

Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

Me'or Einayim

Parshas Va'eira

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty (El Shaddai), etc. Rashi explains: "Alas for those who are gone and are no longer found," etc. The explanation is as follows: It is known that the secret of the exile in Egypt was that true awareness (da'at) was in a state of exile, meaning that they were unable to grasp the awareness necessary to serve the Creator, blessed be He. This is similar to what is stated in Divrei HaYamim (I Chronicles 28:9): "Know the God of your father and serve Him."

For in truth, awareness (da'at) is the essential foundation that leads to complete awe and love of God. When a person truly knows and believes that the entire earth is filled with His glory, that there is no place devoid of Him, and that He is the delight of all delights—blessed is He and blessed is His name, the Source of all life—then it becomes clear that all delights depend on His light and vitality. Were it possible, God forbid, for His light and vitality to be absent from created things, they would return to being formless and void. This applies not only to the created beings of this world but also to all the higher and lower worlds. If His vitality were, God forbid, absent from them, they would cease to exist altogether.

If so, this awareness is primary in all matters. When one truly believes this, they will certainly not desire any worldly pleasure. Since the essence of all pleasures is rooted in the Creator, blessed be He, it is far better to cleave to the true delight and not, God forbid, sever oneself from the Source by pursuing physical pleasures as perceived by the physical eye. Such separation is described in Proverbs (16:28): "A troublemaker alienates a leader," which is interpreted as alienating the Leader of the world from His Shechinah (Divine Presence). For all things are referred to as Shechinah, meaning the vitality of the Blessed Name that dwells within all things. If one performs an action in the manner of ordinary people, they cause, God forbid, a separation. Therefore, one who possesses this awareness will certainly see the inner essence that sustains every thing, which is the Shechinah, Blessed be He, and will cleave to Him, thereby attaining awe and love.

Love is described, as it is stated in the Mishnah, in the verse: "And you shall love [the Lord your God] with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). What does "with all your might" mean? It means with every measure and situation. It is known that the Blessed Name is infinite, having no boundary or limit, whereas the world is finite and bounded. How, then, can the world bear the light and vitality of His infinite presence that dwells within all creations, as mentioned above, given that He, Blessed be He, has no limits? The answer is that He, Blessed be He, governs His world through His attributes. These attributes are referred to as "measures" (middot) because the Blessed Name, as it were, measured and contracted Himself in such a way that the world could bear His light. This is the meaning of the term "measure."

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All of this occurs according to the decree of His infinite wisdom, which is beyond human comprehension. Sometimes He measures with one attribute, and at other times with another, depending on what His wisdom determines is necessary at that particular time for governing His world through the flow of His vitality. Similarly, for every individual among Israel, He measures and contracts His divinity according to the person's capacity and understanding at that time—sometimes through kindness, and sometimes through mercy.

For it is impossible for a person to receive His divinity at that moment except through that specific attribute. If a person possesses awareness (*da'at*), they will surely accept His divinity as it is measured out to them at that time. They will rejoice in receiving His divinity, give abundant thanks, and serve Him with complete awe and love. This is because one with awareness understands that *da'at* encompasses all of these attributes, as is known.

For this reason, each person must accept upon themselves during the recitation of the Shema, with the "T" of "תְּהִלָּה" (Echad), the four types of capital punishment administered by the court, corresponding to the four directions, and unify His Name in truth, as it is written (Psalms 44:23), "For Your sake, we are killed all the day long." This reflects the acceptance of the four types of execution to sanctify His great and blessed Name.

[NOTE: This passage teaches that during the recitation of the Shema, specifically with the "T" in the word "תְּהִלָּה" (Echad, meaning "One"), one should symbolically accept the four types of capital punishment prescribed by the Torah. These correspond to the four directions, representing a complete self-sacrifice to sanctify God's Name. The idea is rooted in the verse, "For Your sake, we are killed all the day long" (Psalms 44:23), emphasizing a willingness to dedicate oneself fully to God's unity and sovereignty, even to the point of self-sacrifice for the sanctification of His Name. **END NOTE]**

For through this, the unification of *Havayah* (representing mercy) and *Elokim* (representing judgment) is achieved. By accepting His divinity through both attributes, it fulfills (Deuteronomy 6:4), "The Lord is our God, the Lord is One"—whether He relates to the person with the attribute of *Havayah* or with the attribute of *Elokim*, it is all the Lord, who is the kindness of the Blessed Name, enabling the person to receive His divinity in that matter, as necessary for them at that time.

This is further explained in the verse (Deuteronomy 4:39), "For the Lord, He is God," and all of this is achieved through awareness (*da'at*), as it says at the beginning of the verse, "And you shall know this day." When one serves God with this awareness, judgment is also transformed into mercy. This is because they believe, accept with joy, and give thanks to Him abundantly, treating the judgment as though it were kindness.

