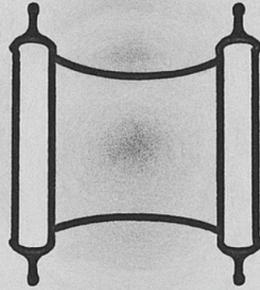


ד"ר

The Maggid of Mezritch
Ohr Torah
Parshas Yisro



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Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch

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Siman #94

And Jethro heard that which God had done for Moses and for Israel His people. And it requires careful examination what is written “for Moses,” for behold the main miracle was for Israel. And further, if the report was the miracles and the wonders and the signs, then the essence is missing from the text, and what is “that which He had done.”

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹקִים לְמֹשֶׁה וְלִישְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ. וַיֵּשׁ לְדַקְדֵּק מֵה שְׁאַמֵּר לְמֹשֶׁה, וְהֵלֵא עֵיקַר הַנִּסִּים הַגְּדוֹלִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. וְעוֹד, אִם הַשְׁמוּעָה הַזֹּאת הַנִּסִּים וְהַנִּפְלְאוֹת וְהָאוֹתוֹת, אִם כֵּן עֵיקַר חֹסֵר מִן הַסֵּפֶר, וּמֵהוּ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה.

And it can be said according to a parable, for it is known that Pharaoh and his counselors did not believe in the Name Havayah, blessed be He, rather they had an attachment to the Name Elokim, in the letters mi from Elokim, as is written in the writings of the Ari of blessed memory.

וַיֵּשׁ לוֹמֵר עַל פִּי הַלְצָה, כִּי יָדוּעַ שֶׁפָּרַעַה וַיּוֹעֲצָיו לֹא הָיוּ מֵאַמְיֵנִים בְּשֵׁם הַנּוֹי"ה בְּרוּךְ הוּא, רַק הֵיטָה לָהֶם אַחֲזִיזָה בְּשֵׁם אֱלֹקִים, בְּאוֹתֵיזוֹת מִי מֵאַלְקִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בְּכַתְבֵי הָאָר"י זְכָרוֹנוֹ לְבָרְכָהּ.

And behold a parable of a village youth who had never seen the king in his days and never grasped in his days the protocols of kingship and his essence, only that he heard that there is a king in the world and that he rules and governs all the lands, and crowns kings over particular lands and places various authorities in all the lands of his kingdom.

וְהִנֵּה מִשְׁלַל לְבָן כְּפָר שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה אֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ מִיָּמָיו וְלֹא הֵשִׁיג מִיָּמָיו נִימוּס הַמְּלוּכָה וּמַהוּתוֹ, רַק שֶׁשָּׁמַע שֵׁיִשׁ מֶלֶךְ בְּעוֹלָם וְשֶׁהוּא שְׁלֵיט וּמוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל הַמְּדִינוֹת, וּמִמְלִיךְ מְלָכִים עַל מְדִינוֹת פְּרָטִיּוֹת וּמוֹשִׁיב שְׁרָרוֹת שׁוֹנוֹת בְּכָל מְדִינוֹת מְלָכוֹתוֹ.

And it came to pass one day, the village youth went to wander from land to land, and he encountered one authority from among the lesser ministers, clothed in garments of embroidery and gold and precious stones, and he said in his heart, certainly this is the king.

וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם, הִלָּךְ בֶּן הַכֹּפֵר לְשׁוּט מִמְּדִינָה לְמְדִינָה, וּפָגַע בְּשֶׁרְרָה אֶחָד מִן הַשְּׂרָיִם הַקְּטָנִים מְלוּבָשׁ בְּבִגְדֵי רִקְמָה וְזָהָב וְאַדְרָכְמוֹנִים, וְאָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ בְּוַדָּאִי זֶה הַמֶּלֶךְ.

And afterward he asked others, and they said to him that he is one minister from among the lesser ministers, and above him there are many and many greater authorities, different and varied, and all of them are servants of the king, and then he recognized the greatness of the king.

