

Pri Ha'eiz

Menachem Mendel of Horodaka

Parshas Vayeshev

The Talmud poses a question (Shabbat 23a): "Does the mitzvah pertain to the lighting [of the Chanukah candles] or to their placement?" and resolves it with a teaching from the Talmud: "If a deaf-mute, a mentally incapable person, or a minor lights the candles, it is of no consequence. Learn from this that the lighting constitutes the mitzvah."

The rabbi began by interpreting Rashi's commentary (Genesis 37:2) on *Vayeshev*: "Jacob sought to dwell in tranquility, but the turmoil of Joseph sprang upon him. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, said, 'Is it not enough for the righteous what is prepared for them in the World to Come?'" Similarly, Bereshit Rabbah (84:1) comments: "After Jacob observed the chiefs of Esau from above, he settled down. Hence, 'Jacob dwelled.'" See there for further explanation.

The idea is connected to the Mishnah's teaching (Pirkei Avot 4:16): "Prepare yourself in the hallway so that you may enter the banquet hall." In ethical works, it is noted that the Mishnah uses the phrase "so that you may enter" rather than the more assertive "and enter," reflecting worldly practice.

The analogy describes someone preparing outside before entering within, thus using the language "so that you may enter." This implies that the analogy is not entirely parallel to the deeper meaning. Even if one prepares themselves fully in this world, it is uncertain whether they will enter the World to Come. One should not see themselves as fully righteous or assured entry. Rather, all preparations made in this world should be viewed as tentative, with the hope of entry. Hence, the phrase "Prepare yourself in the hallway so that you may enter" suggests a level of uncertainty.

The rabbi offers an additional interpretation of "so that" (*kedei*). It reflects the concept that a person of Israel is truly "a part of God above" (Job 31:2). They have the potential to unite completely with God without interruption or barrier. While our thoughts and ways are not like God's (Isaiah 55:8), through Torah and mitzvot, one can devote their entire being—heart, soul, and might (Deuteronomy 6:5)—with yearning, desire, and attachment to God.

Bereshit Rabbah (80:6) teaches: "From the conduct of the wicked, you can learn about serving God." Regarding Shechem, the Torah states: "He was deeply attached to the daughter of Jacob" (Genesis 34:3), "His soul longed for your daughter" (34:8), "and he clung to Dinah" (34:3). His attachment was expressed through his soul and might, as it says: "Increase my bride-price and gifts greatly" (34:12). He even endangered his life for circumcision (34:19).

All of a person's emotions, whether physical or spiritual pain, stem from their connection and unity. For example, when a person stubs their toe, they feel it, the entire body functions as a single unit, and similarly, emotional pain arises from one's connection to a particular trait or feeling. However, when a person redirects all their being to another place with complete attachment and unity, they sever their prior connection—whether to the body or emotional traits. As a result, they no longer feel anything related to their initial connection, as it has been replaced by the new attachment. This enables them to devote themselves completely, without experiencing pain, to something that may bring harm or benefit.

When a person wholly immerses themselves in a sacred act—be it a mitzvah, Torah study, or prayer—with complete attachment, they shed their prior physical connections and no longer feel them at all. This is referred to in Zechariah 3:4: "Remove the filthy garments and clothe him with clean garments," symbolizing being enveloped in a spirit of holiness.

When one immerses themselves in the words of Torah and prayer, it is akin to the verse (Genesis 7:1): "Come into the ark, you and all your household," signifying entering the words with one's entire being. Similarly, when one embraces the mitzvot of Shabbat or Chanukah, dedicating all their energy to them and nullifying prior sensations, this creates complete unity with the Divine.

The garments of mitzvot envelop and surround a person, uniting them with the Divine without any separation. This is expressed in the verse (Ruth 3:9): "Spread your garment over your servant," where the garment symbolizes the means of unity. Since Torah and mitzvot are, in essence, Divine (as is well known), they enable a person to unite with God through their engagement, offering a taste of the World to Come.

Pri Ha'eiz

Menachem Mendel of Horodaka

This is reflected in the prayer of the Shabbat Musaf service: "Those who taste it merit life." It teaches that one cannot cling to the life and supreme light of the World to Come without first experiencing it in this world. This is unlike superficial Torah and mitzvah observance, performed mechanically without true attachment, which lacks this transformative connection.

