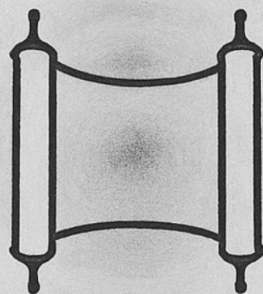


בס"ד

כתר שם טוב

Kesser Shem Tov

נ-נט Simanim



Dedicated To:

Anonymous

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The Baal Shem Tov Kesser Shem Tov Simanim נ-נט

Siman #נ

From the Baal Shem Tov: If one has already come to a test, meaning that he has entered and exited, he will no longer come to a test and will be able to remain in a state and level without descending. And this is what is meant by "I shall not die, but live," that he will not need to descend in order to elevate another.

מהבעש"ט: אם כבר בא לידי נסיון, דהינו דעייל ונפק, שוב אינו בא לידי נסיון ויוכל להיות עומד על מצב ומדרגה אחת שלא לירד. וזה שאמר לא אמות כי אחיה, שלא יצטרך לירד כדי להעלות זולתו.

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that life's tests are not punishments but stages of spiritual ascent. When a person has already entered and successfully exited a test—meaning they have faced challenge, confusion, or temptation and remained faithful—they reach a point where further descent is no longer necessary for growth. They have internalized the lesson of that struggle so completely that their soul no longer needs to fall to rise. This is the meaning of the verse "I shall not die, but live": death here represents spiritual descent or concealment, while life signifies continuous Divine connection. Such a person now lives with constancy, dwelling in a stable state of light and awareness.

Practical Takeaway

Every test you face is a classroom for your soul. The goal is not merely to survive it, but to graduate from it—to integrate its lesson so deeply that you no longer need to revisit that darkness again. When you pass a test fully, you create a new baseline of holiness that becomes your permanent home. Your soul no longer oscillates between highs and lows but learns to live in light continuously. **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE: Elevation of the Lower without Descending to Their Place

From the Baal Shem Tov: If a person has already come to a test once, meaning that he has "entered and exited"—that is, he entered safely and exited safely; in other words, despite the descent from his spiritual level that occurred at the time of the test, he withstood it properly and remained whole in his service until he returned and ascended to his level in holiness, thereby elevating with him to holiness those who were in the lower level he had been in—then from now on, he will no longer come to a test, and he will be able, from now on, to remain in one state and level permanently, staying at his lofty level in holiness without descending. He will not need to descend from his level even momentarily in order to elevate to holiness those who are in a lower level; rather, he will be able to elevate them while remaining in his place and level.

And this is what King David said and requested from the Holy One, Blessed be He: "I shall not die, but live." "*I shall not die*"—meaning, he will not need to descend from his spiritual level (since such a descent is called "death"), even if the reason for it is "*but live*"—in order to "revive" others, that is, to elevate another to holiness. Rather, he will be able to "revive them" and elevate them to holiness even without this descent. **END FN:]**

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Siman #נא

Even though these prohibit and those permit, this applies in the six extremities of Zeir Anpin. However, above, in Binah, which is called "Elokim Chaim" (the Living G-d), all is a singular unity. And this is what was said: "These and those are the words of the Living G-d."

אף על פי שאלו אוסרין ואלו מתירין, הינו ב' קצוות זעיר אנפין, אבל למעלה בבינה שנקראת אלקים חיים, הכל אחדות אחד. וזהו שאמרו "אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים"

And this is what was said: "These and those are the words of the Living G-d"—specifically "Elokim Chaim," which refers to the aspect of Binah.

וזהו שאמרו "אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים" – "אלקים חיים" דייקא, בחינת בינה

[NOTE Summary

This teaching reveals the inner harmony behind disagreement. When sages debate—some prohibiting and others permitting—it reflects differences within the six emotional attributes of Zeir Anpin, the realm where multiplicity and distinction exist. However, above that plane, in Binah—the “Living G-d” (Elokim Chaim)—all opposites merge into one unified truth. From the perspective of Binah, every position expresses a different ray of the same Divine wisdom. Thus, “these and those are the words of the Living G-d” is not poetic tolerance but a mystical reality: in the source of understanding, all divergent views emanate from one Divine mind.

Practical Takeaway

When encountering conflicting perspectives—whether in Torah study or personal relationships—remember that unity exists above division. Instead of fixating on who is right or wrong, look for the higher plane from which both truths flow. True understanding arises not from erasing differences but from perceiving their shared root in the Living G-d, where every path is part of one vast and living wisdom. **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE: At the Root of Things, the Extremes Unite

It is stated in the Gemara regarding the disputes between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, that after they had argued for a long time ("These say the law follows us, and those say the law follows us"), a Divine Voice went forth and said: ‘These and those are the words of the Living G-d.’

The explanation of the matter is that the division into two opinions—as expressed in the language of the Talmud: "Even though these prohibit and those permit"—applies specifically within the six extremities of Zeir Anpin. That is, the ten Sefirot are divided into *Mochin* (the three upper Sefirot) and *Middot*, which are also called *Zeir Anpin* (the six lower Sefirot, excluding Malchut, the last of the Sefirot). The division of Torah teachings into opposing viewpoints exists only in the realm of the Middot, where there is a separation into different lines that cannot dwell together—such as the line of Chesed (kindness) and the line of Gevurah (strictness), etc. This idea is hinted at in their number (six), which signifies division into different directions (*extremities*), whose totality is six—East, West, North, South, Above, and Below—known as the "six extremities" (Vav Ketzavot).

