

אור תורה

Or Torah

The Teachings of the Maggid of Mezeritch on
Parshas HaShavua
מאת

האי סבא קדישא אור עולם מופת הדור
הגאון האלקי החריף

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אשר רוח ה' הופיע עליו כנודע ומפורסם

WITH INTRALINEAR TRANSLATION
AND ELUCIDATION



Or Torah — The Light of the Torah
The Complete Parshiyos

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A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The Nature of this Work

This volume presents an original English elucidation and commentary, prepared through a combination of advanced language and translation technology and experienced human editorial oversight. The methods employed were carefully configured to adhere to Orthodox Jewish *hashkafa* and to preserve fidelity to the original Hebrew text, and portions of the work were reviewed by an experienced translator and editor of Torah literature. Even so, this edition does not carry the authority of a translation prepared and certified by a full team of rabbinic scholars.

Usage and Limitations

This translation is intended as a tool to help advanced learners access the depth of the original work. It is **not** intended to replace the original Hebrew source, nor to serve as a substitute for study under a qualified teacher.

Because the nuance of Torah study often transcends any single method of preparation, we ask the reader to keep two things in mind:

1. **Verification:** Any novel insight, ruling, or conclusion drawn from this translation should be checked against the original Hebrew.
2. **Consultation:** All practical questions or derived lessons should be discussed with and verified by a qualified rabbinic authority before being relied upon.

The goal of this edition is to make these teachings accessible to a wider audience, but the responsibility for accurate understanding and practical application remains with the reader.

יהי רצון מלפני אבינו שבשמים, שזכות הוצאת ספר קדוש זה לאור עולם, והפצת תורתו הקדושה של הרב המגיד נ"ע, תעמוד לנו ולכל יוצאי חלצינו, ותמשיך ברכה והצלחה מרובה בטוב הנראה והנגלה על בנינו היקרים

יוסף שלמה, יעקב משה, מנחם מענדל ושניאור זלמן שיחיו

ויגדלו להיות חסידים, יראי שמים ולמדנים, מוארים באור התורה וחדורים בחמימות של חסידות. ילכו מחיל אל חיל בתורה, בעבודה ובגמילות חסדים, ויהיו דברי תורה ערבים בפיהם ויקרים על לבם, ונזכה לרוות מהם רוב נחת חסידות.

המברכים ומתברכים,

אריה וזוגתו לאה שיחיו

ניסקי

אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְנוּ וְנָדַעְנוּ, וְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ סִפְרוּ לָנוּ.
לֹא נִכְחַד מִבְּנֵיהֶם, לְדוֹר אַחֲרוֹן מִסִּפְרֵיהֶם תְּהִלּוֹת ה',
וְעֻזּוֹ וְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה.
תְּהִלִּים ע"ח, ג"ד

In Honor of Our Beloved Parents

Ian and Carol Ratner שיחיו

Mel and Karen Rom שיחיו

With tremendous *hakaras hatov* for everything you do for us, and for being such wonderful role models.

Our blessing to our children is that they should continue to hear the praises of Hashem that we grew up hearing in your homes.

With love,

Myles and Shira Ratner

תולדות

PARASHAS TOLDOS

SECTION I

Two Kinds of Love in Avraham and Yitzchak

SUMMARY

Derush: The Torah opens the account of Yitzchak with an apparent redundancy, “These are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham; Avraham begot Yitzchak,” and the Midrash pairs it with “The crown of the elderly are grandchildren, and the glory of children are their fathers.” Why is what Yitzchak generated named first, before what Avraham generated? The Maggid answers by distinguishing two kinds of love.

Torah Basis: *Bereishis* 25:19 read together with *Mishlei* 17:6 in *Midrash Tanchuma*, along with *Mishlei* 27:19, 23:15 and 8:30, *Yesheyahu* 49:3, *Iyov* 41:3 and *Shir HaShirim* 8:8, plus the *Zohar* on the Jewish people arising in the divine thought.

Kabbalistic Framework: a love awakened from above, which is “father,” and a love aroused from below, which is “offspring” and which in turn generates a further, greater love in the father. Delight (*taanug*) produces joy, and joy produces that new love. Since Hashem precedes time, the delight He takes in every tzaddik’s Torah and deeds was already present when the Jewish people arose in His thought.

Avodah: Serving Hashem out of gratitude for one’s own existence makes a person “righteous for himself.” The complete level is to cause delight above, to have “breasts with which to nurse.”

— **בְּמִדְרָשׁ וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אֲבִרָהִם. אֲבִרָהִם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק.** — It is stated in the Midrash: “These are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham; Avraham begot Yitzchak” (*Bereishis* 25:19). *Midrash Tanchuma* opens its exposition of the parashah with this verse, whose second clause seems to add nothing to the first. That redundancy is the peg on which the entire derush hangs.¹ הַה"ד עֲטֶרֶת זְקֵנִים בָּנֵי — This is what the verse says: “The crown of the elderly are grandchildren, and the glory of children are their fathers” (*Mishlei* 17:6). The two halves of the verse describe two directions of honor, from grandchild upward to grandfather and from father downward to son. The Midrash treats the Torah’s doubled phrase as expressing the same pair. לֹא נִיצוֹל אֲבִרָהִם מִכֶּבֶשׁ הָאֵשׁ. אֲלֵא בְּזִכּוּתוֹ שֶׁל — אֲלֵא בְּזִכּוּתוֹ שֶׁל — Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace only through the merit of Yaakov, and so on. This is the Midrash’s illustration of “the crown of the elderly are grandchildren”: the grandfather is rescued by what his descendant would one day be. The merit that saved him lay entirely in the future, yet it was already effective. מוֹבֵן עַל הַפְּסוּק כְּמִים פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים וְגו'. — On this basis the verse “As water reflects face to face...” (*Mishlei* 27:19) can be understood. The verse’s plain sense is that one heart mirrors another. Here it supplies the principle of the whole passage: love directed at a person awakens a corresponding love in him, which reflects back at its source.² — וְהִנֵּה נִמְשָׁל לְזֶה עַד"מ רְאוּבֵן שְׂאוּהָב לְשִׁמְעוֹן אֶהְיָ עִזָּה. — Let

¹ *Midrash Tanchuma*, parshas Toldos 4; cf. *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:2.

