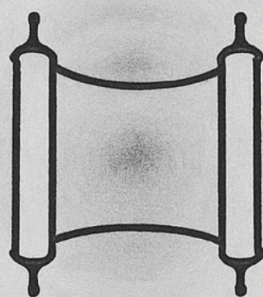


בס"ד

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel
of Horodak
Parshas Vayigash (ב)**



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Menachem Mendel of Horodak

Pri Ha'Eretz

Parshas Vayigash (ב)

Introduction

Menachem Mendel Horodaker (circa late eighteenth to early nineteenth century), a Chassidic thinker and disciple within the broader tradition of early Chabad-influenced Chassidic masters, expounds in this maamar on the inner meaning of Judah's approach to Joseph, unveiling a comprehensive spiritual framework that explains human descent, struggle, and engagement with the physical world as a divinely orchestrated process of elevation and rectification.

And Judah approached him and said, "Please, my lord"

(Genesis 44:18). Behold, in the book Or HaChaim it is brought to explain the word "and he approached," what is the meaning of approaching.

וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי (בראשית מ"ד:י"ח). הִנֵּה בְּסֻפֵּר אֹר הַחַיִּים מוֹבָא לְפָרֵשׁ מֵלֶת וַיִּגַּשׁ מֶה הָיָא הַגִּשָּׁה.

And its explanation is that it is fitting for him, that the approaching was in the heart, to be known, as water reflects the face, so the heart of a man to a man (Proverbs 27:19).

וּפְרוּשׁוֹ הוּא כְּרָאוּי לוֹ שֶׁהַגִּשָּׁה הִתְהַב בְּלֵב לְהִיּוֹת נוֹדַעַת כַּמִּין הַפְּנִים בֵּין לֵב הָאָדָם אֶל אָדָם (משלי כ"ז:י"ט).

And through these words was Judah's desire to arouse the compassion of Joseph; therefore he drew near in his heart to come close to Joseph and to love him with the truth of the heart.

וּבְדִבְרֵי אֵלָיו הָיָה רְצוֹן יְהוּדָה לַעֲוֹרֵר רַחֲמֵי יוֹסֵף לְכֵן הִגִּישׁ בְּלִבּוֹ לְהִתְקַרֵּב לְיוֹסֵף וּלְאַהֲבָה אוֹתוֹ בְּאַמֶּת הַלֵּב.

In order to arouse Joseph's love toward him and to arouse his compassion. And behold, there emerged here holy speech, words of a wise mouth, grace, truth, and faith.

בְּכִדִּי לַעֲוֹרֵר אֶהְבֵּת יוֹסֵף אֵלָיו לַעֲוֹרֵר רַחֲמָיו. וְהִנֵּה יֵצֵא מִפֶּה קְדוֹשׁ דְּבָרֵי פִי חָכָם חֵן אֱמֶת וְאַמוּנָה.

But if indeed, according to Judah's understanding, that he thought of Joseph that he was an Egyptian, concerning whom Israel was warned "you shall not show them favor" (Deuteronomy 7:2), not to give them favor.

אָבֵל אִם אֲמַנָּם לִפִּי דַעַת יְהוּדָה שֶׁהָיָה סְבוּר עַל יוֹסֵף שֶׁהוּא מִצְרִי שֶׁהִזְהִירוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא תִחַנֵּם (דְּבָרִים ז':ב') שֶׁלֹּא לְתֵת לָהֶם חֵן.

Judah did not refrain from drawing his heart close to love him, according to what is known regarding prayer and offerings and eating.

לֹא נִמְנַע יְהוּדָה מִלְּקַרֵּב לִבּוֹ לְאַהֲבָה אוֹתוֹ עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַיָּדוּעַ בְּתַפְלָה וְקִרְבָּנוֹת וְאַכִּילָה.

Behold, our sages of blessed memory said in the Midrash and the Talmud: Jacob our father was fit to descend to Egypt in chains of iron, but so forth.

הִנֵּה אֲמָרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנָם לְבָרְכָה בְּמִדְרָשׁ וּבַשּׁ"ס רָאוּ הָיָה יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ לִירֵד בְּשִׁלְשָׁלוֹת שֶׁל בְּרִזָּל לְמִצְרַיִם אֲלֵא וְכוּלִּי.

