

בס"ד

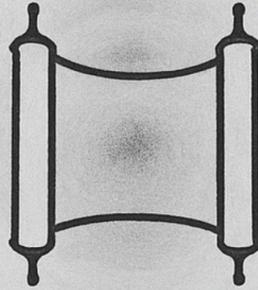
Alter Rebbe

Torah Ohr

Shemos

לְהַבִּין מַה מְאַרְז"ל עַל פִּי כִּי טוֹבִים

הַדָּרָה מֵיָדָיו



*Dedicated in Honor of the
Yahrzeit of the
Alter Rebbe 24th of Tevet*

לע"נ

רבי שניאור זלמן בן רבי ברוך

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Parshas Shemos

להבין מה מארז"ל על פי פי טובים דדיך מיין

Introduction

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (the Alter Rebbe, 1745–1812), founder of Chabad Chassidus, developed a systematic, intellectual approach to divine service that integrates Kabbalah, Halachah, and inner psychology. In this maamar, beginning with the words “To understand what our Sages of blessed memory said on the verse, ‘For your loves are better than wine,’” the Alter Rebbe explains why the Sages state that the words of the Scribes are more pleasing “to me” than the wine of the Torah, and why the formulation is specifically “upon me,” revealing a profound hierarchy between Torah, mitzvot, blessings, inner light, encompassing light, and the dynamic of ratzo and shov in the soul’s bond with the Infinite.

To understand what Arizal said on the verse, “For your loves are better than wine” (Song of Songs 1:2), that the words of the Scribes are more pleasing to me than the wine of the Torah (Eruvin 21b). One must understand the expression “to me,” for it should have said “for me.”

Behold, it is written, “To love the Lord your God, for He is your life” (Deuteronomy 30:6). The explanation of “for He is your life” is that it gives a reason.

And it is known that the word “for” serves four meanings, and here it serves in the sense of “because,” which is giving a reason to love the Lord your God, because He is your life.

For the Supernal Emanator, blessed be He, is the source of life and the source of pleasures, as it is written, “For with You is the source of life” (Psalms 36:10), and it is written, “From You is everything” (I Chronicles 29:14). From Him were drawn all the lives and pleasures found in the four worlds, Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and He, may He be blessed, is the life of all life.

Therefore, when a person contemplates this, he will be drawn from it to love the Lord, that just as a person loves the life of his soul, so he will love the Lord, who is the life of all lives and the life of his soul in particular.

However, this love that is drawn from the reason “for He is your life” is not yet called self-sacrifice, which is stated in the verse, “with all your soul and with all your might”

להבין מה מארז"ל על פי פי טובים דדיך מיין (שיר השירים א, ב), ערבים עלי דברי סופרים יותר מיינה של תורה (ערובין כ"א, ב). ויש לומר לשון עלי והיה לו לומר לי.

הנה קתיב לאהבה את ה' אלקיך כי הוא חייך (דברים ל, ו). פרוש פי הוא חייך, הנינו נתינת טעם.

וכנודע דכי משמש בארבע לשונות, וכאן הוא משמש בלשון דהא, שהוא נתינת טעם לאהבה את ה' אלקיך מפני שהוא חייך.

שהמאציל העליון ברוך הוא הוא מקור החיים ומקור התענוגים, כמו שכתוב כי עמך מקור חיים (תהלים ל"ו, י), וגו', וממך הכל קתיב (דברי הימים א' כ"ט, י"ד), שממנו נמשכו כל החיים והתענוגים הנמצאים בארבעה עולמות אצילות בריאה יצירה עשייה, והוא יתברך הוא חיי החיים.

ואי לזאת, כשיתבונן האדם בנה, ימשך מנה לאהבה את ה', שכמו שאהב האדם לחיי נפשו, כך יאהב את ה' שהוא חיי החיים כלם וחי נפשו בפרט.

אך אהבה זו שנמשכת מן הטעם כי הוא חייך, לא נקראת עדין מסירות נפש הנאמרת בפסוק בכל

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(Deuteronomy 6:5), since it is drawn from the reason “for He is your life.”

נפשך ובכל מאדך (דברים ו, ה), מאחר שנמשכה מן הטעם כי הוא חייך.