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However, above this level, in Binah, which is called “Elokim Chaim” (the Living G-d)—meaning, within the Sefirot that belong to the higher level of *Mochin*—this division does not exist. Instead, all is a singular unity—the different lines within the *Middot* merge and integrate into a single aspect. **END FN]**

Siman #נא

It is written in the Zohar, Sha'arei Heichalot, that prayers ascend one above another, and angels receive the prayers. There is an angel whose height is five hundred years, etc. (see there).

And it needs to be understood: Is not the Blessed Name of G-d filling all the earth with His glory, and is there no place devoid of Him? Wherever a person is, His glory is present. If so, why is it necessary that prayers be received by angels, who must carry them from palace to palace, etc.?

It can be said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, did this so that it may appear to a person that he is distant, and thus he will strive greatly to come closer. As the Baal Shem Tov of blessed memory gave the following parable before the blowing of the Shofar:

There was a wise and great king who, through an illusion, created walls, towers, and gates. He commanded that people approach him by passing through these gates and towers, and he placed treasures at each gate. Some would go as far as one gate, take riches, and return, while others would continue, until his dear son exerted himself greatly to go specifically to his father, the king. Then he saw that there were no barriers separating him from his father—for all had been an illusion.

The analogy is clear: The Holy One, Blessed be He, hides Himself in many garments and barriers. It is well known that His glory fills the entire earth, and every movement and thought comes from Him. Likewise, all angels, palaces—everything is created and brought into existence, as it were, from His essence, just as a snail's shell is from itself. There is no actual barrier separating man from G-d—and with this knowledge, all forces of iniquity are scattered.

כתב בזהר ששגרי היכלות, התפלה זה למעלה מזה, ומלאכים מקבלי התפלות. יש מלאך שקומתו ת"ק שנה וכו' יעוין שם.

ויש להבין, הרי השם יתברך מלא כל הארץ כבודו, לית אתר פנוי מיניה, ובמקום שאדם שם, כבודו יתברך מצוי. ואם כן, למה לי שיקבל התפלה על ידי 'המלאכים', שילכו מהיכל להיכל וכו'?

ויש לומר, דהקדוש ברוך הוא עשה זה כדי שיראה לו לאדם שהוא רחוק, וישתדל להתקרב מאד, כמו שאמר הבעל שם טוב ז"ל משל שאמר קדם תקיעת שופר:

שהיה מלך אחד חכם גדול, ועשה באחיות עינים חומות ומגדלים ושערים. וצוה שילכו אצלו דרך השערים והמגדלים, וצוה לפזר בכל שער ושער אוצרות המלך. ויש שהלך עד שער אחד, ולקח ממן וחזר, ויש כו', עד שבנו ידידו התאמץ מאד, שילך דןקא אל אביו המלך. אז ראה שאין שום מחיצה מפסיקה בינו לבין אביו, כי הכל היה אחיות עינים.

והנמשל מובן: דהקדוש ברוך הוא מסתתר בכמה לבושים ומחיצות. ובנידוע שהשם יתברך מלא כל הארץ כבודו, וכל תנועה ומחשבה הכל ממנו יתברך. כן כל המלאכים, ההיכלות, הכל נברא ונעשה, בכיכול, מעצמותו יתברך, בהדין קמצא דלבושיה מיניה וביה. ואין שום מחיצה מבדילה בין האדם ובינו יתברך בידיעה זאת, ועל ידי זה יתפרדו כל פועלי און.

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[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov explains the Zoharic image of angels lifting prayers as a deliberate Divine illusion. Though G-d fills all the earth and there is no place devoid of Him, He conceals His presence behind apparent layers—angels, palaces, and spiritual realms—so that man will yearn to draw near. This concealment is not distance but design: G-d's love hides itself so that the soul will awaken its longing to return. The parable of the king and his son illuminates this: the king creates imaginary barriers so his son will struggle to reach him. When the son finally arrives, he discovers there were never any walls at all. So too, all seeming separations—angels, worlds, barriers—are but illusions within the infinite oneness of G-d. When a person realizes this truth, all concealments dissolve, and he stands directly before the King.

Practical Takeaway

Every obstacle in divine service is a veil placed by G-d Himself to stir your deeper will. When you feel spiritually distant, remember that the distance is only an appearance—an invitation to uncover what is already within. Every prayer that feels like it must climb through heavens is, in truth, already before G-d. The more you push through what feels like concealment, the more you reveal that He was present with you all along.

Chassidic Story

Before the shofar blowing, the Baal Shem Tov once told this very parable to his disciples. When he reached the words “and then he saw that there were no barriers,” he wept deeply. His students later said that at that moment, they felt all illusions fall away—the walls of the world, the veils of intellect, the angels themselves—and they sensed that the Holy One was right there, beyond and within all. This experience became the foundation of their avodah on Rosh Hashanah: to pierce through all concealments and return directly to the infinite love of their Father, the King. **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE: The Concealment of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is an Illusion – Everything is from Him

It is written in the Zohar, listing the names of the Gates of the Heichalot of Prayer in the upper worlds (corresponding to the order of the parts of prayer), one above the other. And the angels that are present in these Heichalot receive the prayers in order to elevate them to the Holy One, Blessed Be He. Elsewhere in the Zohar, the upper angels are listed, one above the other, who elevate the requests of Israel higher and higher, until there is the highest angel of them all, whose height is the measure of a five-hundred-year journey, etc.—he is the one who brings the prayers and requests before the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Himself (see there).

And it needs to be understood: Why is there a need for these Heichalot and angels to elevate and bring the prayers to G-d? After all, “The whole earth is filled with His glory” (Isaiah 6:3), and “There is no place devoid of Him”—there is no space “empty” of Him. Wherever a person stands, there His glory is found. If so, why must prayers be received by angels and carried from palace to palace, etc., rather than being accepted directly by G-d Himself?! It can be explained that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, designed it this way so that it would appear to a person that he is extremely distant from G-d (to the point that, in order for his prayer to reach G-d,

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it must pass through many Heichalot and angels). This perceived distance motivates a person to strive and exert himself greatly to draw closer. However, once he truly draws near, he discovers that, in reality, there was never any distance or separation between him and G-d.

