

The Baal Shem Tov

Kesser Shem Tov

Siman 10-19

Siman #10

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, is called "man," as He is a "man of war," and Israel is referred to as "woman." This is what is meant by the phrase, "a woman is acquired by her husband," so that they are called, so to speak, "His wife." This occurs through three means:

Through money—representing the aspect of loving-kindness: the "days of kindness" during which the Holy One, Blessed Be He, assists a person with His great kindness at the beginning. This causes the person to long for, desire, and become enflamed with passion for His Torah and service, blessed be He. This is referred to as the "first greatness."

[NOTE: "*With silver*" (**b'kesef**)—derived from the words **kisufim** (longing) and **cheshek** (desire)—refers to the type of connection characterized by **chesed** (kindness). This occurs during the "days of kindness," a period when the Holy One, Blessed Be He, assists a person in their service of God with His great kindness, even though the person has not earned it through their own effort and labor. This period comes at the beginning, before the person toils on their own to draw closer to God. As a result of this illumination of kindness, the person feels intense longing, desire, and enthusiasm in their study of Torah and their service of God, blessed be He. This is called the "first greatness" (**gadlut rishon**)—a period of spiritual greatness and elevation, which constitutes the first stage in a person's service of God. END NOTE]

Then this state is withdrawn, and it is called the "days of smallness." Even when the person no longer feels longing or desire, they must nonetheless, out of necessity, attach themselves to the "contract"—**the letters written in the book, referred to as a "contract,"** whether in the letters of the Torah during study or in prayer. As I received from my teacher, the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, that there is a special practice (segulah) etc., until afterward they return to delight in Him through the restoration of intellectual illumination (mohin) in Torah and prayer.

[NOTE: After this, however, this illumination of kindness is withdrawn. This cessation of divine assistance is referred to as the "days of smallness" (**yemei hakatnut**)—a period of spiritual diminishment and descent, during which a person feels distant from divinity. During this time, even though the person does not feel longing, desire, or internal enthusiasm in their service of God, nevertheless, out of necessity, they must still attach themselves to the "contract" (**shtar**), which are the letters written in the book, called a "contract." Whether it be in the letters of the Torah during his study, or in prayer. As I

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received from my teacher, the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, this teaching: that there is a special **segulah** (spiritual remedy) to nullify undesirable matters through clinging to the sanctity of the letters of Torah and prayer, etc." END NOTE]

This is called union (zivug), which is the second coupling mentioned above.

[NOTE: A person must persist in their attachment to Torah and prayer until they return to a period of "second greatness," and merit to take delight in it—specifically, in the words of Torah and prayer that they had previously engaged in out of compulsion and without pleasure. This occurs through the illumination of **mohin** (intellectual enlightenment) in Torah and prayer—when within the words of Torah and prayer, the understanding and inner depth within them are drawn forth and shine. This is referred to as "union" (**bi'ah**), because the illumination of the intellect "comes" and flows into the letters.

At that point, the person merits a renewed connection with the Holy One, Blessed Be He, which is the second union (**zivug sheni**) mentioned above—this "second union" comes after the initial connection during the "days of silver" (**kesef**), representing the first stage of longing and love. END NOTE]

Siman #11

In the book *Etz Chaim*, it is written: "When His simple will arose to create the world, etc." A compelling proof of this is drawn from a person who innovates new insights in Torah. He creates something new, **yesh me'ayin** (something from nothing), for initially, the insight did not exist, but now the intellect generates it, and something new emerges from nothing.

From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory: In a person's intellect, there are ten sefirot (divine attributes). For **Abba (Father)** and **Ima (Mother)** are those that generate the new insight in Torah, and this process is referred to as "Abba and Ima." Initially, it is called **Chesed (Kindness)**, as the new idea expands infinitely, representing the attribute of Chesed, as is known. But subsequently, it requires the attribute of **Gevurah (Discipline)**—the secret of constriction (**tzimtzum**)—to make the idea accessible and communicable to others.

All of this is facilitated through the **middle line** (the balance between Chesed and Gevurah), etc. Afterward, it requires **faith**, as it is said in the Talmud (*Makkot*): "Habakkuk came and established [the entire Torah] on one principle: 'The righteous shall live by his faith.'" The attribute of faith corresponds to the **two supportive pillars, Netzach (Victory) and Hod (Splendor)**.

