

Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Vayechi 5770

D'ei Chochmah L'nafshechah

“Let your soul know wisdom”

Parshas Vayechi

From the discourses of Moreinu v'Rabeinu
the Gaon and Tzaddik Shlit'a

- not for general circulation -



Published by the Yam Hachochmah Institute

Under the auspices of "Yeshivas Toras Chochom"

for the study of the
revealed and hidden Torah

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Shalosh Seudos¹ of Parshas Vayechi 5768

”לא-יסור שֶׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה וּמַחֲקֶק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו, עַד פִּי-יָבֵא שִׁילָה, וְלוֹ יִקָּהֵת עַמִּים. אֶסְרִי לַגֶּפֶן עֵירוֹהָ, וְלִשְׂרָקָה בְּנֵי אֶתְנֹן; כִּבֵּס בַּיַּיִן לְבָשׁוֹ, וּבָדָם-עֲנָבִים סוֹתָהּ. חֲכָלִילֵי עֵינַיִם מִיַּיִן; וּלְבָן-שָׁנִים, מִחֶלֶב.”

“The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh arrives; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.”²

Rashi explains: **“‘His eyes shall be red’—**‘[The word חכלילי] means redness, as we see from the Targum as well as from the verse, ‘Who has redness [חכלילות] of the eyes?’³ For it is the way of drinkers of wine, that their eyes redden. **‘With milk’**—From an abundance of milk that will be in his land, where there will be good silage for flocks of sheep. This is the meaning of the verse, that his eyes will be red from an abundance of wine and his teeth will be white from an abundance of milk.”

¹ The lesson was delivered at the third meal of Shabbos Chanukah in Uman.

² *Bereishis* 49:10-12

³ *Mishlei* 23:29

Wine-Red Eyes and Milk-White Teeth

We must understand the relationship between these blessings of an abundance of wine and milk and the time of the redemption, which is the focus of the remainder of Yaakov's blessing to Yehudah. "The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh arrives'—Shiloh is Moshe."⁴ [The two names have the same gematria—345.] The first redeemer is also the final redeemer.

It is well known that the Torah begins with the letter *beis*, and within the letter *beis* there is a point which is called, "the point in its chamber."⁵ The entirety of the Torah is encompassed within that first letter *beis*, and to an even more concentrated degree within the point inside the *beis*. This is because the Torah as a whole really comes down to a single "point"—the point of faith which is expressed in *Shema*, the statement that Hashem is one. A Jew must contemplate this point all the time, while learning and praying and at every moment of the day. He must see the "supernal whiteness"—that all of reality is only Hashem and there is nothing else beside Him. All of the reality of creation is just the point of *tzimtzum*, the final product of the process of Hashem's emanating forth all of the worlds in the manner of a "round vessel." [An evolving series of vessels that limit the revelation of Hashem's light so that its nature can be perceived by an individuated creation.]

He revealed the force of the spiritual roots of *din*, that it too is also purely *Elokus*, and it is the root of all of the desire and will to reveal Hashem's endless

⁴ *Zohar* I:25b

⁵ *Zohar* 1:15b

light. This is the purpose of all of creation, to form a vessel that is ideally suited to reveal Hashem's unity in the most profound way. This is why the *tzaddikim* visualize the simple light of the *Ein Sof* before them at all times, and this is the inner meaning of the verse, "And his teeth white with milk." "White" is written as לבן, which is an acronym of the phrase ל"ב נתיבות, or "thirty-two pathways of wisdom." [There are a maximum of thirty-two spinal nerves, as well as teeth, in the average adult.] The *tzaddikim* derive desire and yearning for Hashem from every one of the boundaries and limits that exist in creation until they are like drunkards, whose "eyes are red with wine." [Just as a person who is exhausted and has "reached his limit" will find that his eyes are red.] This longing drives them to long for the "supernal whiteness" of Hashem's absolute and endless light, so that their teeth will be "white with milk," and so they will experience the ultimate love of attachment to Hashem. Then "red turns to white" [which symbolizes the movement from *gevuros* to *chassadim*]. So, too, after focusing on the "supernal whiteness" until it illuminates the words of the *Shema*, one reaches the *dalet* of *Echad*, which alludes to limitations and *tzimtzum*,⁶ [like the four cardinal directions that define space] and accepts upon himself to sacrifice his life in order to affirm and be joined together with Hashem's light and oneness.

