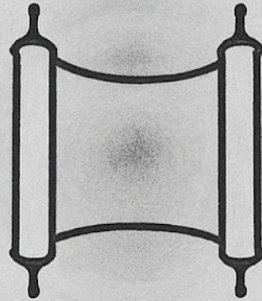


בס"ד

כתר שם טוב

Kesser Shem Tov

כ-טכ סימנים



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סימן #כ

From the Baal Shem Tov: “And Pharaoh drew near” (Exodus 14:10), and [etc.]. I heard from my teacher: “In distress, You have widened space for me” (Psalms 4:2), for through having constrictions (צָרִים), one draws closer to Hashem, and this is the meaning of “You have widened space for me”—that he recognizes that there is something lacking in the Shechinah, and he prays on behalf of the Shechinah to Him, blessed be He. And thereby, a unification of the Holy One and His Shechinah is effected through him. For the righteous are messengers of the Matronita [the Shechinah], etc. (Zohar III, 7b).

מהבעש"ט ופָּרַעַה הִקְרִיב [וכו', דְּשִׁמְעֵתִי מִמּוֹרֵי] (כ"י) בְּצָר הִרְחַבְתָּ לִּי, כִּי עַל-יְדֵי שְׂיֵשׁ מִצָּרִין מִתְקָרֵב יוֹתֵר לֵה' יִתְפָּרֵד, וְזֶהוּ הִרְחַבְתָּ לִּי, שְׂיִדְעַ שְׂנֵה חֶסְרוֹן בְּשִׂכְיִנָּה וּמִתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַד הַשִּׂכְיִנָּה אֵלָיו יִתְפָּרֵד וְנַעֲשֶׂה יְחִוּד קב"ה [על ידו], כִּי צְדִיקֵי־א [אינון שְׁלוּחֵי דְּמַטְרוֹנִיתָא] [וכו' ודפח"ה]

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that the very act of being constricted—facing distress or hardship—is not only not a barrier to closeness with Hashem but actually a conduit for it. Quoting “וּפָרַעַה הִקְרִיב,” he explains that when Pharaoh drew near, it wasn’t just a tactical threat—it caused the Jewish people to draw spiritually closer to God. This is what is meant by the verse “בְּצָר הִרְחַבְתָּ לִּי” (“In distress, You have widened space for me”): the constriction itself creates a spiritual widening. But the Baal Shem Tov adds a deeper layer—the tzaddik experiences this pain as a *lack in the Shechinah*, and he prays not only for himself or others, but for the *Shechinah Herself*. Through this deep empathy, he causes a union between the Holy One and the Shechinah. The tzaddik is thus called the “messenger of the Matronita”—a divine agent who facilitates cosmic unification through his inner distress and prayer.

Practical Takeaway

When facing pressure or difficulty, don't see it merely as personal suffering. See it as an opportunity to come closer to God—not just for yourself, but on behalf of the Divine Presence. By turning pain into prayer, especially with the awareness that the Shechinah is also in exile, you can participate in a higher service: healing the Divine fracture and creating unity Above.

Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov once traveled with his students and passed by a small village where they encountered a sickly Jewish man who was crying softly in a corner. When asked why he cried, the man responded, “Because I feel the Shechinah crying within me.” The Baal Shem Tov wept upon hearing this and told his students, “This simple Jew has touched a place most of us never reach. His suffering is not for himself but for the exile of the

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Shechinah. And therefore, his cry pierces the heavens and causes a unification Above.” (Source: *Shivchei HaBesht*, story #163) **END NOTE]**

[FOOT NOTE From the Baal Shem Tov:

Regarding Pharaoh's pursuit of the Israelites as they stood before the Red Sea, it is written: "And Pharaoh drew near" (*u'Pharaoh hikriv*). The Sages explain that "he brought Israel closer to our Father in Heaven," for through this, "they lifted their eyes heavenward" and prayed to God.

The reason for this is: "In distress, You expanded for me" (*ba'tzar hirschavta li*). In other words, that which constricts and hinders a person in serving God ("in distress") is precisely what causes them to strive harder and achieve greater spiritual elevation ("You expanded for me"). This is because through experiencing constriction, one is brought closer to God.

Furthermore, through this process, there is also an elevation in Divinity itself, as it were. This is the meaning of "You expanded for me": "For me" refers to the level of the Shechinah, and "You expanded for me" means that the closeness and prayer to God, which result from the "distress," bring about an "expansion" in the Shechinah itself. When a person prays for the removal of the "distress," it is done with the awareness that this distress reflects a deficiency in the Shechinah. The existence of the "distress" originates from, as it were, a deficiency in the Shechinah—the Divine light dwelling within the worlds—which is in "exile" and concealment, resulting in constriction and lack for the individual.

In prayer, the person pleads with God for mercy on the Shechinah (and not merely for their own personal lack or suffering). The essence of the prayer is that the Divine light beyond the worlds (*Kudsha Brich Hu*) should connect with the Shechinah and shine within it openly, thereby freeing it from "exile" and constriction. This leads to the "union of *Kudsha Brich Hu* and His Shechinah," a complete unification and connection between the Infinite Divine and the Shechinah.

The foundation of this idea, that prayer is not for one's personal lack but for the distress of the Shechinah, is rooted in the teaching that "the righteous are the emissaries of the Matronita" (*tzaddikaya inun shluchei d'Matronita*)—the Shechinah, called the "Matronita" (Queen). Therefore, the entire content of their prayer is a plea for mercy on her behalf. **END FT]**

סימן #כא

And behold, within affection (chibah) in vitality there are two aspects: male and female.

וְהִנֵּה יֵשׁ בְּתוֹךְ הַחֲבִיבָה בְּחַיִּיּוֹת שְׁנַיִם זָכָר וְיִמְּקָה,

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For I have written elsewhere in the name of my teacher, may his memory be blessed, an explanation of the verse “In Solomon’s old age, his wives turned his heart.”

דְּכַתְּבֵתִי בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר בְּשֵׁם מוֹרֵי זָכַר צְדִיק לְבָרְכָהּ
 בִּיאֹר פְּסוּק לְעֵת זְקֵנֹת שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם
 נִשְׂוִי הַטּוֹ אֶת לְבוֹ

For within every word (*teivah*) there are two interpretations: (1) compassion, the male aspect; (2) judgment, which is called female.

כִּי בְּכָל תִּיבָה יֵשׁ ב' פִּירוּשִׁים, א' רַחֲמִים בְּחֵינֵת זָכָר,
 ב' בְּחֵינֵת דִּין הַנִּקְרָא נְקֵבָה

Behold, it says “his wives turned his heart,” etc., and this is explained further in the Zohar.

תַּזְוִי שְׁנַאֲמַר נִשְׂוִי הַטּוֹ אֶת לְבוֹ וְכוּ' וְדַפְח"ח

And with this it is understood why it says: “Two by two, male and his mate came to the ark.”