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Then comes the **delight** that one feels from the new insight, which is referred to as **Yesod (Foundation)**—the organ of delight. The revelation of this delight occurs through **speech**, which corresponds to **Malchut (Kingship)**.

Indeed, before this, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, would create higher worlds through His engagement in Torah in hidden mysteries. Then, through His engagement in Torah in its revealed aspects, these revealed worlds were created.

[NOTE: Explanation

1. **Creation and Innovation:**

- The text starts with the idea that God created the world through His simple will. This act of creating something from nothing (**yesh me'ayin**) serves as a model for human creativity, especially in Torah study. A person who generates a new insight in Torah mirrors this divine act.

1. **The Ten Sefirot in Human Intellect:**

- Human intellect is described as containing the ten sefirot, divine attributes that are tools of creation. These include:
 - **Abba (Chochmah/Wisdom)**: Represents the initial flash of insight.
 - **Ima (Binah/Understanding)**: Develops and nurtures the idea.
- Together, these generate a "new thing" in Torah.

1. **The Process of Expansion and Constriction:**

- The initial insight (Chesed) is expansive and unlimited, representing divine kindness.
- To share the insight, it must be constrained (Gevurah), refined, and articulated so it can be expressed clearly to others.

1. **Faith as a Central Pillar:**

- Faith (**Emunah**) serves as a stabilizing force in the process of creation and innovation. It aligns with **Netzach** (endurance) and **Hod** (humility), the supportive pillars that give strength to new ideas.

1. **Delight and Speech:**

- Once the idea is fully developed, there is a sense of spiritual delight (Yesod). This delight is then expressed and revealed through speech (Malchut), the final stage of communication and manifestation.

1. **Divine Parallel:**

- The process mirrors God's creation of the worlds:
 - Higher, concealed worlds were created through engagement in hidden Torah mysteries.

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- Revealed worlds were created through engagement in the revealed aspects of Torah.

Practical Reflection:

This teaching highlights the sacredness of Torah study and innovation. It suggests that generating new insights is not just intellectual but a spiritual process that mirrors divine creation. It involves stages of inspiration, refinement, faith, and ultimate expression, all rooted in the balance of divine attributes. END NOTE]

Siman #12

"For with the Name 'Yah,' God formed the worlds. This world was created with the letter hei, as it is written, 'These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created (behibaram)' (Genesis 2:4). And the World to Come was created with the letter **yud**, because the righteous in it are few.

And regarding this matter, I heard from my teacher, the Baal Shem Tov, that it was shown to him: When they led him beneath the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he was accompanied by many people from Israel. But afterward, when they passed him under the Tree of Life, the group had diminished, and there were fewer people. Then, when they brought him into the inner Garden of Eden, the number decreased even further, until only a very small remnant remained."

Siman #13

"And the Spirit of God hovered"—this refers to the spirit of a person, which should hover over the face of the waters, meaning the Torah. Then, "God said, 'Let there be light'"—this means that God illuminates a person's eyes through the light of the Torah.

Siman #14

"And it was at about midnight"—the moment of uncertainty, when 'midnight' can lean this way or that way. At that time, "I, the Lord, will go out in the midst of Egypt"—into his place of constriction, to illuminate his eyes.

[NOTE: It is written: "Thus says the Lord, 'At about midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt'" (Exodus 11:4), and this can be interpreted in the context of human spiritual work:**"And it was at about midnight"**—this refers to the doubt a person experiences, which is balanced like "midnight," equally uncertain, half leaning this way and half that way. At such a time, in order to resolve the doubt, **"I, the Lord, will go out in the midst of Egypt"**—"Egypt" (Mitzrayim) is derived from the word *meitzar* (narrow straits or constraints), meaning that the light of God shines into their constraint, into the difficulty

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in which the person finds themselves, to illuminate their eyes and enable them to resolve the doubt. END NOTE]

Siman #15

From the Baal Shem Tov: Three kinds of grace (ינ) exist— the grace of a place upon its inhabitants, etc.

Explanation: "Shim d'Chalin" (the fear or awe of God).

"Fold all of the Land of Israel beneath him" (a mystical idea): "The land on which you are lying, I will give to you" (Genesis 28:13).

Interpretation: This means that a person will not need to travel from place to place to refine the sparks (of holiness) that are assigned to him, because he will refine them in his own place.

"And Noah found favor (ינ) in the eyes of God" (Genesis 6:8).