As the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, gave the following parable before the blowing of the Shofar: There was a wise and great king who, through an illusion, created walls, towers, and gates. He commanded that people approach him by passing through these gates and towers, and he placed treasures at each gate. Some went as far as one gate, took riches, and were satisfied, returning without reaching the king. Others continued further, but eventually, they too were content with what they had found and returned, never actually reaching the king himself.

However, his beloved son, whose sole desire was to reach the king himself, and for whom nothing else could serve as a substitute, exerted himself greatly to go directly to his father, the king. Then, he saw the truth—that there were no barriers at all separating him from his father. For in reality, all the walls and gates that seemed to block his way to the king were nothing more than an illusion.

And the analogy is clear: The Holy One, Blessed Be He, conceals Himself from man through various garments and barriers. However, it is known that, in truth, this is merely an illusion, for “the whole earth is filled with His glory” (Isaiah 6:3), and every movement and thought comes from Him, Blessed Be He.

Therefore, all these garments and barriers do not obstruct before Him at all, for He is present within everything. Likewise, all the angels and palaces—everything was created and brought into existence, as it were, from His very essence, just as “a snail whose shell is part of itself” (Zohar II, 48a). Thus, there is no actual barrier separating man from G-d when one possesses this awareness and recognition. And through this realization, “all workers of iniquity shall be scattered” (Psalms 92:10)—for indeed, all forms of concealment that obscure the light of holiness and Divine truth shall be nullified and removed, for “the whole earth is filled with His glory.”

END FN]

Siman #נב

In the name of the Ramban	בְּשֵׁם הַרַמְבַּ"ן
"And My soul shall not abhor you" Vayikra 26:11	וְלֹא תִגְעַל נַפְשִׁי אֶתְכֶם
to connect seeing	לְקַשֵּׁר רֵאיוֹן
and hearing	וּשְׁמִיעָה
and physical movement	וְהַלּוּךְ הַגִּשְׁמִי
in the spiritual	בְּרוּחָנִי
etc. (indicates continuation not shown here)	כו'

[NOTE Summary

The Ramban interprets the verse “And My soul shall not abhor you” (Vayikra 26:11) as referring to the deep harmony between the physical and the spiritual within man. “Seeing,” “hearing,” and “movement” are not merely bodily functions; they correspond to parallel powers within the soul. When a person aligns his physical

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senses and actions with spiritual awareness, every sense becomes a channel for Divine revelation. The body ceases to obstruct holiness and becomes a vessel through which G-d's presence can dwell. In this state, G-d's "soul" — His inner will and delight — does not abhor man, for man's very being reflects Divine unity.

Practical Takeaway

Holiness is not achieved by escaping the body but by sanctifying it. When your eyes see goodness, your ears hear truth, and your movements follow purpose, you transform the physical into the spiritual. Each action, thought, and sense can become an instrument of Divine connection. By living with this awareness, you draw G-d's presence into your world, fulfilling "And I will dwell among you, and My soul shall not abhor you."

END NOTE]

[FOOTNOTE: Unification of the Physical Senses in Their Spiritual Root

Said Rabbeinu in the name of the Ramban in his commentary on the Torah, in explanation of the language of the verse (spoken in the promise of reward for fulfilling the commandments) *"And I will place My dwelling among you, and My soul shall not abhor you"*

(There (in that place), the Ramban posed a difficulty on the interpretation of the verse according to its simple meaning, *"My spirit shall not abhor you"* (Rashi) — "And I do not know what the reason is for this — that the Holy One, blessed be He, would say that when we observe all the commandments and do His will, He will not abhor us with the revulsion of His soul,"

for behold, even when "we transgress His covenant and do abominable things," He said (below, [Leviticus] 26:44), *"Yet I have not despised them, nor abhorred them..."*

("And all the more so when we are doing His will... 'And My soul shall not abhor you' — why is this needed?" — *Kesones Pasim* there.)

And he answered:

"But the matter is a secret from the hidden [secrets] of the Torah.

He said that He will place His dwelling among us,

and the soul from which the dwelling comes [i.e., the Shechinah itself, as in the continuation of the Ramban's words there — from which the inspiration comes within us] shall not abhor us, like a vessel that is purged (נגעילין אותו) in boiling water."

"To destroy and consume — like the purging that destroys the forbidden substance inside the vessel." — *Kesones Pasim* there.)

— that a person must connect all his physical senses, sight, hearing, and bodily movement, to bind and unify them in the spiritual — in these matters as they are in spirituality, etc. For just as a person has a sense of physical sight, so too there exists above a spiritual level of "sight," and so with the rest of the physical senses found in a person; and when a person directs himself to cleave to and unify his physical senses with these spiritual aspects, then is fulfilled in him *"And I will place My dwelling among you,"* that the Shechinah dwells and shines within all his physical matters — and then he is assured that the Shechinah (*"My soul"*) will not annihilate or nullify (*"abhor"*) all that is done with these physical senses:

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For there is sight, speech, hearing, movement, and touch, etc., and when one unifies these above — to know that they are the limbs of the Shechinah — then he elevates all the levels; for example, all the speech he spoke that entire day — he should have intention to elevate it through the words of Torah and prayer of that day; and likewise the sight, hearing, and movement — he should have intention to elevate and connect the physical with the spiritual. (*Kesones Pasim* there.)