וְאַחַר כֵּן שָׁאַל לְאַחֵרִים, וְאָמְרוּ לוֹ שֶׁהוּא שֶׁר אֶחָד מִן הַשְּׂרָיִם הַקְּטָנִים וְעַלְיוֹ יֵשׁ כְּמָה וְכְמָה שְׁרָרוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת שׁוֹנוֹת וּמְשֻׁנוֹת, וְכֻלָּם הֵם עֲבָדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְאָז הִכִּיר גְּדוּלַת הַמֶּלֶךְ.

And after this he encountered yet another minister, greater and more honored, until he erred regarding each and each, to say this is the king, until he encountered the greatest minister of all the authorities that are in all the lands, and he saw his very great honor, and then it was concluded in his heart that this is certainly the king himself.

וְאַחַר זֶה פָּגַע עוֹד שֶׁר יוֹתֵר גְּדוֹל וְנִכְבָּד, עַד שֶׁשָּׁטְעָה בְּכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד לֵאמֹר זֶהוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ, עַד שֶׁפָּגַע בְּשֶׁר הַגְּדוֹל מְכַל הַשְּׁרָרוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל הַמְּדִינוֹת וְרָאָה כְּבוֹדוֹ הַגְּדוֹל מְאֹד, וְאָז נִגְמַר בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁזֶהוּ בְּוַדָּאִי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעַצְמוֹ.

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And afterward it became known to him that also this minister is under the king, and all the governance and the honor that are in the hand of that minister, all of it is by the permission of the king, for the king gave him the greatness and the honor and appointed him to be an important minister like him.

ואחר זה נודע לו שגם זה השר הוא תחת המלך, וכל הממשלה והכבוד שביד השר ההוא הכל הוא ברשות המלך, שהמלך נתן לו הגדולה והכבוד ומינה

Him to be an important minister like him. Then the village youth recognized by himself the essence of the king himself and his protocols and his governance, and he said in his heart, if the king made another person besides himself into such a great minister and brought him to all the honor, certainly the greatness of the king has no measure and limit and end.

אותו לשר חשוב כמוהו. אז הכיר בן הכפר בעצמו מהות המלך עצמו ואת גימוסיו וממשלתו, ואמר בלבו אם עשה המלך איש אחר זולתו לשר גדול כזה והגיע לכל הכבוד, מסתמא גדולת המלך אין לה שעור וקץ ותכלית.

For if he had a measure, he would not make for another person an honor like him.

כי אם היה לו שעור לא היה עושה לאיש אחר כבוד כמוהו.

And the analogue is understood of itself. That Pharaoh and his counselors at first erred and denied the unique Name that is mentioned, for also Jethro was one of his counselors.

והנמשל מובן מאליו. שפרעה ויועציו תחלה טעו וכפרו בשם המיוחד הנזכר, שגם יתרו היה אחד מיועציו.

And behold it is said regarding Moses, "See, I have made you God to Pharaoh," and regarding Israel it is said, "You are gods"; it is found that the Holy One, blessed be He, made God to Moses and to Israel.

והנה נאמר במשה ראה נתתיך אלקים לפרעה, ובישראל נאמר אלקים אתם, נמצא שהקדוש ברוך הוא עשה אלקים למשה ולישראל.

And therefore at the beginning they erred and denied, for they said in their heart, this level of theirs performs all the wonders, and in particular Pharaoh and his counselors, for they had an attachment in the attribute of God.

ולפיכך מתחלה טעו וכפרו, שאמרו בלבם האי דרגא דלהון עביד ית כל מופתא, ובפרט פרעה ויועציו שהיתה להם אחיזה במדת אלקים.

But now, "and Jethro heard that which God had done for Moses and for Israel His people," meaning that He made and appointed them to be God, he said in his heart, certainly this is not the name of the King Himself, for if so He would not appoint another under Him.

אבל עכשיו וישמע יתרו את אשר עשה אלקים למשה ולישראל עמו, פרוש שעשה ומנה אותם להיות אלקים, אמר בלבו בודאי לא זה הוא שם המלך בעצמו, שאם כן לא היה ממנה אחר תחתיו.

And then he recognized and converted. And understand this very well.

ואז הכיר ונתגיר. והבן זה היטב מאד.