² The Kehot edition reads הפנים here, matching the wording of *Mishlei* 27:19 more closely.

us illustrate this with an analogy: Reuven loves Shimon with a powerful love. The Maggid begins with two ordinary men rather than father and son, so that the mechanics of reflected love can be seen on their own. — **ומחמת ששמעון ראה שראובן אוהב אותו ביותר. נתעורר אצל שמעון ג"כ אהבת ראובן.** Because Shimon sees that Reuven loves him so intensely, a love for Reuven is awakened in Shimon as well. The second love is not self-generated. It is a response, produced by the first. **נמצא כי אהבת ראובן שאוהב לשמעון נקרא.** — **אב** — It emerges that Reuven's love for Shimon is called "father." The terms "father" and "offspring" are being redefined as functions rather than as persons: whatever generates is "father." **ואהבת שמעון שאוהב** — **לראובן נקרא תולדה מפני שגולדה אהבת שמעון מכח אהבת ראובן.** And Shimon's love for Reuven is called "offspring," since Shimon's love was born out of the force of Reuven's love. With this, the words "offspring" and "begot" in the verse become available as names for stages of love, which is what allows the derush to read *Bereishit* 25:19 the way it will. — **והנה יש אהבת אב לבנו בשני ענינים.** Now, a father's love for his son exists in two forms. The analogy now moves to an actual father and son, where both loves can be located in one relationship. **הא' האב אוהב לבנו מחמת הטבעות וזה האב גורם שגם הבן אוהב את האב.** — **הב' האב אוהב לבנו מחמת הטבעות וזה האב גורם שגם הבן אוהב את האב.** The first: the father loves his son by nature, and this love of the father causes the son to love the father in return. Natural paternal love owes nothing to the son's conduct. It is prior, unearned, and it is what awakens the son's answering love. **ויש אהבה גדולה מזו אחרת שרואה את בנו הולך בדרך הישר. ומצדיק.** — **מעשיו וחכם בכל החכמות** — And there is another love, greater than this, when he sees his son walking in the straight path, acting righteously, and wise in every wisdom. This second love is a response to something actual in the son, and it is therefore, in the terms just established, an "offspring" of the son.³ **אז יש להאב תענוג גדול מזה ומזה נתהוה השמחה.** — **אז יש להאב תענוג גדול מזה ומזה נתהוה השמחה.** Then the father has great delight from this, and from this delight joy comes into being. *Taanug*, delight, is the deeper of the two, and joy emerges out of it. **כי השמחה באה מהתענוג. שאין אדם שומח כ"א יש.** — **כי השמחה באה מהתענוג.** For joy comes from delight, since a person does not rejoice unless he has delight in something, and from that his joy comes. Joy is never primary. It is always the outward expression of a delight already present. **ומחמת גודל התענוג והשמחה שיש לו מן הבן. נתוספה וגולדה להאב.** — **ומחמת גודל התענוג והשמחה שיש לו מן הבן.** And because of the magnitude of the delight and joy he has from his son, a further and greater love toward the son is added and born in the father. The full sequence is now complete: the father's natural love awakens the son's love, the son's righteousness produces delight, the delight produces joy, and the joy gives birth to a second paternal love greater than the first. **הנה זה המשל.** — **הנה זה המשל.** This analogy applies to human beings. The Maggid now marks the point at which the analogy fails when transferred upward. **כי קודם לידת הבן או אף אחר לידתו עדיין אינו יודע מה טיבו ומה.** — **כי קודם לידת הבן או אף אחר לידתו עדיין אינו יודע מה טיבו ומה.** For before the son is born, and even after his birth, the father does not yet know his character or what the son's conduct will be. A human father is bound by time, so the second love must wait for the son to prove himself. **שהוא רק אהבה הא' שהוא.** — **שהוא רק אהבה הא' שהוא.** Therefore the father does not yet have that great a love, the second one mentioned, but only the first love, which comes from his nature. In a human relationship the two loves are necessarily sequential. **אבל אצל הש"כ ב"ה נאמר ישראל אשר בך אתפאר.** — **אבל אצל הש"כ ב"ה נאמר ישראל אשר בך אתפאר.** But with regard to Hashem, blessed is He, it says, "Israel, in whom I take glory" (*Yeshayahu* 49:3). The verse speaks of Hashem taking pride in the Jewish people, which is precisely the second love, the delight a father takes in what his son actually is. **כי אצלו ית' העבר והעתיד הכל בשוה. לפי שהוא קודם הזמן.** — **כי אצלו ית' העבר והעתיד הכל בשוה.** For with Him, past and future are all alike, since He precedes time. Because time itself is created, the limitation that forces the two loves apart in a human father does not apply above. **קודם שהיו ישראל היה גלוי לפני ית' כל צדיק וצדיק עם כל מעשיו.** — **קודם שהיו ישראל היה גלוי לפני ית' כל צדיק וצדיק עם כל מעשיו.**

³ The Kehot edition has אחרת, "another," already at this point, so that the phrase reads "and there is another love, greater than this one." Cf. §46 and §192.

ותורתו — Before the Jewish people existed, every single tzaddik, with all his deeds and his Torah, was revealed before Him. The tzaddik's righteousness is not future to Hashem. It is present, and so the delight it produces is present as well. הָיָה כְּבוֹד שְׂשׂוּעַ וְתַעֲנוּג בְּכָכֹל. — From the very outset, as soon as the Jewish people arose in His thought, He already had, as it were, delight and pleasure before Him from every single tzaddik and his deeds. The *Zohar's* teaching that the Jewish people arose in the divine thought before creation supplies the moment being described. Even at that stage, before there was any world, the “second” love was already in force. וְהָגַם רֵאִיָּה לְזֶה מֵהַשְׁמִינֵנוּ שֶׁהֵקֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּעֲשֵׂעַ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיק כַּמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁרָצָה לְשַׂעֲלָה מִשָּׁה לְמָרוֹם. — There is even a proof for this in what we find, that the Holy One, blessed is He, takes delight in the Torah of the tzaddik, as our Sages taught: when Moshe ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed is He, saying, “My son Elazar says: a cow...”, and this was several hundred years before R. Elazar came into the world. The teaching is quoted for one detail: Hashem was already savoring a ruling that its author would not utter for centuries. Delight in a tzaddik's Torah is not deferred until the tzaddik exists.⁴ וְכֵן מִשֶּׁרָצָה לְזֶה מֵהַשְׁמִינֵנוּ שֶׁהֵקֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּעֲשֵׂעַ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיק כַּמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁרָצָה לְשַׂעֲלָה מִשָּׁה לְמָרוֹם. — The same applies to what our Sages said, that everything a worthy student will one day innovate was already included at Sinai. So it is here too: the Holy One, blessed is He, told Moshe that such and such