And in the Ba'al Shem Tov on the Torah, Parshas Bechukosai, note 13, he added to this: “And the explanation of this matter appears — that just as the Ba'al Shem Tov, of blessed memory, revealed, that through the words of Torah and prayer, one can elevate idle words along with them — so too, through a sight connected to a mitzvah, one should intend to elevate whatever was damaged through vision; and likewise, through hearing words of Torah, holiness, and mitzvah, he should intend to elevate all the hearing of idle things that he heard; and likewise, through movement for a mitzvah, he should intend to elevate all that he damaged in his movement to places not connected with a mitzvah.”

And see further in Toldos Yaakov Yosef, at the end, in the name of our teacher: “All lashon hara (evil speech) is through the articulation and speech of the 22 letters of the Torah... therefore, when one speaks idle words and then learns using the 22 letters, then he elevates the letters of the idle words upward.”

And see also at length in Ohr HaGanuz (*Arvei Nachal*) on Parshas Vayakhel and Parshas Behaaloscha:

END FN]

Siman נג

It is explained, according to the intention of the Arizal, the concept of refining the holy sparks that fell when the Holy One, blessed be He, was building worlds and destroying them,

and a person must elevate and refine them — from inanimate to plant, animal, and human — to extract the holy spark from within the shell,

and this is the ultimate purpose of a Jewish person's service in Torah and mitzvos and the intention during eating, as explained in each place.

And it is known that every spark within inanimate and plant life, etc., contains a complete form — 248 limbs and 365 sinews —

מבאר בכונת האר"י זלה"ה ענין פרורי נצוצות הקדושות שנפלו בעת שהיה הקדוש ברוך הוא בונה עולמות ומחריבן

וצריך האדם להעלות ולברר מדומם לצומם חי מדבר, לברר הניצוץ הקדוש שבתוך הקלפה

זה תכלית עבודת איש ישראל בתורה ומצות וכוונת אכילה, במבאר כל אחד במקומו

ונודע כי כל ניצוץ שבתוך דומם וצומם כו' יש בו קומה שלמה מן רמ"ח איברים ושס"ה גידים

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and when it is inside the inanimate or plant, it is as if in a prison, unable to stretch its hands or feet or to speak — only its head on its knees and its innards;

וְכִשְׁהוּא בְּתוֹךְ הַדּוֹמֵם וְהַנּוֹמֵם הוּא בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִין,
שְׂאִינוּ יָכוֹל לִפְשֹׁט יָדָיו וְרַגְלָיו וּלְדַבֵּר כִּי אִם רֹאשׁוֹ
עַל בְּרָכָיו וְקֶרֶבוֹ

and one who is able, through the goodness of his thoughts, to elevate the holy spark from plant to animal to speaker, he brings it to freedom — and there is no redemption of captives greater than this,

וְמִי שְׂיָכוֹל בְּטוֹב מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ לְהַעֲלוֹת הַנִּיצוֹץ הַקָּדוֹשׁ
מִצֹּמֶמֶת לְחַי מַדְבָּר, הוּא מוֹצִיאָו לְחֵירוּת, וְאִין לֹךְ
פְּדִיּוֹן שְׁבוּיִם גָּדוֹל מִזֶּה

as the Baal Shem Tov of blessed memory said — especially if it is the king's son in prison, and one person, through his efforts, brings him out from the prison from bondage to freedom, his reward is doubled and redoubled.

כְּמוֹ שְׁאָמַר הַבַּעַל שֵׁם טוֹב ז"ל, וּבִפְרָט אִם הוּא בֶן
הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִין וּבֶאֱדָם אֶחָד בְּהַשְׁתַּדְּלוּתוֹ
וְהוֹצִיאָו מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִין מֵעֲבָדוּת לְחֵירוּת, עֲשָׂכְרוּ
כַּפּוֹל וּמִכְפָּל

However, all of this is according to the judgment and supreme justice — for He has set an end to the darkness: until when will it remain in prison, when will it merit to go free, and by whose hand will the release to freedom come.

אֲמָנָם כָּל זֶה הוּא בְּדִין וּמִשְׁפָּט עֲלִיוֹן, אֲשֶׁר קִץ שֶׁם
לְחֹשֶׁךְ עַד מָתִי יִהְיֶה בְּבֵית הָאֲסוּרִין וְאֵימָתִי יִזְכֶּה
לְצֵאת חֲפָזִי וְעַל יְדֵי מִי יִהְיֶה הַנִּצְיָאָה לְחֵירוּת

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov, following the teachings of the Arizal, unveils the profound purpose of man's service: to redeem the Divine sparks trapped within the material world. Before our world, G-d created and destroyed other realms—each shattering left fragments of holiness concealed within matter. Every piece of food, object, or event contains a hidden soul, a spark yearning for release. When a Jew engages the physical world with awareness and intention—whether in Torah, mitzvos, or even while eating—he elevates those sparks through his thoughts, words, and deeds. Each spark possesses a full spiritual structure, but when bound within the inanimate or plant world, it is like a soul imprisoned—its limbs folded, its voice silent. When one uplifts such a spark, he performs an act of supreme redemption, freeing a royal captive. The Baal Shem Tov emphasizes that this is the highest form of salvation—especially when the imprisoned spark is the “king's son,” a lofty soul fallen into material confinement. Yet, all this follows Divine order: each spark has its destined time and redeemer, for G-d “has set an end to the darkness.”

Practical Takeaway

Every encounter in life—every meal, every moment, every task—is an opportunity for redemption. When you engage the world with holiness and mindfulness, you transform ordinary acts into Divine service. Eating with gratitude, speaking truth, and acting kindly are not small deeds—they liberate the hidden sparks of G-dliness within creation. Remember that your actions may be the very key chosen from Heaven to free a royal soul from its prison. Approach daily life with this awareness, and every breath becomes an act of cosmic repair and light.

