah Knowledge

The Sages paint an inspiring picture of King Hezekiah's generation. The Gemara recounts his devotion to Torah study: he planted a sword at the study hall's entrance and proclaimed that anyone not engaging in Torah would be pierced by it. It continues: "They searched from Dan to Beersheba and found no ignoramus; from Gevat to Antipatris, they found no boy or girl, man or woman, who was not proficient in the laws of impurity and purity." These are areas of halachah rich in details and distinctions. The picture is one of Torah spreading throughout the public, until even the young share in its knowledge.[630]

Nearby, the Gemara brings Bar Kappara's exposition: "The Holy One, blessed be He, sought to make

[630] Sanhedrin 94b, in Rabbi Yitzchak Nappacha's remarks. Text on Sefaria.

Hezekiah Mashiach and Sennacherib Gog and Magog." The attribute of judgment objected that Hezekiah, for whom such great miracles were performed, had not sung praise, and the matter was delayed. The first picture shows knowledge filling a generation; the second shows that the same generation was considered for redemption, which the absence of song delayed. Their combination inspires a connection between broadening knowledge and aspiring to redemption, not a statement that knowledge brought redemption. The Gemara is not discussing technology here; the comparison with our work is an educational application we learn from it, not something the Gemara says.[631]

In the talk for Noach in Likkutei Sichot, volume 15, the Rebbe also refers to the Zohar's words: "אפילו רביי דעלמא זמינין לאשכחא טמירין דחכמתא," "even the children of the world will find the hidden treasures of wisdom," as the days of Mashiach approach. In the Zohar itself, these words occur in Rabbi Shimon's discussion of calculating the end, "and knowing through it the ends and calculations," and the Rebbe brings them within his discussion of the revelation of wisdom approaching redemption.[632] This reference bears directly on the

[631] Sanhedrin 94a: "Rabbi Tanchum said: Bar Kappara expounded in Tzippori... The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to make Hezekiah Mashiach and Sennacherib Gog and Magog. The attribute of judgment said before the Holy One, blessed be He... Hezekiah, for whom You performed all these miracles, did not sing before You; will You make him Mashiach?" Text on Sefaria.

[632] Likkutei Sichot, vol. XV, Noach II, p. 42 and following, note 5; the reference there is to Zohar, vol. I, 118a: "When the days of Mashiach draw near, even the children of the world will be destined to discover hidden matters of wisdom and to know through it the appointed times and calculations." Zohar on Sefaria. The passage is cited here according to the reference in the talk.

aspiration to make the inner dimension of Torah accessible. We take from it a direction for work: prepare an explanation opening a path for a young learner, and add understanding through orderly study.

This example places a high aspiration before us. A subject's difficulty does not require leaving someone who wishes to learn outside the door. It requires preparing a good path: explain a term, clarify an example, divide a question into stages and return to the principle after the details. Even when the full depth cannot be conveyed at once, a genuine opening to understanding can be made. A young student and an adult beginner deserve an explanation that does not assume they already know what they came to learn.

This is the commentary's hope: that great labor in the sources will become clear understanding for the learner. The secret becoming common possession, of which the Rebbe spoke on the third night of Selichot; the dwarf seeing far from the giant's shoulders; radio and new tools bringing Torah to new places; and the boy and girl sharing Torah knowledge: all these examples direct us to invest in making the treasury accessible. Iggeret HaKodesh 20 concerns the revelation of higher power within finite reality; we seek to present its study patiently, in defined, clear words that open a world of meaning before the reader and add vitality to performing a mitzvah.

Case Studies: How Sources Changed Conclusions

Before the Cases

The preceding part described a working method. Here we will see it in action, specifically where we erred. Before you are eight cases in which an initial formulation did not withstand checking against the source. Sometimes it was written in a chapter draft, sometimes in a report in which a reviewer compared the commentary with its sources. Each case teaches a step in checking and shows how several of the book's assertions were clarified.

Each case is structured as a short story with five fixed stages:

1. **The difficulty:** what was written initially, and what raised doubt.
2. **The search path:** where and how we searched.
3. **The evidence:** what was actually found, and in which witness, printed facsimile or digital text.
4. **The changed conclusion:** what was written after checking.
5. **The limit of the proof:** what the check does not prove and what remains open.

At the end of each case is a "methodological rule," the practical lesson that can be taken into the next study.

Four labels recur throughout the cases. They indicate which witness we saw, as explained in the preceding part's "Digital Text and Printed Facsimile," where digital text is also called "digital transcription":

- **Printed facsimile:** a printed book page seen with one's own eyes in an image.
- **Digital text:** a typed version on a website. The Kehot digital text of the Epistle expands most abbreviations, so it does not establish their printed form.
- **Testimony through an editor:** something known only from another editor's statement.
- **Not opened:** the source was not examined at all.

Errors in the review reports themselves are recorded here as they occurred, alongside errors in the drafts. Explicitly recording the error and correction makes it possible to learn from them.

Case 1. An Abbreviation That Hid a Connection: "אג"ה" in Likkutei Torah, Emor

The difficulty. The question behind this case matters for the commentary's ending: did the author of Tanya himself connect the angels' enjoyment of sacrifices at

the Epistle's end with the teaching of Tohu? Likkutei Torah, Emor, contains an explanation addressing this matter. But an early version of chapter 19 said that in the digital text of that explanation, "the reference to the Epistle was not found," and therefore could not serve as a link in the argument. Caution remained in the version edited for readers: "The attribution of the printed reference to the Epistle remains open."

The search path. The first search used the usual forms of the Epistle's name: אגה"ק, אגרת הקודש. In the second check, the reference was found in the explanation's digital text, section ד [4], in an abbreviated form the first search had not tried: אג"ה. At the same time, it was found to be mentioned in the notes of Likkut Peirushim, a book collecting source references, explanations and textual variants for Tanya (printed facsimile). Finally, the Likkutei Torah page itself was opened in a printed facsimile.