And it is known that the level of Ta'amim, Nekudot, Tagin, and Otiyot is in the emanated realms: the Ta'amim are in Chokhmah, and so forth.

ונודע שבחינת טעמים נקודות תגין אותיות הוא בבחינת הנאצלים, טעמים בבחינת חכמה וכו'.

But the Infinite Emanator, blessed be He, is exalted and elevated even above the category of wisdom, as it is written, “You made them all with wisdom” (Psalms 104:24), for wisdom is considered like physical action before Him, may He be blessed.

אבל המאציל אין סוף ברוך הוא מרומם ונשגב אף מגדר החכמה, כמו שכתוב פלם בבחינת עשיית (תהלים ק"ד, כ"ד), שהחכמה נחשבת לעשייה גשמית קמיה יתברך.

From this is drawn the aspect of self-sacrifice, which exists in the power of every Jew, because within his soul is en clothed an illumination from the Infinite, blessed be He, that is above wisdom and reason, to give over his soul in absolute oneness, without any reason or understanding at all, solely because of simple love for the exalted Lord alone, to whom there is no comparison whatsoever.

ומזה נמשכת בחינת מסירות נפש, שיש בכח כל אחד מישראל מחמת שמלובשת בנשמתו הארה מבחינת אין סוף ברוך הוא שלמעלה מן החכמה והטעם וכו', למסור נפשו באחד בלי טעם ודעת כלל, רק מצד האהבה הפשוטה לה' המרום לבדו, ואין ערוף אליו כלל.

As it is written, “I, the Lord, have not changed” (Malachi 3:6), for between before the world was created and after the world was created there is no change or arousal in Him at all.

וכמו שכתוב אני ה' לא שניתי (מלאכי ג, ו), שבין קדם שנגבר העולם ובין אחר שנגבר העולם אין בו שום שנוי והתפעלות כלל.

The meaning of this love is that one does not want to be separated from His blessed unity, but rather to be one with the One, literally, and this is the meaning of “with all your soul and with all your might,” to give over one’s soul entirely above reason and understanding.

וענין אהבה זו הינו שאינו רוצה להיות נפרד מיחודו ותברו, אלא להיות הנוה אחד באחד ממש, והינו ענין בכל נפשך ובכל מאדך למסור נפשו ממש למעלה מן הטעם והדעת.

This is the bond with His very essence and being, blessed be He, which is far above the level of Ta'amim, Nekudot, Tagin, and Otiyot, as explained above.

והוא ההתקשרות במהותו ועצמותו יתברך, שלמעלה מעלה מבחינת טעמים נקודות תגין אותיות פניל.

Behold, this love and this self-sacrifice exist in every one of Israel in potential, but they are in a state of concealment and hiddenness.

והנה אהבה ומסירות נפש זו יש בכל אחד מישראל בכח, אלא שהיא בבחינת העלם והסתר.

In order to bring it forth from concealment into revelation, this is specifically through the aspect of the wine of the Torah.

וכדי להוציאה מן ההעלם אל הגלוי הוא על ידי בחינת יינה של תורה דוקא.

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As our Sages of blessed memory said, “When wine enters, the secret emerges” (Eruvin 65a), and the secret hidden in the soul is the concealed love mentioned above.

כמאמר רבותינו זכרונם לברכה, נכנס יין יצא סוד (ערובין ס"ה, א), והסוד הגנוז בנפש הוא האהבה המסותרת הנ"ל.

Through the entry into one’s soul of the aspect of the wine of the Torah, which is the aspect of fulfilling the Torah and commandments, by which is drawn the revelation of the concealed love, the love emerges into revelation in the heart of the Congregation of Israel, so that they burn with simple love to be Havayah one with One.

ועל ידי ש'כנס בנפשו בחינת יינה של תורה, שהיא בחינת קיום התורה והמצוות, שעל ידי זה נמשך התגלות האהבה המסותרת, שתצא האהבה אל הגלוי בלב פנסת ישראל, שיהיו בוערים באהבה פשוטה. להויה אחד באחד.

Behold, on Shabbat as well the aspect of concealed love is revealed in a state of revelation.

והנה בשבת מתגלה גם כן בחינת האהבה המסותרת בבחינת גלוי.