And the parable is of an animal that they lead to the slaughterhouse, and it does not want to go; they pull it with a rope. See there.

וּמִשָּׁל בְּהֵמָה שֶׁמוֹלִיכִין אוֹתָהּ לְמַקְוֵלִין וְאֵינָה רוֹצָה לֵילֵךְ מוֹשְׁכִין אוֹתָהּ בְּחֶבֶל עַיִן שָׁם.

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Behold, the parable is an instruction of the matter of the descent of Jacob and his sons to Egypt, in order to elevate the holy sparks of Egypt, as is known.

הנה המשל הוא הוראת ענין ירידת יעקב ובניו למצרים בכדי להעלות נצוצות הקדושות ממצרים כידוע.

Regarding "and they emptied Egypt" (Exodus 12:36), as its Aramaic translation explains it as "and they emptied," and our sages of blessed memory said, like a net that has no fish.

על פסוק וינצלו את מצרים (שמות י"ב:ל"ו) כתרגומו וריקינו ואמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה כמצודה שאין בה דגים.

And behold, the matter of a person's eating is also for this purpose, in order to elevate the sparks from level to level.

והנה ענין האכילה של אדם גם כן לצורך זה בכדי להעלות הנצוצות מדרגה לדרגה.

From the inanimate to the vegetative that is fit for human consumption, and what is not fit ascends from vegetative to animal until it reaches human consumption.

מדומם לצומח הראוי לאכילת אדם ושאינו ראוי עולה מצומח לחי עד שתגיע לאכילת אדם.

And sensory perception testifies that seemingly it is a wondrous matter, that physical food is a cause for the bonding of the soul with the body, which cannot live without eating.

והחוש מעיד שכלאורה דבר פלאי להיות המאכל הגשמי סבה להתקשרות הנפש בגוף שאינו יכול להיות בלי אכילה.

And it is therefore necessary that within food there be an extract of holy vitality, from which the soul is nourished, while the body is nourished from the physicality.

ומכרח להיות במאכל מצוץ חיות הקדש אשר הנפש נזון ממנה והגוף מן הגשמיות.

And nevertheless, no holy spark wishes to move from the place in which it is concealed in its level and to ascend, as our sages said that every blade of grass has an angel appointed over it who strikes it and says to it, "Grow" (Bereishit Rabbah 10:6).

ואף על פי כן אין רוצה שום ניצוץ הקדש לזוז ממקום שהוא בסתר המדרגה ולעלות כדברי חז"ל שכל עשב יש לו מלאך הממנה ומכה אותו ואומר לו (גדל) (בראשית רבה י"ו).

For the holy spark fears an impure occurrence that may happen, perhaps it will come before a base person, and by his eating it will fall lower than it is now.

כי הניצוץ הקדש מתירא מקרה בלתי טהור אולי יודמן לפני אדם בליעל שישפלו באכילתו יותר ממה שהוא עכשו.

Although this is the entirety of man standing upon free choice, and who knows if he will choose the good to elevate it.

אף כי זה כל האדם עומד על הבחירה ומי יודע אם יבחר בטוב להעלותו.

For no elevation is relevant unless a person intends to be nourished from sustenance that is given from the house of the King.

כי אין שיכות לשום עלוי אלא אם יחשב האדם לזון ממזוני דמתיהיב מבי מלפא.

The Holy One, blessed be He, is within the food, and one eats and drinks and beholds God, drawing close to Him through the food.

קודשא בריך הוא בתוך המאכל ויאכל וישתה ויחזק את האלהים להתקרב אליו על ידי המאכל.

As in the deed of Rav Hamnuna the Elder, who would immediately ascend, like the act of a sacrifice.

כמעשה דרב המנונא סבא שהוא מתעלה תקף כמעשה הקרבן.

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And all the worlds become unified, from the lowest and most base until the supernal will, the Infinite One, blessed be He, through the unification of man and beast in his eating.

ומתחברים כל העולמות מן השפלים התחתונים עד רצון עליון אין סוף ברוך הוא על ידי יחוד אדם ובהמה באכילתו אותה.

And below him is a person who is good before God but does not elevate immediately through his eating.

ולמטה ממנו אדם שטוב לפני אלהים ואינו מעלה תכף באכילתו.

Nevertheless, the additional vitality that he received through his eating, and the vitality reached this as well, for this is the teaching of man.