The evidence. Likkutei Torah, Emor, "ביאור ע"פ והניף הכהן אותם" ("Explanation of 'And the Kohen Shall Wave Them' "), section ד [4], 38c (לח, ג), printed facsimile: > "Therefore the angels derive pleasure from the sacrifices through the revelation of the lights of Tohu, from which their root derives; this is what is said in the holy Zohar (Pinchas, 241a), 'And they derive pleasure from their foundation and root,' as cited in Iggeret

HaKodesh [אג"ה] toward the end of the discourse beginning 'איהו וחיוהי.' "

Likkut Peirushim, note 90, gives the same reference with another abbreviation: וכמובא באגה"ק, "as cited in Iggeret HaKodesh." The Zohar page, 241a, was also checked in a facsimile: the sentence stands in the opening lines, with the spelling עקרא דלהון.

The changed conclusion. "Not found" became "found and printed." The reference stands in section ד [4] of the explanation, not in the portion's first discourse. Another, smaller error emerged along the way, also instructive: in the first correction of the chapter 19 note, the source's name was written twice consecutively. Our first proposed repair did not remain either: the note was instead written in full, also stating what the section cites before the reference, the Zohar's words ואתהניין מיסודא ועקרא דילהון.

The limit of the proof. The reference teaches how Likkutei Torah read the Epistle's ending. It is not the Epistle's wording, and all the details of the teaching of Tohu should not be loaded onto the Epistle from it. The parallel passage in Or HaTorah, Naso, p. 287, is a parallel version of the same discourse, not an additional independent witness: two versions of one discourse are not two proofs.

Methodological rule. Search for a source under all its abbreviated forms. “Not found in a search” is not “does not exist.”

Case 2. Sefer HaGilgulim, Chapter 20: A Reading Done Twice

The difficulty. The Epistle mentions “the light of Atzilut within Asiyah,” referring on this subject to “Sefer HaGilgulim, chapter 20, cited in Likkutei Amarim.” An early version of chapter 15 said: “This concerns an internal division: within Asiyah itself too, there are levels called Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah.” But knowing whether this was correct required reading the chapter to which the Epistle refers, and the research volumes recorded that the search “had not succeeded in establishing a clean reading” of it.

The search path. First, two similarly named books had to be distinguished, Sefer HaGilgulim and Shaar HaGilgulim. Shaar HaGilgulim has an introduction with the same number, addressing another subject. Then the chapter was read in a facsimile of the Frankfurt 5444 printing, in two copies of the same edition. The print is difficult to read, and chapter 20 begins midway down a column, while the running

heading, the line at the page's top, still says "chapter 19."

The evidence. Sefer HaGilgulim, Frankfurt 5444, chapter 20, printed facsimile: > "This is not the Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah of the aspects of Asiyah themselves … but what we said is the aspect of actual Atzilut revealed within Asiyah." > "Although it is not the nefesh of Atzilut itself." > "This too is divided into ABYA of Asiyah."

The changed conclusion. "The light of Atzilut within Asiyah" is not an inward level of Asiyah figuratively called "Atzilut." It is the aspect of actual Atzilut, revealed within Asiyah. Nevertheless, "it is not the nefesh of Atzilut itself," and is itself divided into ABYA of Asiyah. All three layers must be stated together.

But the checking itself was also done twice. Our first reading in print correctly rejected "the sefirot of Asiyah themselves," yet omitted the third layer and contained transcription errors. In the second check, we compared again with the facsimile, word by word, including the quotation in the note, although it had already been labeled "according to the printed facsimile." The note said של בחי' עשיה עצמו, whereas the print has עצמם. It also became clear that several expressions in the note, such as "first printing" and "five aspects," did not emerge from the lines read. One final detail: the folio

marker טז [16] is damaged in the image, so the page was identified through the sequence of pages.

The limit of the proof. - Sefer HaGilgulim concerns souls and their levels. The transfer to the sefirot rests on the gloss in Likkutei Amarim, chapter 6, checked in digital text only. - Applying the account to the kav is an inference of the commentary, not the source's wording. - One word in the chapter is difficult to read. - The first printing of Tanya was not opened.

Methodological rule. A negative result is recorded as a negative result until the page is found. A similarly titled source does not replace the correct source. Even a quotation "according to a facsimile" is checked against the facsimile again, especially word endings.

Case 3. A Work's Title Interchanged: Hemshech 5666 and Hemshech 5672

The difficulty. An early version of chapter 13 said: "In Hemshech 5666, where revelation in vessels is discussed, the coming into being of created beings is mentioned first …" But that draft's notes refer to "Hemshech 5672, p. 955." Body and note contradict each other, and both works genuinely exist: Hemshech 5666 is cited in chapter 11 on another matter. The contradiction therefore cannot be resolved by conjecture.

The search path. We opened Hemshech 5672 in a printed facsimile, its printed index, the numbered list of discourses in the volume, and the pages adjacent to the cited page.

The evidence. Hemshech 5672, Part II, printed facsimile. The discourse begins “אדם כי יהי’ בעור,” item קיב [112] in the index. At the top of p. 952 it says “בס”ד. ש”פ תו”מ, העת”ר” (“With the help of Heaven. Shabbat Parashat Tazria–Metzora, 5675”), and on p. 955: > “As written in Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 20, from the union of ZON of BYA all created beings came into being from nothing into something through the neshamah-light, etc. …”

The changed conclusion. The location is Hemshech 5672, the discourse beginning “אדם כי יהי’ בעור,” p. 955. But our first correction was incomplete. It corrected the Hemshech’s name and called the discourse “ש”פ תו”מ, העת”ר,” as though this were its title. This is the date line, taken from a page heading supplied by a digital site. In the same check, the titles of two adjacent discourses were also corrected according to the printed index: “בראשית ברא” (item פד [84]) and “ויהי ביום השמיני” (item קיא [111]).

A further lesson emerges from the print’s running heading. On one page it reads תרחצ, while the sequence shows that תרצח was intended. Anyone copying a page number from the running heading

without checking the sequence transfers a printing error into the note.

The limit of the proof. The locations in Hemshech 5666 were not opened in print during this check. How the titles became interchanged cannot be known from the available material. Moreover, one quotation from Hemshech 5672 in chapter 11 had no location specified in any note, and we did not locate it.

Methodological rule. Take a discourse's title from its printed opening heading or the index, not a page heading. Check page numbers against the sequence. When the chapter body and note contradict, open the source rather than "reconcile" them.