Ze'ir Anpin United with Atikah

Of course, one must never think that there is really some sort of visible reality of colors in the upper world. Rather, it is like what the Ramban taught and that which the Baal Shem Tov discussed, that a Jew is given permission to

⁶ Ibid., I:12a

imagine the light of Hashem surrounding him on all sides as he prays.⁷ He is also permitted to always visualize, especially while reciting *Shema*, the white light of Hashem that pervades all of creation so that he will really feel how all of the myriad colors and forms of the universe are only a means through which we are to come to long more strongly to be encompassed in Hashem's simple and pure light. This is the inner meaning of the teaching that, "*Ze'ir Anpin* is dependent on and united with *Atikah Kadisha*."⁸ Through contemplating the spectrum of colors and forms [associated with *Ze'ir Anpin*], especially those that parallel the three main *sefiros* within *Ze'ir Anpin*—*Chessed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferes*—one can merit to unite with the higher state of *Atikah* and be encompassed in the Divine light.

It is not enough to meditate on the appearance of the colors alone, because each of them reveals a different type of *dveikus* accessible within the human soul. Therefore, everything depends on the degree to which a person arouses within himself the attributes that parallel the *sefiros* of *CHaGaT*—love, Divine awe, and *dveikus*—so that he can meaningfully contemplate the supernal colors.

The Baal HaTanya taught that there are three types of love.⁹ The first is אהבת עולם, the "eternal love" [of the second blessing that precedes the *Shema* during *Maariv*] which is sourced in the world of *Binah*. The second is אהבה רבה, the "great love" [of that same blessing during *Shacharis*] which is sourced in the world of *Chochmah*. And the third is אהבה בתענוגים, the "love in delights" [that is mentioned in *Shir HaShirim* and which is associated with Shabbos] which is

⁷ *Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah, Parshas Noach* #57

⁸ *Zohar* III:292a

⁹ *Tanya*, chapters 9, 14, 40, 46; *Iggeres HaKodesh* 18

sourced in the world of *Kesser*. A person must arouse each of these types of loves inside his own soul as he contemplates Hashem's light, and this is also true of *yirah* and *dveikus*. If a person fails to arouse these emotional states within himself he will certainly not be able to attain a state of *dveikus* with the Divine light. We can understand this better by way of example: If a person wants to fulfill the obligation to "place Hashem before him always" by envisioning the *Shem HaVaYaH* or *ADNI*, he must also awaken within himself the emotional state that parallels each of them. This was expressed by the Kozhnutzer Maggid when he said that all of the meditations on the Divine Name and the Kabbalistic *yichudim* that were revealed by the Arizal were all a kind of ladder upon which a person can ascend to achieve a state of *dveikus* with Hashem. It isn't enough to simply meditate on the *sheimos*—one must focus on Hashem's existence. This idea is paralleled in the writings of Rav Tzaddok HaKohen of Lublin, who wrote that the main purpose of the Kabbalistic meditations on the Divine Names is to focus on Hashem's reality.

In truth, every single word of prayer and Torah is itself a Divine Name, and the *tzaddikim* spent their entire lives focused on the holy *sheimos* during every moment of prayer and Torah study. Even as they ate and drank and conversed, they were in a state of meditation and communion with Hashem—this is the defining quality of the *tzaddikim* "who walk before Hashem." The formal meditation upon the *sheimos* is a kind of gateway and tool for a person to reach the goal, which is the [emotive] focus on Hashem's existence and all-pervasive reality. One way to achieve this is through visualizing supernal lights and colors and their parallel emotive states. This is one of the forms of *avodah*

that the Baal Shem Tov revealed, that every thought-state and its parallel emotional expression should be invested into *avodas Hashem* until the heart is aroused with a fiery passion. This arousal is what draws down the true Divine light during one's subsequent meditation on the Divine Names, and it is what makes one worthy of seeing the King's glory. That vision makes one worthy to be "drawn into the body of the King," to commune with the King Himself.¹⁰