עֲתִיד תִּלְמִיד פְּלוֹנִי לְחַדֵּשׁ בְּדוֹרוֹ — a particular student is destined to innovate in his generation. The novel Torah of a student not yet born is already spoken by Hashem to Moshe, which is exactly the point the Maggid needs. כִּי תוֹרַת הַצַּדִּיק וּמַעֲשָׂיו הוּא הַשְׂשׂוּעַ וְתַעֲנוּג לְפָנָיו ית' — For the Torah of the tzaddik and his deeds are the delight and pleasure before Him. This is the object of the second love: not the tzaddik's mere existence, but his Torah and his conduct. לֹא נִמְצָא כִּי זֶה הַתַּעֲנוּג וְהַשְׂמִינָה וְהַהֲבָה נִלְחָדָה לוֹ. — It emerges that this delight, joy and love are born in the father by the force of his son. The delight above is genuinely generated from below, which is why the son can be called the one who “begot.”. זֶהוּ מִשֶּׁרָצָה לְזֶה מֵהַשְׁמִינֵנוּ שֶׁהֵקֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּעֲשֵׂעַ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיק כַּמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁרָצָה לְשַׂעֲלָה מִשָּׁה לְמָרוֹם. — This is the meaning of what the holy *Zohar* says, that the Jewish people provide sustenance, and so on. The *Zohar's* striking formulation is that the Jewish people are the ones who provide sustenance above. The Maggid explains it through the delight a father draws from his son.⁵ כְּמִשְׁלַל הָאֵב שֵׁשׁ לוֹ תַעֲנוּג מִבְּנוֹ הַיָּבִיב. אִי מְגוֹדֵל הַתַּעֲנוּג וְהַשְׂמִינָה אֹמֵר הָאֵב. — It is like the analogy of a father who has delight from his beloved son: out of the magnitude of the delight and joy, the father says, כְּדֶרֶךְ הַבְּרִיּוֹת אֹמְרִים בְּלִשׁוֹן זֶה אֲנִי נֶעֱשֶׂה מִהַתַּעֲנוּג הַזֶּה כְּרִיא וְשִׁמְן. — as people ordinarily put it, “This delight is making me healthy and fat.” The common idiom is doing real work here: delight is spoken of as food, as something that nourishes the one who receives it. כִּי מְגוֹדֵל הַתַּעֲנוּג. — So too, given the magnitude of the delight and pleasure the Holy One, blessed is He, has, it is as though, so to speak, they are sustaining Him. The *Zohar's* language is thus not a claim that Hashem lacks anything. It expresses how great the delight is that the tzaddik's Torah and deeds produce. זֶהוּ וְהוּא וְהוּא אֶצְלוֹ אָמוֹן. — This is the meaning of “And I was beside Him as a nurse” (*Mishlei* 8:30). Torah speaks in the first person in that chapter. The Maggid reads *amon* as *omein*, one who nurses and rears, so that the Torah is describing itself as sustaining Hashem, as it were. וְהָגַם רֵאִיָּה לְזֶה מֵהַשְׁמִינֵנוּ שֶׁהֵקֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּעֲשֵׂעַ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיק כַּמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁרָצָה לְשַׂעֲלָה מִשָּׁה לְמָרוֹם. — Rashi explained that the Torah was reared in the bosom of the Holy One, blessed is He, for two thousand years, and so on. Rashi takes *amon* passively, as a child being raised. On that reading the Torah is the nursing and Hashem is the one who rears. הָלֹא הֵקֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתַּעֲשֵׂעַ בְּתוֹרָתוֹ שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיק כַּמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁרָצָה לְשַׂעֲלָה מִשָּׁה לְמָרוֹם.

⁴ *Zohar* vol. 1, 24a, on the Jewish people arising in the divine thought; *Midrash Tanchuma*, parshas Chukas 8; cf. *Vayikra Rabbah* 22:1 and §57. The Kehot edition reads והנה here, “now,” which introduces the proof rather than conceding it.

⁵ *Zohar* vol. 3, 7b; cf. §60. The Kehot edition reads מפרנסים, “the Jewish people sustain [Him],” which is the reading the derush goes on to explain.

קדמוֹן לְכָל הַקְדוּמִים — But the plain sense of the verse implies that the Torah became a nurse to the Holy One, blessed is He, and such a thing is difficult to say, for surely the Holy One, blessed is He, precedes all that is primordial. The difficulty is theological: how can anything nurture Him who has no antecedent and no need? — אָבֵל לִפִּי דִרְכָּנוּ יִתְרוֹן שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה מְשַׁבֶּחֶת א"ע שֶׁהִיא אוֹמֵן לַהֲקַבֵּ"ה כ"י. — But according to our approach it is resolved: the Torah praises itself for having been a nurse to the Holy One, blessed is He, as it were. The whole passage has established in what sense this can be said, since delight was already compared to nourishment. דְּהֵיִינוּ גוֹדֵל הַתַּעֲנוּג וְהַשְׁעָשׂוּעַ שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ ית' מִן הַתּוֹרָה דְּהֵיִינוּ מִתּוֹרַת. — That is, the magnitude of the delight and pleasure He had from the Torah, meaning from the Torah of every single tzaddik and from his good deeds, which are the mitzvos written in the Torah, “Torah” in the verse is not an abstraction. It is the Torah as it will be learned and lived by particular people. זֶה נֶעֱשֶׂה לוֹ ית' בְּכִיכּוֹל אוֹמֵן וּפִרְנָסָה וְכו'. — וְזֶה וְאֵהִי אֶצְלוֹ אֲמוֹן. — this became for Him, as it were, a nurse and sustenance, and so on. This is “And I was beside Him as a nurse.” The pairing of “nurse” with “sustenance” confirms that *omein* is being taken in the sense of one who provides and nourishes. — וְיָדוּעַ כִּי שֵׁם אֵהִי מוֹרָה עַל הָעֲתִיד. — It is known that the Name *Ekyeh* indicates the future. *Ekyeh* means “I shall be.” The Maggid now presses on the verse’s form: Torah says *va’ebyeh*, “and I shall be,” not “I was.”⁶ שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה פ' שֶׁהִיא אֶצְלוֹ וְהָיָה פִּי וְאֵהִי כְּלוֹמַר א"ע שֶׁהִיא אֶצְלוֹ. — עֲתִידָהּ לִיתְנָה לִישְׂרָאֵל וְעִידֵינוּ לֹא נִתְּנָה. — וְא"כ מֵהוּ הַשְׁעָשׂוּעִים, לְכָה אֲמַר אֶצְלוֹ. — This is the meaning of “and I shall be”: even though the Torah was still destined to be given to the Jewish people and had not yet been given, so what were these delights? For this reason it says “beside Him.” The future form registers the problem, and the word “beside Him” answers it. הַכֹּל שׁוֹה הָעֶבֶר. — וְהָעֲתִיד. — That is, with Him, as it were, past and future are all alike, and everything is revealed before Him. Therefore I was to Him a nurse and a delight, as explained. “Beside Him” locates the delight within His own perspective, where the not-yet-given Torah is fully present, and so it can nourish Him already. וְיֵשׁ אֶהְיָה שֶׁהוּא אָב. — יֵשׁ אֶהְיָה שֶׁהוּא אָב. — Let us return to the matter: there is a love that is “father,” and a love that is “offspring.” The Maggid now turns the distinction into a measure of a person’s own service. וְהִנֵּה הָאָדָם שֶׁמִּתְעוֹרֵר לְעִבּוּדָתוֹ. — יֵשׁ מִחֶמֶת שְׂרׁוּאָה אֶהְיָה הַבּוֹרָא עָלָיו. — יֵשׁ מִחֶמֶת שְׂרׁוּאָה אֶהְיָה הַבּוֹרָא עָלָיו. — Consider a person who is aroused to His service because he sees the Creator’s love toward him, that He created him, formed him, sustains him, gives him life, and provides all his needs. This is service that begins from an awareness of what has already been given. — וּמִחֶמֶת זֶה נִתְעוֹרֵר לוֹ אֶהְיָה הַבּוֹרָא ב"ה וְעוֹבְדָהּ. — Because of this, love of the Creator, blessed is He, is awakened in him, and he serves Him. His love is a response, the counterpart of Shimon’s love for Reuven. In the terms established above, it belongs to the category of “offspring,” an awakening from above. — וְז"ש מִי הַקְדִּימְנִי וְאֶשְׁלֵם לוֹ. — This is the meaning of “Who has anticipated Me, that I should repay him?” (*Iyov* 41:3). In its plain sense the verse denies that anyone can put Hashem in his debt. Here it characterizes this level of service exactly: such a person never came first, because everything in his love was given to him beforehand. הֵגֶם שֶׁזֶה ג"כ עִבּוּדָה מִיָּקָרִי. — עכ"ז הוּא מִיָּקָרִי. — Although this too is called service, nevertheless he is called a tzaddik for himself alone. — צַדִּיק לְעַצְמוֹ. — But he does not possess the quality of the tzaddik who bestows upon others. The Maggid does not dismiss this avodah. He measures it: it is real, but it terminates in the one performing it. — אָבֵל אֵינוּ כְּמוֹ מִדַּת הַצַּדִּיק לְהַשְׁפִּיעַ לְזוּלָתוֹ. — But he does not possess the quality of the tzaddik who bestows upon others. The higher level is defined by what it gives, not by what it receives. וְע"י הַצַּדִּיק אֲמַר. — And concerning such a tzaddik Scripture says, “We have a little sister, and she has no breasts” (*Shir HaShirim* 8:8). Two details of the verse are being read: “little,” and the absence of the organs of nursing.⁷ — וְיָדוּעַ שֶׁזֶה אוֹמְרִים הַמַּלְאָכִים שֶׁנֶּחֱבְרָה לִישְׂרָאֵל. — It is known that these words are spoken by the angels, who are called companions to the Jewish people. The line is not a