The matter is as follows: behold it is written, “Six days Havayah made the heavens...” (Exodus 20:11), and on the seventh day He rested.

והענין, דהנה פתיב ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים וגו' (שמות כ, י"א), ובימים השביעי שבת.

For the world was created through ten utterances, which are the ten sefirot.

פי בעשרה מאמרות שהם עשר ספירות נברא העולם.

And “In the beginning” is also an utterance, meaning that even wisdom of Atzilut, which is the beginning of Atzilut, is also merely an utterance relative to His essence and being, blessed be He, as explained above regarding “You made them all with wisdom” (Psalms 104:24).

ובראשית נמי מאמר הוא, דהינו שגם החכמה דאצילות, ראשית האצילות, הוא גם כן בחינת מאמר לבד לגבי מהותו ועצמותו: תברך, וכנ"ל (בענין פלם בחכמה עשית (מהלים ק"ד, כ"ז).

During the six days, the wisdom and the supernal attributes, which are the ten utterances, descended in order to create the world, similar to the analogy of a person performing a task, who writes or draws some form, lowering his intellect and thought to examine that drawing and writing.

ובששת ימים נשפלו החכמה והמדות העליונות שהם העשרה מאמרות לברא העולם, כמו על דרך משל האדם העושה איזה מלאכה, שכותב או מציר איזה ציור, אזי משפיל שכלו ומחשבתו לעיין באותו הציור והכתב.

When he completes his thought, his intellect and thought return to their essence and being.

וכשגמר מחשבתו חוזרים שכלו ומחשבתו למהותם ועצמותם.

So too, by way of analogy above: during the six days the ten supernal sefirot descended so that the creation of the world would be through them, and on Shabbat He rested and was refreshed, and the wisdom and attributes ascended to His essence and being, blessed be He, exalted and transcendent alone, in a state of absolute incomparability, the source of pleasures.

כך על דרך משל למעלה, בששת ימים נשפלו העשר ספירות העליונות להיות בריאת העולם על ידיהן, ובשבת שבת ונפש (שמות ל"א, י"ז), שנתעלו החכמה והמדות למהותו ועצמותו ותברך המרום והנשגב לבדו בבחינת אין ערוף כו', מקור התענוגים.

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Therefore, on Shabbat the aspect of concealed love is revealed, for it is from that level above wisdom and above the level of ta'amim, as explained above.

All of this comes through the entry into the soul of a person of the aspect of the wine of the Torah, meaning the fulfillment of the commandments, in which the supernal will is enlothed, which is known to be above the level of wisdom.

Through the revelation of the supernal will, there is aroused within a person the revealed form of the concealed love, which is the aspect of love and will that is above wisdom and reason, and this is the meaning of "When wine enters, the secret emerges" (Eruvin 65a).

Now the meaning of "The words of the Scribes are sweeter to me than the wine of the Torah" will be understood. "To me" specifically, and this is because the commandments themselves are called the wine of the Torah, as explained above.

Behold, the blessings that are recited over the commandments are from the words of the Scribes.

They are higher than the fulfillment of the commandments themselves, as written in Etz Chaim, that through the act of the commandment itself there is drawn the aspect of the Inner Light that enclothes itself literally within the vessels.

Through the blessing over the commandment, there is drawn the aspect of the Surrounding Light, which is higher than the aspect of the Inner Light, and therefore cannot enclothe itself within the vessel.

This is the meaning of what our Sages of blessed memory said, "All commandments are blessed over prior to their performance," where the expression "prior" means passing over, an expression of surrounding, like "a merchant passing by."

This is the meaning of "The words of the Scribes are sweeter to me," and it does not say "to me" in the sense of inner reception, because the meaning of "to me" is that the drawing down through the blessing is in the aspect of surrounding, and this is "upon me."

ולכן מתגלה בשבת בחינת האהבה המסותרת, שהיא מבחינה זו למעלה מבחינת חכמה ובחינת טעמים וכו' כנ"ל.

וכל זה בא על ידי שנגנס בגוף האדם בחינת יינה של תורה, הינו קיום המצוות, שבהן מלוכלש רצון העליון, שהוא למעלה מבחינת חכמה פנודע.