Being in a state of oneness with Hashem and contemplating His reality is the main delight that a Jewish soul can experience. As the verse says, "Your eyes are like doves"¹¹—just as doves delight in merely gazing upon one another, so too the greatest pleasure that a Jewish soul can feel is in contemplating Hashem's existence all day long. This is the level of "love in delights"—that a Jew takes the greatest delight and pleasure in just contemplating Hashem's existence.

The Path of Ascent

To come to this level, one must ascend step-by-step through the opportunities that are afforded by every bit of Torah and prayer and every mitzvah act. Each one offers a unique means of apprehending the Divine light in another shade, through a different *shem*, and when a person takes advantage of these opportunities the Divine Name unique to that mitzvah-moment becomes a vessel to hold Hashem's light. This light is associated with the level of *Atikah*, but it depends on the *middos* within the person's own soul which are associated with the various shades of *Ze'ir Anpin* for it to be revealed. In this way, *Ze'ir Anpin* is unified with *Atikah*, and Hashem's light is activated within the [lower]

¹⁰ *Zohar* I:217b

¹¹ *Shir HaShirim* 1:15

middos of love, fear, and *dveikus* more and more strongly. This light is revealed more powerfully and more splendidly within the person's awareness until he becomes like a drunkard, filled with longing to be subsumed in the "light of the face of the living King."

How can a person rise through these levels, though, so that he really feels this lofty pleasure in the contemplation of Hashem's existence, this "love in delights?" He can ascend to the extent that he guards his eyes from anything unseemly. It was through the care that they took to avoid seeing anything negative that the *tzaddikim* merited to "gaze on Hashem's pleasantness and visit in His chamber." It goes without saying that they took care to never see anything actually forbidden. What distinguished them was that they never glanced upon the luster of this world unless it was for the purpose of their *avodas Hashem*. Anyone who doesn't guard his eyes will certainly not merit to reach the level of "love in delights," and will not be able to take pleasure in contemplating Hashem's existence. Avoiding actual sin is insufficient; unless he develops a healthy trepidation so that he can avoid looking at anything that draws him and unless he does a genuine *teshuvah*, his vision of higher things will be blocked.

This is the meaning of the verse, "וַיֹּסֵף יָדָו עַל עֵינָיִךְ"—"And Yosef will place his hand upon your eyes."¹² Yosef represents personal purity and the holiness of *Yesod* that make having pure eyes possible. And if Yosef is absent, all the Torah and *mitzvos* that a person has will not purify his eyes. He will not merit the, "eyes of Hashem that are directed to those who fear Him," the eyes

¹² Bereishis 46:4

that see that the entire universe is all G-dliness and to delight in the Creator's light and existence.

The Days of *Shovevim*

It is specifically during this period of *Shovevim*¹³ that we must make extra efforts in the *avodah* of, “His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.” This is the *avodah* of *Kriyas Shema*—to see the King's glory and focus on the fact that all of reality is G-dliness. The main time to work on this is during the bedtime *Shema* when it is possible to rectify the most difficult sins, which we see from the inclusion of the verse, “בְּיַדְךָ אֶפְקֵד רוּחִי” —“Into Your hand I commit my spirit.”¹⁴ This declaration signifies that after all of the limitations of life in this world have exhausted us—which is the nature of the “wine-red eyes”—we still long to be subsumed into Hashem's light—which is the nature of the “milk-white teeth.” This *avodah* of the bedtime *Shema* really applies all day long, because feeling a longing to unite with Hashem and delight in His light is the main way to rectify any damage to the eyes caused by occasionally looking at improper sights. When that happens, the “red comes and removes the white” [which is the opposite of a *tikkun*], and so the reverse process has to happen spiritually to undo the damage—the red of the experience of boundaries has to be uplifted to the longing to unite with the infinite light of Hashem's presence. If a person finds that he has seen something in the world that is obscuring Hashem's light, he must immediately fill his mind with thoughts of

¹³ *Shovevim* extends from the week of *Shemos* through *Mishpatim*—שובבי"ם is an acronym for שמות, וארא, בא, בשלח, יתרו, משפטים.

