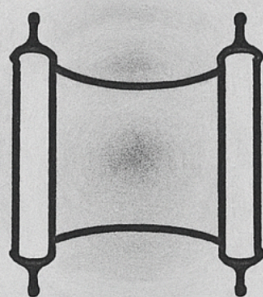


בס"ד

**Menachem Nachum  
of Chernobyl  
Me'or Einayim  
Parshas Vayigash**



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## Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

### Me'or Einayim Parshas Vayigash

#### Introduction

Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl (1730–1797), a foremost disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch and author of *Me'or Einayim*, is renowned for revealing the inner unity of Torah, mitzvot, and the inner life of the soul. In this maamar on the opening of Parashat Vayigash, beginning with Judah's approach to Joseph, he explains why the Torah cannot be read as mere narrative, and how the deepest foundations of divine service, love and awe, are embedded within its very stories.

**And Judah approached him and said, "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not let your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh"** (Genesis 44:18). It must be understood why this is written in the Torah, for it is impossible that it be, Heaven forbid, merely stories, like those whom the holy Zohar dismisses, who say that the Torah is only stories, Heaven forbid.

ויגש אליו יהודה ויאמר בי אדני ידבר נא עבדך דבר באזני אדני ואל יחר אפך בעבדך כי כמוך כפרעה (בראשית מד:יח). להבין למה נכתב זה בתורה כי אי אפשר שיהיה חס ושלום רק ספורי מעשיות כדלית להו בזהר הקדוש להאמרים שהתורה היא רק ספורי מעשיות חס ושלום.

It is written, "You are clothed in splendor and majesty" (Psalms 104:1). The explanation is that "majesty," which is the Torah, as it is written, "Place Your majesty upon the heavens" (Psalms 8:2), is something with which the Creator, blessed be He, clothed the Torah in garments.

כתיב (תהלים קד:א) הוד והדר לבשת, פירוש והדר שהיא התורה כמו שכתוב (שם ח:ב) תנה הודך על השמים, לבשת שהלביש הבורא ברוך הוא את התורה בלבושין.

For the Torah is called fire, as it is written, "Are My words not like fire" (Jeremiah 23:29). And just as it is impossible to grasp fire without garments, so too the Torah, which is called fire, cannot be grasped without vessels. Therefore it was necessary for it to be clothed in garments and vessels.

כי התורה נקראת אש כמו שכתוב (ירמיה כג:כט) הלא כה דברי פאש וגו', וכמו שאי אפשר לאחוז אש בלי לבושין כך התורה נקראת אש שאי אפשר לאחוז אותה בלי כלים לכן הצרכה להתלבש בלבושים וכלים.

And behold, sometimes the Torah is called water.

והנה לפעמים נקראת התורה מים.

As it is written, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters" (Isaiah 55:1). Seemingly, how can there be two aspects in the Torah, fire and water, which are opposites. This can be only by the Creator, blessed be He, Who makes peace in His heights, as our Sages of blessed memory said that heaven is fire and water, which the Holy One, blessed be He, mixed together and made them into heaven, binding and uniting them as a mediator between the two aspects.

כמו שכתוב (ישעיה נה:א) הוי כל צמא לכו למים. ולכאורה איך אפשר להיות שני הבחינות בתורה אש ומים שני הפכים, זה אינו יכול כי אם הבורא ברוך הוא שהוא יתברך עושה שלום במומו כמאמר חכמינו זכרונם לברכה שמים אש ומים שערכן הקדוש ברוך הוא זה בזה ועשה מהם שמים, והוא קשר לון מיוחד לון שהוא ממוצע בין שתי הבחינות ומקשרם ומיחדם.

## Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

### Me'or Einayim Parshas Vayigash

What then are fire and water. They are love and awe, which are the essence of the entire Torah, for without awe and love the soul does not ascend. Fire is awe, for just as one fears approaching a great fire, so too the Creator, blessed be He, is a consuming fire that consumes all the fires of the world. Water is love, for water causes all kinds of delight to grow, and thus water is the root of all loves in the world.

Therefore our Sages of blessed memory said that "Torah" in gematria equals six hundred eleven, even though there are six hundred thirteen commandments, because the two commandments of love and awe are the root of the entire Torah, and they must be present in every single commandment.