ועל ידי גלוי רצון העליון יתעורר באדם גלוי האהבה המסותרת, שהיא בחינת אהבה ורצון שלמעלה מן החכמה והטעם, וזהו ענין נגנס יין נצא (סוד) (ערובין ס"ה, א).

ועתה יובן ענין ערבים עלי דברי סופרים יותר מיינה של תורה. עלי דוקא, והינו כי המצוות עצמן נקראים יינה של תורה כנ"ל.

והנה הברכות שמברכים על המצוות הם מדברי סופרים.

והם למעלה מקיום המצוות עצמן, כמו שכתוב בעין חיים, שעל ידי עצם המצוה נמשך בחינת האור הפנימי המתלבש בתוך הכלים ממש.

ועל ידי הברכה שעל המצוה ממש ממשיכים בחינת האור המקיף, שהוא למעלה מבחינת האור הפנימי, שלכן אינו יכול להתלבש בתוך הכלי.

וזהו שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה, כל המצוות מברך עליהן עובר לעשייתן (פסחים ז, ב), לשון עובר הוא ענין מקיף, כמו עובר לסוחר.

וזהו ענין ערבים עלי דברי סופרים, ולא אמר לי, כי פרוש עלי הינו לומר שהמשכה על ידי הברכה היא בבחינת מקיף, וזהו עלי.

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Therefore, they are sweeter than the wine of the Torah, which is only the aspect of Inner Light, whereas the pleasantness of Havayah and the sweetness drawn through the blessing, which is from the words of the Scribes, is from the aspect of Surrounding Light.

ולכן ערבים יותר מיינה של תורה, שהם רק בחינת אור פנימי וכו', ונועם ה' והעריבות הנמשך על ידי הברכה שהיא מדברי סופרים הוא מבחינת מקור, וזהו ערבים עלי.

The explanation of the wording of the blessing “Blessed are You, Havayah our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments” is as follows: “Blessed” means a drawing down from the head and source of all blessing, the source of life that is above the chain of emanation.

ויפרוש ועגנו לשון הברכה ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו, הינו ברוך הוא המשכה מבחינת ראש ומקור כל ברכה, מקור החיים ושלמעלה מהשתלשלות.

This blessing and drawing down is extended to the aspect of “You,” which is the revealed world, so that the aspect of Havayah, which is the generality of the chain of emanation, will be drawn down: Yod contraction, Heh expansion, Vav extension, Heh expansion.

ונמשכת ברכה והמשכה זו אל בחינת אתה, שהוא בחינת עלמא דאתגלא, שיהנה בחינת הויה שהוא פללות ההשתלשלות, יו"ו צמצום, ה"א התפשטות, ו"ו המשכה, ה"א התפשטות.

This is what is meant by “The blessing of Havayah makes rich” (Proverbs 10:22), and regarding Abraham it is written, “And you shall be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2), meaning that the blessing itself is the aspect of Havayah.

וזהו שאמר הכתוב ברכת ה' היא תעשיר (משלי י, כ"ב), ובאברהם פתיב והיה ברכה (בראשית י"ב, ב), שהברכה היא בחינת הויה.

Afterwards one says “our God, King of the universe,” so that the flow will be drawn downward even into the aspect of “King of the universe,” which is the aspect of Malchut of Atzilut, the lowest level within Atzilut, as is known.

ואחר כך אומרים אלקינו מלך העולם, שימשך השפע למטה עד גם בבחינת מלך העולם, שהוא בחינת מלכות דאצילות, שהיא הבחינה התחתונה שבאצילות פנודע.

“Who has sanctified us” refers to the aspect of supernal delight, as it is written, “Happy are you, for daughters have called me fortunate” (Genesis 30:13), in order to sanctify us through His commandments, for the Holy One, blessed be He, lays tefillin, and so forth, which are from His essence and being, blessed be He.

אשר הוא בחינת תענוג העליון, כמו שקתוב באשרי פי אשרוני בנות (בראשית ל, י"ג), בכדי לקדשנו במצותיו. הקדוש ברוך הוא מניח תפלין וכו' (ברכות ו, א), שהם מבחינת מהותו ועצמותו יתברך.