וּבָנָה יוֹבֵן כִּי בְּתוֹךְ הַתִּיבָה (שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ
 בָּאוּ אֶל הַתִּיבָה

For there are two interpretations in every word: (1) the male aspect, compassion; (2) the female aspect, judgment.

כִּי יֵשׁ ב' פִּירוּשִׁים בְּכָל תִּיבָה, א' בְּחֵינֵת זָכָר רַחֲמִים,
 ב' בְּחֵינֵת (נְקֵבָה) דִּין

And the righteous reverse the attribute of judgment into the attribute of compassion. [Understand this well.]

[וְצְדִיקִים מֵהֶפְכִּים מִדַּת הַדִּין לְמִדַּת רַחֲמִים] וְהִבִּין

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that every *teivah*—a word, especially a word of Torah or prayer—contains two internal dimensions: one of *rachamim* (compassion), aligned with the masculine quality, and one of *din* (judgment), aligned with the feminine quality. Drawing from the verse about King Shlomo’s wives turning his heart and the image of “two by two” entering the ark, he explains that each word carries both potentials: to express mercy or to express judgment. The role of the tzaddik, and by extension anyone engaged in spiritual work, is to shift the internal dynamic of the word from judgment to compassion—transforming its energy and purpose.

Practical Takeaway

When you speak, study, or pray, be aware that your words carry layered energies. With intention and inner purity, you can direct those words to awaken compassion rather than judgment. Especially in moments of distress or spiritual tension, your *teivos* (words) become vessels that can either constrain or expand divine flow. Your task is to sweeten the words—to turn every utterance into a channel of *rachamim*. **END NOTE]**

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[FOOT NOTE: Male and Female in Every Word

Regarding Noah's Ark, it is written: "Two by two, they came to the ark, male and female." The inner meaning of this is that the "ark" (*teivah*) refers to the words (*teivot*) and letters of the Torah. It is said that within the ark ("they came to the ark") are "male and female," meaning that within every word (*teivah*), there are two aspects:

1. **A higher and positive interpretation**, which corresponds to the aspect of *zachar* (male, the giver), representing the attribute of *rachamim* (mercy).
2. **A lower and negative interpretation** (which descends and derives its life force from the male aspect), corresponding to the aspect of *nekevah* (female, the receiver), representing the attribute of *din* (judgment), which is characterized by restriction and concealment.

This means that all judgments (*dinim*) and negative aspects in the world have a good and positive source in the attribute of *rachamim*, from which they derive and draw their vitality. Thus, the good and positive source is the "male aspect" (the giver) relative to the judgment itself (the receiver).

This concept is rooted in the Torah, where every word contains these two levels of "male" and "female."

This is also the reason for the power of the righteous to bring salvation and transform negative situations into positive ones. The *tzaddikim* reverse the attribute of judgment (*din*) into the attribute of mercy (*rachamim*) by revealing the higher source (the male aspect) of the very negative situation itself. **END FN]**

Siman #כב

From the Baal Shem Tov: I heard in the name of my teacher, may his memory be blessed, that he expounded in a Torah gathering, etc., on what is stated in Pirkei Avos: "One who learns from his friend even one chapter, one halachah, or one letter..."

מהבעל שם טוב דשמעתי ב'שם מורי זכר צדיק
 לברכה] דרש באכסניא של תורה כו', דאיתא
 במסכת אבות הלומד מחבירו פרק אחד או הלכה
 אחת או אות אחת כו'

As we find by David HaMelech (King of Israel), peace be upon him, that he learned from Achitofel only two things, etc.—how much more so one who learns from his friend a full chapter must treat him with honor.

שמצינו ב'דוד המלך (יש'אל) >עליו השלום) שלא
 למד מאחיתפל אלא שני דברים בלבד כו' קל וחומר
 הלומד מחבירו פרק אחד על אחת כמה וכמה שצריך
 לנהוג בו כבוד.

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But it is difficult: what is he saying—that it was only two things? Furthermore, the rule “It is enough for the derived law to be like the source” (דיו לבא מן הדין להיות כנדון)—why didn’t he suffice with that?

וְקָשָׁה מֵהִי קָאָמַר שְׁנֵי דְבָרִים בְּלִבְדָּ. וְעוֹד קָשָׁה, הֲוֵה לִיָּה לְמִימַר דִּיּוֹ לְבָא מִן הַדִּין לְהִיּוֹת כְּנִדּוֹן.

And he explained: when a person learns from a proper and upright teacher, the Torah increases and multiplies within him, as is known.

וּפְרָשׁ, דְּקָשְׁאָדָם לֹמַד מֵרַב הַגּוֹן, הַתּוֹרָה הִיא פּוֹרָה [וְרַבָּה אֲצִלוֹ כְּנִדּוֹעַ] וְכוּ.

But when one learns from a wicked person, the Torah does not increase or multiply—it remains as it is, exactly as it was learned.

וְכִשְׁלוֹמַד מֵרָשָׁע אִזְּ הִיא אֵינָהּ פּוֹרָה וְרַבָּה אֲלָא נִשְׁאָרָת) כְּפִשׁוּטָה כְּמוֹ שֶׁלְמַד מִמֶּנּוּ.

And this is what it meant when it said that David learned from Achitofel only two things—that he was a wicked man, and the Torah he learned from him did not multiply but remained just the two things, as he received them.

וְלָזָה אָמַר מַה דָּוִד שֶׁלְמַד מֵאַחִיתּוֹפֵל [אֲלָא] שְׁנֵי דְבָרִים בְּלִבְדָּ, דְּהִיָּה רָשָׁע, וְלֹא (הִיָּה) פּוֹרָה וְרַבָּה רַק, נִשְׁאָר שְׁנֵי דְבָרִים בְּלִבְדָּ כְּמוֹ שֶׁלְמַד מִמֶּנּוּ.

And even so, he called him “his teacher.” All the more so one who learns from his friend—meaning when both are righteous, and the Torah then increases and multiplies—how much more is he required to honor him.

וְאַפִּילוּ הֵכִי קָרְאוּ רַבּוֹ, הַלּוֹמַד מִחֻבְרֵי, דְּהִינּוּ שְׁנִיָּהֶם צְדִיקִים, דְּאָז הַתּוֹרָה פּוֹרָה וְרַבָּה, עַל אַחַת כְּמָה וְכְמָה שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְנַהֵג בּוֹ כְבוֹד.

And with this is resolved why it began with “a Torah gathering” (*achsanya shel Torah*)—because they were all righteous.

וּבְזָה מְתַרְצָא שֶׁפְתָחוּ בְּאַכְסַנְיָא שֶׁל תּוֹרָה, שֶׁהִיוּ כָּלָם צְדִיקִים.