Therefore, "I am" and "You shall have no other" we heard directly from the Divine utterance. The Creator, blessed be He, made us hear the essence and root of the entire Torah from His own mouth. For "I am" is love, for "I took you out of the land of Egypt," and therefore you must love Me.

And "You shall have no other gods," meaning other powers, as we explained according to the verse, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart ... to love" (Deuteronomy 30:6). It seems puzzling why the Blessed One opened for us this path of loving Him with the phrase "for the sake of your life."

Rather, one must believe with complete faith that all one's powers and vitality are from the Creator, blessed be He. For man is a small world, comprising all the worlds, and the Creator, blessed be He, binds and unifies all the worlds.

As it is stated, "And You are the One Who binds them and unifies them," and as Rabbi Moshe Isserles, of blessed memory, wrote, "and performs wonders," for He binds the spiritual with the physical.

This is how the Creator, blessed be He, taught us how to love Him. "For the sake of your life" means that the Creator, blessed be He, is your life, that all your powers and vitality are from Him.

אף מה הוא אש ומים, הוא אהבה ויראה שבהם הם עיקר כל התורה, כי בלא דחילו ורחימו לא פרהה לעילא. אש הוא יראה, כמו שישראלים לגשת אל האש הגדולה, כך הבורא ברוך הוא אוכלה אשא דאכלה כל אישים דעלמא. ומים הוא אהבה שהמים מגדלים כל מיני תענוג.

ונמצא המים הם שרש כל האהבות שבעולם, ולכן אמרו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה תורה בגימטריא תרי"א, אף שיש תרי"ג מצוות, פי שתי המצוות אהבה ויראה הם שרש כל התורה והם צריכים להיות בכל מצוה ומצוה.

ולכן אנכי ולא יהיה לך מפי הגבורה שמענו, העיקר והשרש של כל התורה השמיענו הבורא ברוך הוא מפיו. כי אנכי הוא אהבה, כי הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, וצריך אתה לאהוב אותי.

ולא יהיה לך אלקים אחרים, כחות אחרים, כמאמרנו על פי (דברים ל:ו) ומל ה' אלקיך גוי לאהבה גוי למען חייך. כי למה פתח לנו השם יתברך לעשות זאת לאהבה אותי יתברך בשביל פנייה כאומרו למען חייך.

אף כי צריך להאמין באמונה שלמה כי כל כחותיו וחייתו הוא הבורא ברוך הוא. כי האדם הוא עולם קטן, הוא כלול מכל העולמות, והבורא ברוך הוא הוא מקשר ומיוחד כל העולמות.

כמאמר ואנת הוא דקשיר לון ומיוחד לון, וכמו שכתב רבי משה איסרל'ש זכרוננו לברכה, ומפליא לעשות, שיקושר הרוחני בגשמי.

וזהו שלמד אותנו הבורא ברוך הוא איך לאהוב אותו יתברך, ואמר למען חייך, פירוש למען שהבורא יתברך הוא חייך, שכל כחותיך וחייתך הוא הבורא ברוך הוא.



## Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

### Me'or Einayim Parshas Vayigash

He binds and unifies all the worlds within you, joining the spiritual with the physical. When you move any limb, who moves it if not the Creator, blessed be He.

שהוא מקשר ומיחד כל העולמות שבתוכך, וקושר הרוחני בגשמי. וכשאפתה מנענע איזה אבר, מי הוא המנענע אותו כי אם הבורא ברוך הוא.

This is “The Lord your God you shall fear,” specifically your God, Who is mighty and all-capable, the Master of all powers, the Master of all your powers.

וזהו את ה' אלקיך תירא, אלקיך דיקא, שהוא תקיף ובעל היכולת ובעל הכחות כלם, שהוא בעל של כל הכחות שלך.

Therefore, “You shall have no other gods,” meaning other powers, as the Baal Shem Tov explained on the verse, “And you will turn away and serve other gods” (Deuteronomy 11:16).

וזהו לא יהיה לך אלקים אחרים כו', כחות אחרים, כמאמר הבעל שם טוב על (דברים יא:טז) וסרתם ועבדתם אלקים אחרים.

Immediately when one turns away from Him and from the faith that all one's powers and vitality are from the Creator, blessed be He, one is immediately called a servant of other gods.