It is thus found that within the blessing there is the aspect of running and returning. First is the returning, to draw the flow downward as far as the aspect of “King of the universe,” and afterwards the running, “who has sanctified us with His commandments,” into His essence and being, to draw from there downward.

ונמצא יש בברכה בחינת רצוא ושוב. תחלה הוא השוב, להמשיך השפע למטה עד בחינת מלך העולם, ואחר כך הרצוא, קדשנו במצותיו, במהותו ועצמותו, להמשיך משם למטה.

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This is what is written, “Happy is the man who fears the Lord” (Psalms 112:1). At first there is the aspect of distance, that he fears to approach the holy, saying, “Who am I, that I have come until here?”

וְזֶהוּ שְׂפָתוֹב אֲשֶׁרֵי אִישׁ יִרָא אֶת ה' (תְּהִלִּים קי"ב, א). תְּחִלָּה בְּחֵיבַת רְחוּק, שְׂיִרָא לְגִשֵׁת אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ, מִי אֲנֹכִי כִּי בָאתִי עַד הֵלֶם.

Afterwards, “His commandments he greatly desires” (Psalms 112:1), meaning: it is true that I am not worthy of this, but nevertheless, in His commandments he greatly desires.

וְאַחַר כֵּן בְּמִצְוֹתָיו חֲפִצַּן מְאֹד (תְּהִלִּים קי"ב, א), דְּהֵינּוּ, אֲמַת שְׂאִינִי רְאוּי לְכֹד, אִךְ מִכָּל מְקוֹם בְּמִצְוֹתָיו חֲפִצַּן מְאֹד.

The reason that there must be running and returning is that every drawing down from above must be through “reaching and not reaching.” First there is the aspect of withdrawal, which is the matter of “not reaching,” and afterwards expansion, which is the aspect of “reaching.”

וְהַטַּעַם שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת רְצוּא וְשׁוֹב, כִּי כָל הַמְשָׁכָה מְלַמְעֵלָה צָרִיכָה לְהִיּוֹת עַל יְדֵי מִטִּי וְלֹא מִטִּי. תְּחִלָּה בְּחֵיבַת הַסְּתַלְקוֹת שֶׁהוּא עֲנֵנּוּ לֹא מִטִּי, וְאַחַר כֵּן הַתְּפִשְׁטוֹת בְּחֵיבַת מִטִּי.

Therefore there must also be, in the arousal from below, the aspect of running and returning.

וְלָכֵן צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת אֲתַעְרוּתָא דְלִתְמָא גַם כֵּן בְּחֵיבַת רְצוּא וְשׁוֹב.

This is the meaning of “The words of the Scribes are sweeter to me,” for the root of the words of the Sages is drawn from the aspect of “Scribe,” the aspect of “Where is the Scribe?” (Isaiah 33:18), which is above the aspect of the wine of the Torah.

וְזֶהוּ עֲנֵנּוּ עֲרָבִים עָלַי דְּבָרֵי סוֹפְרִים, שְׂשִׁרְשׁ דְּבָרֵי חַז"ל נִמְשָׁךְ מִבְּחֵיבַת סוֹפֵר, בְּחֵיבַת אִיָּה סוֹפֵר (יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ ל"ג, י"ח), שֶׁהִיא לְמַעְלָה מִבְּחֵיבַת יַיִנָּה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה.

For the Written Torah is called “Book,” as explained above.

שֶׁתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכֶתֶב נִקְרָאת סֵפֶר, וְכוּ', וְכַמְבּוֹאֵר לְעֵיל.

See further what is written regarding the matter of the blessing of the commandments in the verse, “And you shall make holy garments” (Exodus 28:2).

וְעֵינּוּ מַה שְׂפָתוֹב יִמְעַנֵּן בְּרַפְתַּת הַמִּצְוֹת בְּפָסוּק וְעֵשִׂיתִּי בְּגָדֵי קֹדֶשׁ (שְׁמוֹת כ"ח, ב), עֵינּוּ שָׂם.

[NOTE Summary:

The maamar opens by questioning the wording of the statement “For your loves are better than wine” (Song of Songs 1:2), as interpreted by the Sages: “The words of the Scribes are more pleasing to me than the wine of the Torah” (Eruvin 21b). The Alter Rebbe focuses on the unusual phrasing “to me” or “upon me,” explaining that this choice of language is deliberate and precise.