על כל פנים התוספת חיות שקבל באכילתו והחיות הגיע גם כן לזאת תורת האדם.

And every deed that he performs afterward for the sake of Heaven, the vitality is elevated as well.

וכל מעשה שיעשה אחר כך לשם שמים מתעלה החיות גם כן.

In contrast, Heaven forbid, when a person becomes coarse from eating, and he eats and is satiated and his desire comes upon him.

מה שאין כן חס ושלום כשהאדם מתגשם מן האכילה ויאכל וישבע ותאוותו יבא לו.

Behold, he causes the holy spark to fall further and further into the husks, for he gives vitality and creates husks, may the Merciful One save us.

הרי הוא מפיל לניצוץ הקדוש בתוך הקלפה יותר ויותר שהרי הוא נותן חיות ובורא קליפות רחמנא ללצל.

This is the fear of the spark from ascending, until they strike it, as mentioned above.

זהו יראת הניצוץ להתעלות עד שמכים אותו כפנזר לעיל.

In truth, a holy spark that sees a place prepared before it for elevation, without doubt greatly desires it, as is known from the matter of the lower waters that weep, saying: we too desire to be before the King.

ובאמת ניצוץ הקדוש שרואה מקום מוכן לפניו להתעלות בלי ספק מבקש מאד כידוע מענין מים מתחתונים בוכים גם אנו בעינינו למנהיג קדם מלפא.

This is the matter of prayer, for sometimes when a person approaches God with the point of his heart in truth, as stated regarding Judah, foreign thoughts or foreign traits awaken within him.

שהוא ענין התפלה שלפעמים כשהאדם נגש אל האלהים בנקודת לבו באמת כאמור ביהודה מתעוררים עליו מחשבות זרות או מדות זרות.

And this is because their desire is to be elevated, for behold, a place has been prepared for them to be elevated through repentance, since he is ready to serve in holiness.

והוא שרצונם להתעלות כי הנה מקום אתם מוכן להעלותם על ידי התשובה להיותם מוכן לשרת בקדוש.

So too Jacob our father feared to descend to Egypt to elevate the sparks, like the matter of the grass that is struck so that it may grow,

וכן יעקב אבינו היה מתירא מלרדת למצרים להעלות הנצוצות כענין עשב שמפים אותו לגדל.

And like a cow that they lead to the slaughterhouse, to elevate it through its slaughter and its eating.

ופרה שמוליכים אותה למקולין להעלותה בשחיטתה ואכילתה.

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He was fit to descend in chains of iron, but his merit caused that the Holy One, blessed be He, promised him: "I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up" (Genesis 46:4).

And behold, our Torah is a Torah of truth and faith, that certainly it is forbidden for a person to bring himself into a test,

To bring himself into a foreign thought in order to elevate it, Heaven forbid, for who knows if he will prevail like a lion and rise up.

Or perhaps he will descend lower and lower and not withstand the test, Heaven forbid.

Only when the test comes before him without intent, it is certainly from God to test him,

And he must prevail with all his strength and with self-sacrifice for repentance, and this itself is the ascent.

And this was indeed the matter of the king, peace be upon him, who said, "I will increase and not refrain," and from the outset he went out with intention in order to elevate holy sparks, yet he did not withstand the trial.

And this is what our sages of blessed memory said, that one blesses over beautiful creatures, "Blessed is He Who has such in His world," even over a beautiful gentile.

And this does not contradict the statement "you shall not show them favor," for there the discussion is about bringing oneself to look at him intentionally.

To say, "How beautiful is this gentile," one is not permitted; whereas when he has already come before him unbidden,

He certainly must bless, in order to elevate the pleasantness of the sight, as in the deed of Rabbi Akiva with that noblewoman, of whom the sages said she was at the corner.

But at the outset, it is certainly forbidden, and this is self-sacrifice, like the matter of falling on one's face, as is known.

And behold, the general principle of the matter regarding elevation is that a person must contemplate everything that comes before him.

ראוי הנה לירד בשלשלאות של ברזל אלא שזכותו גרמה לו שהבטיח לו הקדוש ברוך הוא אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלה גם עלה (בראשית מ"ו:ד').

והנה תורתנו תורת אמת ואמונה שבדאי אסור לו לאדם להביא את עצמו לידי נסיון.

