

Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch

Ohr Torah Parshas Bo

Siman #81

For the sake of "My signs (etc.) these among them"(Exodus 10:1-2), [where God tells Moses: "Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, in order to place these signs of Mine in his midst, and so that you may relate in the ears of your children and grandchildren how I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I placed among them, and you will know that I am the Lord."]

Because the Holy One, blessed be He, desired to refine all the sparks from Egypt, which stemmed from the breaking [of the vessels]. What is the matter of refining the sparks? It involves the idle words of Pharaoh and Egypt, which are letters. For what difference is there between the letters of idle matters and the letters of the Torah? The only distinction is that the letters of idle matters come from the breaking [of the vessels]. The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to refine them, which means that this refining occurs by transforming these words, letters, and matters into Torah. Through this, a new configuration of holiness is made. This is their refinement. This is one of the secrets of the Torah narratives, beyond the myriad other secrets hinted at in the narratives—endless and innumerable secrets in every single letter—for the Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah, and Israel are one.

Let us return to the initial matter: if these three additional plagues had not been brought upon Egypt, certain narratives would be missing from the Torah. The sparks would not have been fully refined. This is the hint in the verse: "In order to place My signs [among them]"—meaning the letters of the breaking. I need to refine them through the Torah. Therefore, it was necessary to bring upon them these three additional plagues, in order to integrate those letters into the holy configurations of the Torah, as mentioned. Understand this well.

[NOTE: The practical takeaway is to view challenges or disruptions in life as opportunities for refinement and growth. Just as God used the plagues to transform the "idle letters" of Egypt into holiness, we can take the seemingly mundane or even negative aspects of our experiences and redirect them toward a higher purpose. Every situation, no matter how broken, has potential for holiness when approached with intention and faith. Seek to elevate the "sparks" in your daily life by turning idle or challenging moments into meaningful actions. **END NOTE]**

Siman #82

In the Midrash, Rabbi Yannai said: The Torah should have started with "This month shall be for you" (Exodus 12:2). So why did it begin with the story of Creation? For the sake of Israel [because] they said, "We will do and we will hear." This aligns with

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the teaching in Chazal: "Israel arose in thought [before all else]."

The precedence of divine will was so that Israel would be righteous in every generation. The Holy One, blessed be He, contracted His radiance, as it were, like a father who limits his intellect and speaks in a childish manner for the sake of his young child. Similarly, all tendencies toward "childlike behaviors" arise in the father, as he delights in those actions to bring joy to the child and make the child's enjoyment more meaningful and beautiful to him.

With the Holy One, blessed be He, past and future are equal before Him, and He took delight in the deeds of the righteous. He therefore contracted Himself. This contraction is called wisdom (חכמה), for wisdom is "nothingness" (or derived from "from nothingness"), as in the verse, "Wisdom is found from nothingness" (Job 28:12).

Thus, the contraction was for the sake of Israel. Moreover, love itself brought about this contraction. This is the meaning of the verse: "These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham begot [Isaac]..." (Genesis 25:19).

[NOTE: To recognize that sometimes we need to adjust and simplify ourselves—whether it's our language, expectations, or actions—to connect meaningfully with others. Just as God contracted His infinite light out of love to make the world comprehensible and accessible, we too can practice humility and empathy by meeting others where they are. Simplifying doesn't diminish the message; it deepens connection and nurtures growth. **END NOTE]**

Siman #83

"This month shall be for you"—it is stated in the *Zohar* in *Saba de-Mishpatim* that Nissan is called "Aviv" (spring), meaning the letters Aleph and Bet in order, which is "yours." Tishrei, on the other hand, is in reversed order, which is "Mine."

This can be understood based on the verse: "Like an eagle arousing its nest... hovering over its young" (Deuteronomy 32:11), touching and not touching. The matter is as follows: The eagle is merciful toward its young, wanting to provide for and protect them. However, because it is large, both in body and feathers, if it were to touch them directly, they would not be able to bear it. Therefore, it touches and does not touch.

Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, knows that the world cannot bear the brightness of His light and influence, and they would be nullified into nonexistence. Therefore, He needed to contract His light.

Now, the letters in proper order (*kesidran*) indicate His influence from above to below, while letters reversed (*lemefara*) indicate contraction. This concept is also true regarding the configurations of the Tetragrammaton (*Havayah*): when in proper order, it

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signifies mercy.

This is the meaning of "Nissan, with letters in order, is yours"—for the sake of My love and mercy toward you, to influence you and protect you. But Tishrei, with reversed letters, signifies contraction. Even though this, too, is for your benefit, so that you can endure My brightness, it is called "Mine." This means it is associated with Me because the great light and brightness of My being prevents Me from fully bestowing My abundant kindness and immense goodness upon you. Therefore, it is "Mine."

But Nissan, which represents the quality of bestowal, is "yours." This is the meaning of "This month shall be for you"—*for you* specifically. Therefore, the configuration of the Tetragrammaton during this month is in proper order (*kesidran*).