⁶ *Zohar* vol. 3, 65b. The Kehot edition reads שֵׁם אֵהִי הוּא מוֹרָה here, a fuller phrasing with the same sense.

⁷ The Kehot edition reads וְעַל זֶה, “and concerning this,” in place of “וְע"י”.

slur from outside. It is spoken by those who observe the Jewish people from above and note what is missing.⁸ — וְכֵן אָמַר יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵם בְּמִדָּה זוֹ שָׂאִין לָהֶם אֲהָבָה רַק מִחֶמֶת אֲתַעְרוּתָא דְלַעֲיָלָא אֹמְרִים אַחֲוֹת לָנוּ קִטְנָה. When the Jewish people are at this level, having love only because of an arousal from above, the angels say, “We have a little sister.” An arousal from above is the “father” love: it is given to them, not generated by them. — כְּלוּמַר אַחֲוֹת לָשׁוֹן דְּבִיקוּת וְהִתְחַבְּרוּת ר”ל אַע”פ שֶׁהֵם דְּבִיקִים וּמְחוּבְרִים בַּה”ש. That is, “sister” (*achos*) denotes clinging and joining. The meaning is that even though they do cling and are joined to Hashem, The Maggid reads *achos* from the root of joining, so the verse concedes a genuine bond before it registers the deficiency. וְהֵם אַעפ”כ קִטְנָה הִיא הַמִּדָּה הַזֹּאת מִפְּנֵי שָׂאִין לָהֶם רַק מִחֶמֶת אֲתַעְרוּתָא דְלַעֲיָלָא. — מִיִּקְרִי צְדִיקִים לְעֶצְמוֹן. still this quality is “little,” because they have it only from an arousal above. They are called tzaddikim for themselves. “Little” is thus not an accusation of sin but a statement of scale.

אָבֵל אֵינֶם צְדִיקִים לְהַשְׁפִּיעַ לַעֲיָלָא לְגִירוֹם שְׂעִשׂוּעַ וְתַעֲנוּג וְשִׂמְחָה לְעִלְיוֹנִים. — But they are not tzaddikim who bestow upward, causing delight, pleasure and joy in the supernal realms. This is the whole burden of the derush applied to avodah: the complete tzaddik generates something above, exactly as the righteous son generates a new love in his father. — וְזֶהוּ וְשָׂדִים אֵין לָהּ כְּלוּמַר שְׂדֵי”ם לְהִנִּיק וּלְהַשְׁפִּיעַ לְזוּלָתָם. This is “and she has no breasts,” meaning breasts with which to nurse and to bestow upon others. The image of nursing links this back to the Torah as *omein*, the one who nurses and sustains. What the “little sister” lacks is precisely what the Torah of the tzaddik supplies above. לְהִבְיָאֵם אֶל הַמִּדָּה. מֶה נַעֲשֶׂה לְאַחֲוֹתֵינוּ. לְהִבְיָאֵם אֶל הַמִּדָּה. — הַשְׁלִימָה הֵנּוּ “What shall we do for our sister?” (ibid.), that is, how shall we bring them to the complete level described. The angels’ question is read as a concern to raise the Jewish people from responsive love to generative love. וְכֵן יִתְרַץ וְיֻבֵּן גַּם הַמִּדְרָשׁ שֶׁהִתְחַלְנָנוּ. וְאַלָּה תוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק וְגו’ אֲבִרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת. — With this, the Midrash with which we began is also resolved and understood: “These are the offspring of Yitzchak... Avraham begot Yitzchak.” The Maggid now returns to the verse’s redundancy with the two loves in hand. — פִּי הַתְּנוּב מִסְפָּר בְּשִׁבְחָם. שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְמַעֲלַת הַשְׁלִימוּת שֶׁהֵם ב’ מִיְּנֵי אֲהָבָה בָּהֶם. The explanation is that the verse is recounting their praise, that they attained the level of completeness, in that both kinds of love were present in them. The doubled phrase is not repetition. Each clause names a different love. — וְזֶהוּ וְאַלָּה תוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אֲבִרְהָם. ר”ל שֶׁיִּצְחָק הוּא לָשׁוֹן צָחוּק וְשִׂמְחָה. This is “These are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham.” The name Yitzchak denotes laughter and joy. The name itself carries the theme, since joy is the middle term between delight and the new love it generates. — הוֹלִיד ר”ל שֶׁגָּרַם וְהוֹסִיף לְאַבְרָהָם תַּעֲנוּג וְשִׂמְחָה וְאַהֲבָה מְגוֹדֵל צְדָקָתוֹ. “Begot” means that through the greatness of his righteousness he caused and added delight, joy and love in Avraham. The clause is read with Yitzchak as the one who generates and Avraham as the one in whom something is born. It is the son’s righteousness that does the begetting. כִּי מִתְחִילָה לֹא הָיָה לְאַבְרָהָם רַק אֲהָבָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה שְׁהוּא. — הוֹלִידָת אֲבִרְהָם וְיִצְחָק. שֶׁהוּא אֲהָבָה הַנִּקְרָא אֲבִרְהָם. For at first Avraham had only the first love, which is Avraham’s begetting of Yitzchak, the love called “Avraham.” Chesed, the natural outflowing love, is Avraham’s own middah, and it corresponds to the father’s love by nature.⁹ — וְאַח”כ עָלָה לְמַעְלָה. וְגַרַם תוֹלְדָה. ואח”כ עָלָה לְמַעְלָה. — Afterward he rose higher and generated an “offspring” for Avraham. The son’s own ascent produces a new love in the father, and that love is the true “offspring” the verse names. — וְזֶהוּ שֶׁעָמְדָה. — ר”ל כִּי כְמוֹ שֶׁהָיָה הַפ’ מְדַבֵּר בְּתַחֲלִיל מְשֻׁבָּח תוֹלְדוֹת. — זִקְנִים בְּנֵי כְנִים. This is the meaning of “The crown of the elderly are grandchildren.” The Mishlei verse is now read with the same two-stage structure. — ר”ל כִּי כְמוֹ שֶׁהָיָה הַפ’ מְדַבֵּר בְּתַחֲלִיל מְשֻׁבָּח תוֹלְדוֹת. — זִקְנִים בְּנֵי כְנִים. — ואח”כ מִתּוֹלְדוֹת אֲבִרְהָם. Meaning that just as the verse in the Torah speaks first in praise of the offspring of Yitzchak and only afterward of the offspring of Avraham, The Torah’s word order is itself the proof: what Yitzchak generated is named before what Avraham generated. — אַע”פ שֶׁהוֹלִידָת. — יִצְחָק שֶׁנִּיָּה לְהוֹלִידָת אֲבִרְהָם מֵאוּחֶרֶת מִמֶּנּוּ. — even though Yitzchak’s begetting is second to Avraham’s

⁸ Zohar vol. 2, 80b; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 8:1; the reading of אַחֲוֹת as clinging and joining is cited in the Alter Rebbe’s *Likkutei Torah*, *parshas Behar*.