[NOTE From the Baal Shem Tov:

Our sages taught: "There are three kinds of charm (ינ): the charm of a place upon its inhabitants, etc."

The inner explanation of this is as follows: In every place in the world, there are sparks of holiness hidden within material, earthly things. The work of a person is to "refine" and extract the good from the bad—that is, to reveal the sparks of holiness within the physical things and return them to their source. This is accomplished by using those material things for the sake of Heaven and in service of God.

This task is assigned to every individual, as each person has specific sparks that are connected to the root of their soul. For this reason, God leads each person to the place where the sparks belonging to them are located.

Now, it is explained in the teachings of Kabbalah that this mixture of good and evil (material things containing sparks of holiness) is called *Kelipat Noga* (the "shell of Noga"). The word *Noga* (נוגה) has the same numerical value (gematria) as *Chen* (ינ, "charm"). This explains the words of the sages: "The charm of a place upon its inhabitants"—the *chen* present in a specific place belongs to the people of that place ("upon its inhabitants"), and it is their responsibility to refine it.

Based on this, we can explain the Talmudic teaching in *Chullin* regarding our forefather Jacob: "God folded the entire Land of Israel beneath him so that it would be easy to

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conquer, etc." This is related to the verse: "The land upon which you are lying, to you I will give it" (Genesis 28:13).

The meaning of this "folding" and bringing the entire land under Jacob's place is that he would not need to travel from place to place to refine the sparks. Instead, he would be able to accomplish this task within his immediate location.

In order to refine his sparks of holiness, just as Heaven guides each person from one place to another to find their specific sparks (as mentioned earlier), so too, he can refine them in his own place. He will achieve the refinement of these sparks through his service of God in his location, making it "easy to conquer."

This is also the inner meaning of the verse, **"And Noah found favor (*chen*) in the eyes of the Lord"** (Genesis 6:8). Because Noah was pleasing to God ("found favor" in its simple sense), God granted him a kindness: that his service would be "easy." He would find the "chen"—the sparks of holiness he was meant to refine—through his divine service in his own place. **END NOTE]**

Siman #16

From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory:

"For from my flesh I shall perceive" (Job 19:26): Just as in a physical union, procreation occurs only when there is vitality, desire, and joy in the act, so too in the spiritual union—this refers to the words spoken in Torah study and prayer. When these words are expressed with vitality, joy, and heartfelt devotion, they bring forth spiritual offspring (i.e., they generate divine energy or influence, fulfilling their spiritual purpose).

[NOTE From the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory:

Our master explained the verse **"From my flesh I shall perceive God"** (Job 19:26) as follows: From what occurs within a person on the physical plane, one can learn about the order of matters in divinity.

Just as in a **physical union**, procreation occurs only when there is vitality, desire, and joy, so too in a **spiritual union**—a complete connection and unification between two levels, in which the higher level illuminates and becomes revealed within the lower level.

This spiritual union refers to **speech in Torah study and prayer**, where there is a unification between the content of the words, understood by the person's intellect (the higher level), and the letters of speech that emerge from their mouth (the lower level).

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However, this connection is effective only when the "organ" is alive—meaning, when the speech is expressed with **joy and delight**. Then the union accomplishes its purpose, bringing forth "offspring," which refers to growth and an increase in spiritual vitality. **END NOTE]**

Siman #17

From the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory:

The Mishnah states, **"Whoever performs one mitzvah, benefits are granted to him"** (Avot 4:11). In the Mishnah of chapter 7 of Shabbat, we learn about the 39 melachot (categories of labor), described as "forty minus one." Instead of simply stating 39, it emphasizes "minus one," alluding to a deeper concept.

The Baal Shem Tov explained this by referencing the spiritual dynamics of Torah, prayer, and mitzvot. Prayer, which is the **"service of the heart"**, involves two aspects:

1. Drawing divine abundance (*shefa*) into the realm of Malchut (the divine attribute of sovereignty) and adorning it with spiritual beauty.
2. According to the root of one's soul, divine abundance flows through the spiritual "pipeline" connected to that soul, enlivening the sefirot through it. This enables the **Shechinah** (Divine Presence) to cleave to the person, as they serve as a channel for divine light, akin to the role of the *tzaddik* (righteous person), referred to as the "foundation of the world."