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Thus, it truly becomes so. This is the meaning of the statement that the righteous transform the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy. On the other hand, the wicked, even when the Blessed Creator relates to them with mercy, fail to accept His divinity. Lacking awareness (*da'at*), they separate themselves from the Blessed Creator and turn mercy into judgment. However, the righteous can rectify even the damage caused by the wicked, transforming it back into mercy.

This is the meaning of the teaching of Ben Bag Bag: "Turn it over and turn it over" (Avot 5:22). Through the Torah, which represents awareness (*da'at*), one can transform how the Blessed Creator relates to them with the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy. Additionally,

they can correct and transform the damage caused by the wicked, as explained above. Understand this well.

- However, every person must face trials (*nisyonot*). Even if they have accepted God's divinity in their thoughts, as described earlier, every individual is tested through ten trials. This is as it was said about Abraham: "Our forefather Abraham was tested with ten trials, and he withstood them all." The essence of a trial is that the attachment to God, achieved through awareness, is temporarily removed when the trial arises, leaving the person with only free will. Without this removal, it would not be considered a trial, for the attachment would ensure that the righteous remain steadfast in their ways. During the trial, the person's awareness is diminished—not completely removed, but reduced. If they withstand the trial, it is because they had firmly established in their heart beforehand, during times of expanded awareness, the resolve and strength to endure.

When the Israelites were in Egypt, awareness (*da'at*) was in exile because the shell (*klipah*) precedes the fruit. Awareness was hidden within the shells, like the shell of a walnut. As the verse states (Song of Songs 6:11), "I went down to the grove of nuts," referring to the exile in Egypt. A walnut has an outer shell that is very hard and conceals the fruit, and beneath it is another hard shell that allows the fruit to be seen, although thin shells still remain until the arrival of our Messiah, may it be speedily in our days, when the innermost essence will be fully revealed. Nonetheless, the primary concealment was already removed, as Egypt (*Mitzrayim*) contains the letters of *Meitzar Yam* ("the constriction of the sea"), symbolizing the Sea of Wisdom, which is the awareness (*da'at*) that flows from it. Someone who lacks awareness entirely is, even today, still in the "constriction of the sea," having not yet entered the Sea of Wisdom.

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Thus, the author of the Haggadah says, "Not only our ancestors did the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeem, but He also redeemed us with them." For each year, there is a personal Exodus from Egypt in this way. However, the wicked, who lack awareness, have not yet left Egypt. This is why the author of the Haggadah emphasizes that the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeemed both us and our ancestors. The wicked person's question, "What is this service to you?" reflects their lack of awareness, which makes the service seem burdensome. Therefore, one must respond, "It is for me and not for him. Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed." This is because even today, he remains in Egypt, meaning his awareness (*da'at*) is still in exile.

Therefore, it is written, "And God saw the children of Israel, and God knew" (Exodus 2:25). This indicates that awareness (*da'at*) began to emerge, allowing the recognition that even the attribute of *Elokim* (representing judgment) is an expression of accepting His divinity. This is why it says, "And God spoke to Moses and said to him, 'I am the Lord (Havayah)" (Exodus 6:2).

Moses, our teacher of blessed memory, had asked, "Why have You done evil to this people?" (Exodus 5:22). The Blessed Name replied that what Moses perceived as evil was not truly so. The essence of redemption lies in knowing that *Elokim* (judgment) and *Havayah* (mercy) are one unified reality, as explained earlier. What seems to be "evil" is only perceived as such by those lacking awareness.

In truth, according to His infinite wisdom, which is beyond comprehension, it was necessary at that time to manifest through that specific attribute (*Elokim*). This is what He conveyed to Moses, teaching him that even the apparent "evil" Moses mentioned was actually for the ultimate good. Thus, God said, through the attribute of *Elokim*, "You will know that I am the Lord (Havayah)," demonstrating their unity as one.

"I appeared to the forefathers as *El Shaddai*," meaning the One who said to His world, "Enough," which signifies contraction and judgment. I related to them through contractions and judgments, testing them by removing expansive awareness (*da'at*) through the withdrawal of the deep connection they previously had. This withdrawal created the condition for it to be called a test (*nisayon*).

The forefathers withstood these tests because they relied on the core of their faith, rooted in the limited awareness that remained with them after the connection was withdrawn. This is because the divinity of the Blessed Name also manifests in judgment, and they maintained their faith in this reality.

This is the meaning of "but by My Name, the Lord (*Havayah*), I was not known to them." I withheld from them the expansive awareness that comes through deep connection, as

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Havayah represents awareness (*da'at*), as is known. Therefore, they did not know Me in the same way as before the test. Nonetheless, they accepted His divinity in whatever measure He allotted them.

This explains "Alas for those who are gone and are no longer found" (Rashi). "Gone" refers to the level they lost during the test, and "are no longer found" (*lo mishtakchin*) relates to the word *shikcha* (forgetfulness). Even though they lost a certain level of connection, they did not forget to accept His divinity in every attribute and measure, maintaining their awareness and faith.

