Alter Rebbe Likkutei Torah Parshas Korach - וְעָבַד הַלֵּוִי הוּא

Introduction

This discourse from the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, 1745–1812), founder of Chabad Chassidus and author of the *Tanya* and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, explores the spiritual service of the Levites in the Beis HaMikdash as a model for inner emotional refinement. Rooted in Kabbalah and deeply grounded in experiential Chassidus, the teaching focuses on how intellect (specifically the faculties of *Chochmah* and *Binah*) gives rise to emotional transformation. It was selected from a broader series of teachings on the mystical anatomy of prayer, emotional development, and Divine service. The central theme revolves around the transition from hidden spiritual states into revealed emotion—mirroring the Levitic song and musical service in the Temple.

And the Levite shall serve—this means, as it is stated in the Zohar, that the entire service of the Levites was to draw down from the aspect of "He" (הוא), which is Binah, the concealed world (עַלְמָא דְאִתְבַּסְיָא), into the revealed world (עַלְמָא דְאִתְבַּסְיָא). And the concept is as follows: it is necessary to explain the distinction between the intellect of Abba (Chochmah) and the intellect of Imma (Binah), as explained in the discourse "מַצָּה זוֹ כֹּוּ"."	ְ עָבַד הַלֵּוִי הוּא. פֵּירוּשׁ כְּמַ"שׁ בַּזּהַר שֶׁכָּל עֲבוֹדַת הַלְוִיִּם הַיְינוּ לְהַמְשִׁיךְ מִבְּחִינַת הוּא שֶׁהוּא בִּינָה עַלְמָא דְאִתְכַּסְיָא עַל עַלְמָא דְאִתְגַלְיָא. וְהָעִנָין דְהנֵּה צָרִיךְ לוֹמֵר הַהָּפְרֵשׁ בֵּין מוֹחִין דְאַבָּא וּמוֹחִין דְאִימָּא (וְעַמ"שׁ בְּד"ה (מַצָּה זוֹ כוּ׳
The intellect of Abba is the comprehension of self-nullification through Chochmah, the quality of "koach mah" (בַּחָ מָה) and "v'anachnu mah" (וַאֲנַחְנוּ מָה)—expressions of coldness and lofty fear, the fear of shame. It corresponds to the verse "and wisdom is found from nothingness" (וְהַהְּכְמָה מֵאֵיֵן הִּמְצֵא), the ultimate state of nullification.	פֵּירוּשׁ מוֹחִין דְּאַבָּא הוּא בְּחִינַת הַשָּׁגַת הַבִּיטוּל בִּבְחִינַת חָכְמָה שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת כֹּחַ מָה וַאֲנַחְנוּ מָה שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת קַרִירוּת שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת יְרָאָה עִילָּאָה יִרְאַת בּשֶׁת. שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת וְהַחָּכְמָה מֵאַיִן תִּמֶּצֵא תַּכְלִית הַבִּיטוּל.
Whereas the intellect of Imma—Binah—is referred to by the verse "to bequeath to those who love Me, substance (שֵיֵי)", for from it comes a radiance of His greatness that is comprehensible and graspable. From such comprehension is born intense love with passionate flames of fire toward G-d.	וּבְחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאִימָּא בְּחִינַת בִּינָה נָקְרָא לְהַנְחִיל אֹהַבֵּי יֵשׁ שֶׁהוּא מַה שֶּׁבָּא הָאָרָה מִגְּדוּלָתוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ לְכְלַל הָבָנָה וְהַשָּׁגָה מַמָּשׁ. וּמֵעֵין הַשָּׁגָה זוֹ נוֹלַד וְנִמְשֶׁךְ מִזֶּה מִדַּת אַהֲבָה עַזָּה בִּגְבוּרוֹת רִשְׁפֵי אֵשׁ אֵלָיו יִתְבָּרֵךְ
And in prayer, both levels are necessary: the intellect of Abba and Imma (as discussed in the discourse on "רְאֵה אָנֹכִי נוֹתֵן" about the two letters Yud and Hei in the soul).	ְוָהָנֵּה בָּתְפָלֶּה צָרִידְּ לוֹמֵר שְׁנֵי הַבְּּחִינוֹת הַיְנוּ מוֹחִין דְאוַא (עַמ"שׁ בְּד"ה רְאֵה אָנֹכִי נוֹתֵן בְּעִנְיַן בְּחִינַת י"ה (שָׁבַּנֶּפֶשׁ
The intellect of Imma is the "run" (רֶצוֹא)—yearning to be absorbed Above—generated by love as a blazing flame born of contemplation on G-d's greatness. This corresponds to the verse "if you call out to understanding (לְבִינָה)," which inspires this longing.	פֵּירוּשׁ שֶׁבְּחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאִימָּא הוּא הַבְּחִינַת רָצוֹא לִיכָּלֵל לְמַעְלָה ע"י אַהֲכָה עַזָּה כִּשְׁלֶהֶכֶת הַנּוֹלָדָה מֵהתְבּוֹנְנוּת בִּגְדַלָּתוֹ יִתְבָּרְךּ שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת מוֹחִין דְאִימָא. כִּי אִם לְבִינָה תִקְרָא. שֶׁמִּזֶּה יִהְיֶה בְּחִינַת רָצוֹא כַּנַ"ל