Case 4. A Source and a Later Quotation: Derech Mitzvotecha, 170a

The difficulty. The Tzemach Tzedek testifies to the time of the Epistle's composition, and his testimony matters. The draft placed the testimony at the "end of chapter 2" of the explanation of "ושבתה," 5562, in his Derech Mitzvotecha, quoting as his wording: "It is from the actual holy handwriting of my master and teacher, whose soul is in Eden, who wrote it in the days before his passing in the village of Piena." But this sentence does not appear at all in the digital text of Derech Mitzvotecha.

The search path. We opened Derech Mitzvotecha in a printed facsimile, then the places where the Rebbe cites the passage.

The evidence. Derech Mitzvotecha, Kehot 5766, 170a, at the end of the explanation's chapter א [1], followed by "ב. אחר שנת' בפרק הקודם" ("2. After what was explained in the preceding chapter"), printed facsimile: > "(However, in Iggeret HaKodesh, 16a, in the discourse 'איהו וחיוהי,' etc., it appears explicitly that the vessels are in the aspect of actual finitude, yet they are Divinity for creating something from nothing; see there at length. One should rely more on the aforementioned discourse, for it is from the actual holy handwriting of my master and teacher, whose soul is in Eden, who wrote [כ'] it in the days before his passing in the village of Piena …"

The changed conclusion. The passage was found, but in slightly different wording and a different place, revealing three separate layers: 1. **The source.** The Tzemach Tzedek cites the Epistle to decide a substantive question: whether Atzilut's vessels are in the aspect of finitude. He relies on it "more" because it is from the actual holy handwriting and was written in the days before the passing. 2. **The later quotation.** The wording initially cited is not the Tzemach Tzedek's wording, but that of the Rebbe's quotation in Kitzurim VeHearot LeTanya, as cited in Likkut Peirushim,

p. 480. It includes a parenthetical addition, כתב instead of כ', and gives the location as ספ"ב, "end of chapter 2." Elsewhere, the Rebbe simply cites "Sefer HaMitzvot of the Tzemach Tzedek, 170a." 3. **The editors' notes.** The notes and references added by editors are later and are not a source for the date.

The limit of the proof. It is unknown why ספ"ב, "end of chapter 2," was stated when in the 5766 printing these are the end of chapter 1. There may be a different division in a manuscript or earlier printing, but this was not checked and remains only a hypothesis. Kitzurim VeHearot LeTanya itself was not opened.

Methodological rule. Bring the source's wording from the page and the quoter's wording in his name. "The Rebbe cites" and "the Tzemach Tzedek writes" are two different claims.

Case 5. A Textual Variant Not to Be Quietly "Corrected": "עליהם" and "אליהם"

The difficulty. The working text of the Epistle, the text on which this book's commentary was built, reads "העולה עליהם" ("rising over them"), and chapter 19's explanation was built on this reading. Our review report mistakenly said that the Kehot digital text also reads אליהם. This made it appear that there was no question at all.

The search path. We compared the available witnesses: the working text, Wikisource, the Kehot digital text, and Likkut Peirushim VeShinuyei Nuschaot in a printed facsimile.

The evidence. עליהם appears in the working text and Wikisource. אליהם (“to them”) appears in the Kehot digital text and also in Likkut Peirushim, Kehot 5762, p. 479. There the lemma, the Epistle’s words at the beginning of the note, reads אליהם, without a note on a textual variant (printed facsimile).

The changed conclusion. עליהם is not simply “the Epistle’s text,” but one of two readings. It must not be quietly replaced with אליהם, nor left as though undisputed. The decision must be explicit: retain the working text and note the variant, or align with Kehot and state this. The present book chose the first course: the working text remained, and the variant was recorded in a note to chapter 19. In both cases, the sense of ascent to the higher recipients remains, but no grammatical argument should be built on the preposition. The error in the review report was corrected in a later report through an explicit correction.

The limit of the proof. Which wording came from the author’s hand cannot be known until the first printing and manuscripts are examined. Avodat HaLevi was not opened either.

Methodological rule. An error in a review report is recorded through an explicit correction, not erased. A textual variant is recorded even when "what is right seems obvious."

Case 6. "Absent from the Epistle" Due to Spelling and Abbreviation

The difficulty. This case concerns the glossary at the book's end. Our glossary draft said of שורש, "root": "The word is not in the Epistle. It is a term of the commentary." A corrected version of the same glossary said that the abbreviation דצח"מ "is not the digital text" of the Epistle, as though there were a difference between readings.

The search path. In the first check, we searched the digital text using only the fuller spelling. In the second, we also searched defective spelling and abbreviated forms. We then compared the digital text with the Epistle's working text, in which the abbreviations were preserved.

The evidence. In the digital text, שרש appears three times: "כל עיקר ושרש הטיפה" ("the entire essential core and root of the drop"); "ושרש התורה דנפקא מחכמה עילאה" ("and the root of Torah, which emerges from supernal Chochmah"); "המצות הן עיקר התורה ושרשה" ("mitzvot are the essential core of the Torah and its root"). The

working text reads “סדר מדרגות דצח”מ שהן בחי’ עפר מים אש רוח,” while the Kehot digital text expands the abbreviation: “סדר מדרגות: דומם, צומח, חי, מדבר, שהן בחינות עפר, מים, אש, רוח” (“the order of levels: inanimate, vegetative, animal, speaking, which are the aspects of earth, water, fire, air”). מיין נוקבין is written in full in both witnesses.

The changed conclusion. “Root” is also part of the Epistle’s wording, spelled שרש, in the contexts of the drop, Torah and mitzvot. The word’s other senses in the glossary belong to the commentary. דצח”מ is not a textual variant: the same text is written once as an abbreviation and once with the abbreviation expanded. The paragraph numbers given in the glossary draft were also rechecked with a tool, not from memory, and several were corrected.

The limit of the proof. The words’ printed form was not checked here. All searches and counts were done in the digital text, so they do not establish whether a term appears abbreviated or in full in print.

Methodological rule. Checking “absent from the Epistle” requires all spellings: full and defective, abbreviated and expanded. A digital text expanding abbreviations is not a witness to their abbreviated form.

Case 7. “Explicitly” About a Passage Its Author Marks as a Variant: Etz Chaim, Gate 28

The difficulty. Chapter 9 asks why the Epistle says “seven months” concerning the growth of souls and “nine or seven months of gestation” concerning the growth of ZON, seeking a key in Etz Chaim. That source discusses “gestation,” in kabbalistic language a stage of coming into being compared to pregnancy, and gestations of seven and nine months. An earlier check said that the division of gestational months, seven and nine, between souls and worlds was written “explicitly” in Etz Chaim.