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov, citing his teacher, explains a puzzling teaching from Pirkei Avos: if someone learns even one chapter, halachah, or letter from another, he must honor him. The example given is that King David learned only two things from Achitofel—yet still referred to him as his teacher. But why emphasize “only two things,” and why not just apply the principle “daiyo lavo min hadin lihyos kanidon”—that derived principles are like their source? The Baal Shem Tov answers: When one learns from a righteous teacher, the Torah learned from him expands and multiplies within the student. It becomes fertile, alive. But when one learns from a wicked person, that Torah remains static—it does not grow. King David learned only two things from Achitofel, and they remained just that: two unmultiplying pieces of knowledge. Yet he still honored him. All the more so, one who learns from a righteous friend—where the Torah is dynamic and fruitful—must certainly show him great

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honor. That's why the Mishnah opens with the idea of a Torah gathering (אכסניא של תורה), emphasizing a context where all are righteous and the Torah blossoms.

Practical Takeaway

Who you learn from matters. Torah isn't just about content—it's about spiritual transmission. When you learn from someone whose life reflects the values of Torah, the knowledge you receive continues to grow within you. It's alive. But if learned from a corrupt source, the Torah remains barren. So choose your teachers wisely, and honor those who elevate you.

Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov once traveled with his students to a distant village. There, they encountered a Jew who taught Torah but was known for unethical behavior in business. A student asked the Baal Shem Tov why people still listened to him. The Baal Shem Tov responded, "Torah learned from such a person is like seeds planted in dry earth—it may have shape, but it will not grow." Later that day, they met a simple melamed, humble and pious. "From his mouth," the Baal Shem Tov said, "every word is a seed watered by tears and warmed by love of God. From him, Torah becomes a tree of life."

(Source: *Shivchei HaBesht*, adapted) **END NOTE]**

[FOOT NOTE: Torah from a Worthy Teacher (1) – The Torah is Fruitful and Multiplies

From the Baal Shem Tov:

"He expounded on the host of Torah..." Our Sages have taught the greatness of Torah teachings spoken in a proper setting. As the Talmud recounts: "When our Rabbis entered the vineyard of Yavneh... they all began with honoring the host and expounded, and Rabbi Yehuda began with honoring the Torah." Sanhedrin 32b

The deeper meaning of this can be explained as follows: It is stated in *Pirkei Avot*: "One who learns from his friend a single chapter (of Torah), or a single law, or a single verse, or even a single statement, or even one letter—must show them respect. For we find that King David, peace be upon him, only learned two things from Ahitophel, and yet he called him his teacher, his guide, and his confidant. How much more so must one show respect to someone who teaches them a single chapter, a single law, and so on."

This raises a difficulty: What is the meaning of the emphasis "only two things" (*shnei devarim bilvad*) in language that seems to diminish the significance of these teachings?

Another difficulty arises: Shouldn't the lesson be that just as David honored Ahitophel for teaching him "two things," so too one is obligated to honor a teacher specifically when they teach at least two things—not for a single chapter, law, or letter? This would align with the principle of *dayo l'ba min ha-din liheyot ka-nidon* ("it suffices for the derived case to resemble the original"). In our case, since the obligation to honor one's teacher is derived from the case of Ahitophel, who taught David "two things," it should not be extended to learning only "one chapter or one law," as this would make the derived case more stringent than the original.

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Thus, the language and reasoning require further explanation.

Our teacher explained that when a person learns from a worthy teacher, the Torah is "fruitful and multiplies" within them, as is known. That is, the teachings of Torah grow and deepen continually in the learner's mind. However, when one learns from a wicked person, the Torah does not become fruitful or multiply; instead, the lesson remains in its original, simple form, exactly as it was taught, without any addition or expansion. This is why the Tanna mentions the example as a proof via a *kal va'chomer* (logical inference): "What of David, who learned only two things from Ahitophel," who was a wicked person? The teachings David received from Ahitophel did not become fruitful or multiply but remained as just "two things" without any further development. Nevertheless, despite this, David still called him his teacher.

If so, "one who learns from their friend"—meaning both teacher and student are righteous, as implied in the Mishnah, which discusses Torah learning from someone worthy—then in such a case, the Torah becomes fruitful and multiplies. Thus, "how much more so must one honor them." Even if they learned only "a single chapter, and so forth," since the Torah learned will eventually expand and multiply greatly, this learning surpasses the "two things" that David learned from Ahitophel. Therefore, the obligation to honor such a teacher can be derived from this case through a *kal va'chomer*.

This also explains and clarifies the story from the Sages mentioned earlier, where the Rabbis in Yavneh began their teachings by emphasizing the importance of the "host of Torah." This highlights the greatness of the Torah that would be learned in that place, as all those present were righteous—both the Torah teachers (the Tannaim who gathered in Yavneh) and the hosts (the local residents who served as the "hosts" of Torah). **END FN]**

כג # Siman

I also heard somewhat in his name regarding a different matter: that the Ten Commandments contain within them the entire Torah, as Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon explained (see there),

עוד [שמעתי בשמו קצת] בענין אחר, כי עשרת הדברות כוללים כל התורה, כמו שביאר רבנו [סעדיא גאון] וכו' יעו"ש

and just as the entire Torah is included within the Ten Commandments, so too the entire Torah is included in one word, etc.

וכמו שנקלל כל התורה בעשרת הדברות כך נקלל 'כל התורה [כלה] בתיבה אחת כו

And all of this is when the soul of the teacher from whom one learns originates from the World of Unity (*Olam HaAchdus*).

וכל זה אם נשמת הרב שלומד ממנו שרשו מעולם האחדות,

But if his soul is from the World of Separation (*Olam HaP'riud*), then also the student who learns from him receives from him separate matters.

משאיו כן אם נשמתו מעולם הפירוד גם התלמיד הלומד ממנו מקבל ממנו גם כן דברים נפרדים.

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And this is what was meant by saying that [King David] learned from Achatofel only two things, etc. (Zohar).

וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר שְׁלֵא לְמַד מֵאַחִיתּוֹפֵל אֶלָּא שְׁנֵי דְבָרִים
 .[בְּלִבְד כו'] וְדַפְתָּח

[NOTE Summary

This teaching from the Baal Shem Tov explores the spiritual root of Torah transmission. Drawing on the idea that the entire Torah is encoded within the Ten Commandments (as explained by Rav Saadia Gaon), and even further condensed into a single word, the Baal Shem Tov teaches that this integrative quality depends on the soul of the teacher. If a teacher's soul originates from the "World of Unity" (*Olam HaAhdus*), then the Torah he teaches is inherently unified, and what the student receives is holistic, cohesive, and connected. However, if the teacher's soul stems from the "World of Separation" (*Olam HaP'riud*), the Torah comes through fragmented, and the student receives scattered, disjointed knowledge. That's why King David, when learning from Achatofel—whose soul was rooted in separation—only retained "two things," rather than an expansive living Torah. The learning didn't grow or multiply because the source lacked unity.

