

Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Vayigash 5770

# D'ei Chochmah L'nafshechah

“Let your soul know wisdom”

Parshas Vayigash

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

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*Shalosh Seudos<sup>1</sup> of Parshas Vayigash 5768*

”וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר בֵּי אָדֹנָי יְדָבָר-נָא עֲבַדְךָ דְבַר בְּאָזְנֵי אָדֹנָי וְאַל-יִחַר אַפְּךָ בְּעַבְדְּךָ כִּי כְמוֹךָ כָּפַרְעֹה. אָדֹנָי שְׂאֵל אֶת-עַבְדְּךָ לֵאמֹר הֲיֵשׁ-לָכֶם אָב אוּ-אָח. וַנֹּאמֶר אֶל-אָדֹנָי יֵשׁ-לָנוּ אָב זָקֵן וְיִלְד זָקֵן וְיִלְד זָקֵנִים קָטָן וְאָחִיו מֵת וַיּוֹתֵר הוּא לְבָדוֹ לְאִמּוֹ וְאָבִיו אֶהְבּוֹ. וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-עַבְדְּךָ הוֹרְדֵהוּ אֵלַי וְאֶשְׂיֵמָה עֵינָי עָלָיו.”

“Then Yehudah approached him, and said: ‘Oh my lord, let your servant, I pray you, speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant; for you are even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying: Have you a father, or a brother? And we said unto my lord: We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him.’”<sup>2</sup>

Rashi explains: “‘And [Yehudah] approached him...speak a work in my lord’s ears’—May my words enter your ears. ‘And let not your anger burn’—From here we learn that he spoke harshly to him. ‘For you are even as Pharaoh’—Its simple meaning is that you are as important in my eyes as Pharaoh. The Midrash teaches that, ‘Your end will be to be struck with leprosy just like Pharaoh was by my grandmother Sarah, for having kept her over one

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<sup>1</sup> The lesson was delivered at the third meal of Shabbos Chanukah in Uman.

<sup>2</sup> Bereishis 44:18-20

night.' Another interpretation is, 'Just as Pharaoh makes decrees that he doesn't fulfill and promises that he doesn't keep, so do you. Is this what you call "placing an eye" upon someone, that you said that you only want to "place your eye on him?"' Another interpretation is, 'You are just like Pharaoh—if you fight with me, I will kill both you and your master.'

### **The "Striking" *Yichud* and the "Inner" *Yichud***

We find in the *Zohar* on the opening verse of this week's *parshah*: "'And Yehudah approached him'—Two worlds approached one another, to join one to the other so that they would become one, because Yehudah is a king and Yosef is a king. One came close to the other and they were joined one to the other."<sup>3</sup> This indicates that at the time of Yehudah's approach toward Yosef, they were united. Yet this appears to contradict the Midrash that Rashi cited, that Yehudah spoke harshly to Yosef and went on the defensive with him.

We can reconcile this apparent contradiction when we consider that there are two types of *yichudim*—one that assumes the form of "striking" and which is external, and another that is internal. When Yehudah approached Yosef, it was an opportunity to generate a "joining" that was internal, one that transcends the external "striking" *yichud* symbolized by Yehudah "speaking harshly" with Yosef.

### **The Waters of *Chochmah***

Hashem reveals His light through the four letters of His ineffable Name *HaVaYaH*. In general, the *yud* relates to water, the first *hei* parallels fire, the *vav*

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<sup>3</sup> *Zohar* I:206a

is associated with air/wind, and the final *hei* to earth.<sup>4</sup> When a person wants to draw the Divine light upon himself, he must first draw down from the “waters of the supernal light of the *Ein Sof*”<sup>5</sup> and be completely subsumed within the light of *Chochmah* of the “upper waters.” This is prescribed in the *Zohar*: “When one recites the *Shema* with love twice every day, he must draw down the upper waters to the earth until the waters are ‘gathered together to one place,’ that is, to the *one / echad* that stands for the collective soul of the Jewish people [and each individual soul]. This means that one must be completely [this is the message of *echad*] subsumed within the waters of the upper light until he feels Hashem’s light filling his entire being, from his head down to his feet. This is the *avodah* of the letter *yud* of the *Shem HaVaYaH*.”<sup>6</sup>

