

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye
Toldot Yaakov Yosef
Parshas Vayigash

"And Judah approached him and said, 'Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not let your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh' (44:18).

One can explain: (1) What is the nature of this approach, according to the plain meaning? The Alshich also raised this question. In the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 93:6), it is said: Rabbi Yehudah holds that 'approaching' refers to war, as it is written (2 Samuel 10:13), 'Joab and the people with him advanced to the battle.' Rabbi Nechemiah says 'approaching' refers to appeasement, etc. The Rabbis say it refers to prayer, as it is written (1 Kings 18:36), 'Elijah the prophet approached and said, "Lord, God of Israel..."' Rabbi Elazar said it encompasses all of them.

It must be understood: what difference does it make whether this was for war, appeasement, or prayer, that it needed to be written in the Torah?

(2) 'Please, my lord': It should have said simply 'my lord.' Even though the first question clarifies the second—since Joseph could fulfill his desires either through a gift or war against his enemies, as expounded by the Sages—nevertheless, it remains difficult to understand why this needed to be written in the Torah.

(3) 'Let your servant speak': Is it possible that Judah wished to whisper in his ear?

(4) 'In my lord's ears': This implies both ears, which seems unnecessary.

(5) 'Do not let your anger burn': Why would he be angry? The Sages explained that Judah spoke harshly to him, but this is not explicitly mentioned in the text.

(6) 'For you are like Pharaoh': In what way is he like Pharaoh? Also, why are there two expressions of similarity?

And it appears to me, as stated in the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 93:2), 'And Judah approached him,' linking to the verse, 'One draws near to the other' (Job 41:8)—this refers to Judah and Joseph, etc. One must understand what difficulty in this verse the Midrash aims to resolve using the verse from Job.

And it appears to me to explain the Mishnah in Kiddushin (Chapter 4, Mishnah 12): 'A man may be secluded with his mother or daughter in physical closeness,' etc. Even though I have explained this several times, there is no study hall without something new. In the verse 'I adjure you... tell him that I am lovesick' (Song of Songs 5:8), it is explained in the book "Yad Yosef" (p. 197b) that true goodness is only the attachment to God, as it is written (Psalms 73:28), 'But as for me, closeness to God is good.' And attachment to the Shechinah can only be achieved by subduing the physical and the

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evil inclination, which happens through suffering, as opposed to what is written, 'Jeshurun grew fat and kicked' (Deuteronomy 32:15), which acts as a barrier separating our connection to our Creator, as it is written, 'Your sins have been barriers between you and your God' (Isaiah 59:2). When the evil inclination is subdued through suffering, attachment is achieved, etc. And thus, 'Tell him that I am lovesick,' meaning, even the sicknesses and sufferings I have endured were love to me, for I merited attachment through them. And as I wrote elsewhere on 'How shall I know that I will inherit it?' (Genesis 15:8), that attachment cannot be achieved through the barrier of the evil inclination. Thus, how will I know, etc.? And the answer is 'Your descendants will be strangers' (Genesis 15:13), and through suffering, attachment will be achieved. Thus, it is not a decree but a notification, clarifying doubts mentioned there.

It is further explained there (p. 73) that the hatred the nations bear toward Israel stems from the Torah, for God has separated us from them, prohibiting intermarriage and sharing meals with them. As it is stated in the Talmud (Shabbat 89a): 'What is Mount Sinai? It is the mountain from which hatred (sinah) descended to the nations of the world.' And thus, 'Tell him that I am lovesick,' meaning, all the suffering the nations bring upon me is because I love Him, etc., see there.

Further, it can be explained as a jest, as I wrote elsewhere, that there are three types of haters: (1) scholars who hate those faithful to Israel, (2) the hatred of the masses toward Torah scholars, and (3) the hatred of the nations toward Israel, etc., see there. Two types of hatred are clear, but why do scholars hate the righteous? It must be said that this hatred stems from the nations' hatred of Israel, which is rooted in jealousy, as I explained on the verse, 'And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons' (Genesis 37:3), and 'they were jealous of him,' etc. (37:11). And thus, 'Tell him that I am lovesick,' meaning, the sickness of hatred from scholars, in addition to the other two types of hatred, is because of the love I have for Him, and it is clear.