The search path. We opened Gate 28 in digital text and read the entire chapter, including the passage’s opening and the adjacent chapter.

The evidence. The passage in chapter 4 opens with “What I found here in a variant, I have written.” In the preceding chapter 3, the division is different: from the nine-month gestation, “and from their inner dimension all souls are drawn,” and only afterward comes a second gestation, of seven months, for the souls of the righteous.

The changed conclusion. “Explicitly” should not be written. One should write that Gate 28 contains two divisions, one presented “as a variant.”

The limit of the proof. The check was done in digital text. The gate's first chapter was not examined.

Methodological rule. Before writing "explicitly," read the passage's opening and the adjacent passage. The author's own marker, such as "as a variant" or "I found written," is part of the quotation.

Case 8. "See the Research Book": Where Does the Reference Lead?

The difficulty. Many notes in the book refer to the research volumes "for an expanded explanation and examination of the sources." Checking the references revealed two opposite problems. On one side, some references lead to material that is not a finding: a working table, an unapproved candidate or a brief, instructions written for the AI tool ahead of the next research round. On the other, one reference was marked "unsuitable" in an earlier review report of ours, and a different destination was proposed. It was checked again and found suitable.

The search path. For each reference, we opened the volume's page and read not only the heading but the kind of text: finding, candidate, table or brief. We read the reference itself where it appears in the chapter, together with the end of the preceding paragraph.

The evidence. - One reference leads to a page whose upper half is a finding and lower half a brief for the system; the page itself says: “The findings must be distinguished from the follow-up brief.” - Another reference leads to a page lacking the term sought. The discussion itself is on a nearby page, marked “candidate for the booklet, not yet approved.” - The reference mistakenly marked “unsuitable” stands at the end of two paragraphs whose final sentence concerns “raising mayin nukvin.” It is suitable as a reference to the discussion in the following chapter.

The changed conclusion. Every reference to the research volumes must say what kind of material it points to. Our proposed correction of that reference was withdrawn, leaving only a possible addition: another reference concerning “continually” and “a likeness.”

The limit of the proof. We checked a sample of references, not all of them. The content of some pages was known from an earlier check and was not reopened.

Methodological rule. A brief is not evidence, and a “candidate” is not a conclusion. A reference is checked where it stands, not only by the wording of the note.

In Summary: What the Cases Share

- In seven cases, an error also occurred in a review report or the first proposed correction: Cases 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8. The reviewer too needs review.
- Repeatedly, “not found” proved to mean “we did not search in the right form”: another abbreviation, another spelling, another similarly titled book or a nearby page.
- Digital text suffices for locating and sometimes for comparison. It is not a witness to the printed form, especially abbreviations.
- The distinction between the source’s wording, the quoter’s wording and the editor’s wording recurs in almost every case.
- “The limit of the proof” is not an appendix. It is part of the conclusion.

Anyone wishing to return from the cases to the working method in the preceding part will find its most difficult stages within them. Opening the source under every form of name and abbreviation: Cases 1 and 2. Checking a quotation in context and where it stands: Cases 3, 7 and 8. Distinguishing a source from someone quoting it: Case 4. Distinguishing digital text from a printed facsimile: Cases 5 and 6. Recording a conclusion with its limit: all of them.

A Glossary for Rereading

The entries are arranged by subject, from general concepts to particular ones, rather than alphabetically. The glossary can be consulted when a concept needs clarification, then followed back to the chapter explaining it.

The glossary helps revisit a concept within the context in which it was learned. It does not replace the commentary: the same name may take a different meaning when the subject or recipient changes. Each entry follows the same order: first a plain explanation; then, where important, whether the word itself appears in the Epistle or belongs to the commentary; and finally what to notice and which chapters chiefly study the concept. Checking whether a word is "written in the Epistle" was done in digital text, using all spellings and abbreviated forms (see Case 6 in the case studies). At the glossary's end are several methodological terms used in "Studying Further" and the case studies.

Glossary entries in the source's Hebrew alphabetical order:

Adam Kadmon · Light · The Light of Atzilut Within Asiyah · The Neshamah-Light · Returning Light · Ein Sof · Atzilut / BYA · Aspect · Nullification · Refinement · Inanimate, Vegetative, Animal and Speaking, and the Four Elements · Radiance · Palaces · Raising MAN ·

Apprehension · Union · Ze'ir Anpin and Nukva (ZON) · Vitality · Something from Nothing · Vessel / Vessels · Keter · Nature / Essence · Malchut · Memale · A Likeness · Explicit / Directly Supported / Plausible · A Parallel · Chariot · Nefesh / Ruach · Neshamah · Sovev / Encompassing · Sefirot · Gestation and Birth · Cause and Effect / Hishtalshelut · Inner Dimension / Outer Dimension · Parsa · Partzuf · Printed Facsimile / Digital Transcription · Tzimtzum · Requires Further Study · Kav · Evidence · Root · Tohu / Tikkun.

Ein Sof

A designation for Divinity as having no limit or definition. It does not mean merely a number greater than any number, but what is not subject to measure at all. The expression recurs in the Epistle, sometimes as "Or Ein Sof," the revelation drawn from it. Note: "Or Ein Sof" and the Creator's Essence are not one name; each sentence must be read to establish its subject. See chapters 1, 7–9, 13, 15.

Sefirot

Ten powers or attributes, Chochmah, Binah, Daat, Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut, through which Divine revelation is drawn into the worlds. Every sefirah has light and vessel. The word appears in the Epistle and is the subject of its opening: ע"ס abbreviates עשר ספירות, "ten sefirot."

Note: the sefirot are not “parts” of Divinity; chapter 1 addresses this question. See chapters 1–2, 4–5, 8.

Aspect

A side, manner or level in which something exists or is perceived in relation to something else. “In the aspect of encompassing,” for example, means that in relation to the worlds, the thing stands in an encompassing manner. The Hebrew word בחינה appears many times in the Epistle, generally abbreviated ”בחי. Note: an “aspect” is not a “part”; the same thing can be one way in one aspect and another way in another. See chapters 1, 8, and throughout the book.