And this is the meaning of the teaching: *"Prepare yourself in the hallway"*—in this world, through Torah and mitzvot—*"so that you may enter"* the banquet hall, which represents the World to Come. This implies engaging deeply, not performing mitzvot as a superficial routine or by rote.

To achieve complete unity with the Divine, one must transcend ordinary attributes, referred to as "garments," as it is written (Leviticus 6:3): *"He shall wear holy linen garments."* This suggests rising beyond human attributes through the letters and configurations of those very attributes.

To explain this concept, we begin with the teaching of our sages (Bereshit Rabbah 1:1): *"In the beginning, God created through the Torah, which is called 'the beginning.'"* Similarly, the Zohar states (Terumah 161a): *"Through the Torah, the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the world."* All this refers to the letters—creation and the world itself were fashioned through the letters, as described in *Sefer Yetzirah* (2:2): "Every creation exists through letters and their combinations." The Zohar elaborates on this (Vayetzei 148a) concerning the verse (Genesis 28:11): *"And he lay down in that place,"* explaining that the 22 letters of the Torah are foundational, as discussed in numerous sections of the Zohar (e.g., *Tikkunei Zohar* 132b).

These letters are not mere spoken letters; they exist even in thoughts that are not fixed or continuous, as described (Ezekiel 1:14): *"The living creatures run and return,"* constantly shifting forms. Thoughts are shaped and reshaped into different letters with each idea. Without letters, understanding would be impossible, as they constrain vitality into a graspable form. Without such constraint, comprehension of the infinite and boundless would remain unattainable.

After the initial constriction (tzimtzum), wisdom (*chochmah*) and understanding (*binah*) are revealed through the combinations of letters, manifesting as attributes like kindness, strength, and mercy. These represent love, awe, and connection, which draw down mercy and influence. This dynamic, which flows and returns, raises and lowers Divine energy and mercy.

The flow from above to below is called the "great vav," while the connection from below to above is called the "small vav" (Zohar, Acharei 74b). This represents Joseph the Righteous, who connects all the worlds, reaching the level of knowledge (*da'at*) that unites wisdom (*chochmah*) and understanding (*binah*), transcending and rising above the attributes entirely.

Behold, in every prayer and blessing, when a person begins to understand and seeks connection, their spiritual state aligns with qualities like kindness and compassion. Even if they are not focused on personal gain but rather on unifying the worlds, they cannot achieve true transformation unless their connection deepens beyond mere understanding. This requires the integration of the letters that emerge from the heart and enter the mind, where the flow of "the living beings ran and returned" (Ezekiel 1:14) occurs without pause. This emanates from the Infinite, which imbues vitality and order within limits—to sustain every living soul.

"For the Lord's portion is His people" (Deuteronomy 32:9), and therefore, "He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:8). This ensures that Israel can elevate all nations, representing foreign thoughts and external qualities, to a complete unity through the connection of letters with the vitality of "ran and returned."

When the nation attains a connection of letters to simple unity, it can achieve all forms of transformation. This is what the Sages (Sukkah 14a) meant when they said, "Why is the prayer of the righteous called 'pitchfork' (עֵתֶר)? Because it overturns the grain on the threshing floor." Similarly, the prayers of the righteous overturn the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy.

Pri Ha'eiz

Menachem Mendel of Horodaka

However, it is known that nothing external can ascend unless it first passes through the thoughts or attributes of the righteous while they are in a state of "smallness" (katnut). Therefore, "He began with smallness," which refers to the lower fear of God, arising from awe of His attributes. This ascent leads beyond attributes to simple unity through the connection of those very letters themselves.

Similarly, in prayer, one begins with qualities (middot): "Restore us," "Heal us," progressing beyond these qualities to a higher state through the letters. These letters condense the infinite without boundary or limitation, transcending understanding—something beyond human comprehension, as it is said, **"No eye has seen, O God, except for You"** (Isaiah 64:3). Then, transformation occurs according to His will, not due to the combination of changing elements, but rather by the letters returning to their root. However, the transformation of combinations can happen immediately when one transcends the qualities, for it connects to wisdom.

When the righteous person is not in a state of "smallness" (katnut), there is no capacity for ascent. Every ascent is called "from below to above," starting with the Shechinah, which represents awe and fear of God (Tikkunei Zohar, Introduction 6a), and culminating in the Infinite, which is simple unity, as mentioned earlier.