¹⁴ *Tehillim* 31:6

Hashem's existence and the Divine Names. Then he will be encompassed within the supernal light and everything will immediately be repaired.

Placing Ephraim before Menashe

Even if a person has merited to achieve this level to a degree, his *avodah* is still far from complete. What we have already described is the array of “hues” that reflect the nature of the *sefiros* of *CHaGaT*, but the hues that reflect the nature of *Netzach-Hod-Yesod* still remain for him to discover. This concept is alluded to in the following verse: “וַיְבָרֶכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לְאֹמֹר, בְּךָ יְבָרַךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמֹר: ” “And he blessed them on that day, saying: ‘By you shall Yisrael bless, saying: May Hashem make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.’ And he set Ephraim before Menashe.”¹⁵ The Arizal taught on this verse: “The initials of the phrase, ‘On that day, saying...’ [בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לְאֹמֹר] spell out the name Hevel, who was the *gilgul* of Moshe. [They were from the same soul-root.] This means to teach us that when Yaakov blessed them and placed Ephraim before Menashe, Moshe agreed to this juxtaposition. We find that later, the camp of Ephraim took precedence over the camp of Menashe, because Ephraim was the head of the group of tribes on the western side and Menashe was not. The initials of the phrase also hint that, just as the younger brother Hevel took precedence over his older brother Kayin, so too does Ephraim the younger take precedence over his holder brother Menashe.”¹⁶

The teaches us that after a person has entered into the Ephraim/Hevel *avodah* of arousing within himself the “colors” of the emotions of love, fear, and

¹⁵ Bereishis 48:20

¹⁶ Sha'ar Hapesukim, Vayechi

dveikus rooted in *Chochmah* and the world of *Atzilus* where one only sees Hashem's all-pervasive existence, he still has another world of *avodah* before him. He must then enter into the *avodah* of Menashe, "for Hashem has made me forget all of my labor," and that of Reuven, who was sourced in the soul of Kayin.

The Birthright of Reuven

The Arizal explained further on the verse, "Reuven, you are my firstborn..."¹⁷: "We have already explained the depth of the matter of Kayin and Hevel in *Parshas Bereishis*. There, it was explained on the verse, 'Kayin shall be avenged [ק"ם also means "shall rise"] seven times,' that Kayin's *nefesh* was reincarnated within the Egyptian [that Moshe killed], his *ruach* within Korach, and his *neshamah* within Yisro. Kayin was the firstborn, and Hashem told him, 'If you do good, shall it not be lifted up? And if you do not improve, sin couches at the door...'¹⁸ What Hashem really told Kayin was, 'If, as you are reincarnated and have the opportunity to refine yourself, you strip from yourself the impurity of the primordial serpent and incline yourself to the good, you will merit to be "lifted up"—to receive your birthright which is known as שאת, "uplifting."' When Yaakov's firstborn Reuven was born, he embodied an aspect of Kayin who had been Adam's firstborn. This is alluded to in the verse, 'And his name was called Reuven.'¹⁹ The sages interpreted Reuven's name as a compound with a message: ראו בן בני לבן חמי—ראובן—'See what distinguishes my son from