### **The Fires of *Binah***

The next level of *avodah* is that which is associated with the first *hei* of the *Shem HaVaYaH* and with *Binah*. It is the subsequent “adorning” of the waters of the supernal light through applying to them a measure and a boundary. This is the concept of *tzimtzum* whose spiritual root is the *Gevurah* within *Atik* that is encloded within *Mocha Sesima’ah*.<sup>7</sup> In practical terms, this means that every person has the power to constrict his mind and draw into himself a G-dly fire that burns within him until his whole body is transformed into an aspect of the lights of *Chashmal*. He can then become like a fiery angel that serves on high because he receives surpassing and limitless strength to serve his Creator with

<sup>4</sup> *Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Rosh Chodesh*, chapter 3

<sup>5</sup> *Eitz Chaim* I:2

<sup>6</sup> *Zohar* I:18b

<sup>7</sup> *Pischei She’arim, Nesiv Gadlus d’Ze’ir Anpin*, p. 70

great toil. A person can come to this by contemplating the fact that Hashem revealed the power of limits and boundaries and the existence of all of the world so that we should be able to discern His infinite power more clearly. This inspires a person to throw himself into his Divine service with a holy passion and exertion that goes beyond [what he would normally consider his] limits. He exerts himself fully until an “eternal flame” burns within him, until the fire itself joins together with the “endless waters” (just as the word for heavens, שמים, is a conjoining of the two words אש ומים). At this point, the fire serves to reveal the power of the water more strongly—after experiencing the “waters” of apprehension of Hashem’s existence and the holiness of His Torah, a person receives a burning desire to learn all its detail and join with the Creator with passionate fervor.

### **Joining Yehudah and Yosef**

The path of contemplative *avodah* that leads to complete self-forgetting within Hashem’s light is that of Yosef HaTzaddik who reveals the “white light.” The path of contemplation in the manner of *tzimtzum*—meditation upon the limits and boundaries that serve to further adorn and highlight that which is limitless—is the path of Dovid HaMelech who reveals the “black light.” These are the two “worlds approaching one another, the two pathways of Yehudah and Yosef that one must know and appreciate individually as well as in conjunction with one another. Anyone who does not know how to join them has spiritually descended to Mitzrayim. Exclusive focus on Yehudah-type fiery yearning and effort will deprive him of serenity in his *avodah*, while exclusive focus on the

cool meditative waters of Yosef will sap him of the ability to expend effort in *avodah* so that he will not be able to achieve completion. This inevitably leads to dissatisfaction and joylessness in his Divine service.

### **The Airy Avodah of Ze'ir Anpin**

For this reason, the main task is to join the two kings, Yehudah and Yosef, and have them “approach” one another. To this end, Hashem drew down into the world the forces of air and earth. They parallel the *chassadim* and *gevuros* within *Da'as* that bridges the watery and fiery forms of *dveikus* of *Chochmah* and *Binah*. The forces of air and earth relate to *Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nukvah*, respectively, and they are the “children” that bring *ratzon* and *chefetz* [will and desire, as discussed in the previous week's *shiur*] to *Abba / Chochmah* and *Imma / Binah* so that they join together as one.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of our personal *avodah*, the force of air/wind teaches us to contemplate how our souls receive a vital spirit from the “upper air,” in the sense of, “And He breathed into [Adam's] nostrils a spirit of life.”<sup>9</sup> Through its life-giving properties, a person can draw into himself from the “waters of the upper infinite light” in the sense of, “And the spirit of G-d hovered over the waters.”<sup>10</sup> Just as a flame cannot burn along the wick without air, so too does the aspect of air—which has both elements of *chassadim* and *gevuros* to it—allow us to unite the waters of *Chochmah* and the fires of *Binah* within ourselves. This state of maintaining the spiritual life-force is expressed in the verse, “And to give them

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<sup>8</sup> See *Otzros Chaim, Shaar HaNekudim*

<sup>9</sup> *Bereishis* 2:7

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:2

life while starving.”<sup>11</sup> A Jew must receive holy vitality in the midst of “starving”—of yearning for his Creator. This vitality is received through the agency of the air/wind, meaning the *chassadim* within *Da'as*.