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[NOTE Summary:

In this maamar, the Maggid explains the inner meaning of “וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לְמִשְׁחָה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עִמּוֹ.” The Torah emphasizes “לְמִשְׁחָה” even though the miracles were primarily for Israel, because the core issue was not the miracles themselves, but the recognition of the true Divine source behind them. Pharaoh and his advisors, including Yisro, denied the Divine Name Havayah and only acknowledged the Name Elokim, which represents Divine power as it is vested within limitation and governance. They perceived the wonders as emerging from a particular spiritual level or force, rather than from the infinite King Himself.

The Maggid illustrates this through a parable of a villager who mistakes powerful ministers for the king. Each encounter with greater authority deepens his impression of kingship, yet he continues to err by identifying intermediaries as the sovereign. Only when he realizes that even the greatest minister holds power solely by the king’s will does he grasp the true, boundless majesty of the king himself. So too, Pharaoh and his counselors mistook the Divine manifestations vested in Moshe and in Israel, described as “אֱלֹהִים,” as independent powers.

When Yisro heard that God “made” Moshe and Israel into Elokim, meaning that they were appointed as channels of Divine authority, he understood that this power could not be the essence of the King. If others could be appointed beneath Him, then the true King must be infinitely beyond all measure and limitation. This recognition led Yisro to abandon his earlier denial and to convert, acknowledging Havayah as the ultimate, incomparable source of all governance and revelation.

Practical Takeaway:

A person must learn not to confuse Divine manifestations with the Divine essence. Success, authority, spiritual power, or even miraculous experiences are only appointed garments through which God acts. True faith requires looking beyond all intermediaries and recognizing that everything derives solely from the infinite King, who remains beyond all form and limitation.

Chassidic Story:

It is told that a learned philosopher once traveled to meet the Maggid of Mezritch, convinced that he already understood God through abstract reasoning. When he arrived, he saw crowds of simple Jews surrounding the Maggid with awe and devotion. The philosopher dismissed them in his heart, assuming their reverence was directed toward the man rather than toward God.

The Maggid sensed his thoughts and said to him gently, “You see people honoring a teacher and you think they mistake the minister for the king. But tell me, when you study wisdom and grasp a deep idea, do you believe the idea itself is God?” The philosopher was silent. The Maggid continued, “They know that I am not the King. They honor the One who sent me and speak through me. You, however, risk stopping at the idea itself and never reaching the King at all.”

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The philosopher remained with the Maggid for some time, learning to distinguish between vessels and source, until his understanding of faith shifted from abstract power to living recognition of the infinite Divine.

END NOTE]

Siman #95

In the Midrash: “On this day they came to the wilderness of Sinai.” From here they said: with three things the Torah was given, with fire, as it is stated, “and Mount Sinai was entirely smoke,” with water, as it is stated, “also the heavens dripped water,” with wilderness, as it is stated, “in the wilderness of Sinai.” And just as these three things are free, so too the Torah was given free to a person, as it is stated, “Ho, everyone who thirsts, go to the water.”

And to understand this, we will first be precise in the verse, “and it was on the third day, when it was morning,” for behold morning is the beginning of the day, and it should have said first “when it was morning,” and afterward “on the third day.”

And it will be understood according to a known introduction, that everything that is in the worlds came into being through wisdom, as it is stated, “all of them You made with wisdom.”

And it is necessary to explain the reason why specifically through wisdom.

For behold it is known that in everything and everything there are mixed within it four elements. And behold the four elements are opposites to one another, and how can creation come into being, and all creatures and things made from matters that are opposites, to be one.

And the matter is, that when wisdom enters into them, it makes everything into nothing, as it is stated, “and wisdom from nothing is found.” Explanation: and wisdom, which is called true existence, makes all the lights nothing, for they are nullified because of the clarity of the light of wisdom, for “a lamp in daylight,” etc.

במדבר ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני, מכאן אמרו בג' דברים נתנה תורה, באש, שנגאמר והר סיני עשן כלו, במים, שנגאמר (אף) [גם] שמים נטפו מים, במדבר, שנגאמר במדבר סיני. ומה ג' דברים הללו הם בחנם כף התורה נתנה חנם לאדם, שנגאמר הוי כל צמא לכו למים.