להכניס את עצמו במחשבה זרה בכדי להעלותה חס ושלום כי מי יודע אם יתגבר פארי ויתנשא.

או אולי ירד מטה מטה ולא יעמד בנסיון חס ושלום.

אם לא כשהנסיון נודמן לפניו בלא מתכונן בדאי מן ה' לנסותו.

וצריך להתגבר בכל כחו ומסירת נפשו על התשובה והוא העליה.

ונה הנה ענין של המלך עליו השלום שאמר ארבה ולא אאסור ומתחלה יצא במתכונן בכדי להעלות נצוצות קדושות ולא עמד בנסיון.

ונהו שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה לברך על בריות נאות ברוך ששכח לו בעולמו אפלו על גוי נאה.

ואינו סותר למאמר לא תחנם כי שם מירי להכניס עצמו לראותו במתכונן.

בכדי לומר כמה נאה גוי זה מה שאין כן בשפך בנודמן לפניו.

בדאי צריך לברך להעלות נאות הראיה כמעשה דרבי עקיבא בהיה מטרוניתא שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה קרו וזוית הוי.

ובתחלה ודאי אסור והוא מסירת נפש כענין נפילת אפים כידוע.

והנה כלל דמלתא מענין ההעלאה הוא שצריך האדם להתבונן על כל המזדמן לפניו.

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That within it as well is found a flow and portion from that very matter, whether good or bad.	שגם בו נמצא שטף מנהו מאותו הדבר אם טוב ואם רע.
And after kind emerges from kind and is awakened, therefore one must immediately bind himself to Him, blessed be He.	ואחר שיצא מין את מינו ונעור לכן צריך תכף להתקשר בו יתברך.
From the nature of the event that came before him, by placing it upon his heart that “the Lord is this, and there is nothing besides Him,”	מעין המאורע שגזדמן לפניו בשומו אל לבו הלא ה' זוא ואין דבר בלתי.
As the saying states, “His kingship rules over all,” for kingship rules over all and gives life to all.	כמאמר ומלכותו בכל משלה פי המלכות היא המושלת בכל ומחיה הכל.
And through attachment to Him, blessed be He, one ascends with the kingship to the foundation, which is attachment.	ועל ידי ההתקשרות בו יתברך מתעלה עם המלכות אל היסוד שהוא ההתקשרות.
And this is the ladder set upon the earth whose head reaches the heavens, to ascend, as is known, from “the righteous one, foundation of the world.”	והוא הסלם מצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה לעלות כידוע מצדיק יסוד עולם.
Therefore, Judah, when he saw all these causes that came before them, as they said, “What is this that God has done to us,”	לכן הגה יהודה כשראה כל אלה הסבות שגזדמנו לפניהם כאמרם איש אל אחיו מה זאת עשה אלהים לנו.
Judah understood that the matter was demanded of them for elevation.	הבין יהודה להיות הדבר מתבקש מאתם להתעלות.
Therefore, “Judah approached him” with his heart, even if he were a gentile or an Egyptian.	לכן ויגש אליו יהודה בלב אפלו אם היה גוי או מצרי.
For behold, the Lord had already arranged before them and caused it to occur that they were compelled to seek his compassion for their lives.	שהרי כבר זמן ה' לפניהם והקרה להיותם מכרחים לרחמי לבקש מאתו על נפשם.
And this is what he said, “Please, my lord,” for Judah was the kingship of the house of David.	וזהו שאמר בי אדני להיות יהודה מלכות בית דוד.
And “His kingship rules over all,” and everything is included within it.	ומלכותו בכל משלה והכל כלול בו.
And he approached in order to attach with him, to Him, blessed be He.	ויגש להתקשר עמו אליו יתברך.
And according to the inner truth, since he was Joseph, who is the foundation, and is bound with kingship.	ועל פי האמת להיותו יוסף הוא היסוד ומתקשר עם המלכות.
And this is “Please, my lord,” both according to the plain meaning and according to the inner truth.	וזהו בי אדני על פי פשוטו ועל פי אמת.

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[NOTE Summary:

The maamar opens with the verse “And Judah approached him and said, Please, my lord” and explains, based on the Or HaChaim, that the essence of approach is not physical movement but inner movement of the heart. True approach means emotional and spiritual alignment, where one heart opens to another. Judah’s intent was to awaken compassion within Joseph by genuinely drawing close in love, since love awakens love, as water reflects a face to a face.