### The Earthiness of *Malchus*

The final phase is to connect with the aspect of the final *hei* of the *Shem HaVaYaH* which is associated with the element of earth and *Malchus*. This process is expressed by the verse: *הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ, אֶל-מְקוֹם אֶחָד; הַכֹּל הָיָה מִן-הָעֶפֶר* “הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ, אֶל-מְקוֹם אֶחָד; הַכֹּל הָיָה מִן-הָעֶפֶר.”—“Everything goes to a single place; everything came from dust and everything returns to dust.”<sup>12</sup> This means that after all of the contemplation and meditation and *dveikus*, everything must return to the state of self-nullification, to the “black fire” of realizing that no matter how much one apprehends G-dliness, it is all black and occluded when compared with the truth of Hashem’s light, which is beyond all apprehension.<sup>13</sup> When a created being comes to realize its nothingness and limitation, this realization becomes a vessel that can contain a spirit of prophecy, so that Hashem’s spirit can dwell within him. All the while that a person believes that he actually has the power to achieve closeness to Hashem through his own efforts and does not realize how dependent he is on Hashem’s mercy, he has no proper vessel in which to draw down a spirit of life and vitality from Hashem. He therefore must “return to dust,” to the aspect of *Malchus*, and understand that all of the levels that he can

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<sup>11</sup> *Tehillim* 33:19

<sup>12</sup> *Koheles* 3:20

<sup>13</sup> *Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun #70*



possibly reach are only reflections of the light that Hashem reveals, but they are as null and void when compared with the truth of Hashem's light.

He must also realize that any experience he has of the sweetness of the Divine light is only in accordance with the limits of human awareness, but that it doesn't touch the truth of Hashem's essence. At every stage and level, his eyes have to be turned toward Hashem's mercy and he must realize, "[Hashem's] holiness is higher than your holiness."<sup>14</sup> This was the way of Dovid HaMelech—to reveal the lowliness of man and to demonstrate that no matter how much he has achieved, he has not begun at all. That way, a person always knows how dependent he is on Hashem's mercy to bring him to completion.

This was the meaning of the Baal Shem Tov's statement that he does not receive Torah from the mouth of an angel or a fiery angel, but rather from Hashem Himself. And even so, he is terrified that at any moment he might fall into the lowest pit of Gehinom. The Baal Shem Tov knew that every person is always completely dependent on Hashem's mercy—when He wants, He can uplift the person and open the pathways of Torah to him so that the “sea of *Chochmah*” splits wide to let him enter. By recognizing his human limitations, he comes to realize his faith in Hashem and to understand that Hashem desired a “dwelling place in the lower world” and that His beloved children should apprehend the reality of His unity. Through the aspects of air and earth, the higher aspects of water and fire—*Chochmah* and *Binah*—unite completely. The work is begun in the realm of *ruach* and ends in that of “earth”—this is the meaning of the state of “*Malchus* that is hidden in *Reisha d'lo Isyadah*.” It is

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<sup>14</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah* 90:2

precisely in this high and lofty place of apprehending the light of the Creator that one comes to realize his own nothingness and lowliness. This is reflected in the teaching of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, that the main element that will be resurrected in each and every person is his degree of humility.<sup>15</sup> This is the meaning of the prophecy, “Arise and sing, dwellers in the dust.”<sup>16</sup> The path of the dust is that of the *gevuros* within *Da'as*.

### “May My Soul be as Dust to All”

To a conventional view, the force of water—of drawing down the upper waters and experiencing delight in Hashem’s oneness—ought to take precedence over the force of fire—of serving Hashem with fiery passion and dedication—since the purpose of the *tzimtzumim* is only to create vessels to greater magnify Hashem’s light. The way of thinking is reflected in the teaching of the *Zohar*: “In the place where the masculine [*Abba / Chochmah*] is, we do not mention the feminine [*Imma / Binah*].”<sup>17</sup> Even so, the *yichud* between the masculine and feminine aspects is completed through the “children”—air and earth, which parallel *Ze’ir Anpin* and *Nukvah*—and it is through the completion of the process that *Malchus* becomes, “a crown to her husband.”<sup>18</sup> When the force of fire is ascendant over the force of water, a person feels how lowly he is in comparison with Hashem and how dependent he is on Hashem’s mercy. But this is only possible when he recognizes how lowly he is in comparison with everyone else and honors highly every single Jew that he meets because he realizes that each of