From all that has been said, it is understood that a person who serves their Creator, blessed be He, must do so in the manner described above, whether experiencing kindness or hardship. If one sees that the Blessed Creator relates to them with kindness for a time, but then their situation begins to falter, they should remain as steadfast as a peg driven into a firm place, not deviating from their spiritual level. This is because it may be a test, as explained earlier.

This explains the verse (Isaiah 63:16): "For You are our Father; though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us." The sages expound that "For You are our Father" refers to Isaac. Abraham said, "Let them be erased for the sanctification of Your Name," and Jacob similarly refrained from pleading on behalf of Israel. However, Isaac advocated on their behalf.

[NOTE: (Shabbat 89b) In the Talmudic narrative, the Jewish people are brought before God for judgment, and Abraham and Jacob do not intercede on their behalf. However, Isaac steps forward and presents a compelling argument:

Isaac says to God:

"Master of the Universe! Why are You angry with Your children? They are Your children, not mine! When they said, 'We will do, and we will listen,' at Sinai, they called You 'our Father' (Isaiah 63:16). Now You want to blame everything on me?"

Isaac continues:

"Let us calculate how much time they actually spend sinning. A person's lifespan is 70 years:

- The first 20 years, they are not held accountable, as the heavenly court does not punish for sins committed before maturity.
- Of the remaining 50 years, half are spent sleeping—that's 25 years.
- Another 12.5 years are spent eating, drinking, and taking care of their physical needs.
- That leaves only 12.5 years for sinning.

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- If You can bear those 12.5 years, good. If not, let half of the burden fall on me, and the other half on You. If You insist that the full responsibility falls on them, I am ready to bear it all myself!"

The Talmud concludes that the Jewish people then proclaim: "For You are our Father!" (*Isaiah 63:16*), as Isaac successfully advocates for their forgiveness. This story highlights Isaac's transformation of judgment into mercy, emphasizing that even the strict attribute of *din* can act as a defender when combined with profound understanding and compassion. **END NOTE]**

At first glance, this seems counterintuitive: How could Abraham, who represents the attribute of kindness (*chesed*), suggest such a harsh stance, while Isaac, associated with judgment (*din*), argues in their favor? This apparent reversal invites deeper reflection.

The truth, as explained, is that someone who serves the Blessed Creator only when He relates to them through Abraham's attribute of kindness (*chesed*) or Jacob's attribute of mercy (*rachamim*), but not when He relates through Isaac's attribute of judgment (*din*), clearly lacks awareness (*da'at*). Such a person does not fully recognize His divinity. Serving in this manner is described in Proverbs (16:28) as "a troublemaker who alienates a leader," implying that this behavior, God forbid, turns mercy into judgment, as explained earlier.

Therefore, through the attribute of kindness, judgment is brought upon them, as both Abraham and Jacob suggested, "Let them be erased for the sanctification of Your Name." However, one who accepts His divinity in all the measures He uses—especially through Isaac's attribute—transforms judgment into mercy. This is why Isaac said, "Half of them fall upon me," because his attribute was transformed into mercy, as previously mentioned.

This is the meaning of the verse, "For Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us" (*Isaiah 63:16*). Someone who accepts His divinity solely through Abraham's kindness does "not know us," as they still lack awareness. Similarly, someone who serves solely through Jacob's mercy "does not acknowledge us," as they do not yet fully recognize His divinity. Only when one serves through the measure of Isaac, acknowledging God even in judgment, does the verse conclude, "For You are our Father," achieving a complete unification of His divinity. Understand this well.

The concept of the ten plagues in Egypt is rooted in the idea that the Blessed Creator governs His world through ten levels of intellect, which collectively form awareness (*da'at*). In Egypt, where the intention was to reveal the secret of awareness, each of the

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ten plagues served to unveil one aspect of these intellectual levels. Through all ten plagues, the full revelation of awareness was completed. However, as mentioned earlier, during trials (*nisyonot*), when the connection is withdrawn, awareness is diminished. This diminution of awareness is itself also a form of its revelation, as this process is necessary. Thus, there are two modes of revealing awareness: one through its expansion and another through its contraction during trials. Both are forms of the revelation of *da'at*, as both are essential for the process. Understand this well, as it is fundamental.

Even after the "shell" (klipah) that conceals awareness is broken, a specific purpose remains. This explains why some plagues, such as hail, darkness, and lice, occurred without prior warning. Since each plague served to reveal *da'at* in its two forms, the plagues associated with the expansion of awareness included warnings, aligning with the principle that someone subject to punishment must first be warned. The warnings, given by witnesses, serve to impart awareness (*da'at*) through speech, as it is known that without a warning, even a deliberate sinner is considered to lack full awareness.

In contrast, the plagues that occurred without warning were intended to break the shell concealing the aspect of *da'at* associated with contraction, necessary during trials. Therefore, those plagues targeted the concealment that obscured this diminished form of awareness. Both forms of *da'at*—expansion and contraction—were revealed through the ten plagues, each serving its purpose. Understand this well.