⁹ The Kehot edition reads לִיצְחָק, “Avraham’s begetting of Yitzchak,” which is the sense the passage requires.

begetting and later than it, In sequence the natural love comes first and the generated love second. **אָר עַל** — **פִּי כֵן מִזְכִּיר הַכְּתוּב תַּחֲלִיל הַוִּלְדֻת יִצְחָק לְאַבְרָהָם**. מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא הַמַּעֲלָה הַיּוֹתֵר שְׁלִימָה שְׁאִין לְמַעֲלָה הַיִּמְנָה. — Scripture nevertheless mentions first Yitzchak's begetting of love in Avraham, because that is the more complete level, than which there is none higher. Rank overrides chronology. The verse orders the two loves by greatness, not by time. **וְלִכְךָ מִזְכִּיר תַּחֲלִיל אַע"פ שֶׁהוּא מֵאוּחַרֵּת**. — This is why it is mentioned first, even though it comes later. The inversion in the verse is therefore deliberate and is the very thing the derush set out to explain.¹⁰ **וְעֵטֶרֶת זִקְנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים**. שֶׁהוּא הַמַּעֲלָה הַיּוֹתֵר גְּדוּלָּה — So too with this verse: "The crown of the elderly are grandchildren," which is the greater level, is placed first. The same principle of ordering governs the Mishlei verse. **וּמִ"ש עֵטֶרֶת זִקְנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים**. ר"ל הַגְּדִיל הַתַּעֲנוּג. — And when it says "the crown of the elderly are grandchildren," the meaning is that the son magnified the delight and joy for his father, and this is what is called "grandchildren." The delight itself is the new entity in the verse's genealogy. **כִּי מִתַּחֲלִיל הַוִּלְדִּיד הָאָב**. — For at first the father begot the son, and afterward the son begot and produced the delight for the father. The delight is therefore the son's own child. Two generations of "begetting" are counted: the father begets the son, and the son begets the delight. **וְנִעֲשֶׂה הַתַּעֲנוּג עֲטָרָה לְרֹאשׁ הָאָב**. שֶׁהוּא כְמוֹ אָבִי אָבִיו לְהַתַּעֲנוּג הַהוּא. — And so the delight becomes a crown upon the elder's head, for he stands to that delight as its grandfather. This is the literal fit with "the crown of the elderly are grandchildren." Relative to the delight, the father is a grandfather, and the delight crowns him. **וְאַח"כ אָמַר וְתַפְאֶרֶת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם**. שֶׁהִיא אֵינָה כ"כ רַק יֵשׁ לוֹ אֶהְיָה רִאשׁוֹנָה מִחֵמֶת. — Only afterward does it say, "and the glory of children are their fathers," which is not as great, for the son has only the first love, produced by his father's arousal and begetting. The second half of the verse describes the lower level, the love a son has merely because his father awakened it. Set beside the whole passage, this is the "little sister" who has not yet come to nurse.

SECTION 2

Chesed Gives Birth to Rachamim

SUMMARY

Derush: *Bereishis* 25:19 says "And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham, Avraham begot Yitzchak." The closing clause seems to add nothing, since the verse has already identified Yitzchak as Avraham's son. The Maggid reads it instead as a statement about how the *middos* generate one another.

Torah Basis: The verse itself, together with the standard identifications in the *Zohar* of Avraham with Chesed, Yitzchak with din, and Yaakov with rachamim.

Kabbalistic Framework: Rachamim, the middle *middah* of Tiferes, is not simple Chesed. It arises only where Chesed encounters restraint, when *din* has come to rest on a person. That meeting is what the verse describes: Avraham, Chesed, produces Yaakov's *middah* "with Yitzchak," reading the word *es* as "with" rather than as the sign of the direct object.

Avodah: Judgment that settles on a person is not an end in itself. It is precisely the condition under which Chesed turns into mercy.

אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק — "Avraham begot Yitzchak." The Maggid opens with the verse's closing clause (*Bereishis* 25:19) rather than its beginning, because this is the phrase that carries the difficulty: having

¹⁰ The Kehot edition reads מזכירה, the feminine form, with the verse itself as the subject.

already called Yitzchak “son of Avraham,” why add that Avraham begot him? **פִּי כִּי מִדַּת הַרַחֲמִימוֹת וְהַחֶסֶד נִוְלָד** — **The meaning is that the middah of mercy and of Chesed is born** The subject of the sentence is *rachamim*, the middle *middah* of Tiferes, considered together with its source in Chesed. **כִּשְׁשׁוּרָה דִּין עַל הָאָדָם** — **when din rests upon a person.** Mercy has no occasion to appear where nothing is being withheld. It emerges specifically where judgment has taken hold, which is the *middah* of Yitzchak. **נִוְלָד הַרַחֲמִימוֹת מִצַּד הַחֶסֶד** — **Mercy is born from the side of Chesed.** The birth is from Chesed, not from *din*. Judgment supplies the circumstance, while the compassion itself flows from the right side. This is why Tiferes is described as inclining toward Chesed even as it restrains it. **זֶהוּ וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק.** — **This is the meaning of “And these are the offspring of Yitzchak.”** The verse’s word *toldos*, “offspring,” is taken in its literal sense of what is generated: what comes forth from Yitzchak, from a state of *din*, is a new *middah*. **אֲבָרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת פִּירוֹשׁ אֲבָרָהָם שֶׁהוּא** — **“Avraham begot Yitzchak.”** The clause is quoted again, now to be parsed. **הַחֶסֶד — That is, Avraham, who is Chesed,** Avraham is Chesed throughout the *Zohar*’s usage, the unrestrained impulse to bestow good. **הוֹלִיד מִדַּת יַעֲקֹב שֶׁהוּא הַרַחֲמִימוֹת** — **gave birth to the middah of Yaakov, which is rachamim,** Yaakov is Tiferes, the middle line, and mercy is its inner experience. The Maggid supplies Yaakov here even though the verse does not mention him, because *rachamim* is the offspring that the verse’s “begetting” produces. **אַתָּה יִצְחָק :** — **together with Yitzchak.** The pivot of the whole reading: since “the *middah* of Yaakov” has already been named as the object of “begot,” the words *es Yitzchak* can no longer be the direct object. They are read as “with Yitzchak,” meaning that Chesed produced mercy in partnership with judgment.¹¹

SECTION 3

The Letters of Eileh Toldos Yitzchak

SUMMARY

Derush: The verse “And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham” (*Bereishbis* 25:19) opens with the seemingly superfluous word *eileh*. The Maggid reads its three letters as the stages by which wisdom becomes speech, and takes “offspring” to mean precisely what that process brings forth.