ולתבין זה, נדקדק תחלה בפסוק ויהי ביום השלישי בהיות הבקר, והלא בקר הוא תחלת היום, והנה ליה למימר תחלה בהיות הבקר, ואחר כך ביום השלישי.

ויוכן על פי הקדמה הידועה שכל דבר שבעולמות נתהוו על ידי החכמה, כמו שאמר כלם בחכמה עשית. וצריך לפרש הטעם למה דוקא על ידי החכמה.

פי הנה ידוע כי בכל דבר ודבר מעורבים בו ד' סודות. והנה הד' סודות הם נגדיים זה לזה, והאיד נכול להתהוות הבריאה וכל היצורים והנעשים מדברים שהם נגדיים להיות אחד.

והענין, כי פאשר החכמה נכנסת לתוכם עשתה את הכל לאין, כמו שאמר והחכמה מאין תמצא. פירוש, והחכמה שהיא נקרא יש אמתי, עושה את כל האורות אין, כי הם מתבטלים מחמת בהירות אור החכמה, כי שרגא בטיהרא וכיו.

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And after it makes everything into nothing, then there is the ability for one creature to come into being from the four elements. And this is “and wisdom from nothing is found,” meaning that from the power that wisdom makes everything into nothing, it will be found, that is, it will be able to be found, a creature from the four elements.

And even though we said that with the entering of wisdom the four elements were nullified, with all this there remains in every creature an impression of the four elements. For they needed to be nullified for a moment in order that the creation could come into being; nevertheless the impression remained, and then from nothing existence was made, meaning from the nothing that was first made through wisdom, afterward existence was made.

And this is what our Sages of blessed memory said, “the beginning of thought is the end of action.” For the beginning of thought, which is wisdom, is called existence, and afterward at the end of action existence also comes into being. It is found that wisdom does everything. And this is “all of them You made with wisdom,” for from the power of wisdom that made everything into nothing, everything is found, as mentioned.

And to clarify the matter further, we will say that wisdom is called koach mah, which is the new mah in which there was no breaking, and the matters are deep and it is impossible to explain them.

And behold the new mah is the aspect of foundation, which has within it the power to ascend up to knowledge and to influence from the supernal minds to the lower ones, as is written in the intention of the lulav.

And it is the connector of everything, as it is stated, “for all is in the heavens and on the earth,” and they translate, “that which holds in heaven and on earth,” in heaven is Tiferet, which is called Jacob, who connects and mediates between kindness and severity.

Therefore Jacob is called the middle bar, bar is letters of joining, for Jacob chose for himself God, and likewise “and Jacob fled,” all of it is language of joining, for he joins with the supernal holy kisses.

ואחר שְׁעוֹשָׂה אֶת הַכֹּל לְאִין, אִזּוּ יְכוּלֵת לְהִתְהוּוֹת בְּרִיָּה אַחַת מִדְּיִסוּדוֹת. וְזֶהוּ וְהִתְקַמָּה מֵאִין תְּמַצָּא, פִּירוּשׁ כִּי מִכַּח שְׁהִתְקַמָּה עוֹשֶׂה הַכֹּל לְאִין, תְּמַצָּא, רְצוֹן לומר יוכל [לְהִתְמַצָּא] בְּרִיָּה מִדְּיִסוּדוֹת

ואף על פי שְׁאֲמַרְנוּ שְׁבִהֲכִנְסַת הַחֲכָמָה נִתְבַטְּלוּ הַדְּיִסוּדוֹת, עִם כָּל זֶה יֵשׁ בְּכֹל בְּרִיָּה רְשִׁימוֹ שֶׁל הַדְּיִסוּדוֹת. כִּי הִצְרִיכוּ לְהִתְבַטֵּל לְפִי שְׁעָה בְּכַדֵּי שְׁיִוְכַל לְהִתְהוּוֹת הַבְּרִיָּאָה, מִכָּל מְקוֹם נִשְׁאַרָה הַרְשִׁימוֹ, וְאִזּוּ נִעְשָׂה מֵאִין יֵשׁ, פִּירוּשׁ מִכַּח הָאִין שְׁנִעְשׂוּ מִתְחִלָּה עַל יְדֵי הַחֲכָמָה נִעְשָׂה אַחַר כֵּף יֵשׁ.