Vitality

The Divine power giving life to and sustaining every created being at every moment. Much of the Epistle clarifies where each world’s vitality comes from and how it reaches earth. Note: related questions must be distinguished: on what a created being’s existence depends, how it comes into being from nothing into something, and what constitutes an added revelation within it. These are not three stages in time. See chapters 12–13, 18.

Light

Language of revelation and vitality. Physical light is not intended. The word appears many times in the Epistle.

Note: light must be distinguished from the luminary; "akin to the luminary" does not identify the light with the Creator's Essence. See chapters 1, 5, 7, 13, 15.

Vessel / Vessels

The aspect defining revelation's manner and measure, like a vessel giving water shape and quantity. The word appears many times in the Epistle, which uses it to explain "garmohi" in the Zohar's wording. Note: Atzilut's vessels, the vessels of Malchut descending into BYA, and BYA's own vessels are not the same recipient; each sentence requires clarifying which vessels are meant. See chapters 1, 4–5, 7, 11, 13.

Tzimtzum

Concealment and limitation of light so that a lower level can receive it. Light that has undergone tzimtzum shines less, or in a more limited manner, than at its source. The singular Hebrew word appears three times in the Epistle, in one sentence; chapter 5 examines what each occurrence refers to. The third is "the first tzimtzum," whose description in Etz Chaim is also cited in chapter 7. The plural, "very numerous tzimtzumim," already appears in chapter 2. Note: "tzimtzum" is used in Chassidic language for several matters, and context determines which is meant. See chapters 2, 5, 7.

Kav

The drawing down of Or Ein Sof in order and measure, after the tzimtzum. The word appears in the Epistle. Note: the Epistle distinguishes "the kav itself" from "the radiance of the kav"; the distinction must not be turned into two independent kavim. See chapters 7, 11–13, 15.

Radiance

A revelation drawn from the light, rather than the light itself. The word appears in the Epistle, as does "a radiance of a radiance." Note: the sequence "a radiance of a radiance" is studied according to the recipients enumerated in the Epistle; it does not automatically add a world or a fourth level. The status of the light and the status of the recipient are not identical. See chapters 11–15, 18.

Sovev / Encompassing

Light not received according to the recipients' measure, and therefore not divided according to their levels; it is thus described as "encompassing" rather than vested. Both Hebrew words appear in the Epistle, and central to the discussion is "encompasses all worlds equally," equally close to all worlds. Note: "sovev" is not a place outside the world, and "equally" does not mean all recipients have equal characteristics.

"Or Ein Sof" should not be indiscriminately identified with the Creator's Essence. See chapters 13, 15.

Memale

Light vested in created beings and received according to their measure, each created being according to its capacity. The word itself does not appear in the Epistle; it is a commentary term helping us understand sovev through comparison. See chapter 13.

Returning Light

A radiance described as "from below upward," in the direction opposite to the light's descent. The expression appears in the Epistle. Note: in the passage discussed, the description refers to the kav at its termination; it is not a physical ray bouncing off a wall and must not be substituted for raising MAN. See chapters 8, 13, 15, 18.

Nullification

"כלא חשיב," "accounted as naught": "as though not," like nothing, not actual "nothing." Nullification means that a thing has no independent standing before its source, not that it disappears, like the sun's radiance within the sun. Note: "nullified" is not "nonexistent." See chapters 3, 5, 10.

Union

The connection of giver and recipient from which a new influence is drawn, as in the union and influence of Ze'ir Anpin in Nukva. This names a relationship, not a bodily act. Note: each occurrence requires clarifying who participates, the manner of union and what is drawn from it. See chapters 5, 9, 11.

Gestation and Birth

Stages in an analogy for coming into being: gestation describes inclusion, development and preparation within the source; birth describes emergence into a mode of distinct existence. Note: the details of periods in the sources receive their meaning from the discourse in which they appear. See chapter 9.

Raising MAN

מ"ן abbreviates מיין נוקבין, Aramaic for "female waters," a designation for arousal from the recipient's side that arouses influence from above. The Epistle writes מיין נוקבין in full and later also abbreviates it מ"נ; the spelling מ"ן belongs to the commentary. In the Epistle's analogy, this arousal is sowing and planting. Note: moving from analogy to service requires clarifying what corresponds to what, not assuming every detail of the analogy is a universal rule. See chapters 15–16. The influence descending in response is called mayin

duchrin, abbreviated מ"ד; this term too is explained in chapter 16.

Atzilut / BYA

Chassidut describes four worlds: Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah. Atzilut is a level in which the sefirot's lights and vessels are united with Divinity. BYA, the initials of Beriah, Yetzirah and Asiyah, includes created existence and the Divine radiance giving it life. The worlds' names appear many times in the Epistle. Note: the status of a world must not be confused with that of everything shining within it. See chapters 1, 4–5, 11–13.

Keter

The aspect above the sefirot, described in the commentary through a king's crown above his head. In one enumeration of the ten sefirot, Keter replaces Daat. Note: "Keter from below upward" concerning Malchut must be read according to the special relationship between termination and beginning explained in chapter 8. See also chapter 10.

Palaces

A physical hall is not intended. The palaces are discussed in the Epistle as an outer aspect created from the vessels' outer dimension, in which "the aspect of igulim" of the sefirot vests itself. See chapters 5–6.

Parsa

A “screen”: in the explanation discussed here, the boundary separating Atzilut from the worlds beneath it. Note: the radiance of the kav is said to have “pierced the parsa” with the vessels of Malchut; this is not a physical partition. See chapters 7, 9, 11–12.

Adam Kadmon

The name of a very lofty spiritual system in the order of hishtalshelut, preceding the four worlds and described through an image of head and feet. Adam, the first man, is not intended. Its “feet of yosher” terminate at the bottom of Asiyah. Note: the image of a stature describes spiritual relationships, not a body. See chapters 12, 15.

Partzuf

A complete structure of sefirot connected to one another and functioning as one unit, like limbs of one body. In Aramaic, a partzuf is also called “anpin,” face, not a physical face but a structure. “Partzuf” itself does not appear in the Epistle, but names of partzufim do, such as “Ze’ir Anpin.” See chapters 2, 5–6, 10–11.