¹⁷ *Bereishis* 49:3

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:7

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29:32

the son of my father-in-law [meaning, Esav].’ The deeper meaning of this is that Esav embodied the negative aspect of Kayin’s character, while Reuven embodied the kernel of good within Kayin. ‘See my son’—that Reuven is the true embodiment of the firstborn of all Hashem’s creations. When Reuven sinned in the matter concerning Bilhah, he lost this positive firstborn aspect from Kayin, the ‘uplifting,’ which is the aspect of *neshamah* within him. Afterward, it was given to Yisro in whom Kayin began to be truly rectified, as we find in the *Zohar* and the *Tikkunei Zohar* on the verse, ‘I have acquired a man-child with [the help of] Hashem,’²⁰ which is the naming verse of Kayin. Then Yisro came and assumed the positive *neshamah* aspect that had been Kayin’s which is called the birthright, the ‘uplifting.’ And it was to this that Yaakov referred when he said to Reuven, ‘Reuven, you are my firstborn.’ It is fitting that you assume the birthright of Kayin. However, because you sinned, "יְתֵר שְׂאֵת"—‘the excellence of dignity’—[is transformed into] ‘Yeser [Yisro] will receive the שְׂאֵת, the ‘uplifting,’ instead of you.’²¹

In terms of *avodah* this means that Reuven always had the birthright privilege due to his relationship with Kayin, but one cannot attain the quality of Reuven without first developing the quality of Yehudah, whose “eyes are red with wine and whose teeth are white with milk.” After developing the emotive *middos*, *dveikus*, and the vision of Hashem’s all-pervasive reality, one goes to the next level of Reuven, Kayin, and Menashe: that of forgetting. This is the “forgetting” of the lower three worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah*, just as the

²⁰ Ibid., 4:1

²¹ *Sha'ar Hapesukim, Parshas Vayechi*

tzaddikim have the power to uplift all of the reality of the lower worlds to the higher and truer light of Hashem and His Torah. This was Reuven's original task—to uplift all of the existence of the lower worlds so that it would be subsumed within the Torah. This is the inner meaning of his name: ראו בן, to bring the level of בן which is the lowest realm of *Asiyah* up to the place of ראו, of all-encompassing vision of Hashem's presence and light. In this way, the existence of the lower worlds are “forgotten” and obliterated, because they are subsumed within the greater reality of the Torah and Hashem's light. This *avodah* is in contrast with that of Hevel and Efraim who are both associated with the world of *Atzilus*. They have nothing whatsoever to do with the lower world and physical reality. However, the person who rises to the highest level of *Kesser* can also descend to the worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* and repair them by focusing his mind not on their external appearance, but on their inner spiritual essence. In this way, the three lower worlds are uplifted to the world of *Atzilus*.

The Prayers of *Shovevim*

It is for this reason that the days of *Shovevim* are especially suited for the inner *avodah* of the bedtime *Shema* and that of Yosef HaTzaddik, and this is why the *tzaddikim* established special prayers and *tikkunim* for this particular period. Many people mistakenly believe that they have no need to participate in all of these special *tikkunim*, especially when the prayers focus on effecting repairs for all sorts of severe sins that seem to have nothing to do with them. However, these people fail to understand that all of these special prayers aren't

like regular supplications and *techinos*—rather, they effect powerful *tikkunim* within the soul, because all of the Jewish people share a single collective soul. A minor blemish within a *tzaddik* is like a severe sin within the soul of a simpler person.

The Greatness of the *Baal Teshuvah*

Whenever a person sins, it is because he seeks a taste of vitality and desire that is found within the action. Yet the entire experience of longing and desire is only so that we should direct this yearning toward revealing Hashem's presence. Since that is the case, it is precisely through all of the experiences and various hues and shades of life that we can approach the greatest degree of *dveikus*—an even greater level than that which can be attained through the “transcendent” colors of the higher plane of *CHaGaT* [which is purely contemplative]. One must begin with the “higher” *avodah* of Efraim, but then one must become a true *baal teshuvah* of the type of Reuven and Menashe who has the power to transform all of his sins, all of his desires and longings, into holiness and a vessel to draw down Hashem's light.

When one becomes accustomed to perform the *avodah* of the bedtime *Shema* and reach the level of “love in delights,” he is empowered to uplift all of the experience of the lower world to its source on high. The *tzaddikim* would perform very profound *avodos* when they recited the various confessions of the bedtime *Shema* and would come to great states of *dveikus* and communion with the collective soul of the Jewish people. For who can say that he is without guilt, since everyone bears some trace of each and every one of the sins mentioned in

the *viduy*. One must therefore confess his sins fully and beg Hashem to forgive him.