וְזֶהוּ [אֶפְשָׁר לומר] מֵה שְׁאֲמַרו רַז"ל תְּחִלַּת הַמְחַשְׁבָּה הוּא סוֹף הַמַּעֲשֵׂה. כִּי [תְּחִלַּת] הַמְחַשְׁבָּה שֶׁהִיא הַחֲכָמָה נִקְרָאת יֵשׁ, וְאַחַר כֵּף בְּסוֹף הַמַּעֲשֵׂה גַם כֵּן נִתְהַוָּה יֵשׁ. נִמְצָא כִּי הַחֲכָמָה הִיא עוֹשֶׂה הַכֹּל. וְז"ש בְּלִם בְּחֲכָמָה עֲשִׂית, כִּי מִכַּח הַחֲכָמָה שְׁעֲשִׂתָּה [אֶת] הַכֹּל לְאִין תְּמַצָּא, אֶת הַכֹּל בְּנִזְכָּר.

וְלִבְאֵר הָעִנְיָן יוֹתֵר נֹאמֵר כִּי הַחֲכָמָה נִקְרָאת כ"ח מ"ה, שֶׁהוּא מ"ה הַקְּדוֹשׁ שְׁלֹא הִיָּתָה בּוֹ שׁוּם שְׁבִיבָה, וְהִדְבָּרִים עֲמֻקִּים הֵמָּה וְאִי אֶפְשָׁר לְפָרְשָׁם.

וְהִנֵּה מ"ה הַקְּדוֹשׁ הוּא בְּחִינַת יְסוּד, שְׁיֵשׁ בּוֹ כַח לְעֹלוֹת עַד הַדַּעַת וְלְהַשְׁפִּיעַ מִן הַמוֹחִין הָעֲלִיּוֹנִים לְתַחְתּוֹנִים, כְּמוֹ שְׁאֲמַר בְּכֹנֶנֶת הַלוּלָב.

וְהוּא הַמְחַבֵּר אֶת הַכֹּל, כְּמוֹ שְׁאֲמַר כִּי כָל בְּשָׂמִים וּבְבָאָרִץ, וּמִתְרַגְּמִינוּ דְּאַחִיד בְּשָׂמִיא וּבְבָאָרְעָא, בְּשָׂמִיא הוּא הַתְּפַאֲרַת הַנִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב, שֶׁהוּא הַמְחַבֵּר וּמְכַרִּיעַ בֵּין חֶסֶד וּגְבוּרָה.

לְכֵף נִקְרָא יַעֲקֹב בְּרִיחַ הַתִּיכוֹן, בְּרִיחַ הוּא אוֹתִיּוֹת חִיבֵר, כִּי יַעֲקֹב בָּחַר לוֹ י"ה, וְכֵן וַיִּבְרַח יַעֲקֹב, הַכֹּל הוּא לְשׁוֹן חִיבֵר, שֶׁהוּא הַמְחַבֵּר בְּנִשְׁיָקִין עֲלִיוֹנִים קְדִישִׁין.

Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch

Ohr Torah Parshas Yisro

And likewise Joseph, who is the attribute of the righteous, it is said about him, “and by your mouth he shall kiss,” etc. And this is what is written, “and these are the generations of Jacob,” and our Sages said that he was similar to him, and what occurred to this one, etc.

וכן יוסף, שהוא מדת הצדיק, נאמר בו ועל פיך ישק וגו'. וזהו מה שפתיב ואלה תולדות יעקב, ואמרו רז"ל שהיה דומה לו, ומה שארע לזה וכו'.

It is found that koach mah, which is the righteous foundation of the world, is the one that connects everything and brings them into being.

נמצא פי כ"ח מ"ה שהוא צדיק יסוד עולם הוא המחבר הכל ומנהיג אותם.

And it is known that the foundation is called morning. And although morning is a designation for the attribute of kindness, as it is stated, “and Abraham rose early in the morning,” nevertheless in foundation the kindnesses are revealed, as is stated in the intentions, “and the merciful One, for Your kindnesses are not exhausted.”