Torah Basis: The verse itself, together with “and I will teach you wisdom” (*Iyov* 33:33), which supplies the link between the letter alef and *Chochmah*. The *Zohar*’s identification of the alef with *Chochmah* and *Tikkunei Zohar*’s identification of the lamed with thought stand behind the reading.

Kabbalistic Framework: Alef is *Chochmah*, the first point of insight. Lamed is thought, where that point spreads out. Hei, the number five, is the five places of articulation in the mouth, that is, speech. Avraham is *Chesed* and Yitzchak *Gevurah*, so “Yitzchak son of Avraham” is awe generated within love.

Avodah: Love and awe must be held together, since only their union produces anything.

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אֲבָרָהָם. — **“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham.”** The verse that opens the parsha (*Bereishbis* 25:19). The word “these” appears to add nothing, since “the offspring of Yitzchak” would have said as much. The Maggid therefore treats *eileh* not as a pointing word but as a word whose three letters themselves spell out how anything is brought forth. **כִּי אֵלֶּה הָאֵלֶּף הוּא הַחֶכְמָה** — **In the word eileh, the alef is Chochmah, as in “and I will teach you wisdom.”**

¹¹ *Zohar* vol. 1, 47b, on Avraham as Chesed; *Zohar* vol. 3, 38a, on Yaakov as rachamim; cf. *Maggid Devarav L’Yaakov* §35 and the close of §1 above.

The proof is drawn from the verb in *Iyov* 33:33, built on the very letters of alef, where what is transmitted is wisdom itself. *Chochmah* is the first flash of insight, a bare point in which everything is present but nothing yet spread out, and the alef, the first and simplest letter, corresponds to it. והלמד הוא המחשבה — **the lamed is thought**, *Tikkunei Zohar* assigns the lamed to thought. This is the second stage: the compressed point of *Chochmah* is turned over inwardly and extended, so that what was folded into the flash becomes articulated to the one thinking it. וע"י ה' מוצאות הפה — **and through the five places of articulation of the mouth**. The hei, whose value is five, points to the five organs of speech: throat, palate, tongue, teeth and lips. With this the sequence in *eileh* is complete, running from insight, through thought, to spoken word.

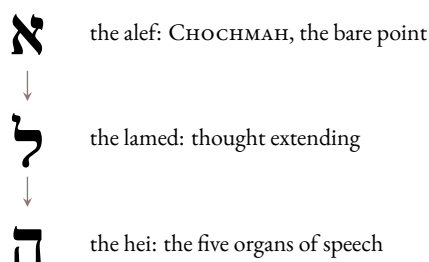


DIAGRAM 1 · The word *eileh*: from the point of *Chochmah* to the five organs of speech

הם תולדות אצל יצחק בן אברהם. — These are the offspring, in the case of Yitzchak son of Avraham. Speech is where things actually come into being, since the world was made by utterances, so the three stages compressed into *eileh* are what the verse calls “offspring”: they are the generative chain itself, not its products. How this chain is bound specifically to “Yitzchak son of Avraham” is left unstated in this first reading, and the second reading supplies it.¹² פ'י אחר ואלה תולדות — Another explanation of “And these are the offspring”: The Maggid now rereads the same words, no longer as a chain of faculties but as a statement about how the world came to be.

הוא בריא"ת ע"י יצחק בן אברהם — this refers to the creation of this world, which came about through Yitzchak son of Avraham, The verse is heard as describing what “these offspring” are: the bringing forth of this world. The agency named is the pairing “Yitzchak son of Avraham.” היינו ע"י התכללות אהבה — **that is, through the interinclusion of love and awe**. Avraham is *Chesed*, the inner experience of which is love, and Yitzchak is *Gevurah*, whose inner experience is awe. The verse does not name them side by side but as son and father, which is exactly interinclusion: the restraining awe of *Gevurah* is generated within, and contained inside, the outpouring love of *Chesed*. Love alone sets no limit and so yields nothing definite, and awe alone withholds, so a world emerges only where the two are folded into each other.¹³

¹² *Zohar* vol. 1, 26b; *Zohar* vol. 2, 136b; *Tikkunei Zohar* 55 (89a). On *eileh* treated as a term in its own right, cf. *Sba'ar HaHakdamot*, in the discussion of the Name B”N.

¹³ cf. §1; *Or HaEmes* 33a-b.

SECTION 4

Why Yitzchak Loved Esav

SUMMARY

Derush: Why did Yitzchak love Esav (*Bereishis* 25:28)? The Maggid answers from the name Yitzchak itself, which the midrash traces to laughter and joy, that is, to delight. Since delight that never lapses ceases to register as delight, the bearer of delight is drawn precisely to what is distant, and so Yitzchak loves the far son and asks that son to bring him “delicacies.”

Torah Basis: *Bereishis* 25:28 and 27:4; the teaching of Reish Lakish and its resolution in *Yoma* 86b that teshuvah out of love converts willful sins into merits; “From afar Hashem appeared to me” (*Yirmiyahu* 31:2) and “peace to the far one” (*Yeshayah* 57:19).

Kabbalistic Framework: *Taanug*, delight, understood as needing contrast, so that estrangement itself becomes the instrument of pleasure rather than its opposite.

Avodah: The distance opened by sin, when it turns into longing to rise, is what generates the delight above. This is why the sins themselves count as merits.

וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו — “And Yitzchak loved Esav” (*Bereishis* 25:28). In its plain sense the verse explains the preference by the game Esav brought his father. The derush asks a different question: what could draw Yitzchak specifically to Esav? **פִּי יִצְחָק הוּא לְשׁוֹן צְחֹק וְשִׂמְחָה** — **The explanation: the name Yitzchak is an expression of laughter and joy.** The midrashic reading of the name from the root of laughter is what triggers the whole derush. **וְהוּא הַתַּעֲנוּג** — **and this is delight.** Laughter is what delight looks like from outside, so the name marks Yitzchak as the *middah* of *taanug*, delight itself. **וְתַעֲנוּג תָּמִידִי אֵינוֹ** — **and a delight that is constant is no delight.** This is the axiom the derush turns on. Pleasure is felt only against a background of its absence. Unbroken, it stops being experienced at all. **לִכֵּן וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק** — **and this is why “Yitzchak loved Esav,”** The love now follows from the nature of delight rather than from any merit in Esav. **הַתַּעֲנוּג אוֹהֵב הַהִתְרַחֲקוּת.** — **for delight loves distance.** Esav is the son who stands at a remove. Distance is exactly what delight requires in order to be felt, so the bearer of delight is drawn to the distant one. **לִכֵּן בָּא עֵשָׂו לְיִצְחָק.** — **That is why Esav comes to Yitzchak.** The movement runs from far to near, and that approach out of distance is what yields the delight. Yitzchak does not go out to Esav. **וְזֶהוּ וַעֲשֵׂה לִי מִטְעָמִים.** — **This is the meaning of “and make me delicacies”** (*Bereishis* 27:4). *Matamim* is built on *taam*, taste. Yitzchak asks the distant son for “tastes,” and what he is asking for is the delight that only distance supplies. **ר"ל כִּי יִתְרַבֶּה הַתַּעֲנוּג,** — **meaning that the delight should be increased.** The request is not for food but for intensification, since the delight grows in proportion to the remove from which it is brought. **וְזֶהוּ גְדוּלָּה תְּשׁוּבָה שְׂדֵדוֹנוֹת נַעֲשׂוּ לוֹ כְּזָכוֹת אֵם הוּא מְאֵהָב.** — **And this is the meaning of “Great is teshuvah, for willful sins become like merits for him”** (*Yoma* 86b), **when it is out of love.** The Gemara resolves its own difficulty by distinguishing teshuvah out of fear, which reduces willful sins to unintentional ones, from teshuvah out of love, which converts them into merits. The mechanism just established explains why love in particular does this. **ר"ל כֹּל מָה שֶׁהוּא חָפֵץ לָעֲלוֹת.** — **That is, [it all depends on] how much he desires to ascend.** The Hebrew is elliptical, and the next clause supplies the sense: the operative measure is the strength of the returning person’s longing. **וְכַפִּי חֲפֵצוֹ וְהִשְׁקוֹ** — **and in accordance with his desire and yearning, so does he increase the delight.** Sin sets a person at a distance, and it is from that distance that the yearning to rise is generated. The stronger the yearning, the greater the delight it produces above. **לִכֵּן בָּזָה הַזְדִּירוֹת בָּא לוֹ תַעֲנוּג לִכֵּן הֵם כְּזָכוֹת.** — **and so it is through these very willful sins that delight comes to him, and therefore they are like merits.** They are not merely erased. Having been the cause of the distance, they are the cause of the longing, and so they become the source of the delight itself. That is why they are credited as merits. **וְזֶהוּ מִרְחֹק ה' נִרְאָה.** — **This is the meaning of “From afar Hashem appeared to me”** (*Yirmiyahu* 31:2). The prophet speaks of Hashem’s enduring love for the Jewish people. Read here, the words state the cause: it is out of