Ze’ir Anpin and Nukva (ZON)

“Ze’ir Anpin,” Aramaic for “small face,” names the six emotional attributes from Chesed through Yesod when

organized as one partzuf. “Nukva” is Malchut as a partzuf receiving from Ze’ir Anpin. Together they are abbreviated ZON, זו”ן. Both names appear in the Epistle, also abbreviated זו”נ in the working text. Note: when the Epistle mentions “the union of ZON,” it says who unites, not how. See chapters 4–6, 9–11.

Malchut

The tenth and last sefirah, receiving from all the sefirot above it, from which revelation is drawn into the worlds below. Etz Chaim also calls it “Nukva of Ze’ir Anpin.” The word appears many times in the Epistle. The Epistle also calls Malchut of Atzilut “Keter from below upward”: in the order from above downward it is tenth, and in the order from below upward, first. Note: the Epistle distinguishes the vessels of Malchut of Atzilut descending into BYA from BYA’s own vessels. See chapters 4, 8–9, 15.

The Light of Atzilut Within Asiyah

The innermost aspect within the world of Asiyah: the light of Atzilut vested within it, garment within garment. In the Epistle, the radiance vests itself in this first, passing from it to Beriah and Yetzirah within Asiyah. The expression appears in the Epistle, which refers on this subject to Sefer HaGilgulim (see Case 2). Note: this is not Atzilut as it is in its own world, nor the usual division according to which each world

comprises ten sefirot, its Chochmah called "its Atzilut." According to Sefer HaGilgulim, this aspect itself is also divided into ABYA of Asiyah. The order of garments describes level within level, not a journey of light from place to place. See chapter 15.

The Neshamah-Light

In the contexts discussed: Divine vitality vested in the sefirot and vessels, giving them life as a soul gives life to a body. The expression appears in the Epistle. Note: "neshamah" here does not of itself mean a human soul. See chapters 4, 11–12, 15.

Neshamah

A name to be read with the sentence's subject. The word appears in the Epistle in several contexts. The book discusses human souls, angelic souls and the neshamah-light of sefirot; a statement about one does not automatically transfer to another. See chapters 4–6, 9, 11–12, 15.

Nefesh / Ruach

Names with several contexts: levels of the human soul, aspects of the sefirot's vitality, or the spirit of the animal and bird. Both words appear in the Epistle. Each occurrence requires clarifying to whom they are attributed. See chapters 4, 6, 12, 19.

Something from Nothing

The coming into being of a new existence that is not a commensurate continuation of a preceding nature. "Commensurability" in Chassidic language means a relationship of common measure, as between cause and effect (see "Cause and Effect"). Ayin, "nothing," does not mean an absence of a Creator or power bringing into being. The expression appears many times in the Epistle. Note: the distinction between something from nothing and an effect descending from its cause is fundamental to the commentary. See chapters 1–3, 7–8, 13–14.

Cause and Effect / Hishtalshelut

"Ilah" is a cause, and "alul" the result drawn from it. In such a relationship the two are commensurate, and the result is drawn from its cause like a link in a chain, hence "hishtalshelut," chainlike descent. Both expressions appear in the Epistle. The commentary distinguishes this relationship from creation of something from nothing. Note: "something from something," changing the form of existing material, as in human action (chapter 8), is an auxiliary term in the commentary and should not be presented as a quotation from the Epistle. See chapters 1–3, 7–8.

A Likeness

Language of resemblance without identity: something possessing a likeness of another's quality, without being that other thing. The Hebrew word מעין appears twice in the Epistle. "A likeness of the aspect of Divinity" in souls and "a likeness of the aspect of Ein Sof" in the power of growth are said in different contexts. Note: in the second case, the condition "if … were to endure" also defines the comparison's limit. See chapters 5–7, 9, 14, 16.

Root

A source in relation to something drawn from it. The word also appears in the Epistle, spelled שרש: concerning the drop ("the entire essential core and root of the drop"), Torah ("and the root of Torah") and mitzvot ("and its root"). The other senses used by the commentary belong to the commentary and the parallels (see Case 6). Note: sometimes a proximate source is discussed, sometimes a higher source; the root's superiority does not abolish the manifest order of levels. See chapters 9–10, 17–20.

Inner Dimension / Outer Dimension

Two sides of the same thing: the inward, principal side, and the outward side that is revealed or serves as a garment. Both Hebrew words appear in the Epistle.

Their relationships are clarified according to the subject: light, vessel, apprehension or drawing down. Note: "outer dimension" alone does not imply inferiority in every respect. In chapter 10, we saw that the mitzvah is "in the outer dimension" and Torah "in the inner dimension," yet "mitzvot are the essential core of the Torah and its root." One must therefore ask separately what the root is, where the revelation is located and what the purpose is. See chapters 2, 5, 10, 15.

Chariot

A concept resting on the prophetic vision in Ezekiel's first chapter. In the analogy, a chariot carries its rider and moves according to his will; hence the emphasis on nullification in the spiritual chariot. The Epistle mentions "the face of the ox and face of the eagle" within the chariot, deriving pleasure and nourishment from the spirit of the animal and bird in sacrifices (chapters 2, 19); Likkutei Torah mentions "the face of the lion and face of the ox" as the root of animal souls (chapters 2, 17).

Tohu / Tikkun

Two orders described by the kabbalists: the world of Tohu, in which the vessels shattered ("the shattering of the vessels"), and the world of Tikkun, in which lights vest themselves in vessels in order and measure. The

words do not appear in the Epistle; they occur in parallels explaining the root of food and refinement. On the same subject, Kuntres Acharon mentions two Names from kabbalistic language, Sag and Mah: Sag is the Name before the shattering, the root of things still requiring refinement, while Mah is the Name through which rectification takes place. Note: the superiority of the root in Tohu does not make food higher than man in every aspect. Tohu or Sag must not be identified with returning light without a source explaining the connection. See chapters 16, 18–19.

Refinement

Separating the good from the refuse within a thing, and elevating the Divine power within the world through human service, as explained in the parallel sources. The word does not appear in the Epistle; it belongs to the commentary and the parallels. Note: nourishment, intellectual activity and the work of refinement are connected, but are not three words for the same action. See chapters 10, 17–19.