The primary intention in this process is to channel spirituality from the higher realms into the letters of Torah and prayer. This enables the letters to ascend to their higher source and fulfill the individual's request. Additionally, one must focus on the divine names and attributes, aligning them with the essence of the sefirot and their inner spirituality. This inner spirituality serves as a "garment" for the divine essence, which emanates from the Infinite Light (*Ein Sof*), unified in absolute oneness.

Thus, a person must contemplate, when engaging in Torah and prayer, that the **letters of Torah and prayer are vessels**, comparable to the body. It is necessary to infuse them with spirituality and the light of the Infinite, which is the true unity, just as the soul animates the body. Similarly, with the performance of mitzvot, the physical act is a vessel that requires spiritual infusion and the unity of the Infinite Light.

This idea is reflected in the statement, **"Whoever performs one mitzvah, benefits are granted to him."** The singular focus of the mitzvah allows divine goodness to flow through. In contrast, the "39 melachot," representing tasks associated with physical

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labor, parallel the forces of *kelipot* (spiritual impurities). These forces are described as "lacking one," reflecting their intrinsic separation from divine unity. They exist within the realm of division and fragmentation, lacking the wholeness of divine oneness.

Moreover, there is a fundamental principle: one must cleave to the **inner essence of Torah and mitzvot**, connecting one's thoughts and soul to the root of the Torah and mitzvah being performed. Without this inner connection, God forbid, the act becomes severed and detached, like a branch cut from a tree. As I heard from my master, the Baal Shem Tov: this connection is essential for true unity and spiritual vitality in divine service.

And so it is with "**Chesed for Abraham**", for the soul derives from the essence of *Binah* (understanding), while the Torah is what flows from *Binah* downward into *Tiferet* (beauty or harmony). When a person connects and unifies their soul with its source in the place of Torah, they will attain hidden and concealed matters from there (profound spiritual insights and revelations).

[NOTE Summary:

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that Torah, prayer, and mitzvot are spiritual vessels requiring inner vitality and intention to connect with divine light. Prayer is the "service of the heart," channeling divine abundance and allowing the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) to dwell with a person. Torah and mitzvot are tools for spiritual refinement and connection when performed with inner focus and joy. The 39 melachot (labors) represent efforts to refine sparks of holiness from impurity, highlighting the importance of unity and alignment with the Infinite Light (*Ein Sof*).

A person's soul, originating in *Binah* (understanding), connects to divine insights and higher revelations through Torah study and prayer. By uniting their soul with its spiritual root, they gain access to profound, concealed wisdom.

Takeaway: Engaging in Torah, prayer, and mitzvot with intentionality, joy, and awareness of their spiritual significance transforms these acts into channels for divine abundance and spiritual growth. Focus on connecting your soul to its divine source, as this unity is essential for unlocking deeper insights, maintaining spiritual vitality, and bringing light into the world. **END NOTE]**

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Siman #18

From the Baal Shem Tov:

One must pray for their enemies, as they are connected to the spirit of a righteous person in a reincarnation. Through prayer, the root of that spirit is sweetened, and its essence is drawn out from them. What remains in the enemy then dissipates on its own.

Siman #19

From the Baal Shem Tov:

The phrase "לשם ייחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה" **For the sake of unifying the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah** refers to the process of bringing *Tiferet* (beauty) into *Malchut* (sovereignty), so that the Holy One, blessed be He, is glorified through His connection with *Malchut*. This means uplifting the lower realm, the world of speech, which sustains all worlds. As it is written, **"By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made"** (Psalms 33:6) and **"You give life to all of them"** (Nehemiah 9:6).

The speech of the Holy One, blessed be He, constantly sustains all worlds. When a person performs a mitzvah, the Holy One, blessed be He, is glorified in *Malchut*—that is, through His speech, which exists within the worlds. At that moment, the person brings *Malchut* closer to the Holy One, blessed be He, meaning that the Holy One, blessed be He, is glorified through the world of speech.

This is the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Shechinah: the Holy One, blessed be He, is glorified in *Malchut*, which is present within the worlds, and His sovereignty is revealed. This means that everyone will recognize that He is the King of the worlds, which brings great delight to the Holy One, blessed be He.

The attribute of *Malchut* (sovereignty) depends on us—it is in our hands. When we proclaim and recognize His greatness and sovereignty, His *Malchut* is completed, for **"There is no king without a people"**—it is through the people that His sovereignty is revealed. This recognition brings immense delight to the Holy One, blessed be He.