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Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov once stopped at an inn and insisted on eating a simple peasant's coarse bread and soup. His disciples were puzzled—why would their holy master, who lived with spiritual refinement, partake of such crude food? The Baal Shem Tov smiled and said, “In this bread lies a spark that has waited since the six days of Creation for its redemption. It has longed for a Jew to eat it with awareness of its Maker.” He closed his eyes, recited the blessing with deep kavana, and tears flowed down his face. Afterward, he said softly, “The king's son has been freed.” **END NOTE]**

[NOTE: “Redemption of captives” – The work of refining sparks

It is explained, according to the intention of the Arizal, the matter of refining the holy sparks that fell at the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, was “building worlds and destroying them.”

— That is: It is stated in the Midrash that before the creation of this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, was “creating worlds and destroying them.”

And it is explained in the writings of the Arizal that in the beginning, Hashem created a spiritual world (called the World of Tohu), in which a very great light shone —

so much so that the “vessels” of that world — meaning, its definitions and structural framework — could not contain the light.

As a result, there occurred the “shattering of the vessels” (“and destroying them”), and from this, supernal sparks fell lower and lower into our physical world.

And now, these sparks are specifically hidden within the lowest physical creations (even to the level of the inanimate, whose vitality is extremely limited).

And a person must elevate them from their low place and refine them — that is, to separate the good from the bad — the holy spark from the klipah that covers it.

(This is done by using those physical things for the sake of Heaven, with specific intention to return those sparks to their supernal source).

Through this, the sparks ascend from level to level — from inanimate to plant–animal–speaker.

For example, a spark that was in the earth (which is inanimate) —

must ascend three levels: First, it rises from the inanimate to the plant, when something grows from the ground and the spark becomes clothed within the plant.

Then, it is eaten by animals that eat grass, and then it rises to the level of animal.

After that, humans slaughter and eat those animals, and the sparks become part of the person's own limbs — and then it is rectified, for there it is refined through the person's eating. **END FN:]**

Siman #נ

From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory: If a person wants to praise, let him praise the Holy One, blessed be He, and if he wants to denigrate, let him denigrate himself.

מהבעש"ט זלה"ה. אם אדם רוצה לשבח ישבח את
הקדוש ברוך הוא
ואם רוצה לגנות יגנה את עצמו

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For one who praises acknowledges the Oneness and honors it,
whereas one who disgraces and denigrates has separated from
the Oneness.

נְשִׁמָּה שֶׁבֶּת מוֹדָה בְּאַחַדוּת וּמְכַבֵּד

מִה נְשִׁאִין בֶּן הַמִּבְזָה וּמַגְנֵה לְשׁוֹפָרֵד מִהֶאֱחָדוּת

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that both speech and attitude reveal a person's relationship to Divine Oneness. When a person praises, he should direct that praise only toward G-d, for every beauty, wisdom, or success in creation is but a reflection of the Infinite. By doing so, he strengthens his awareness of unity — that there is no true source of goodness apart from Him. But if one feels the urge to criticize or denigrate, he should turn that inward — humbling his own ego — rather than directing negativity outward. To belittle others or the world is to forget that all existence flows from one Divine source. In contrast, to humble oneself while honoring G-d is to live within the awareness of Oneness.

Practical Takeaway

Guard your words as instruments of unity. When you speak in praise, let your admiration become a bridge back to G-d, the source of all light. When you find fault, let that recognition become an opportunity for humility and self-refinement. Every word of praise can lift creation higher; every word of self-correction can bring you closer to its Source. Living this way transforms all speech into a form of worship — words that affirm that “there is none else besides Him.” **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE:

Through recognition of the Oneness of God — one will praise God and criticize himself

From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory:

If a person wants to praise someone — let him praise the Holy One, blessed be He, and attribute to Him the praise he finds in others. And if he wants to criticize someone (when he sees a fault in him) — let him attribute that fault to himself, for the very fact that he sees a blemish in his fellow indicates a flaw within himself — therefore, let him denigrate himself.

And we may add in explanation of the matter: When a person attributes another's praise to the praise of the Creator, he himself is also found to be praiseworthy and honored, because one who praises others in this way — by attributing the praise to the Holy One, blessed be He, from Whom they were created — is, by that very act, acknowledging the Oneness, recognizing that the source of this praise is the One God, Creator of all beings, before Whom all of creation is a single unified existence. And such a person thereby honors — and as a result, he himself is also honored through this praise, for through the Oneness in creation, there is found in him also something of the praise of the other.

This is not the case with one who disgraces and demeans another, for he thereby separates himself from the Oneness — denying that all beings relate to the One God, and

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therefore assumes it is possible to denigrate a certain being that is "separate" from him. But in truth, he is disgracing and criticizing himself, for from the perspective of the unity within creation, the disgrace found in another is also found within him.

“When one sees something disgraceful in his fellow...”

“When one sees something disgraceful in his fellow, he should consider that everything is from Hashem, blessed be He, for his benefit — that he should look inward to correct and improve his own deeds... When he sees something disgraceful in his fellow, he should understand with his mind that there is in him a trace of the same, etc.

(See below, sections 89, 116, 363; *Me'or Einayim*, Parshas Korach [in the name of our teacher]).

If so, every criticism he wants to level against his fellow should be attributed to himself, as stated. And through this, he will fulfill “*And you shall love your fellow as yourself*” — which is the fundamental principle of the entire Torah.” (*Toldos Yaakov Yosef*, there).

In Ben Porat Yosef here:

“To understand this... [one must first] explain the Mishnah (Avos 4:1): ‘Who is honored? One who honors others,’ as it says [about the Holy One, blessed be He], ‘For those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who scorn Me shall be despised (קלון).’ This is difficult: What is the connection between this and the honor of the Holy One, blessed be He?