Inanimate, Vegetative, Animal and Speaking, and the Four Elements

דצח"מ abbreviates דומם, צומח, חי, מדבר, inanimate, vegetative, animal and speaking, an order of four levels among created beings. In the Epistle, they correspond to earth, water, fire and air. The working text of the

Epistle contains the abbreviation, while the Kehot digital text expands it; this is not a textual variant (see Case 6). Note: the correspondence to elements is studied in context and is not a chemical classification of materials. In Etz Chaim, Gate 50, chapter 10, the animal is created from the air component and the speaking from the fire component, the reverse of the Epistle, where animal corresponds to fire and speaking to air. The principles behind the two orders can be distinguished, but the distinction does not abolish their difference. See chapters 14, 16–18.

Apprehension

Grasping something intellectually, understanding its nature. The word appears in the Epistle. Note: knowing that a source exists and understanding its nature are different questions. Denial of apprehension does not abolish all knowledge either; one must read what is denied, to whom, and in which respect. See chapters 2–3.

Nature / Essence

“Mahut,” nature, is what a thing is, its principal character. “Atzmut,” essence, is generally said of the Creator Himself as above every revelation. Both words appear in the Epistle. Note: they must not be interchanged in every sentence. Sometimes the nature of a light is discussed, sometimes the Creator’s

Essence; preserve the sentence's subject rather than transferring its assertion from one subject to another. See chapters 1–3, 7, 13.

Methodological terms. The following terms do not come from the Epistle. They serve "Studying Further" and the case studies, describing how a source is checked.

A Parallel

Another place where something similar is said, in the same or nearly the same words. A parallel illuminates and directs a search, but is not evidence of itself. Two parallels with one origin, such as two versions of the same discourse, are not two witnesses. See "A Parallel and Evidence" in "Studying Further," and Case 1.

Evidence

A source that has been opened and read in context and states what we claim, or from which the claim necessarily follows. A system's answer, or agreement among several systems, is not evidence. See "How to Check That a Source Is Real."

Printed Facsimile / Digital Transcription

A printed facsimile is an image of a page from a printed book in a particular edition; it testifies to that edition. A digital transcription is typed text on a website, useful for locating but not a witness to the

printed form, especially abbreviations. See “Digital Text and Printed Facsimile,” and Cases 5–6.

Explicit / Directly Supported / Plausible

Three degrees of certainty used in the research. “Explicit”: something the source itself says. “Directly supported”: something the source and its context support directly. “Plausible”: an inference supported by sources whose precise connection still needs proof. See “A Few More Habits of a Learner.”

Requires Further Study

An expression from the study hall for a question left open. This book also tries to state precisely what is missing and what could decide it. See “How to Leave a Question Open.”

Source Index for Further Study

The index shows where each source is discussed in the book.

Beside each work are the chapters or parts chiefly discussing it. For the precise reference, open the indicated chapter and consult its footnotes. “The Introduction,” “Studying Further” and “Case Studies” are the parts outside the twenty chapters.

- **Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 20 (“איהו וחיוהי”)**: all chapters; its wording is presented continuously in the source passages.
- **Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 20, Wikisource text**: chapters 6, 14.
- **Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 19**: chapter 2; Studying Further.
- **Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 8**: chapters 14, 16.
- **Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 14**: chapters 15, 16.
- **Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 15**: chapter 11.
- **Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistles 17, 31**: chapter 8.
- **Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapters 4, 5, 36, 37**: chapters 10, 16, 20.
- **Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 48**: chapters 5, 7, 13, 14.
- **Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 7**: chapter 18.
- **Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 6 (gloss)**: chapter 15.
- **Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapters 1, 2, 3, 18, 20, 35, 39, 52**: chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15.
- **Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapters 2, 3, 12**: chapters 2, 3, 8, 12, 13.
- **Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapter 1**: chapters 8, 15.

- **Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah, chapters 4, 7, 11**: chapters 5, 8, 10.
- **Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, section 4**: chapters 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20.
- **Tanya, Iggeret HaTeshuvah, chapter 4**: chapters 8, 10.
- **Tanya: its parts and standing**: the Introduction.
- **Likkutei Torah, Ki Tetze, discourse beginning "כי תצא למלחמה"**: chapters 2, 10, 17, 20.
- **Likkutei Torah, Pinchas, the two discourses "צו את בני ישראל"**: chapters 14, 17, 19, 20.
- **Likkutei Torah, Emor, "ביאור ע"פ והניף הכהן אותם"**: chapter 19; Case Studies (Case 1).
- **Likkutei Torah, Vaetchanan, "להבין בתוספת ביאור ע"פ וידעת היום"**: chapter 18.
- **Likkutei Torah, Tzav, discourse beginning "הים ראה וינוס"**: chapter 9.
- **Likkutei Torah, Tzav, "מצה זו" (11c; יא,ג); "ששת ימים תאכל מצות" (13a; יג,א); "ואכלתם אכול" ("And You Shall Eat Plentifully")**: chapters 6, 18.
- **Likkutei Torah, Discourses for Yom Kippur, "ביאור מעט ע"פ שבת שבתון"** — chapters 5, 8, 9.
- **Likkutei Torah, Shelach** — chapters 8, 16.
- **Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim** — chapters 5, 6, 8, 9, 10.
- **Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar (including "ביאור על הדברים הנ"ל," 17a)** — chapters 6, 8, 9, 10.

- **Likkutei Torah, other Torah portions (Shemini, Behar, Naso, Re'eh, Chukkat, Balak, Nitzavim, Bechukkotai, Va'etchannan, discourse beginning ואהבת, Ekev)** — chapters 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.
- **Torah Or, Megillat Esther, "יביאו לבוש מלכות" and the additional explanation** — chapter 2.
- **Torah Or, other discourses (Mishpatim, Yitro, Bereishit, Bo, Vayera, Shemot, Vayeshev, Mikketz, Vayetze, Lech Lecha, additions for Tetzavveh)** — chapters 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10.
- **Derech Mitzvotecha, explanation of "ושבתה," 5562** — chapter 20; Introduction; Case Studies (case 4).
- **Derech Mitzvotecha, Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah, chapter 27** — chapters 7, 13.
- **Derech Mitzvotecha, Mitzvat Achdut Hashem, chapter 2** — chapter 13.
- **Derech Mitzvotecha, other passages (Mitzvat Ha'amanat Elokut 8; Minnui Melech 3; Periyah VeRiviyah, section 2; Shoresh Mitzvat HaTefillah 2–4, 7, 11, 26, 46)** — chapters 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.
- **Or HaTorah, Bamidbar, Discourses for Shavuot** — chapters 14, 16.
- **Or HaTorah, Naso** — Case Studies (case 1).
- **Or HaTorah, Shemot, Va'era** — chapter 6.
- **Hemshech 5672, vol. II, discourse beginning "בראשית ברא" (no. 84 in the index)** — chapters 11, 13.