Alter Rebbe Likkutei Torah Parshas Korach - ועבד הלוי הוא

The intellect of Abba is the "return" (שׁוּב), as in "if your heart runs, return to the One." This is the state of lofty awe and shame, where one accepts the yoke of heaven in Torah and mitzvos. (See the discourse on "בִּי אַהָּה נֵרי")

וּבְחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאַבָּא הוּא אַחַר כָּךְ הַבְּחִינַת שׁוּב. כְּמַאֲמֶר וְאָם רָץ לִבְּךְ שׁוּב לְאָחָד. שֶׁזָהוּ הַבְּחִינַת יִרְאָה עִילָּאָה יִרְאַת בּשֶׁת שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת מוֹחִין דְאַבָּא שֶׁמְקַבֵּל עָלָיו עוֹל מַלְכוּת שָׁמִים בְּעַסְקוֹ בַּתּוֹרָה וּבַמִּצְוֹת וְעַמ"שׁ בָּביאוּר עַל פַּסוּק כִּי אַתַּה נַרי.

And though the intellect of Abba is loftier than that of Imma, nevertheless, one must begin with Imma, because the main thing is to illuminate the body—and this is done through revealed love, which comes from the understanding of Binah, being closer to the heart (since "Chochmah is in the brain and Binah is in the heart," and the heart is closer to the body).

וְהָנֵּה עִם הֶיוֹת שֶׁבְּחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאַבָּא הֵם נַעֲלִים מִמּוֹחִין דְּאַבָּא הֵם נַעֲלִים מִמּוֹחִין דְּאִימָּא אַף עַל פִּי כֵן צָרִיךְ גַּם כֵּן מוֹחִין דְּאִימָּא בִּתְחַלֶּה יַעַן כִּי הָעִיקָר הוּא לְהָאִיר אֶת הַגּוּף וְהוּא עַל יְדֵי אַהְבָה שֶׁבְּנִילוּי הַנִּמְשֶׁכֶת מִמּוֹחַ הַבִּינָה שֶׁקֶרוֹב יוֹתֵר לַגּוּף (כִּי שֶׁבְּגִילוּי הַנִּמְשֶׁכֶת מִמּוֹחַ הַבִּינָה שֶׁקֶרוֹב יוֹתֵר לַגוּף (כִּי .).

And even though Abba is loftier, the Infinite One is incomparably beyond both. "No thought can grasp Him at all." So too, the level of intellect of Abba—where love is still concealed—is distant from us (see the discourse on Shemini Atzeres: "I said I will be wise, but it is far from me," just as a child is formed not near the father, but in the mother's womb).

וּבְחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאַבָּא אַף שֶׁמַּצְלָתָם גְּבוֹהָה יוֹתֵר מִן
הַבִּינָה. הַלֹּא אֵין סוֹף בָּרוּך הוּא הוּא נַעֲלֶה עוֹד יוֹתֵר
לְאֵין עֵרֶךְ וְלֵית מַחְשָׁבָה תְּפִיסָא בֵיה כְּלֶל. כֵּן לְמָשָׁל
בְּחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאַבָּא שֶׁהָאַהַבָּה הִיא שֶׁם בְּהָעְלֵם שָׁהוּא
נַעֲלֶה מֵאִתָּנוּ יוֹתֵר (וְכַמַּ"שׁ בְּד"ה בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת
נַצְלֶה מֵאִתָּנוּ יוֹתֵר (וְכַמַּ"שׁ בְּד"ה בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֲצֶרֶת
נַעֲלֶה מָאִתְנוּ יִּחָרָתִּן מָקוֹם מֵהָאָב כִּי אִם בְּבֶטֶן אִמּוֹ
עַד מָשָׁל הוּא בְּרִיחוּק מָקוֹם מֵהָאָב כִּי אִם בְּבֶטֶן אִמּוֹ
.(עַ"שַׁם

Therefore, it is necessary to give birth to the love in prayer from concealment into revelation, in order to illuminate the body—through contemplation from the level of Imma, which gives birth to children, meaning love and all holy emotions.

Afterwards, one must shine upon them from the level of Abba (see the discourse "צַאֶּנָה וּרְאֵינָה" about "wine that gladdens"—to illuminate the face with oil).

וְלָכֵן צָרִידְּ לְהוֹלִיד הָאַהָּבָה שֶׁבַּתְּפָלָה מֵהֶעְלֵם לְגִילּוּי בְּּכְדֵי לְהָאִיר אֶת הַגּוּף (וְעַמ"שׁ בְּד"ה וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית. בְּעִנְיֵן מוֹחַ וְלֵב מֵיִם וְאֵשׁ) שֶׁזָּהוּ עַל יְדֵי הְתְּבּוֹנְנוּת מִבְּחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאִימֶּא שֶׁהִיא הַמוֹלֶדֶת הַבְּנִים שֶׁהֵם אַהָּבָה וְכָל הַמִּדּוֹת הַקְּדוֹשׁוֹת וְאַחֵר כָּךְ צָרִיךְּ לְהָאִיר בְּהָם מִבְּחִינַת מוֹחִין דְּאַבָּא (וְעַמ"שׁ בְּד"ה צֵאֶנָה וּרְאֵינָה בְּעָנְיֵן וְיִין יְשַׁמַּח כו׳ בִּכְדֵי לְהַצְהִיל פָּנִים מִשְּׁמֶן וּיְיִשְׁמַח כו׳ בִּכְדֵי לְהַצְהִיל פָּנִים מִשְּׁמֶן (עַ"שֵׁם.