He establishes that “the wine of the Torah” refers primarily to the mitzvot themselves. Through the performance of mitzvot, a person draws down an inner divine light that becomes invested within the vessels of the soul and the worlds. This light is פְּנִימִי, internalized, measured, and tailored to the recipient. However, the blessings recited over mitzvot, which are rabbinic in origin and thus categorized as “words of the Scribes,” draw down a higher level of divine light known as מְקִיף, encompassing light. This light is too elevated to be contained within vessels and therefore surrounds and transcends them.

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Drawing on the teaching in Etz Chaim, the Alter Rebbe explains that the mitzvah itself draws the inner light, while the blessing draws the encompassing light. This is why blessings are recited before performing a mitzvah. The term “over” in the Talmudic phrase “one blesses over their performance” indicates a surrounding quality, similar to something that passes over or surrounds from above.

This distinction clarifies why the words of the Scribes are described as more pleasing “upon me” rather than “to me.” The pleasure and sweetness of the blessing are experienced as an encompassing illumination, not as an internalized one. Therefore, they are described as being “upon” rather than “within.” The sweetness of divine delight that comes through rabbinic blessings surpasses that of the mitzvot alone, because it originates from a higher plane of divine will.

The Alter Rebbe then analyzes the structure of the blessing itself. “Blessed” signifies a drawing down from the ultimate source of blessing, the source of life that precedes the entire chain of spiritual worlds. “You” refers to the revealed realm, and the divine name Havayah represents the totality of the order of emanation, from contraction to expansion and flow. When one says “our God, King of the universe,” the blessing is extended downward into the lowest level of Atzilut, Malchut, which governs creation.

The phrase “who has sanctified us with His commandments” reflects a return upward, reconnecting the soul with the divine essence. Thus, every blessing contains a movement of shov and ratzo: first drawing divine flow downward into the worlds, and then elevating the soul back toward the divine essence.

This dynamic is mirrored in the verse “Happy is the man who fears G-d.” Initially, fear creates distance and humility, a sense of unworthiness. Only afterward does the person arrive at “in His commandments he greatly desires,” recognizing that despite personal unworthiness, divine desire is expressed through mitzvot. This two-stage process is essential, because all true divine flow requires an initial withdrawal followed by expansion, described in Kabbalah as “reaching and not reaching.”

Finally, the Alter Rebbe returns to the central claim: the words of the Scribes originate not merely from the level of Torah as “Book,” but from the higher level of “Scribe,” associated with the question “Where is the Scribe?” This level transcends the written Torah itself. Therefore, the blessings and rabbinic enactments rooted in this source awaken the concealed love within the Jewish soul and connect it to the divine essence beyond wisdom, taste, and comprehension.

Practical Takeaway:

A Jew should approach blessings and mitzvot with awareness that the blessing is not a formality but a primary channel for drawing the highest divine light. Before acting, one should pause, feel humility and reverence, and recognize the greatness of the One being addressed. This awareness allows the blessing to awaken the soul’s concealed love and transform the mitzvah from a technical act into a living encounter with the Infinite.

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Chassidic Story:

A well-documented episode from the early Chabad movement illustrates this teaching. One of the Alter Rebbe's chassidim, a learned but emotionally reserved man, once complained that his service of G-d felt dry despite meticulous observance of mitzvot. When he was granted a private audience, the Alter Rebbe asked him to describe how he recited blessings. The chassid answered honestly that he hurried through them in order to begin the mitzvah itself.

The Alter Rebbe responded gently but firmly: "You are drinking the wine but discarding the fragrance." He explained that the mitzvah is the vessel, but the blessing draws the encompassing light that awakens the heart. He instructed the chassid to slow down before each blessing, to contemplate that he was standing before the Source of all life, and only then to proceed.

Months later, the chassid returned transformed. He testified that his heart had begun to soften and ignite during prayer and mitzvah observance, not because he changed what he did, but because he changed how he entered into it. This shift embodied the Alter Rebbe's teaching: the sweetness that comes "upon" a person through the words of the Scribes can awaken a depth of connection unreachable through action alone.