Practical Takeaway

Who you learn Torah from matters not only in terms of knowledge but in terms of *soul*. Seek teachers whose inner lives are rooted in divine unity, whose essence harmonizes with the Torah's oneness. From such teachers, even a single word can contain endless light. But from those rooted in separation, even great insights may remain isolated, lacking deeper impact.

END NOTE]

[FOOT NOTE: Torah from a Worthy Teacher (Part 2) – Every Teaching Contains the Entire Torah

Our teacher further explained the precise wording of the Mishnah (referenced earlier), which states that King David learned from Ahatophel "only two things," in another context:

The Ten Commandments encompass the entirety of the Torah, as explained by Rav Saadia Gaon. Just as the entire Torah is included in the Ten Commandments, so too, the entirety of the Torah is included in a single word (*teivah*) of the Torah. Therefore, even if someone teaches their friend "a single word" of Torah, they have effectively taught them the entire Torah.

However, this principle applies only if the soul of the teacher from whom one learns is rooted in the "World of Unity" (*Olam Ha'achdut*)—a realm of holiness inherently connected to the unity of the Creator, where this unity is evident in every detail. In such a case, the unity and inclusiveness of all aspects of Torah are apparent, such that each word of Torah inherently contains the entire Torah.

In contrast, if the teacher's soul is rooted in the "World of Separation" (*Olam Ha'perud*)—a realm of existence that is separate from Divinity, where the unity of the Creator is not evident, and the details exist independently without integration—then the student who learns from them also receives teachings as separate, disconnected elements. As a result, the learned material does not contain within it any connection to the rest of the Torah, and what is taught remains limited to its specific content without including anything beyond itself.

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This is the meaning of the Mishnah's statement regarding King David: "He learned from Ahitophel (who was from the World of Separation) only two things." These two things were limited, without any additional connections or inclusion of other aspects of Torah. **END FN]**

Siman #כד

From the Baal Shem Tov: I heard from my teacher, may his memory be blessed, in the name of Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon, that the primary purpose of the creation of man in this world is to break his negative natural traits.

מהבעל שם טוב דשמעתי ממורי זכר צדיק לברכה (בשם רבנו) סעדיא גאון כי עיקר בריאת האדם בעולם הזה לשבר מדות רעות הטבעיות שלו), [שלו, טבעית

And through this he elevates [etc.] a level called "your nature" (*tivacha*) in the upper world, which is called the "World of Concealment and Hiddenness."

ובזה מעלה [וכו.]. (מדרגה הנקראת טבעה, בעולם העליון שנקרא עולם לשון העלם ונסתר.

And this is what is said: "Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace"—meaning the natural tendencies with which one was born; he should see to break them, as mentioned above.

ונה שגאמר לה לה מארצה וממולדתה, דהיינו, הטבעי שנולד עמו, יראה לשבר אותה כנ"ל

"And from your father's house"—for your father refers to Chochmah (wisdom), "Abba," and "your father's house" is Binah (understanding), the world of thought.

ומבית אביה, פי אביה נקרא חכמה, אבא, ובית אביה, הוא בינה, עולם המחשבה

And the intention is that he should strive to rectify negative thoughts, as my teacher, may his memory be blessed, explained—and I wrote about this elsewhere.

והכוונה שיראה לתקן המחשבות הרעות [על דרך שביאר מורי זכר צדיק לברכה וכתבתי מזה במקום אחר],

And this is what is said: "And from your father's house"—he should know how to refine those thoughts that fell from "your father's house," so that he can elevate them once again.

ונה שגאמר ומבית אביה, שיידע לברר מה שגפלו, המחשבות מבית אביה, שיהזור להעלותן

And through this you will merit the supernal Land "that I will show you"—meaning, I will reveal to you your true nature in the supernal world.

ועל-ידי זה תזכה אל הארץ העליונה אשר אראה, (שאודיע טבעה בעולם)

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[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov, citing Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon, teaches that the main reason a person is created in this world is to **break and refine their natural negative traits**. These traits are not incidental—they are part of one's *teva*, the innate, instinctual self. The command to Avraham, “*Lech Lecha mei’artzecha, u’ mimoladetecha, u’ miBeis Avicha*” (Go forth from your land, your birthplace, and your father’s house), reflects the stages of this inner work:

- “*Your land*” represents one’s bodily impulses and raw drives.
- “*Your birthplace*” refers to inborn emotional tendencies.
- “*Your father’s house*” points to the world of thought—intellectual patterns rooted in Chochmah (father) and Binah (the house of the father).

The Baal Shem Tov explains that a person must not only fight crude urges but also elevate *fallen thoughts*—those that originate in the spiritual worlds but descend into confusion or ego. When one purifies these layers, they merit access to “*the Land that I will show you*”—a metaphor for the divine revelation of one’s true soul-root, their *higher nature (tivacha)* as it exists in the supernal realm of oneness.

Practical Takeaway

Real spiritual growth means going beyond surface behavior. It means refining your instincts, transforming your emotional patterns, and elevating your thoughts. Every struggle you face is a call to return your soul’s nature to its divine source—and through that, you become who you truly are.

Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov once saw a man praying with tremendous passion but with clear pride in his voice. After the prayers, the Baal Shem Tov approached him gently and asked, “Whom are you really serving?” The man, startled, responded, “Hashem, of course.” The Baal Shem Tov smiled and said, “Then make sure even your holy fire isn’t kindled by your ego.” He explained to his students afterward, “There are thoughts that fall from the highest world, and if not elevated, they become cloaked in self.” This man’s passion came from a spark of Binah—but needed refinement to rise again.

(Source: *Shivchei HaBesht*, adapted) **END NOTE]**

סימן #כה

From the Baal Shem Tov: When a person becomes aware of the afflictions of his own heart—that is, the illness of the soul—this is the mystical concept of *katnus* (small-mindedness or spiritual constriction).

מהבעל שם טוב כְּאִשֶׁר יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם נִגְעֵי לְבוֹ שֶׁהוּא
 ,חֹלֵי הַנְּפֶשׁ בְּסוּד הַקְּטָנוּת

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Once he possesses this awareness, he can sweeten it through this very *daas* (inner knowing), as my teacher explained.

אחר שיש לו דעת זה אז ממתק על-ידי הדעת זה, (כמו שביאר מורי ...)

And this is his healing.

.ונה רפואתו

But when he is in a state of concealment, as my teacher explained (on the verse) “And I will surely hide My face...”

מה שאין פן קשהוא בסוד ההסתר, כמו שביאר (מורי) (על-פי) ואנכי הסתר אסתיר [וכו]

and he does not know that he is ill in the spiritual sense, then he has no remedy for his grievous wound.

שאינו יודע שהוא חולה ברוחני, אז אין לו רפואה למפתו האנושה.