the distance that He appears. **אִם אֲנִי מְרוּחָק אֶזְהֶי' נִרְאָה לִי** — If I am the one who is distanced, then He appeared to me, The verse is taken in the first person as the speech of the one who has become far. **כִּי : שְׁלוֹם לְרָחוֹק ע"י רִיחוֹק** — for “peace to the far one” (*Yesayah* 57:19) comes about by way of the distance. The Maggid marks the wordplay by spacing out the two words: *la'rachok*, “to the far one,” and *richuk*, “distance,” are the same letters. The peace promised to the distant one is not granted in spite of his distance but through it. The point of service follows: estrangement that turns into longing is precisely what produces delight above.¹⁴

SECTION 5

The Tzaddik Who Never Stands Still

SUMMARY

Derush: “And the man grew great, and he went on growing greater until he became very great” (*Bereishis* 26:13) calls Yitzchak “the man” rather than by name, and doubles both the growing and the going. The Maggid asks why.

Torah Basis: The two declarations at the Simchas Beis HaShoeivah in *Sukkah* 53a, the dispute in *Berachos* 34b over whether complete tzaddikim or baalei teshuvah stand higher, Reish Lakish’s two kinds of teshuvah in *Yoma* 86b, and the midrash that people preferred the dung of Yitzchak’s mules to Avimelech’s silver and gold.

Kabbalistic Framework: *Chochmah* as *ayin*, as *koach mah*, and as “old age”; the Arizal’s rule about the inner dimension of a lower world becoming the outer dimension of the world above it; and *me’od* read as the letters of *adam*, whose value is *mah*, the middah by which the shattering of the vessels is repaired.

Avodah: The tzaddik’s task is never to stand still on one level, and to keep his service burning with the fervor that only love produces, since habit deadens it.

בְּפָסוּק וַיִּגְדַּל הָאִישׁ וַיֵּלֶךְ הַלֹּךְ וגדול עד כי גדל מאוד, — On the verse, “And the man grew great, and he went on growing greater until he became very great” (*Bereishis* 26:13). The verse describes Yitzchak’s prosperity in the land of the Philistines. Three features of its wording drive the entire derush: the anonymous “the man,” the repetition of growth, and the repetition of going. **וְהָיָה יֵשׁ לְדֹקֵדֵק לָמָּה קוֹרָא אוֹתוֹ בֶּפ' זֶה** — One must examine why in this verse Scripture calls him “a man,” when throughout the entire portion it calls him Yitzchak, yet here it calls him “a man.” The whole narrative names Yitzchak explicitly. The switch to the generic *ish* asks to be accounted for. **וְעוֹד מָהוּ כָּפֵל הַגְדוּלוֹת. וְכָפֵל הַלֵּכָה** — Furthermore, what is the point of the doubled expression of greatness, and of the doubled expression of going? “He grew great” and “until he became very great” say greatness twice, and “he went on going” says going twice. **וְאֵל עפ"י מ"ש בְּגַמ' הִלְלוּ אֱמָרוּ** — This can be explained in light of what the Gemara teaches: some of them would say, “Happy is our youth, which did not shame our old age.” At the Simchas Beis HaShoeivah, the pious men and men of deed made this declaration. **וְהִלְלוּ אֱמָרוּ אֲשֶׁרִי זִקְנִיתִינוּ שְׂכַפָּרָה** — Others would say, “Happy is our old age, which atoned for our youth.” This second group is identified in the Gemara as the baalei teshuvah. **אֲשֶׁרִי מִי שֶׁלֹּא חָטָא וְכו'.** — And both groups would say, “Happy is one who has not sinned...” The passage concludes with a line both groups say together, which the Maggid will presently take apart. **הִנֵּה ר"ל אומרים זִקְנִיתִינוּ שְׂכַפָּרָה** — Now, [consider] what they mean by saying, “our old age, which atoned,” and so on.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ A parallel appears in *Or HaEmes* 33b. Cf. *Kesser Shem Tov* §121 on constant delight, and §§29-30 on this reading of “From afar.”

¹⁵ The Kehot edition reads **יֵשׁ לְדֹקֵדֵק** here, “one must examine,” making this the opening of a list of difficulties rather than a statement of the passage’s meaning.