תכף כשסר ממנו יתברך ומאמונתו שכל כחותיו וחייתו הוא הבורא יתברך, אזי תכף נקרא עובד אלקים אחרים.

It is also known what we have stated many times on the verse, “A righteous one rules through the fear of God,” and our Sages said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Who rules over Me? The righteous.”

ונודע מאמרנו כמה פעמים על הפסוק צדיק מושל וראת אלקים, ואמרו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא מי מושל בי, צדיק.

For the Holy One, blessed be He, decrees a decree and the righteous nullifies it. The holy Zohar asks: Is the righteous one a prosecutor against his Master.

שהקדוש ברוך הוא גוזר גזירה וצדיק מבטלה. והקשו בזהר הקדוש, וכי צדיקא קטרוגא דמריה איהו.

We explained this according to what we were precise about in the wording “Who rules over Me,” for it should have said, “Who rules upon Me.”

ובארנו על פי מה שדקדקנו באומרו ומי מושל בי, שהיה לו לומר ומי מושל עלי.

#### [NOTE Summary:

The Torah's account of Judah approaching Joseph is not, Heaven forbid, a historical tale devoid of inner content. The Zohar already rejects the notion that Torah is merely narrative. Rather, the verse “You are clothed in splendor and majesty” teaches that the Torah itself is divine light clothed in garments. The Torah is called fire, for it is divine speech aflame with holiness, yet fire cannot be grasped without protection. Therefore, the Torah had to be en clothed in garments and vessels, namely stories, laws, and worldly forms, so that human beings could receive it.

At the same time, the Torah is also called water, as it is written, “All who thirst, go to the waters.” Fire and water are opposites, yet both exist within the Torah because the Creator alone makes peace between opposites. Just as the Holy One mixed fire and water to form the heavens, so too He unites opposing spiritual qualities through His oneness.

Fire and water correspond to awe and love. Awe is like fire, for just as one fears approaching a great flame, so must one approach the Creator with reverence, for He is a consuming fire. Love is like water, for water nurtures

## Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

### Me'or Einayim

### Parshas Vayigash

growth and pleasure, and from it all forms of delight emerge. These two qualities, love and awe, are the root of the entire Torah. Without love and awe, the soul cannot ascend.

This is why "Torah" numerically equals six hundred eleven, even though there are six hundred thirteen commandments. The two additional commandments, love of God and awe of God, are not counted among the six hundred eleven because they are the roots that must animate every mitzvah. Every commandment must contain both awe and love to be spiritually alive.

Accordingly, the first two commandments, "I am the Lord your God" and "You shall have no other gods," were heard directly from the Divine. "I am" expresses love, for God reveals Himself as the One who redeemed Israel from Egypt and gives life. "You shall have no other gods" means not to attribute power or vitality to any force other than Him. Man is a microcosm containing all worlds, and the Creator binds and unifies all spiritual and physical realms within the human being. When a person recognizes that every movement, every breath, and every power comes solely from God, love naturally emerges.

Awe follows from this recognition as well. "The Lord your God you shall fear" means fearing God precisely as your God, the sole source of all strength and power. The moment a person turns away from this faith and imagines independent forces at work, even within themselves, they are already serving "other gods."

This understanding also explains the teaching that "the righteous rule through fear of God," and the statement of the sages, "Who rules over Me? The righteous." This does not mean that the righteous oppose God's will. Rather, through complete unity with divine awe and love, the righteous become transparent vessels for God's will, so that divine decrees are transformed from within, not challenged from without.

#### **Practical Takeaway:**

Torah study and mitzvah observance must never be approached as external actions or intellectual exercises alone. Every engagement with Torah should be infused with conscious love and awe of God, recognizing Him as the sole source of all life and power. When love and awe animate one's service, the Torah's outer garments reveal their inner fire and water, drawing the soul upward and aligning human will with divine unity.

#### **Chassidic Story:**

It is told of Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl that once, before teaching Torah, he remained silent for a long time. His students grew uneasy, wondering why he delayed. Finally, he spoke and said that he had been preparing himself to speak words of Torah with both burning awe and flowing love. "Without awe," he said, "the words have no fire, and without love, they have no life." Only then did he begin teaching, and his words entered the hearts of his listeners with warmth and reverence together.

**END NOTE]**