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that spiritual healing begins with **awareness**. When a person recognizes the “afflictions of his heart”—the brokenness or distortion within his soul—this recognition itself is the beginning of healing. These inner flaws are called *katnus* (smallness), referring to spiritual constriction or immaturity. But once a person has *daas*—inner knowledge—of his condition, he can begin to **sweeten and transform** it through that very awareness. That insight becomes the medicine.

However, if the person is in a state of *hester panim*—concealment, where he doesn’t even realize he is spiritually ill—then he has no access to healing. As the verse says, “I will surely hide My face,” and in such concealment, the wound remains **incurable** because it goes **unrecognized**.

Practical Takeaway

The first and most critical step in spiritual growth is **honest self-awareness**. Don’t fear your flaws—identify them. The moment you recognize your inner spiritual pain is the moment healing becomes possible. Denial is more dangerous than the wound itself.

END NOTE]

Siman #כו

From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory [I heard from my teacher, may his memory be blessed]: Since the Shechinah includes all the worlds—Atzilus, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah—and all created beings, both good and evil,

מהבעל שם טוב זכרוננו לברכה [רשמעתי מזמורי זכר צדיק לברכה] מאחר שהשכינה כוללת כל העולמות דצח"ם וכל הנבראים טובים ורעים

and the true unity is the Shechinah—how then does she contain two opposites in one subject: good and evil, which are complete opposites? And yet she is unity?

והיחוד האמתי היא השכינה, ואיך כוללת שני הפכים בנושא אחד, טוב ורע שהם שני הפכים, והיא היחוד.

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But in truth, it works out well—for evil is a throne for the good, like the verse “And Pharaoh drew near,” etc.

אָבֵל בְּאֵמֶת אֶתְיָא שְׁפִיר, כִּי הִרְע הוּא פֶסֶא לְטוֹב, כְּמוֹ "וּפְרָעָה הִקְרִיב" וְכוּ.

Or through seeing the deeds of the wicked, one feels pleasure that he himself is righteous; he feels joy and delight—this joy reverberates through all the worlds due to the presence of evil.

אוּ עַל־יְדֵי שְׂרוּאָה מַעֲשֵׂי הַרְשָׁעִים יֵשׁ לוֹ הִנָּאָה שֶׁהוּא צָדִיק וְיֵשׁ לוֹ הִנָּאָה וְתַעֲנוּג וְנַעֲשָׂה זֶה בְּכָל הָעוֹלָמוֹת הַתַּעֲנוּגִין עַל־יְדֵי הִרְע

And nearly, through this, evil itself is also elevated—until, when it rises too high, then “all workers of iniquity are scattered.”

וְכַמְעַט שְׁעַל־יְדֵי זֶה יֵשׁ לְרַע גַּם כֵּן עֲלִיָּה, רַק כִּשְׁעוֹלָה מִשָּׁם יִתְפָּרְדוּ כָּל פְּעֻלֵי אָוֶן

Likewise, a bad thought is a throne in the same manner as above, etc. [and know the explanation of Chazal].

וְכֵן מִתְשַׁבֵּה רָעָה הִיא פֶסֶא עַל דְּרָף הַנִּזְל וְכוּ' [וְדַפְח"ח].

And likewise, I heard from him similar to this: that a spark of a soul from Atzilus sometimes descends into Asiyah and sees how people degrade the honor of the King, the King of the universe,

וְכוּ אָמַר (וְכוּצָא בְּזַה שְׁמַעְתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ) שְׁנִצּוּץ נִשְׁמָה <מֵאֲצִילוֹת יוֹרֵד בְּעֵשְׂיָה לְפַעֲמִים וְרוֹאֶה אִיךָ מְקִילִין בְּכַבּוֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ מְלֶךְ שֶׁל עוֹלָם

and he is pained by the insult to the King’s honor that they are light with it—and afterward, he feels pleasure that he is not among them, etc. [and know the explanation of Chazal].

וּמִצְטַעַר עַל כְּבוֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁהֵם מְקִילִין בוֹ, וְאַחַר כֵּן ([יֵשׁ לוֹ תַעֲנוּג שְׂאִינוֹ מֵהֵם וְכוּ] וְדַפְח"ח).

And through this, we understand the verse “And Hashem said to Avram”—meaning to the soul, which is called Avram, as stated in the Zohar.

וּבְזַה יוֹבֵן "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם", רְצוֹן לוֹמַר אֵל הַנִּשְׁמָה שְׁנִקְרָאת אַבְרָם כְּמוֹ שְׁפָתוֹב בְּזַהַר

“Go for yourself from your land and from your birthplace...”—meaning: “Go from your land,” that is, from Atzilus to Beriah; “from your birthplace,” from Beriah to Yetzirah;

לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּגו', רְצוֹן לוֹמַר לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ, הַיְיָנוּ מֵאֲצִילוֹת לְבְרִיאָה, וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ, הַיְיָנוּ מִבְּרִיאָה לְיִצְרָה

“and from your father’s house,” from Yetzirah to Asiyah—which is “the land that I will show you.”

וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, מִיִּצְרָה לְעֵשְׂיָה, שֶׁהִיא הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ

And the meaning of “that I will show you” is: that you will see there the actions of the people of the World of Asiyah—how they degrade the honor of Hashem, may He be blessed, and you shall rebuke them.

וְהַכֹּנֵן אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ, שֶׁתִּרְאֶה שָׁם מַעֲשֵׂי אָנָשִׁי עוֹלָם <הַעֲשֵׂיָה אִיךָ מְקִילִין בְּכַבּוֹדוֹ יִתְפָּרֵךְ וְתוֹכִיחֵם

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[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches a profound and paradoxical truth: the **Shechinah encompasses all worlds and all beings**, both good and evil. This raises a question—how can true divine unity (*yichud*) contain such opposites? How can the Shechinah embody both righteousness and wickedness, which are complete contradictions?

The answer lies in the mystical principle that **evil serves as a throne for good**. Sometimes, seeing evil stirs in a person a deeper awareness of his own righteousness, creating spiritual joy that resonates through all realms. In this way, the presence of evil paradoxically **generates divine pleasure and elevation**, even for the negative itself—until it reaches a point where it is separated and purified, as expressed in “all workers of iniquity shall be scattered.”

Even **evil thoughts** can serve this function: they become platforms upon which higher awareness can be reached. Similarly, a soul-spark from the world of Atzilus may descend into Asiyah and feel **pain over the dishonor shown to the King**, yet that very pain leads to **holy pleasure** and elevation when it recognizes that it remains connected Above.

The Baal Shem Tov ties this to the command to Avraham: “Lech Lecha”—a call not only to leave one’s homeland physically but to **descend through spiritual worlds** (from Atzilus to Asiyah), in order to witness the degradation below. Yet this descent is for the purpose of **rebuking and uplifting**—transforming that experience into divine awareness.