[In other words,] what is the lesson about one who “honors others,” from the fact that God honors those who honor Him, and despises those who scorn Him? And it appears to me:

Because of the principle of Oneness, a flaw in one’s fellow contains in it a trace of that same flaw within oneself, even if he denigrates that other person from the perspective that he is a created being — one who denigrates any creation is, as it were, denigrating the Artisan who made him. As in the story of Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar (*Taanis 20a–b), who encountered a man who was ugly, and said to him, “How ugly is that man!” And the man replied, “Go and say to the Craftsman Who made me: How ugly is this vessel You have made!” etc.

And with this we can understand the phrase, “*Whoever honors the creations...*”

— *creations*, specifically — meaning, he honors them because they are creations, beings created by Him, blessed be He. This shows about himself that he is honored, through the lens of Oneness. Whereas one who denigrates any creation is, as it were, called among the “scorners” (בזוי), and he thereby touches the honor of the Holy One, blessed be He, and not only that — he shows about himself that he is lowly and despised, for from the perspective of Oneness, a trace of that disgrace is also in him. And this is what it means, “*And those who scorn Me shall be despised*” — understand this well...

And with this, the elegant language of my teacher, of blessed memory, is understood:

If one praises any created being — then he is praising the Holy One, blessed be He, Who created this honorable creature.

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And if one denigrates any created being — aside from insulting the Creator, blessed be He, he is only denigrating himself, and all fits perfectly.” **END FN:]**

Siman #נה

From the Baal Shem Tov: One who performs a great mitzvah, or studies much Torah, and prays with concentration, must not bring into his heart any sense of pride that he has done this. Rather, it is the attribute of *Malchus*, which is called “Ani” (I) from the Name *Adnai*, that has done it.

מהבבש"ט. העושה מצוה גדולה, או למד תורה הרבה ומתפלל בכונה, לא יכניס בלבבו שום התפארות שהוא עשה זאת, כי אם מלכות שנקראת אני מן אדנ"י היא עשתה זאת.

However, if he prides himself and says that he alone has done it, he causes—Heaven forbid—that the letter Yud be removed from the word *Ani*, leaving only *An* (אן).

מה שאין בן אם מתפאר לומר שהוא בעצמו עשה זה, אז גורם חס ושלום שנסתלק יו"ד מאני ונשאַר אן.

This is what is meant by the saying: “From where (מאין) do you come, and to where (ולאן) are you going?” Meaning: when a person considers himself as *ayin* (nothingness), then he has come closer to the Blessed One.

שנהו מה שאמרו מאין באת ולאן אתה הולך וכו', רוצה לומר באשר חושב את עצמו לאין, באת בהתקרבות להשם יתברך.

But if he boasts that he is the one who acts, this is called “going”—that he goes farther from the Blessed One; then the Yud departs and only *An* remains. This is the meaning of “And to where are you going.” Understand this well.

מה שאין בן במתפאר שהוא העושה, וזה נקרא הולך ומתרחק מהשם יתברך, אז מסתלק יו"ד ונשאַר אן. וזהו ולאן אתה הולך, והבן.

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov reveals that spiritual pride is the subtlest form of separation from G-d. When a person performs a great mitzvah, studies Torah deeply, or prays with devotion, he must recognize that the strength and inspiration to do so are not his own. It is the Divine attribute of *Malchus*—the “Ani” (I) of *Adnai*—acting through him. The moment he thinks, “I did this,” he removes the Divine *Yud* (which signifies G-dliness) from *Ani*, leaving only *An*, a self cut off from its Source. This is the meaning of “From where (*me'ayin*) do you come and to where (*le'an*) are you going?” When a person sees himself as *ayin*—nothingness before G-d—he draws closer to Him. But when he glorifies his own efforts, he walks away, leaving only the hollow shell of self.

Practical Takeaway

True humility is not denying your greatness—it’s knowing that your greatness is not your own. Every act of holiness, every word of prayer, every moment of inspiration is G-d breathing through you. The more you attribute your achievements to Him, the more you preserve the Divine *Yud* within your “Ani.” Live as a channel, not as a source, and your deeds will carry infinite blessing.

Chassidic Story

Once, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov came to him glowing with joy, saying, “Rebbe, today my prayers soared to the highest heavens.” The Baal Shem Tov smiled and replied, “Then they will not reach there again—until

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you forget that they did.” The student understood: the moment he took pride in his success, the *Yud* left his *Ani*. He wept, returning to prayer in humility. The Baal Shem Tov later said, “Now his words pierce the heavens again, for they are not his—they are G-d’s.” **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE:

One who takes pride in his spiritual service distances and separates himself from G-dliness.

From the Baal Shem Tov:

One who performs a great mitzvah, or studies much Torah, or prays with concentration, should not allow into his heart any sense of pride that he has done this. Rather, he should know and remember that the attribute of *Malchus*—the final of the ten Sefiros, which is the Divine power operating within creation—called “Ani” (I) from the Name “Adnai” (meaning that the word “Ani,” as used in Scripture, such as in the verse “I cause death and bring to life,” refers to His attribute of Kingship, which corresponds to the Name Adnai, and “Ani” means “Adnai” without the letter Dalet)—it is *She* who has done this.

However, if one prides himself and says that he alone has done it, he thereby causes, Heaven forbid, that the Yud be removed from “Ani.” That is, the Divine light within *Malchus*, symbolized by the letter Yud, departs—for since the person fails to recognize that his action is enabled only by the Divine power within him, he separates, as it were, the act from its Divine source. What remains is “An,” which signifies emptiness and lack. Thus, the person forfeits the Divine illumination that would have accompanied his mitzvah, Torah study, or prayer with devotion.