Therapeutic Psychological Integration (TPX)

Framing the Inner Conflict

The Alter Rebbe is addressing a tension that modern psychology recognizes well. Action without meaning leads to emotional numbness. Meaning without structure leads to instability. Many people do the right things yet feel untouched. Others feel inspired yet cannot sustain consistent behavior. The maamar explains that this is not a personal failure. It is a structural reality of how the soul receives vitality.

Mitzvot alone generate internalized structure. They shape behavior, discipline, and identity. This is necessary, but insufficient for emotional ignition. The soul also needs an experience of transcendence, something that is felt as surrounding rather than contained. In contemporary terms, this is the difference between regulated functioning and lived meaning.

Inner Light and Surrounding Light as Psychological States

The distinction between inner light and surrounding light maps cleanly onto psychological experience.

Inner light corresponds to integrated cognition. Values are understood, habits are formed, behavior aligns with belief. This produces stability but not necessarily passion.

Surrounding light corresponds to affective awe. It is not processed fully. It is felt as presence, elevation, or reverence. It exceeds comprehension. In psychology, this resembles peak experience, self-transcendence, or attachment-based safety that is felt rather than analyzed.

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The Alter Rebbe teaches that mitzvot draw inner light, while blessings draw surrounding light. Translated psychologically, behavior alone shapes identity, but intentional framing before action awakens emotional depth.

Why Blessings Come First

The Talmudic requirement to bless before acting reflects a core therapeutic truth. Meaning must precede behavior if behavior is to remain alive.

The blessing is not preparation. It is orientation. It creates humility, distance, and receptivity. This corresponds to the initial phase of fear or restraint described in the verse "Happy is the man who fears the Lord." Fear here does not mean anxiety. It means respect for magnitude. The person pauses and acknowledges that they are entering something larger than themselves.

Only after this distancing does desire emerge. "In His commandments he greatly desires." Desire that follows humility is stable. Desire without humility collapses into entitlement or burnout.

Ratzo and Shov as Emotional Regulation

The movement of running and returning mirrors healthy emotional regulation.

Running is emotional elevation. Aspiration. Longing. Expansion.

Returning is grounding. Integration. Structure. Containment.

If a person only runs, they burn out. If a person only returns, they stagnate. The blessing initiates return, grounding the self in humility. The mitzvah then enables running, connection, and meaning.

This explains why the words of the Scribes are described as sweeter "upon me." They do not enter cognition alone. They surround the person with emotional safety and reverence, creating a holding environment for passion to emerge.

The Concealed Love and Modern Attachment Theory

The Alter Rebbe insists that love already exists within the soul. It is concealed, not absent. Modern attachment theory would describe this as secure attachment potential that is dormant due to lack of activation.

Blessings activate this bond. They remind the soul that it is seen, commanded, and desired by something greater. This awakens trust. From trust comes love. From love comes willingness to give oneself beyond logic.

This is why the concealed love revealed here is not rational. It is pre-cognitive. It resembles the willingness of a person to sacrifice comfort for meaning when they feel deeply connected.

Story

In 2016, a trauma surgeon in a major United States hospital began experiencing severe burnout. He was highly competent, ethically driven, and externally successful. Yet he described his work as mechanical and

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emotionally empty. Therapy revealed that he had trained himself to function without pausing, believing that stopping meant weakness.

At the suggestion of a mentor, he adopted a simple ritual before every surgery. Thirty seconds of silence. No analysis. Just acknowledgment that life was about to pass through his hands and that it was not his to control.

Over months, his emotional experience changed. Not because the work changed, but because his orientation did. He reported renewed compassion, steadier focus, and a return of meaning. This ritual functioned exactly as the blessing does in the maamar. It did not add skill. It restored connection.

Integrated Takeaway

The Alter Rebbe is not teaching mysticism alone. He is teaching emotional architecture.

Do not rush into action.

Pause.

Acknowledge magnitude.

Accept humility.

Then act.

Blessings are not religious decoration. They are psychological gateways. They allow the soul to receive what action alone cannot. This is why they are sweeter. They surround the person with meaning, awaken concealed love, and transform obligation into relationship.

END NOTE]