There are two types of ascent in this:

1. The ascent of the "smallness" itself,
2. The ascent of the Shechinah, which begins with awe and reaches unity with the Infinite, blessed be He—this is the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Presence.

For "this is the entirety of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13), and the entire world was created for this purpose (Berachot 6b): to elevate limitation into simplicity. This refers to the elevation of "smallness" through the letters to their root. Thus, one who insists on always being in a state of "greatness" (gadlut) is considered "brazen before Heaven" (Sanhedrin 105a), as if the world requires their existence specifically.

This is the meaning of what the Sages said (Shabbat 31a) regarding the gentile who came to convert before Shammai, asking to be taught the entire Torah while "standing on one foot." Some explain this as referring to "a single stance," meaning that he did not want to fall from greatness to smallness at all. Shammai, representing severity (gevurot) and limitation (tzimtzum), rejected him, as such an approach allows for no ascent. However, Hillel, representing kindness (chesed), accepted him and taught him, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend" (Shabbat 31a). Here, "your friend" refers to the Shechinah, which is called "your friend and the friend of your father, do not abandon" (Proverbs 27:10; Zohar Beshalach 55b). From smallness arises the elevation of the Shechinah. Without smallness and contraction, creation itself has no relevance, as is known. This is the meaning of "what is hateful to you," for you were created through contraction and smallness, as it is written, **"The world is built with kindness"** (Psalms 89:3), and it is certainly fitting to elevate it.

This is also the meaning of the verse: **"And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings"** (Genesis 37:1). Jacob observed all the chiefs of Esau, representing the seven nations, foreign thoughts, and external qualities, which signify smallness. Since Jacob did not desire to engage them in battle, but rather in peace and security, the verse states, "he dwelt"—conveying tranquility—in "the land of his father's sojournings," as explained in the Zohar (Vayeshev 180a) that this refers to a "land of fear from all sides" (Psalms 31:14). Jacob clung to the attribute of Isaac's fear, ensuring that war would not reach him at all.

The Sages also said (Bava Metzia 84a), **"The beauty of Jacob is a reflection of the beauty of Adam."** This means that Jacob and Moses were similar to Adam HaRishon (the first man) and were tasked with rectifying his sin. Consequently, Jacob was compelled to elevate the state of smallness. This is what is meant by the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 84:1): **"The trouble of Joseph leapt upon him,"** referring to Joseph the righteous and the interconnectedness of all worlds—a process that could not be achieved except through the starting point of smallness.

This is the meaning of the distinction in the verses (Psalms 33:18): **"The eye of God is on those who fear Him"**—a single eye, compared to (Psalms 34:16): **"The eyes of God are on the righteous"**—two eyes. This corresponds to

Pri Ha'eiz

Menachem Mendel of Horodaka

the statement (Psalms 91:11): **"For He will command His angels concerning you,"** referring to the two angels that accompany a person always—the good inclination and the evil inclination.

Behold, the righteous person (tzaddik) who unites all the worlds—from smallness (katnut) to greatness (gadlut) and simple unity—directs their gaze downward while their heart soars upward, transcending even the scope of their own perception. They do not reject smallness or the evil inclination with both hands. This is the meaning of **"the eyes of God"**—God's dual perspective. In contrast, someone who fears engaging in the struggles of spiritual battle and rejects the evil inclination entirely with both hands corresponds to **"the eye of God"** being upon those who fear Him.

It is possible to interpret this in relation to the Talmudic question: **"Does the act of kindling fulfill the mitzvah, or does placing [the lamp] fulfill the mitzvah?"** This can be understood as follows: "Kindling" represents the ascent of smallness to a higher level, where it illuminates and then shines back down below, creating transformation. "Placing" represents abstention from engaging in spiritual struggle altogether. The word **"mitzvah"** can also mean connection, as in "to join together" (Berakhot 6b).

The Talmud concludes its discussion by deriving from the case of **"a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor who kindled a lamp"** that **"kindling fulfills the mitzvah"**—for it is the act of unification. However, a deaf-mute, imbecile, or minor lacks the conscious understanding necessary for creating unification, and therefore their actions do not achieve the intended purpose.