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<sup>15</sup> *Likutei Moharan* II:72

<sup>16</sup> *Yeshayah* 26:19

<sup>17</sup> *Zohar* II:101a

<sup>18</sup> *Mishlei* 12:4

them are a “portion of G-d from above” that reveals Hashem’s glory in this world. Without a doubt, he will never speak disparagingly of any Jew, since the reason why people do that is because they feel that the unique light that others reveal somehow blocks the light that they can reveal. In contrast, when a person rises to the place of supernal “dust” he only sees the greatness of others, and when he sees their greatness he receives a stronger vision of Hashem’s greatness. This is to what Rebbe Nachman of Breslov referred when he spoke admiringly of his own humility.<sup>19</sup> This humility allowed him to see the greatness of others, and it brought him to perceive Hashem’s greatness and to keep on realizing that all he perceived was still nothing compared with the truth of Hashem’s greatness.

This is reflected in the Gemara’s description of the deathbed statement of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi: “When Rebbi left this world, he stretched his ten fingers toward the heavens and said, ‘Master of the universe, it is revealed and known before you that I toiled in Torah with these ten fingers, but that I did not take pleasure [from this world] even as much as my little finger’s worth.’”<sup>20</sup> Rav Yaakov Emden explains that even though Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi wrote all of the Mishnah and toiled in Torah his entire life, he did not feel that he achieved what he did through his own efforts. Rather, he knew that all his achievements were unearned gifts from Hashem who had showered His presence upon him so that the six orders of the Mishnah would be revealed in the world. And anyone who knows that no person has the power to achieve anything and that everything is a heavenly gift will naturally nullify himself before any other Jew. He sees in

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<sup>19</sup> *Shivchei HaRan* #22

<sup>20</sup> *Kesuvos* 104a

each and every Jew how Hashem reveals His glory on earth, and so he takes great pleasure in the successes of others that are living testaments to Hashem's greatness and praise.

### **“And Yehudah Approached Him”**

Yehudah symbolizes this deep humility, as does his descendant Dovid HaMelech who claimed, “And I am a worm and not a man.”<sup>21</sup> Yosef, on the other hand, symbolizes drawing down the waters of the supernal light. The redemption and resurrection of the dead depends on their joining together, and even though Yehudah's “speaking harshly to Yosef” appears to have been a lower form of *yichud*—that of “striking” which is external—in truth at its root this “striking” *yichud* is the completion of the process. “Striking” represents the beating down of the sense of self that comes at the highest levels of *dveikus*—that at the heights of “Yosef awareness” and *dveikus*, one realizes that he is nothing and knows nothing, which is the “Yehudah awareness.”

This concept is developed further by the Baal HaTanya, in his explanation of the Talmudic teaching, that in Eretz Yisrael we end the blessing, “Rejoice and be glad,” of the *sheva berachos* with, “He who gladdens the groom and bride.” Afterward, in Eretz Yisrael we end the blessing, “He who made...” with the statement, “He who gladdens the groom *with the* bride.”<sup>22</sup> The Baal HaTanya explains that in the final blessing, we are really praying about the future redemption, when *Malchus* will rise to be a “crown to her husband.” This refers to the higher state of *dveikus*, when the “black light” of struggle and

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<sup>21</sup> *Tehillim* 22:7

<sup>22</sup> *Kesuvos* 8a

humility is not merely supportive of the “white light” of *Chochmah*, but rather it is a whole world of *dveikus* and revelation of Hashem’s light of its own. Then, the “bride” has an identity of her own, which is rooted in the knowledge that, no matter what we attain or achieve, it is “black” and nothing compared with the ultimate truth of Hashem’s reality. This is what is meant in the prophecy, “And My servant Dovid will rule over them.”<sup>23</sup> It is precisely the aspect of Yehudah that will rule over them, because, “In the place where you find His humility, that is where you find His greatness and praise.”<sup>24</sup>

### **The Avodah of Nadav, Avihu, and Aharon**

This final and ultimate level of “returning to dust” after all of the *avodah* of water, fire, and air, is expressed in silence. [In Hebrew, silence is related to the word for inanimate matter, or earthiness: אדומם.] This was manifested in the progress of the *avodah* from Nadav and Avihu, who served Hashem with a burning longing, of receiving their life-force through “starving” for Hashem, to Aharon who was “silent.” This silence expresses the acceptance that we are not capable of anything, and it is upon this level of humility that the resurrection depends.