However, the primary meaning of the verse 'I am lovesick' is explained in the Tikkunim: the Shechinah is lovesick, yearning to unite with her Beloved through the righteous, as it says, 'I adjure you'—these are the righteous, etc. As I heard from my teacher on the verse 'A prayer for the afflicted when he is faint and pours out his supplication before the Lord' (Psalms 102:1), with a parable: A king declared on the day of his joy that anyone who requests something from him will have their wish fulfilled. Some asked for positions of power, others for wealth, and their wishes were granted. But one wise man said that his request was to speak with the king personally three times a day. The king was greatly pleased by this, for his speech was more beloved to the man than wealth or power, and thus, his request was granted, allowing him access to the royal chambers to

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Speak with the king, where he also received wealth and power. And thus, 'A prayer for the afflicted,' whose request is simply to 'pour out his supplication,' and this is his desire, etc., and it is delightful.

Through this, it can be understood that 'a man may be secluded' means resembling Ze'ir Anpin, called Adam, whose numerical value is 45 (Mem-Heh), connecting the letters of his Torah and prayer—letters that represent the Shechinah, called 'daughter,' the lower world—with his Binah, understanding, which connects the letters in his thoughts to the upper world, called 'mother.' And thus, 'a man may be secluded with his mother and daughter in physical closeness,' meaning without any foreign thoughts, so they 'approach one another,' for 'love' has the numerical value of 'one.' And thus, 'I am lovesick,' and it is understood.

See what is written in 'Nof Etz Chaim' on the verse 'Deep calls to deep' (Psalms 42:8): The ten Sefirot of Binah reside in the mouth of a person, illuminating and influencing Malchut when one studies Torah and prays, as the mystery of 'Deep' (Malchut) calls to 'Deep' (Binah), etc., see there.

Through this, it can be understood that the upper world concludes with the masculine aspect, called Joseph, as it is written in the Zohar, Vayikra. Additionally, the foundation (Yesod) ascends to Da'at, uniting Chochmah and Binah, whose names (Ayin-Bet and Kuf-Samech-Alef) have the numerical value of 'Zachor' (remembrance), which influence the foundation, from which remembrance emanates, as explained in the unifications. And thus, 'Judah approached him,' which is the mystery of prayer, to connect and bring near the lower world (Malchut), called Judah, as it is written (Psalms 109:4), 'But I am prayer,' to the upper world (Binah) through the righteous, called Joseph.

And this approach has three aspects: (1) for war against foreign thoughts, to break the shells and elevate the internal to holiness, as I heard from my teacher, though it is not permissible to write; even so, I wrote briefly about it elsewhere. (2) For appeasement, to appease the spark that was within the shells, elevating it now in holiness to its original place among the 288 sparks, etc. (3) For prayer, as per Rabbi Elazar's view mentioned above, encompassing all three aspects within prayer.

'And he said, "Please, my lord"'—this verse reveals the secret of prayer, that one should not pray for themselves but for the Shechinah to unite with her Beloved. For the righteous are agents of the Shechinah, praying 'Please, my lord,' meaning the Shechinah's intention is also not for itself but for the honor of God, that His mastery is revealed. Thus, Malchut is called Adonai, revealing and proclaiming His mastery as the Master of all.

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'Let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears'—my sole intention is to merit speaking with You directly, in 'my lord's ears,' in the mystery of 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth' (Song of Songs 1:2), and the mystery of 'If you lie' (Psalms 68:14), meaning 'Mother, lie,' etc. And thus, 'in my lord's ears,' for the morning prayer connects and brings Malchut close on the right, and the afternoon prayer on the left, and thus, 'in my lord's ears'—right and left.

'And do not let your anger burn against your servant'—the Zohar (Vayikra 23b) states on the verse 'He shall be made aware of his sin' (Leviticus 4:23): How is he made aware? Through suffering. But one who engages in Torah at night, the Torah makes him aware of his sin, etc. And thus, 'do not let your anger burn against your servant,' meaning do not let Your anger (suffering) make him aware of his sin; rather, let the Torah remind him of his sin so that suffering will not be needed to remind him.

'For you are like Pharaoh,' for the aspect of Joseph, from which remembrance flows, originates from the upper world, called Pharaoh, from which great and lofty lights are revealed, as it is written in the Zohar (Part I, 210a). From there derives the aspect of being wise and discerning, as it is written (Genesis 41:39), 'There is none as discerning and wise as you,' and it is understood.