This raises a difficulty. Judah believed Joseph to be an Egyptian, and the Torah forbids granting favor or affection to such people. Yet Judah nevertheless drew close in his heart. The resolution lies in understanding that there are moments when closeness is not an act of forbidden favor but a divinely mandated descent for the sake of elevation. Just as Jacob was destined to descend to Egypt to extract and elevate holy sparks embedded within it, Judah sensed that this encounter was not incidental but purposeful.

The maamar explains at length the doctrine of holy sparks. Every element of the physical world contains concealed divine vitality. Human beings descend into physical engagement in order to elevate that vitality. Food sustains the body materially, but the soul is nourished by the divine life-force hidden within it. The reason eating binds soul and body is precisely because the soul is reclaiming its own source from within the physical.

Yet the sparks themselves resist ascent. Each spark fears being further degraded if consumed or engaged by an unworthy person. This explains why the Midrash describes each blade of grass as being struck and commanded to grow. The spark is compelled upward despite its fear. If a person eats for selfish pleasure, the spark falls deeper into concealment and gives life to destructive forces. If one eats with awareness of God, the spark ascends.

The highest level is exemplified by Rav Hamnuna the Elder, whose eating immediately effected unification of all spiritual worlds, like a sacrifice upon the altar. A lower level person may not elevate immediately, but if the added vitality is later used for mitzvot or divine service, the spark is ultimately raised. Only when eating leads to indulgence and material coarseness does the spark suffer further descent.

This principle extends to prayer and inner struggle. When a person approaches God sincerely, foreign thoughts or emotions may suddenly arise. These are not random distractions but sparks seeking elevation, sensing that the person is in a state capable of uplifting them. One must not deliberately invite such challenges, as doing so constitutes a forbidden self-imposed trial. King Solomon erred when he intentionally entered danger claiming he would not stumble. Elevation can only occur when the challenge arises uninvited.

The same rule applies to beauty in the world. One may not seek out forbidden sights under the guise of spiritual elevation. However, when beauty presents itself unbidden, one must elevate it by recognizing it as an

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expression of divine creativity and blessing God for it. This distinction resolves the apparent contradiction between the prohibition of showing favor and the blessing over beautiful creations, even non-Jews.

The unifying principle is awareness. Every event, whether uplifting or disturbing, contains a divine message and vitality meant for that moment. A person must immediately bind the experience back to God, recognizing that there is nothing besides Him and that divine kingship animates all existence. Through this conscious attachment, the experience ascends through the spiritual structure, from kingship to foundation, symbolized by the ladder set on earth whose head reaches heaven.

Judah embodied this awareness. Seeing the cascade of events surrounding Benjamin, he recognized divine orchestration. He understood that elevation was being demanded of them. Therefore he approached Joseph with his heart, even believing him to be Egyptian, because God had placed Joseph before them as the channel for mercy. On the inner level, Judah represents kingship and Joseph represents foundation. Their meeting was not merely negotiation but cosmic unification. Thus Judah's words "Please, my lord" are true both on the surface and in their deepest mystical meaning.

Practical Takeaway:

A person should not seek spiritual challenges, temptations, or moral danger in the hope of transforming them. Growth does not come from manufactured trials but from responding correctly to what God places before us. When difficulty, distraction, or desire appears uninvited, the task is not panic or indulgence, but awareness, restraint, and conscious redirection toward God. Eating, praying, seeing, and engaging the world all become acts of elevation when done with intention and humility. The measure of spiritual maturity is not how much one can handle, but how faithfully one responds to what one is given.

Chassidic Story:

A well-known Chassid once asked his Rebbe why he felt sudden waves of improper thoughts precisely during moments of heartfelt prayer, whereas at other times his mind was calm. The Rebbe answered that when a fire is lit in a dark room, moths immediately rush toward it. The fire had not created the moths; it merely revealed them and gave them direction. The Rebbe explained that sincere prayer ignites a spiritual fire, and sparks wandering in darkness sense the opportunity to rise. The task of the worshipper is not to chase them away in anger nor to engage them, but to continue steadily toward God. In doing so, the sparks ascend on their own.

END NOTE]