- **Hemshech 5672, vol. II, discourse beginning "ויהי ביום השמיני" (no. 111 in the index)** — chapters 11, 13.
- **Hemshech 5672, vol. II, discourse beginning "אדם כי יהי' בעור" (no. 112 in the index)** — chapters 11, 13; Case Studies (case 3).
- **Hemshech 5666** — chapters 3, 11; Case Studies (case 3).
- **Discourse beginning "ציון במשפט תפדה ושבי' בצדקה," Shabbat Parashat Devarim 5735** — chapter 20.
- **Discourse beginning "ונגלה כבוד ה'," 5722** — chapters 18, 20.
- **Discourse beginning "פקודא ליתן מחצית השקל," 5723** — chapter 19.
- **The "באתי לגני" sequence, 5710 (the Rebbe Rayatz), and the Rebbe's "באתי לגני" discourses; discourse beginning "ואתה תצוה," 5741** — Introduction.
- **The Rebbe's talks, discourses and Likkutei Sichot on Torah study and new tools** — Introduction; Studying Further.
- **Reshimot on Tanya (the Rebbe), section 20** — chapters 2, 3, 4, 6.
- **Shiurim BeSefer HaTanya / Lessons in Tanya (Rabbi Y. Weinberg)** — chapters 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12; Introduction; Studying Further.
- **Maamarei Admur HaZaken, 5566 and other years** — chapters 4, 9.
- **Hayom Yom, 11 Tishrei** — chapters 1, 13.

- **Kitzurim VeHe'arot LeTanya** — chapter 20; Case Studies (case 4).
- **He'arot VeTikkunim LeTanya (the list of notes the Rebbe appended to Tanya)** — chapters 14, 16, 18.
- **Likkut Peirushim VeShinnuyei Nuschaot LeTanya** — chapters 18, 20; Case Studies (cases 1, 4, 5).
- **Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchot Talmud Torah, chapter 4** — chapter 10.
- **Tanya LaAm** — chapter 11; Introduction; Studying Further.
- **Etz Chaim, Gate 1 (Igulim VeYosher)** — chapters 5, 7, 12, 15.
- **Etz Chaim, Gate 40, discourse 10** — chapters 5, 9, 11, 12.
- **Etz Chaim, Gate 44, chapters 1–2** — chapters 4, 5.
- **Etz Chaim, Gate 42 (Derushei ABYA)** — chapters 4, 5, 8, 9.
- **Etz Chaim, Gate 47 (Seder ABYA)** — chapters 8, 11.
- **Etz Chaim, Gate 28 (HaIbburim)** — chapters 9, 11; Case Studies (case 7).
- **Etz Chaim, Gate 50, chapter 10** — chapter 17.
- **Etz Chaim, other gates (3, 5, 19, 29, 39, 40 discourse 15; "the end of the Gate of MAN and MAD")** — chapters 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 17.
- **Pri Etz Chaim** — chapter 9.
- **Shaar HaKavvanot** — chapters 6, 9.
- **Shaar HaGilgulim** — chapters 5, 6; Case Studies (case 2).

- **Sefer HaGilgulim** — chapter 15; Case Studies (case 2).
- **Zohar, vol. III, Pinchas** — chapter 19; Case Studies (case 1).
- **Zohar and Tikkunei Zohar, other passages** — chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10; Studying Further.
- **Sefer Yetzirah** — chapters 1, 2, 3, 8, 10.
- **Pardes Rimmonim** — chapters 2, 3, 8, 10; Studying Further.
- **Shaarei Kedushah (Rabbi Chaim Vital)** — chapter 2; Introduction; Studying Further.
- **Chanah Ariel (Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik of Homil)** — chapter 2; Introduction; Studying Further.
- **Nehar Shalom (the Rashash)** — chapter 11.
- **Mishnat Chassidim; Elimah; Shaar HaNevuah** — chapters 2, 3, 10.
- **Babylonian Talmud and Mishnah: Berachot, Bava Kamma, Sanhedrin, Kiddushin, Eruvin, Pe'ah, Avot** — chapters 10, 18, 20.
- **Babylonian Talmud: additional tractates** — chapters 2, 3, 4, 9, 10.
- **Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin, Horayot, Yevamot, Chullin** — Introduction.
- **Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 94 (Hezekiah's generation)** — Studying Further.
- **Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 1:2; Shabbat 1:2** — chapter 10.

- **Bereishit Rabbah** — chapters 6, 14; Studying Further.
- **Shemot Rabbah** — chapter 13; Studying Further.
- **Rashi** — chapters 3, 5, 6, 16, 18.
- **Rambam** — chapters 2, 7; Introduction.
- **Tanach** — chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20.
- **Science and medicine; personal accounts of using the tools** — Studying Further.
- **The Research Book (3 volumes)** — chapters 1–20; Introduction; Studying Further; Case Studies.
- **The Rebbe's Igrot Kodesh and secondary sources ("Hiskashrut," "Kfar Chabad," Sichot Kodesh 5736)** — Introduction; Studying Further.

Sources for the Introduction's Discussion of Tools and Their Time

Source	Location in the book	How the source was examined
Hitvaaduyot 5742, vol. IV, 13 Elul, section 1, pp. 2150–2151	Introduction: listening, the time of revelation and means of communication	A facsimile of the two printed pages was read; an unreviewed transcript
Ecclesiastes 3:11; talk of 17 Kislev 5741, Sichos in English, vol. 8	Introduction: beautiful in its time	Digital text; the parallel passage was read in English translation
Habakkuk 2:9–12; Hayom Yom, 15 Adar I	Introduction: a stone shall cry out from the wall	Digital source; the promised event is not identified with a particular system
OpenAI, Introducing ChatGPT, 30.11.2022 (6 Kislev 5783)	Introduction: the milestone in the availability of conversation	Official launch announcement; a source only for the date and product description