Practical Takeaway

Don’t be discouraged when you encounter evil—whether around you or within your own thoughts. Instead, recognize that this confrontation can itself be the **platform for deeper clarity, humility, and joy**. If you let it, even the darkness you see can push you toward greater light. Descent, when done with awareness, is part of divine unity.

Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov once sent a student to a distant town known for its corruption. The student was shocked: “Rebbe, why would you send me there?” The Baal Shem Tov replied, “Because in that place, when you feel pain for My honor, you’ll taste your truest joy.” Upon arriving, the student indeed wept over the desecration he witnessed. But then, in prayer, he felt an overwhelming closeness to God—more than he ever felt before. That closeness, the Baal Shem Tov explained, was the Shechinah’s joy, born from his descent.

(Source: *Shivchei HaBesht*, story #204)

END NOTE]

[FOOT NOTE: The Baal Shem Tov teaches that the Shechinah encompasses all aspects of creation, including opposites like good and evil, showing that true unity lies in their coexistence. Evil serves a purpose, often as a “throne” for good, providing opportunities for spiritual growth and elevation. Similarly, a soul descending to the world of action (Asiyah) witnesses dishonor toward God, feels pain for His glory, and is tasked with rebuking

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and elevating those actions, ultimately transforming the lower world into a place of divine revelation. This is symbolized in the verse "Go forth" (Lech Lecha), representing the soul's journey through spiritual realms to fulfill its mission in this world. **END FN]**

Siman #כז

“And Avram went as Hashem had spoken to him... And there was a famine in the land”—he saw that they lacked faith, as is stated in the Zohar.

וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיְהִי רָעָב
 בְּאֶרֶץ, רָאָה שֶׁהֵם חֹסְרֵי מַהֲיִמְנוּתָא כְּמוֹ שְׂאִיתָא
 בְּזוֹהַר,

Meaning, they were light with the honor of Hashem, may He be blessed; and therefore, “And Avram descended to Egypt”—for he was pained by the disrespect for Hashem’s honor that prevailed in the World of Asiyah.

דְּהִינּוּ שְׂמֻקְלִין בְּכְבוֹדוֹ יִתְבַּרַךְ, וְלָכֵן "וַיֵּרֵד אַבְרָם
 מִצֹּרְמָה", שֶׁהֵיךָ מִצָּר עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ יִתְבַּרַךְ שְׂמֻקְלִין בּוֹ
 עוֹלָם הָעֲשִׂיָּה.

However, through this, “And Avram went up from Egypt”—to delight even more in the service of Hashem, for there is advantage to light emerging from darkness, since he is not like those among them.

אִךְ עַל-יְדֵי זֶה "וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם", לְהִתְעַנֵּג יוֹתֵר
 בְּעִבּוּדַת ה', כִּי יֵשׁ יִתְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן הַחֹשֶׁךְ עַל שְׂאִינּוֹ
 כְּאֶחָד מֵהֶם.

And therefore “And Lot”—he is the evil inclination—“with him, toward the south”; for through evil one delights more in the service of Hashem, and it becomes a throne, and the left is subdued to the right.

וְלָכֵן "וְלוֹט", הוּא הַיֵּצֵר הָרָע, "עִמּוֹ הִנְגָּבָה",
 שְׁעַל-יְדֵי הָרָע מִתְעַנֵּג יוֹתֵר בְּעִבּוּדַת ה', וְנִעְשֶׂה כְּסֵא
 וְנִקְבַּע שְׂמַאל בִּימִין.

...“And Avram was very heavy with cattle, with silver, and with gold”—meaning that he had extracted sparks of holiness, like the matter of “And Yosef gathered all the silver.”

וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בַּמִּקְנֵהוּ בַכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב "לְפִי" ...
 שְׁהוֹצִיא נִיצוּצוֹת קִדְשָׁה, כְּעִנְיָן "וַיִּלְקֹט יוֹסֵף אֶת כָּל
 הַכֶּסֶף".

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov reveals a deeper meaning behind Avram’s descent to Egypt. The verse “*There was a famine in the land*” is understood to mean a spiritual famine—a lack of emunah (faith) and reverence for G-d. This troubled Avram, who descended into the world of *Asiyah* (action) and was *pained* by the dishonor shown to Hashem. But from this descent came elevation: “*And Avram went up from Egypt.*” The contrast between darkness and light enabled him to experience greater delight in divine service.

Lot, representing the evil inclination, journeys “with him to the south.” This teaches that even the *yetzer hara* can be a vehicle for spiritual elevation—it becomes subjugated and transformed into a throne for holiness, as

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“left is subdued to the right.” Avram becomes “very wealthy” in cattle, silver, and gold, symbolizing that he successfully extracted sparks of holiness from Egypt—just as Yosef would later gather all the silver.

Practical Takeaway

Moments of descent or encountering darkness are not spiritual failures—they're opportunities. When you're disturbed by the world's moral or spiritual confusion, channel that pain into deeper service. Even the *yetzer hara* can be transformed into fuel for growth. Elevation is often born from descent. **END NOTE]**

[FOOT NOTE: The continuation of the discussion about the role of evil in relation to good focuses on the idea that light is enhanced and clarified when it emerges from darkness (“יתרון האור מן החושך”). This concept is illustrated through the verse, *"And Abram went as the Lord had spoken to him... and they came to the land of Canaan... and there was a famine in the land"* (Genesis 12:4-10). When the soul, as a spark from Atzilut (the highest spiritual realm), descends into the world of Asiyah (the realm of action, representing "the land that I will show you"), it observes a lack of faith (“חסרי אמונה”) and disrespect for God’s honor, as the Zohar describes. This lack of faith symbolizes the "famine in the land." The verse continues with Abram descending to Egypt, a term that also means "narrowness" (מצרים = מיצר), symbolizing the soul’s distress over the dishonor toward God in the world of Asiyah.

However, this descent ultimately leads to spiritual ascent, as stated in the verse, *"And Abram went up from Egypt"* (Genesis 13:1). Through this process, the soul grows in its longing and delight in divine service, as light becomes more appreciated when contrasted with darkness. This illustrates the advantage of overcoming spiritual challenges. Furthermore, the darkness (evil) itself becomes a tool to serve holiness. This is reflected in the continuation of the verse, *"And Lot went with him to the south."* Lot, representing the evil inclination, joins this ascent, as the struggle with the evil inclination enhances the soul's spiritual growth. The "darkness" is thus transformed into a throne for holiness, subdued and utilized in the service of God.

The text explains that even the evil inclination (יצר הרע) can ascend and be elevated alongside the righteous person. Through the existence of evil, the righteous derive greater delight and devotion in their service to God. This results in the evil itself being uplifted, becoming a "throne" (כיסא)—a tool and vessel for increased holiness. The "left side" (representing impurity) becomes subservient to the "right side" (representing holiness), aiding and enhancing the righteous person's spiritual growth.