ידוע פי היסוד נקרא בקר. והגם שהבקר הוא מכנה למדת הקסד, כמו שאמר וישכם אברהם בבקר, עם כל זה ביסוד נתגלו הקסדים, כמו שאמר בכונות והמרחם פי לא תמו קסדיך.

Therefore it said first “on the third day,” which is the attribute of Jacob, and afterward it said “when it was morning,” which is the attribute of Joseph, the completion of the body, in order that they could receive the Torah which was given in water and fire, which are kindness and severity.

לכן אמר בתחלה ביום השלישי, שהוא מדת יעקב, ואחר כך אמר בהיות הבקר, שהוא מדת יוסף, סיומא דגופא, בכדי שיוכלו לקבל את התורה אשר נתנה בפנים ובאש, שהם קסד וגבורה.

And he is the mediator and the mean between them, and the connection came into being, and afterward “in the wilderness,” meaning all the flow was given in the world of speech, which is the lower level, and a complete stature was formed.

והוא המכריע והממצע ביניהם ונתנהו החיבור, ואחר כך במדבר, פירוש כל השפע נתנה בעולם הדבור שהוא מדרגה תתאה, ונעשית קומה שלמה.

[NOTE Summary:

In this maamar, the Maggid explains the deeper structure behind the giving of the Torah and the order of the verses describing Matan Torah. The Midrash teaches that the Torah was given through three mediums: fire, water, and wilderness. Just as these are ownerless and free, so too the Torah is given freely, without restriction or prior claim. This freedom is not incidental; it reflects the Torah's root in Divine wisdom, which precedes all limitation and ownership.

To understand this, the Maggid explains that all existence is brought into being through chochmah, as stated, “All of them You made with wisdom.” Every created thing is composed of four opposing elements, which by nature cannot unite. The possibility of creation emerges only because chochmah enters and nullifies all differentiation, turning all existence into ayin, nothingness. In this state of total bittul, opposites can unite, and a new being can emerge. Afterward, the impression of the elements remains, allowing existence to return as yesh, being. This explains the statement that the beginning of thought is the end of action: chochmah, called yesh in its source, first nullifies everything into ayin, and from that ayin a renewed yesh is formed.

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The Maggid continues by identifying chochmah as koach mah, the new level of Mah that was not affected by shattering. This level is expressed through the sefirah of yesod, which has the power to connect above and below, drawing influence from the highest intellect down into the lowest realms. Yesod is the unifying force, described as “that which holds heaven and earth together.” In heaven it corresponds to Tiferet, Yaakov, who harmonizes chesed and gevurah. For this reason Yaakov is called the middle bar, the axis of connection, and Yosef, the tzaddik, embodies this power of bonding and transmission.

This framework explains the verse “And it was on the third day, when it was morning.” First comes “the third day,” corresponding to Yaakov, the power of balance and harmony. Only afterward comes “morning,” identified with yesod and Yosef, where chesed becomes revealed and transmitted. Through this sequence, Israel could receive the Torah, which was given in fire and water, gevurah and chesed, united through the mediating power of yesod. Finally, the Torah is revealed in the wilderness, the level of speech and humility, completing the full stature of Divine revelation in the lowest world.

Practical Takeaway:

True spiritual growth comes from bittul, the willingness to become ownerless and open like a wilderness. Only when a person allows wisdom to dissolve ego and inner contradiction can opposing traits be harmonized. From that inner nothingness, a stronger and more integrated self can emerge, capable of receiving and transmitting Torah into everyday life.

Chassidic Story:

It is told that a תלמיד חכם once complained to the Maggid of Mezritch that his learning felt fragmented. One day he was inspired by deep love of God, another day overwhelmed by fear and self-judgment, and he could not unify the two. The Maggid asked him, “When two people argue, who can make peace between them?” The student answered, “Someone who stands above both sides.” The Maggid replied, “So too within yourself. As long as each trait insists on standing on its own, there is conflict. Rise to the place of connection.”

He then pointed to a simple wooden beam running through the center of the room and said, “That beam holds the house together, not because it is the strongest wall, but because it runs through the middle.” The student understood that his task was not to destroy fear or passion, but to rise to a deeper place of humility and connection, where both could serve a higher purpose. From then on, his learning became settled and whole.

END NOTE]