This is what is meant by the teaching: “From where (*me’ayin*) do you come and to where (*le’an*) are you going?”—meaning: precisely when a person regards himself as *ayin* (nothingness) and knows that his actions are not accomplished by his own power, then “you have come”—that is, you are in a state of coming close and drawing near to the Blessed One.

But when he takes pride and says that he is the one who acts, this is called “going,” for he goes farther and farther from the Blessed One. Then the Yud departs, and only “An” remains. And this is the meaning of “And to where (*le’an*) are you going”, that when all you have is “An,” without the Yud that signifies the Divine connection, then “you are going,” meaning you are moving away from G-d. And understand this well.

END FN]

Siman #נ

From the Baal Shem Tov: For in the place where a person’s thought dwells, there he is entirely.

מהבעש"ט. כי במקום שאדם חושב במקושרה שם
הוא כלו.

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that a person’s essence follows his thoughts. Wherever one’s mind is directed, there his being truly resides. Thought is not a passive act—it is the soul’s movement, the bridge between the

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inner world and reality. When a person's mind is immersed in holiness, he is spiritually present in that holiness. But when his thoughts wander toward emptiness or impurity, his soul is drawn there as well. A person's inner geography is determined not by where he stands, but by what he contemplates.

Practical Takeaway

Guard your thoughts as you would your actions, for they determine where your soul dwells. Even while living in a physical place, your consciousness can abide in a higher world through pure and G-dly contemplation. Wherever your thoughts linger, that becomes your true dwelling. Train your mind to rest in goodness, gratitude, Torah, and awe—and you will find that your very being rises to dwell before the Divine. **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE

A person is entirely in the place of his thought.

From the Baal Shem Tov:

Our master said that in the place where a person's thought resides—meaning, when a person's thought and will are directed toward a certain place (whether physical or, all the more so, spiritual)—then truly there he is found, even if in actuality he is located elsewhere. **END FN]**

Siman #נז

From the Baal Shem Tov: “And I will turn my feet toward Your testimonies” — this, explained the Arizal, refers to the idea of elevating one's steps, meaning to direct and return them from material pursuits to the path of the Divine testimonies.

מבעש"ט. ואשיבה רגלי אל עדתך, פרוש הקראל

And here too, it is likewise: “If you restrain your foot because of the Shabbos” — that is, if you withhold your feet from the bustle and distractions of this world,

והקא נמי כך אם תשיב משבת רגלך, הקראל נשל
עולם הזה,

then “I will feed you the inheritance of Yaakov your father” — meaning that through this withdrawal from worldly agitation, you merit to be nourished from the inner holiness of Yaakov's portion.

אז והאכלתך נחלת יעקב אביך

Likewise, “And Yaakov lifted up his feet” — this too refers to the same matter, that he lifted himself from physicality to spirituality. Understand this.

וכן וישא יעקב את רגליו גם כן הקראל, שניצא
מגשמיית לרוחניות, והבן

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov reveals that “And I will turn my feet toward Your testimonies” expresses a movement of the soul from the physical to the spiritual. The “feet” symbolize man's outer actions and worldly pursuits. To “turn the feet” means to redirect one's external energy—what drives and carries him—away from the noise of

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this world toward Divine purpose. The Baal Shem Tov parallels this with “If you restrain your foot because of the Shabbos”: by ceasing the rush and entanglement of mundane life, one ascends to a higher inheritance—the spiritual delight symbolized by “the heritage of Yaakov.” Likewise, when it says “And Yaakov lifted up his feet,” it signifies his elevation from material attachment to a state of spiritual vitality. Thus, every act of turning inward, of sanctifying the ordinary, is an ascent of the soul from motion in the world to movement toward G-d.

Practical Takeaway

Your “feet”—your actions and pursuits—carry your soul through the world. Where they walk depends on the intention of your heart. When you pause from the endless motion of habit and choose to act with awareness of G-d, you transform motion itself into devotion. Shabbos is the model: to step back from worldly busyness so that every future step is aligned with holiness. Every moment of restraint, focus, or mindful redirection is your own act of “lifting the feet,” rising from the physical to the spiritual.

Chassidic Story

It is told that once, before Shabbos, the Baal Shem Tov walked with his disciples through the forest. As the sun set, they hurried to reach town before nightfall, but the Baal Shem Tov suddenly stopped. “Why do you run?” he asked. “If our feet hurry without our hearts, where are we truly going?” He stood still, closed his eyes, and began to sing softly the verse, “And Yaakov lifted up his feet.” The disciples later said that at that moment they felt their exhaustion fade, their steps lightened, and their movement became prayer itself. Through his stillness, the Baal Shem Tov taught them how to lift their feet—to let every journey begin not with motion, but with the turning of the heart. **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE

The Path to Boundless Spiritual Delight — Removing the Habits of This World

From the Baal Shem Tov:

It is written, “And I will turn my feet toward Your testimonies.” The term “your feet” (*raglecha*) is derived from the word *hergel* (habit). This means: I will return and turn away from the habits—the material matters in which I was immersed and accustomed—to “Your testimonies” and Your commandments.

And so it is likewise here, in the verse, “If you restrain your foot because of the Shabbos.” Here too, “your foot” refers to the *hergel*, the worldly habits and physical involvements in which a person is accustomed and entrenched. Thus, “If you restrain your foot because of the Shabbos” means: if you turn away and withdraw from worldly habits toward “Shabbos,” that is, toward spirituality—then the promise of the continuation of the verse will be fulfilled in you: “Then you shall delight in Hashem, and I will feed you the inheritance of Yaakov your father.”