[NOTE: A practical takeaway from this teaching is the recognition of two modes of divine interaction with the world—expansion (bestowal) and contraction (restraint)—and how they manifest in our own lives. Here's how this can be applied:

1. **Embrace Times of Abundance (Nissan):** When you feel inspired, blessed, or supported by divine mercy, use that time to grow, act, and connect. This is a period of "letters in order," where you feel clarity and alignment. Recognize that such moments are gifts of divine love meant for your personal benefit and spiritual growth. Use them to maximize your potential.
2. **Appreciate Times of Contraction (Tishrei):** When life feels challenging, unclear, or distant from divine light, understand that this is also a purposeful process. Just as God contracts His light so we can endure and grow, moments of restraint or difficulty can foster resilience, deeper faith, and self-awareness. See them as opportunities for internal strength and refinement.
3. **Balance Giving and Restraining:** Just as God's relationship with us alternates between bestowal and contraction, we can emulate this in our relationships and actions. In moments of giving (like the "Nissan mode"), be generous and loving. In times of restraint (like the "Tishrei mode"), practice measured responses, boundaries, and introspection.
4. **Live with Awareness of the Bigger Picture:** Like the eagle that "touches and does not touch," understand that every experience—whether mercy or challenge—is part of a larger divine purpose. Trust that even moments of contraction are ultimately designed for your benefit.

By internalizing this dual approach, we can move through life with faith, gratitude, and wisdom, knowing that both light and shadow serve to help us grow and flourish. **END NOTE]**

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Siman #84a

"Draw forth and take for yourselves sheep" (Exodus 12:21) – In Egypt, there was no arousal from below, as the Israelites were steeped in idolatry. Therefore, they required an arousal from above. This is why it is written, *"I am the Lord, I and no other."* As it says, *"And Israel saw the great hand that the Lord performed in Egypt"* (Exodus 14:31), this refers to the promise made to Abraham, *"and afterward, they shall leave with great wealth"* (Genesis 15:14). Abraham is associated with the *great hand*, which represents love (*ahavah*). Love was the cause of this arousal from above, even though there was no arousal from below. As it states in the Zohar: *"My bride in the tannery appears to Me as though she is in a perfume market."* This illustrates that even in a place of impurity, God's love for Israel prompted arousal from above.

This is also the meaning of *"but by My name, Lord (Y-H-V-H), I was not known to them"* (Exodus 6:3)—that today, the expansive flow of great lovingkindness becomes revealed and tangible. This occurred despite the lack of arousal from below; nevertheless, there was arousal from above.

However, the name *Shaddai* (שדי) indicates contraction, representing the secret of expansion through the three lines of the letter Shin (ש), directed toward the Dalet (ד). This reflects a measured contraction, as in the teaching: *"He said to His world, 'Enough'"* (Shabbat 30a).

But here (at the splitting of the Sea), the flow came from *the tower floating in the air*—symbolized by the Lamed (ל), whose form connects to the letters Y-H-V-H (26), through the three lines of the Shin into the open Mem (מ).

Therefore, the phrase *"Draw forth"* (משכו) hints at the open Mem (מ), which receives from the Shin, connecting it to the Divine Name Y-H-V-H (26). This represents an expansive flow of divine kindness and wisdom through the channels of Binah (understanding).

This is why it is called the **Great Shabbat** (*Shabbat HaGadol*). It is explained in the *Zohar* that there is a distinction between "higher Shabbat" and "lower Shabbat." The "Great Shabbat" refers to the Shabbat of the day (*Shabbat d'Yoma*), indicating that typically, there is a need to elevate from below to above. However, on this Shabbat, the Great Shabbat extends itself downward, into the lower realms.

This answers the difficulty posed by some commentators regarding this concept. The *Zohar* also mentions "310 higher days" (*yomin ila'in*) and "365 lower days" (*yomin tata'in*), which correspond to the interplay of divine realms. It is also written that "everything depends on the Ancient One" (*Atika*), signifying the source of all emanations.

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This is the meaning of the verse: *"To Him who struck Egypt through their firstborn"* (Psalms 136:10). A higher level, referred to as the "firstborn," represents a lofty divine attribute.

The verse *"I made you numerous like the plants of the field"* (Ezekiel 16:7) reflects the process of growth through four levels: tens, hundreds, thousands, and ten thousands. These represent the lower levels of the worlds of *Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah* (ABYA).

The first stage, the level of ten thousand (*revavah*), corresponds to *"I made you numerous like the plants of the field."* This growth occurs as the worlds are adorned with divine light (*tashmishta*), descending from the higher realms of ABYA into the lowest world, *Asiyah*.

The continuation of the verse, *"You were naked and bare"* (Ezekiel 16:7), implies that this process took place without any initial awakening from below. It was entirely driven by divine bestowal from above.

[NOTE: The practical takeaway is to strive for self-nullification and alignment with the Divine will. By setting aside ego and personal desires, you open yourself to embody seemingly opposing traits, such as joy and humility, or strength and gentleness, because they are unified in the service of a higher purpose. This approach fosters harmony within yourself and with others, allowing divine light to guide your actions and bring balance even in complexity. **END NOTE]**