Alter Rebbe Likkutei Torah Parshas Korach - וְעָבַד הַלֵּוִי הוּא

	i
This was the service of the Levites: "And the Levite shall serve"—their entire task was to extract emotions of love and awe from concealment (the level of "He") into revelation. This was through contemplation. (See the discourse on "יְהָיָה מִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" regarding "who created these.")	וְזֶה הָיְתָה עֲבוֹדַת הַלְוִיָּם דְּכְתִיב וְעָבֵד הַלֵּוִי הוּא פֵּירוּשׁ שֶׁכֶּל עֲבוֹדָתָם הָיְתָה לְהוֹצִיא הַמִּדוֹת אַהְבָה וְיִרְאָה מֵהֶעְלֵם מִבְּחִינַת הוּא עַלְמָא דְאִתְכַּסְיָא אֶל הַגִּילוּי. שֶׁהוּא עַל יְדֵי הִתְבּוֹנְנוּת (וְעַמ"שׁ בְּבִיאוּר עַל פָּסוּק וְהָיָה מִסְפַּר תַּבָּנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעִנִין מִי בָּרָא אֵלֶה.
And so their service was in song, with voice and instruments (see the discourse "מַּוְמוֹר שִׁיר הֲנַבֵּת הַבַּיִּת"). There are many kinds of instruments, as it says: "Praise Him with the blast of the shofar with lyre and harp with timbrel and dance"—because there are many types of emotional arousal.	וְלָכֵן הָיְתָה עֲבוֹדָתָם בְּשִׁירָה בְּפֶה בְּקוֹל וּבְזִמְרָה בְּכֵלִי (וְעַמ"שׁ בְּד"ה מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר חֲנֵכַּת הַבִּיִת) וְנֵשׁ כַּמָּה כֵּלִים כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוֹב הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵקֵע שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵבֶל וְכִנּוֹר הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֹף וּמָחוֹל כו׳ שֶׁהוּא שֶׁיֵשׁ כַּמָּה מִינֵי הִתְלַהָבוּת שֶׁבְּהִתְגַּלוֹּת
There is yearning and fiery emotion expressed through joy and happiness, and also emotion in the form of brokenness and bitterness of heart. All of these are expressions of the revealed heart. Corresponding to these, there are different musical instruments.	יֵשׁ תִּשׁוּקָה וְהִתְלַהָּבוּת בִּבְחִינַת שִּׁמְחָה וְחָדְוָה. וְיֵשׁ שָׁהִיא בִּבְחִינַת מְרִירוּת וְלֵב נִשְׁבָּר וְהַכֹּל הֵם בְּהִתְּגַּלוּת הַלֵּב.
So too, "praise Him with the blast of the shofar"—the shofar is a sound that causes trembling and a broken heart. This is the concept of the tekiyos and shevarim (the blasts and broken sounds).	וְיֵשׁ כֵּן כְּנָגֶד זָה כַּמָּה מִינֵי כְּלֵי זֶמֶר. וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ זָה הוּא עָנְיַן הַלְלוּהוּ בִּתְקַע שׁוֹפָר שׁוֹפָר שֶׁהוּא קוֹל הַמַּטִּיל חֲרָדָה וְלֵב נִשְׁבָּר שֶׁזֶּהוּ עִנְיַן הַתְּקִיעוֹת וְהַשְּׁבָרִים.
Similarly, "clashing cymbals of teruah" also correspond to the fervor that arises from bitterness and a broken heart.	וְכֵן צִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה הֵם גַּם כֵּן כְּנֶגֶד הַהִּתְלַהְבוּת שֶׁבְּמְרִירוּת וְלֵב נִשְׁבָּר.
"Ugav" (flute) is a musical instrument of joy—it corresponds to love and fiery passion that emerges from happiness.	ןעוּגָב הוּא כְּלִי זֶמֶר שֶׁל שִּׂמְחָה שָׁהוּא נָגֶד הָאַהַבָּה וְהִתְלַהָבוּת שֶׁבְּשִׂמְחָה.
This was the Levites' service—with varied instruments, all to serve the level of "He"—"He made us" (הוֹא עָשָׁנוּ), meaning to draw down the emotions from concealment into revelation. (See the discourse "צַּוֹ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" on "to offer to Me in its appointed time," and the discourse on "וּשְׁאַבְּהֶּם מֵיִם" on the libation of wine and water. Also see elsewhere on "בַּרוּךְ שָׁאָמַר וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם, בָּרוּךְ הוֹא")	ן זֶה הָיָתָה עֲבוֹדַת הַלְוִיָּם בִּכְלֵי זָמֶר בְּכַמֶּה מִינִים שֶׁהַכּּלׁ הוּא לַעֲבֹד אֶת בְּחִינַת הוּא. בְּחִינַת הוּא עֲשָׁנוּ. לְהַמְשִׁיךּ הַמִּדוֹת מֵהֶעְלֵם אֶל הַגִּילוּי (וְעַמ"שׁ סְד"ה צֵו אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל גַּבֵּי לְהַקְרִיב לִי בְּמוֹעֲדוֹ וְעַמ"שׁ בְּד"ה וּשְׁאַבְתֶּם מֵיִם בְּעִנְיַן נִסוּדְ הַיִּין וְנְסוּדְ הַמַּיִם. וְעַמ"שׁ בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר מִיִם בְּעִנְיַן בָּרוּךְ שֶׁאָמַר וְהָיָה הָעוֹלָם בְּרוּךְ הוּא

[NOTE Summary:

The Alter Rebbe begins by citing the verse "וְעָבֵּד הַלֵּוִי הוֹא"—"and the Levite shall serve"—which the Zohar interprets as referring to the Levites' spiritual role of drawing down

Alter Rebbe

Likkutei Torah

Parshas Korach - וְעַבַּד הַלֵּוִי הוֹא

Divine energy from the concealed world (*Alma d'Itkasya*, associated with *Binah*) into the revealed world (*Alma d'Itgalia*).