That is, you will experience “a heritage without boundaries”—unlimited spiritual delight.

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Similarly, the phrase “And Yaakov lifted up his feet” can also be interpreted this way: “his feet” refers again to the worldly *hergel*, the habitual material state; thus, “And Yaakov lifted up his feet” means that he raised and elevated himself above this habit—that he departed from physicality to spirituality.

For this reason, it was Yaakov in particular who merited “the inheritance without boundaries,” as explained above. And understand this. **END FN]**

Siman #נח

From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory: Those two who would rejoice—the *trei badchei* (jesters)—they would unify all matters of the physical world by connecting them to the spiritual.

מבעש"ט ז"ל. הנהו תרי בְּדָחִי, שְׁהִיוּ מִיְחָדִים כָּל
עֲנִינֵי הַגִּשְׁמִי לְמִשְׁרֹ בְּרוּחָנִי

Except for one who was in sadness—it was not possible to bring him to oneness except by first gladdening him, and then uniting him (with holiness), as is known.

זולת מי שְׁהִיָּה בְּעֻצְבוֹת לֹא הִיָּה אֶפְשָׁר לִיְחָדוֹ כִּי אִם
עַל יְדֵי שְׁהִיוּ מְבֻדָּחוֹ תְּחִלָּה וְכוּ'

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that joy has the power to unite the physical and the spiritual. He recalls the *trei badchei*—two joyous souls who used humor and lightheartedness to elevate the mundane. Their laughter was not trivial; it was holy, a tool to dissolve separation between the material world and its Divine root. Through joy, even physical matters became vessels of holiness. But when a person was trapped in sadness, this unity could not be achieved. Only by first bringing him to joy could his heart open to connection with G-d.

Practical Takeaway

Sadness divides; joy unites. When you approach life with lightness and gratitude, you draw holiness even into simple, physical moments. True joy is not distraction—it is a bridge that links the body to the soul, the earth to the heavens. If you or someone around you feels distant or heavy, find the spark of laughter that restores wholeness. In joy, everything can become one with the Divine. **END NOTE]**

[FOOTNOTE

Connecting to Spirituality Through Joy

From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory:

In the words of our Sages, we find mention of “*Hanehu trei badchei*”—two jesters—who merited to be called “sons of the World to Come,” because they would bring joy and laughter to people who were sunk in sadness.

The deeper meaning is that their holy service consisted of uniting all aspects of the physical to connect them with the spiritual. By engaging with people in their occupations and in their mundane affairs, they were able to link and elevate those matters to their higher, spiritual root.

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Except for one who was in sadness—for such a person, being in a state of spiritual “smallness,” could not be joined and connected entirely, together with all his physical matters, to spirituality. Only by first gladdening him could this be accomplished, for joy opens a person’s heart and draws him out from *katnus* (narrowness and constriction) to *gadlus* (expanded consciousness).

Then, once joy was awakened, even that person could elevate his dealings and worldly matters to their Divine source. And through this sacred work, they—the *trei badchei*—merited to be “sons of the World to Come.”

END FN]

Siman #נט

Those who “kiss the earth and the heavens” — meaning, who bind and connect physical action with the spiritual — through this, a union of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah is accomplished.

דְּנִשְׁקֵי אֶרֶץ וְרִקִּיעַ, לְקַשֵּׁר וּלְחַבֵּר מַעֲשֵׂה הַגִּשְׁמִי
בְּרוּחֵנִי, עַל יְדֵי זֶה נַעֲשֶׂה יְחִוּד קוֹדֶשׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא
וּשְׂכִינְתִּיהָ.

[NOTE Summary

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that the righteous are those who “kiss the earth and the heavens.” This means they live in both realms at once—bringing the physical and the spiritual into union. When a person performs a physical act but infuses it with spiritual intention, his deed becomes a bridge between heaven and earth. This “kiss” is not poetic—it is the very act of uniting *Kudsha Brich Hu* (the transcendent Divine) with the *Shechinah* (the indwelling presence of G-d). The Baal Shem Tov reveals that holiness is not found in leaving the world behind, but in transforming the world itself into a vessel for the Infinite.

Practical Takeaway

Every action you do can become a meeting point between heaven and earth. Eating, speaking, working, helping another—when done with awareness of G-d, each becomes a sacred act of connection. Do not seek G-d only in lofty meditation or study; seek Him in your footsteps, in your breath, in the simple world around you. When the physical and spiritual touch through your intention, you bring harmony to creation and unity to the Divine.

Chassidic Story

It is told that the Baal Shem Tov once bent down to pick up a small stone from the road, turning it gently in his hand. “Do you see?” he said to his disciples, “this too waits for its elevation.” He then placed the stone on a nearby wall and whispered a blessing. His students were puzzled. The Baal Shem Tov smiled: “When we raise the earth to heaven and bring heaven down to earth, every being finds its place. That is a kiss of creation.”

END NOTE]

[FOOTNOTE:

Uniting Heaven and Earth — Deed and Intention

We find in the Gemara that there is a certain place where “the earth and the heavens kiss.”

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The deeper meaning is that this image conveys a fundamental principle in serving G-d: a person must bind and join the physical act with its spiritual intention—connecting the deed to the thought and inner purpose within it. In this way, the physical act (the “earth”) becomes entirely joined and unified with its spiritual root (the “heaven”).

Through this, a “union of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah” is brought about—meaning that when a person, through his service, fulfills this joining of “the earth and the heavens,” connecting the lower, physical aspect with the higher, spiritual aspect, he effects a “unification” and oneness between the Holy One, blessed be He (Who is exalted beyond the worlds) and the *Shechinah* (the Divine light that descends and dwells within the worlds). **END FN]**