This is reflected in the verse, *"And Abram was very wealthy in livestock, silver, and gold."* This signifies that Abram extracted sparks of holiness from "Egypt" (symbolizing impurity or evil). Even within realms of evil, there are hidden sparks of holiness, the inner goodness for which these things were created. When evil serves as a "throne" for good and its divine purpose is revealed, the sparks of holiness within are elevated and restored to their rightful place.

The wealth that Abram amassed—symbolized by livestock, silver, and gold—represents the sparks of holiness he uplifted. This idea parallels the story of Joseph, who *"gathered all the silver in the land of Egypt"* (Genesis

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47:14), meaning he elevated the hidden sparks of holiness concealed within Egypt and brought them into the realm of holiness. **END FN]**

Siman #כח

It is known what is written in *Etz Chaim* (Sha'ar 22 ...) regarding the concept of the mitzvah of circumcision and *Chashmal* (and [so too] in *Pri Etz Chaim*, see there).

נודע מה שכתוב בספר עץ חיים (שער כ"ב ...) ענין מצות המילה ותשמל (וכו' ובספר פעה"ח (יעו"ש).

And it seems fitting to apply these ideas allegorically: that the mitzvah of circumcision pertains to Torah, to prayer, and to the performance of mitzvos.

ונראה להלביש הדברים, שנה (שמצות מילה) שיהי בין בתורה בין בתפלה בין בעסק המצוות

And this is the secret of *Chashmal*. For I received from my teacher (the Baal Shem Tov), may his memory be blessed, the secret of **humility, separation, and sweetening**—which must be present in every engagement with Torah and prayer.

ונה סוד חשמל. דקבלתי ממורי (הבעל שם טוב) זכרונו לברכה], סוד ההכנעה והבדלה והמתקה שצריך בכל עסק תורה ותפלה

I wrote about this briefly elsewhere, because we were not given permission to elaborate on this, as it is self-evident [and know the explanation of Chazal].

וכתבתי מזה במקום אחר בקצרו נמרץ כי לא נתן [רשות להרחיב בזה כי הוא מוכן ממילא [ודפח"ח

And this is the secret of *Chash-Mal*: one must first be silent (*Chash*) until he circumcises and severs the kelipos (husks). Then he may speak (*Mal*) and articulate in order to sweeten the judgments at their root.

ונה סוד ח"ש מ"ל, שצריך לחשות עד שמל וכורת, הקלפות, אז ימלל וידבר למתק הדיניו בשרשן

This is the secret of prayer, which my teacher explained in the name of his teacher. And therefore they are called “Harvesters of the Field,” as explained in the writings of the Kabbalists.

שהוא סוד התפלה שביאר מורי בשם רבו, ולכה (נקראו מחצדי חקלא במבואר במקבלים

And therefore, one must be careful to separate from his thoughts any foreign thoughts. Through this, he causes separation and distance of the kelipos from the Shechinah.

ולכה צריך [יזהר] להפריד ממחשבתו מחשבות זרות ועל-ידי זה גורם להבדיל ולפרוש מהשכינה הקליפות

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(As written in *Reishis Chochmah*, fol. 81b and fol. 130, see there.) Therefore, the word *Mal* (circumcise) bears two meanings: (1) speech, and (2) cutting and separation—one flows from the other.

וְכִמוֹ שֶׁפָּתַב בְּרֵאשִׁית חֲכָמָה דָּף פֶּא ע"ב וְדָף קל)
זַעו"ש), וְלִכְף תִּיבַת מִל סוּבַל שְׁנֵי פִירוּשִׁים, א'
[דִּיבּוּר ב' פְּרִיטָה וְהַבְדָּלָה, וְזֶה נִמְשָׁף מִזֶּה [כְּאֶמֶר

And this is the secret of *Chash-Mal*—one must first sever the kelipos, and only afterward speak words of Torah and prayer, which are separation and sweetening.

וְזֶה סוּד ח"ש מ"ל, שְׁאֲרִיף לְהַכְרִית הַקְּלִיפּוֹת
וְאַחֲרֵיכֵן מִל דִּיבּוּר בְּעֶסֶק תּוֹרָה וְתַפְלָה שֶׁהִיא
הַבְּדָלָה וְהַמְתָּקָה

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov, drawing from *Etz Chaim* and teachings of his own teacher, reveals a mystical understanding of the mitzvah of milah (circumcision) and its connection to the divine word *Chashmal* (חֲשָׁמַל). The Zoharic term *Chashmal* is interpreted here as an acronym for three stages of spiritual refinement: הכנעה (humility), הבדלה (separation), and המתקה (sweetening). These are not limited to the physical mitzvah of milah—they are essential stages in all service of Hashem, including Torah study, prayer, and mitzvah observance.

Before one can speak words of Torah or tefillah (*Mal* = speech), he must first be silent (*Chash* = silence)—internally still, humble, and ready to cut away the klipos (spiritual husks) that block divine flow. Only after removing these barriers can his words be pure vessels that sweeten harsh judgments at their source.

This explains why the word *Mal* can mean both “to speak” and “to cut.” The two are inseparable: only when the inner blockage is removed can holy speech emerge. Thus, improper thoughts must be separated and pushed away before true d’veikus can begin. This is why Kabbalists are called *machatzdei chakla*—“harvesters of the field”—because their speech “harvests” divine energy only after inner pruning.

Practical Takeaway

Before praying or speaking words of Torah, pause. Silence yourself inwardly. Push aside foreign thoughts. Cut away distractions and ego. Only then will your words truly elevate and sweeten. Every act of Torah, tefillah, or mitzvah requires humility, separation, and sweetness.

END NOTE]

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בכה # Siman

If the teacher resembles an angel of Hashem, Master of Legions—and the meaning is that he truly *is* an angel, for the word *malach* (angel) shares the letters of *ke-elam* (as if mute),

אם הרב דומה למלאך, [ה' צבאות וגו', ורצון לומר שיהיה מלאך, פי'] (הם) אותיות פאל"ם (דומה למלאך) [להיות (ח"ש) מ"ל

meaning: he is silent (*chash*) until he cuts and circumcises the kelipos (spiritual husks), guarding himself from external forces,

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then Torah may be sought from his mouth—for then it enters the heart of the listener and becomes fruitful and multiplies within him.

אז תורה בקש מפי, כי אז נכנסת בלב השומע ופרה ורבה (בו)

As I heard from my teacher, may his memory be blessed, regarding David—that he only learned two things from Achitofel, etc.

כמו ששמעתי ממורי זכרונו לברכה מה דוד שלא [למד מאחיתפל אלא שתי דברים בלבד וכו

And with this, we understand the verse “Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father’s house”: that he must distance himself from three levels corresponding to the three stages mentioned above—humility, separation, and sweetening, as my teacher, may his memory be blessed, explained.