The Baal Shem Tov said that was fully able to ascend to the upper world while alive, but he wanted to fulfill Hashem’s word: “And you shall return to the dust.”<sup>25</sup> He meant to say that even in his lifetime a person needs to do the *avodah*

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<sup>23</sup> *Yechezkel* 34:24

<sup>24</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni, Devarim* 10:856

<sup>25</sup> *Bereishis* 3:19

of “returning to dust,” since this is what makes him worthy of receiving the dew that revives the dead: “Arise and sing, dwellers in the dust.”

### **The Main Test**

Of course, “The study is not the main goal, rather it is the doing.”<sup>26</sup> And anyone who has merited to study Torah and delight in some degree of *dveikus* must check himself constantly to ensure that he feels humble before every other Jew he meets. This is reflected in the words of the Divrei Chaim and the Baal HaSulam, that if a person wants to know if he is on the straight path or if he has veered into crooked ways, he must examine what his behavior is like toward other Jews. In our relationship with Hashem, it is all too easy to engage in self-deception and convince ourselves that all is well. Therefore, the main test is in how free we are from conflict with our fellow Jews. If we [get confused because we] have heard of *tzaddikim* who sometimes spoke harshly of others, we must understand that they were involved in very lofty *tikkunim* of which we have no concept. Such matters have nothing to do with simple people like ourselves, who must constantly take care to remove every shred of pride over others from our hearts. The greatness that can be discerned in our fellow Jews should be a mirror reflecting to us Hashem’s greatness, and we must always try to strip away the external and illusory reality so that we can seek after Hashem’s glory and minimize our own.

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<sup>26</sup> *Avos* 1:16

### “Let Your Soul Know Wisdom”

All of this brings us to a new understanding of the phrase: דעה חכמה  
 ”לנפשך והיא כתר לראשך”—“Let your soul (*nefesh*) know (*d'ei*) wisdom  
 (*Chochmah*) and it will be a crown (*Kesser*) for your head.”<sup>27</sup> Every single  
*yichud* is an expression of the joining of *Chochmah* and *Binah*, of *chayah* and  
*neshamah*, and the finalization of the *yichud* takes place at the level of the  
*Kesser*. The further refinement of the *avodah* is in drawing down Hashem’s  
 endless light to the “children”: firstly, *Ze’ir Anpin* whose influence then ascends  
 to the higher level of the apex of the *yud* of the *Shem HaVaYaH*, which parallels  
 the level of *Arich Anpin*. Then, finally, *Malchus* which is “hidden within *Reisha*  
*d’lo Isyadah*.” The *yichud* is finalized when the highest and most lofty lights are  
 drawn down through the lowest possible vessels: “And to dust you shall return.”  
 For anyone who wants to enter into Divine service, “Let your soul know  
 wisdom.” Let the lowest level of *Malchus* / *nefesh* be infused by the light of  
*Chochmah* bound with *Binah*, which is expressed in *Da’as*. Then, “it will be a  
 crown to your head.” Then, *Malchus* will be expressed in complete humility, in  
 the knowledge that the “crown” belongs to Hashem alone. Then we will be able  
 to honor each and every Jew as a reflection of the King’s glory.

May Hashem help us so that these lofty ideals and delights will be  
 revealed, so that Yehudah will approach Yosef “and they will become as one.”<sup>28</sup>  
 Even though it appeared as though Yehudah spoke harshly to Yosef in the way  
 of “striking,” we must realize that this is the pathway of the most lofty *yichud*,

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<sup>27</sup> From the *Shabbos zemer* “*D’ror Yikrah*,” based on *Mishlei* 24:14.

<sup>28</sup> *Yechezkel* 37:17

where a person comes to realize his utter nothingness when compared with Hashem's all-encompassing unity. When the contemplation of Yosef will be bound together with the humility of Yehudah, we will approach the final rectification of the sin of Adam HaRishon, with the arrival of our righteous redeemer, speedily and in our days. Amen.

**Translated and Adapted by Rav Micha Golshevsky.**

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