The main *avodah* of *teshuvah* is in developing a yearning to rise ever higher, even higher than someone who was always a *tzaddik* and who always contemplated Hashem's existence throughout the day. For this reason, it is not enough to perform the *avodah* of the bedtime *Shema* which should be an especial focus during this period. It is not enough to capitalize on all of the spiritual obstacles one faces in order to attain a state of greater longing and *dveikus* that can rectify all blemishes. One must also spend a great deal of time over the various confessional prayers and mention each and every blemish in detail. Certainly, one should not deviate from the custom of his community [and avoid the additional prayers]; even in private, one should spend extra time in a state of confession and prayer over his sins, because this is what uplifts all of his worldly experience to a higher state where its inner essence is revealed. And this, in turn, fills a person with a powerful desire for Hashem until he is like a drunkard, intoxicated with love of Hashem. This is the "drunkenness" [of self-forgetting that is the nature] of the world of *Reish d'lo Isyadah*, it is the drunkenness of Purim which is the highest moment of the year that shines with the light of the future world. Yet the only way to come to taste of this great delight is by first performing the *avodah* of *Shovevim* as we have described, which is the Divine service of the bedtime *Shema* that can actually be performed all day long.

In earlier generations, people would engage in all kinds of self-mortification and additional fasts to cleanse themselves of every blemish, but the Baal Shem Tov annulled this practice because it is no longer appropriate for us

who are so much weaker. Nevertheless, this is the time to invest energy in additional prayer and *teshuvah*. As Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught, this is really the main form of *avodah* that Hashem desires from these latter generations, especially the recitation of *Tehillim*, which encompasses all possible forms of prayer and confession. During these prayers and confessions, one must focus on the fact that all of existence is only G-dliness, and not on the details of the sins themselves. This parallels the actual organization of the essential *viduy*, which follows the order of the *Alef-Beis*. Its initials are the twenty-two letters that build the holy Torah to remind us that the essence of confession is to build vessels that can reveal Hashem's light.

The Revealed Torah

Similarly, *Shovevim* is the time to focus on study of the revealed Torah because it too is the means through which we build vessels in the lower worlds for the revelation of Hashem's light. This is the meaning of the verse, "And he saw rest, that it was good...and he bent his shoulder to bear..."²² Many people toil in Torah for all sorts of reasons, but when the *tzaddikim* toil in Torah, they "bend their shoulder to bear" the yoke of Torah. They intend to transform all of their efforts into a fitting vessel to draw down Hashem's light, the light of "rest." They learn to give satisfaction to their Creator, and this vitalizes their subsequent prayers so that their confessions are honest and filled with *dveikus* like a genuine *baal teshuvah*.

²² *Bereishis* 49:15

This is the essence of the *avodah* of Moshiach who comes to rectify that which is flawed in Reuven/Kayin and unite the inner and outer *avodos* of Efraim and Menashe. “Unto him shall the obedience of peoples be”—he will join the “peoples” of Efraim and Menashe by virtue of the “redness” of his eyes and the “whiteness” of his teeth. All of this will be accomplished by Shiloh, meaning Moshe, the “point within the chamber” that unites Menashe and Efraim. From within the confines of creation, he reveals the unity of Hashem: “Moshe commanded us the Torah”—he draws down a revelation of G-dliness through every single letter of the Torah. “He sees the vision of *HaVaYaH*”²³—and delights in the all-pervasive reality of Hashem which is “love in delights.”

May Hashem help us during these holy days of *teshuvah* to join together with all of the Jewish people. May no one say that he is well and good and doesn't need elaborate prayers and *tikkunim*, because we will only be redeemed by virtue of *teshuvah*. May we come to perform the bedtime *Shema* by contemplating Hashem's unity all day long. Then we will be able to pray at length and repair all of the external physical reality of this world until we see, eye to eye, Hashem's return to Tzion with the arrival of our righteous redeemer. Speedily and in our days, Amen.

Translated and Adapted by Rav Micha Golshevsky.

²³ *Bamidbar* 12:8

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