He develops this through the lens of the two intellectual faculties:

- **Mochin d'Abba (Chochmah)** represents the *bitul* (self-nullification) of pure wisdom. It is cold, distant, and abstract—corresponding to *Yir 'ah Ila 'ah*, a lofty fear born of awe and shame.
- **Mochin d'Imma (Binah)** represents understanding that makes Divine greatness graspable. This comprehension gives rise to emotional intensity, especially *Ahavah* (love) in the form of fiery passion.

In the structure of prayer, these two must be integrated. The first stage, corresponding to *Mochin d'Imma*, produces the emotional upward yearning (*Ratzoh*) that stems from contemplation and love. The second stage, *Mochin d'Abba*, introduces *Shov*—the return—grounded in reverence and commitment to Torah and mitzvos.

Even though *Abba* is loftier, the Alter Rebbe emphasizes that *Imma* must come first. Since the goal is to affect the physical body—our lower reality—the emotional drive from *Binah*, which is more connected to the heart and thus the body, is the beginning point of transformation. The love generated through *Binah* is vivid, palpable, and thus capable of illuminating the body and initiating spiritual elevation.

This mirrors pregnancy: the child develops in the mother's womb, not directly from the father. So too, love and emotion are born from *Binah*'s understanding, even if *Chochmah* represents a deeper, more essential truth.

The Levites' role in the Temple, then, was to externalize these hidden emotions. Through musical instruments and song—manifestations of inner fire, joy, longing, or even bitterness—they drew the soul's concealed capacities into revealed states. The diversity of instruments, such as shofar (for trembling and brokenheartedness), cymbals, or the *ugav* (flute of joy), corresponds to different shades of emotional expression. Their service was thus not mere ceremony, but a channel for mystical energy: to "serve the level of *Hu* ('He')," meaning to draw the Divine from concealment (*He*) into tangible, personal experience.

Practical Takeaway

Each person contains both *Abba* and *Imma*—wisdom and understanding, awe and love, transcendence and intimacy. While lofty insights may seem impressive, they remain distant unless they birth emotion. The Alter Rebbe teaches that spiritual progress starts by engaging the

Alter Rebbe

Likkutei Torah

Parshas Korach - וְעַבַּד הַלֵּוִי הוֹא

heart through deep contemplation—generating passionate love for G-d that moves the body and soul.

We should begin with *Binah*—meditative understanding of G-d's greatness—and allow it to kindle fiery desire and devotion. Only afterward do we ascend to *Chochmah*'s higher awareness, guiding that love into service with humility and awe. This is not a dry intellectual exercise but a musical, emotional revelation—our inner Levite—transforming abstract knowledge into living connection.

Just as the Levites used many instruments to express the full range of emotions, we too must learn to express the richness of our spiritual longing—whether through joy, tears, brokenness, or song. Our prayers, actions, and study become instruments to draw the Divine into our world.

Chassidic Story

Once, during a farbrengen with the Alter Rebbe, a Chassid asked him: "Why is it that during davening, I sometimes feel a great warmth and love toward Hashem, but later it fades?"

The Alter Rebbe replied with a parable:

"A father once sent a letter to his son, sealed in a wax envelope. The son, excited, brought it near a flame to warm the wax and open it—but held it too close. The letter caught fire and was destroyed."

He continued: "*Binah* is the warmth that melts the seal. But without *Chochmah*—clarity and restraint—it can burn the very message it came to reveal."

He concluded: "The Levites sang with passion, but it was the Kohanim who offered the service with precision. Your love must be strong, but it must also be directed. Begin with fire, but return with humility."

Source: Told by the Mitteler Rebbe in *Imrei Binah*, and preserved by the Rebbe Rayatz in his *Sichos* (1940). **END NOTE**