ובזה יובן "לה לה מארצה וממולדתה ומבית אביה", שיתרחק מן ג' בחינות נגד ג' בחינות הנ"ל הכנעה, הבדלה והמתקה שביאר מורי זכרונו לברכה

For from *earthiness*, *materiality*, and the *coarseness of the kelipos* comes arrogance. Therefore, the Torah commands “Go forth from your land,” leading to humility.

פי מצד (ארציות ועכירות החומר והקליפות) (ארציות חמר ועכירות הקליפות) נמשך גסות הרוח, לכה הזירו "לה לה מארצה", ויבוא להכנעה

“And from your birthplace”—that is, from Terach, an idol worshiper, who is the root of the kelipos; for the strength of the father is in the son,

וממולדתה שהוא תרח עובד עבודה זרה שרש הקליפות ויש פה האב בן

as the Raavad wrote in *Sefer Yetzirah*—that the strength of the builder is found in the building, etc.

כמו שכתב הראב"ד בספר יצירה כי פה הבונה [בבנין] וכו

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Therefore, separation is required to extract and distinguish the kelipos that come from the father who generated him.

וְלִכְּבֹד צָרִיךְ הַבְּדֵלָה לְהַפְרִישׁ וּלְהַבְדִּיל הַקְּלִיפּוֹת
 ,שֶׁמִּצַּד הָאָב הַמוֹלִידוֹ

“And from your father’s house”—which was in Charan, as it is written “and Terach died in Charan,” and our Sages said: until Avraham came, there was Divine wrath in the world.

וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ שֶׁהִיא בְּחָרָן כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב "וַיָּמָת תְּרַח בְּחָרָן" וְדָרְשׁוּ רַז"ל עַד אֲבָרְהָם הָיָה חֲרוֹן אַף שֶׁל
 ,מְקוֹם

That refers to din (judgment) and gevurah (severity), and Avram, who is the attribute of chesed (kindness), sweetened the judgment through the root of chesed found within that gevurah.

שֶׁהוּא דִּין וְגְבוּרָה, וְאַבְרָם בְּחֵינַת חֶסֶד יְמַתִּיק הַדִּין
 ,בְּשֶׁרֶשׁ הַחֶסֶד שֶׁיֵּשׁ בְּגְבוּרָה וְהַדִּין הֵוא

As I wrote elsewhere in the name of my teacher, may his memory be blessed, how to sweeten judgment at its root.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתַבְתִּי בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר בְּשֵׁם מוֹרֵי זְכוּרֵנוּ לְבָרְכָה
 ,אִיךְ לְמַתֵּק הַדִּין בְּשֶׁרֶשׁוֹ

And after sweetening, you will then attain the level of “the Land that I will show you.” Understand this well.

וְאַחֵר הַמְּתַקֶּה אֵז תִּשְׁיֵג בְּחֵינַת "הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרְאֶךָ",
 וְהִבֵּן.

[NOTE Summary

This teaching from the Baal Shem Tov offers a deep mystical and psychological interpretation of two central ideas: the verse “*If the teacher is like an angel of Hashem...*” and the divine command “*Lech Lecha.*” A true teacher must embody the qualities of an angel—specifically, the secret of **Chash–Mal**: *Chash* (silence) represents humility and inner restraint, where the teacher first “cuts away the kelipos” (spiritual impurities). Only then comes *Mal* (speech), where the teacher’s words have transformative power, entering the listener’s heart and bearing fruit. This is why Torah may only be “sought from his mouth” if his spiritual channels are purified.

The journey of *Lech Lecha* is explained as an inner one, mapping the three stages of spiritual refinement:

- “*From your land*” — represents physicality and ego, which must be subdued through **humility**.
- “*From your birthplace*” — alludes to inherited traits and spiritual baggage, which requires **separation**.
- “*From your father’s house*” — represents harsh divine judgment (*gevurah*), which must be **sweetened** at its root by revealing the *chesed* (kindness) within.

Only after passing through these three levels—**humility, separation, sweetening**—can one attain “*the Land that I will show you*”, a higher spiritual reality of clarity and connection.

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Practical Takeaway

Before you speak words of Torah or prayer—or before you influence others—do inner work. First humble yourself, separate from unholy distractions, and sweeten your judgments. Only then will your words truly have impact. And when you feel stuck spiritually, remember: “Lech Lecha” is the path—inward refinement leads to divine revelation. **END NOTE]**

Siman #כט

From the Baal Shem Tov, [I heard in the name of my teacher]: “*You are Hashem our God.*”

מהבעל שם טוב), [דשמעתי בשם מורי] "אתה",
"הוא ה' אלקינו",

The explanation: When a person imagines that he is **present before Hashem**, with the expression “*You*” (*Atah*), then in truth he is **distant** from the Name, for the expression “*You*” implies a certain **hiddenness**.

פירושו) כשסובר האדם שהוא נכח ה', תאר
"אתה", אז הוא רחוק מהשם, תאר "הוא" נסתר

But when he thinks that Hashem is **hidden and distant** from him, described as “*He*” (*Hu*), then in truth he is **close** and present before Hashem, described as “*You*” (*Atah*), Hashem our God.

מה שאין פן כשסובר שהוא נסתר ורחוק מהשם,
תאר "הוא", אז הוא קרוב ונכח ה', תאר [אתה] (ה'
אלקינו).

[And know the explanation of Chazal.]

[ודפח"ה].

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov, quoting his teacher, reveals a profound spiritual paradox rooted in the verse “*אתה הוא ה'*” —“*You are Hashem our God.*” He teaches that when a person **feels close** to Hashem and imagines himself *present before Him* (“*You*” / *Atah*), he may in fact be **further** from true divine awareness. This is because the confidence of closeness can mask ego or complacency. On the other hand, when a person feels that Hashem is **hidden or distant**—represented by the word “*He*” (*Hu*)—and perceives himself far from G-d, **that humility brings him closer**. In truth, such feelings of distance are a vessel for deeper connection, because they come with awe, longing, and broken-hearted sincerity. The Baal Shem Tov teaches that in this state of lowliness, the person is actually **in the presence of Hashem**—not *He*, but *You*. Divine closeness is often revealed specifically **within the sense of concealment**.

Practical Takeaway

When you feel far from Hashem, don’t despair. That very feeling may be **your greatest closeness**. A humble heart that longs for G-d from a place of distance is often nearer to truth than a heart that assumes it already dwells with the Divine. Embrace the brokenness—it may be a hidden form of nearness.

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Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov once noticed a simple villager standing in the back of the shul, too ashamed to pray among the others. The man whispered, "I don't know how to speak to G-d—I feel so far away." The Baal Shem Tov turned to his students and said, "He is closer to Hashem than many who feel near. His broken spirit is a ladder to Heaven."

(Source: *Shivchei HaBesht*, story #219) **END NOTE]**