he was still wicked, so presumably he had very many willful sins, and now that he has repented out of love, they have been turned into merits for him. The very volume of his former sinning becomes the measure of his present merit. **ועוד הַזְכוּת שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה אַחֵר הַתְּשׁוּבָה נִמְצָא כִּי יֵשׁ לוֹ יוֹתֵר זְכוּת מִן הַצַּדִּיק** — Add to that the merits he earns after his teshuvah, and it turns out that he has more merits than the tzaddik. Converted sins plus fresh mitzvos outweigh a lifetime of steady service. **וְשִׁמְעָתִי טַעַם א' שֶׁהִבַּע"ת יוֹתֵר** — I have also heard a further reason why the baal teshuvah is greater: he has already known the heat and burning excitement of sin, The argument now shifts from quantity of merits to quality of service. **וְכָשֶׁעוֹשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה וְעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת עוֹשֶׂה הֵפֵל בְּהַתְּלֵהְבוֹת** — **וְחָשַׁק גָּדוֹל מִפְּנֵי שֶׁיּוֹדֵעַ הֵיטֵב הַהַתְּלֵהְבוֹת** — so when he repents and occupies himself with Torah and mitzvos, he does everything with fervor and great longing, because he knows well what such burning is. The capacity for passion, once trained on sin, is transferred intact to avodah. **מִשָּׂא"כ הַצַּדִּיק שֶׁלֹּא הִכִּיר זֶה** — The tzaddik, by contrast, never knew this. He has no acquired experience of that inner heat to draw upon. **וְעוֹד אָמַר מוֹרֵי וְרַבֵּי הַטַּעַם, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁאֶצֶל הַצַּדִּיק נַעֲשׂוּ מַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים וְלִימוּד תּוֹרָה הִרְגִּיל. וְאֵינוֹ** — My teacher and master gave a further reason: for the tzaddik, good deeds and Torah study have become habit, and so he does not perform them with as much fervor. “My teacher and master” is the Baal Shem Tov. Habit is the specific liability of consistency: what one has always done, one does automatically. **וְעוֹד אֵם לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה הֵפֵל בְּדַבְרֵיקוֹת יְפוֹל מִמְּדִרִיגָתוֹ. לָכֵן מִן הַהִכָּרָה הוּא** — For the baal teshuvah, however, it is all new. Novelty keeps his service awake. **לִכְּה מִן הַהִכָּרָה הוּא** — Moreover, if he does not do everything with attachment [to Hashem], he will fall from his level. He therefore has no choice but to serve his Creator, blessed is He, with great fervor. His position is unstable, and instability itself forces intensity. **וְאֵ"כ לְפִי טַעַמִּים הַנִּזְכָּר גַּם** — According to these reasons, then, even one who repents out of fear has known such fervor. The three reasons just given apply to any baal teshuvah, which threatens to erase the distinction the Maggid drew a moment ago. **אֵה עַכְ"ז יָדוּעַ הוּא. כִּי עֵיקָר הַתְּלֵהְבוֹת הוּא מִגִּדּוֹל הָאֵהָבָה,** — Even so, it is known that fervor comes essentially from the intensity of love. Fervor is a function of *Chesed*. Its true source is love, not fear. **אֵינוֹ כ"כ גָּדוֹלָה. אֵינוֹ כ"כ גָּדוֹלָה.** — One who serves out of fear, though he has the fire of fervor, does not have it as strongly as the tzaddik who serves out of love. So the distinction stands: the fear-driven baal teshuvah burns, but with a lesser flame than love produces. **וְעַפ"י י"ל ג"כ הַלָּלוֹ אוֹמְרִים אֲשֶׁרִי וְקִנּוּתִינוּ מִיָּרִי** — On this basis we can also explain that those who say “Happy is our old age” likewise refer to those who repented out of love. The Gemara’s second group is now identified precisely, which answers the first difficulty about the word *ashrei*. **וּבָזֶה וּנְדָאִי כִּיפָּרָה יְלֻדוּתָם** — In their case their old age certainly did atone for their youth. This answers the second difficulty. Since their sins were converted into merits, the atonement genuinely reached backward. **וְאֵה שֶׁשָּׁבוּ בִּימֵי הַשִּׁיבָה עַכְ"ז גָּדוֹלָה תְּשׁוּבָתָם שֶׁעָשׂוּ** — Even though they repented in old age, their teshuvah was great, since it was done out of love, and consequently their fervor and attachment were great, for the reasons given. Lateness is offset by the quality of the motive and by the three advantages of the baal teshuvah. **וּבָזֶה כִּיפָּרָה לָהֶם מִכָּל וְכָל. וְאֵין בָּהֶם רוּשָׁם חָטָא כִּי אֲדַרְבָּא נַעֲשֶׂה** — Thus it atoned for them entirely, and no trace of sin remains in them. On the contrary, their sins were made into merits. Not a residue removed, but a substance transformed. **וּז"ש אֲשֶׁרִי מִי שֶׁלֹּא** — This is why they say, “Happy is one who has not sinned”: both groups are warning and rebuking the other baalei teshuvah, those who repented [out of fear], and it is about them that they said, “Happy is one who has not sinned.” This answers the third difficulty. The closing line is not self-deprecation but instruction addressed to a third category of penitent. **וְגַם הָיוּ צָרִיכִין מַחֲלִילָה וְכִפָּרָה כִּי הָרִי הַזֶּה נַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם כְּשִׁנְגוֹת** — They too still needed forgiveness and atonement, for

their willful sins became like unwitting ones, and an unwitting sinner requires atonement. That is the meaning of “and whoever has sinned, may He forgive him.” This answers the fourth difficulty. For the fear-driven penitent, sins downgraded to *shegagos* still call for a *korban*, so forgiveness is still needed. ומ"ש — But the statement “Happy is our youth, which did not shame our old age” is not understood. Having settled the second group, the Maggid returns to the first. כי הלא אִמְרָנוּ שֶׁזֶה מְדַבֵּר מִצְדִּיקִים גְּמוּרִים מִתְחִילָתָם א"כ מה"ת שִׁיבוּשׁוּ מִפְּנֵי הַיְלָדוּת שֶׁלָּהֶם וְהָלוּא — For we said that this refers to those who were completely righteous from the start. Why, then, should there be any reason for their old age to be shamed by their youth, when all of it was equally good? The very formula presumes that their youth might have shamed their old age. For a lifelong tzaddik that presumption makes no sense. אָה"ל כִּי אוֹתָן הַצְדִּיקִים הָלְכוּ וְנִתְגַּדְלוּ מִמְּדִירָגָה לִמְדִירָגָה — The answer is that those tzaddikim went on growing greater from level to level, to the very heights, until they reached the world of *Chochmah* and the gate of *ayin*. *Chochmah* is the topmost reach of conscious attainment, and it is the point of *bitul*, where the self is experienced as nothing. That is “the gate of *ayin*.” כִּמ"ש וְהַחֲכָמָה מֵאַיִן תִּמְצָא — as it says, “And wisdom, from where is it found?” (*Iyov* 28:12). The plain sense is a question, “where is wisdom to be found?” Read kabbalistically, *me'ayin* names the source: *Chochmah* is found from *ayin*. חכמה"ה כ"ח — The word *Chochmah* [breaks into] *koach* *

מ"ה כִּמ"ש וְנִחְנָנוּ מה" — *mah*, as it says, “and what are we?” (*Shemos* 16:7), *Chochmah* is *koach mah*, the power of “what,” Moshe and Aharon’s own expression of utter self-nullification. וְחֲכָמָה נִקְרָא זִקְנָה — and *Chochmah* is called “old age,” as in “this one has acquired wisdom,” and it is called *mah*, and it is called *ayin*. Three names for one rung. Chazal define *zaken* as one who has acquired wisdom, which lets “old age” in the Gemara’s formula stand for *Chochmah* itself. Thus the two declarations at the Simchas Beis HaShoeivah are not only about two kinds of person but about two rungs in one person’s ascent.¹⁷ — וְהָרִי הָלְכוּ וְנִתְגַּדְלוּ מִעֵט מִעֵט מִמְּדִירָגָה לִמְדִירָגָה. — So they went on growing greater, little by little, from level to level. The ascent is gradual, which is what generates the problem of relative smallness. וְאָף בְּהִיּוֹתָם בִּמְדִירָגָה הָא' שֶׁהִיא תַּחְתּוֹנָה לְעֵלְיוֹתָם הָיוּ תִּיכָף בְּגִלּוֹת וְלֹא הָיָה לָהֶם קְטָנוּת. — Even while they were on the first level, the lowest of their ascents, they were immediately in a state of greatness and had no smallness at all. The printed בגלות is evidently בגדלות, “greatness,” since the sentence’s contrast is with *katnus*, smallness. — שֶׁהָרִי קוֹרְאִים אוֹתָן צְדִיקִים מִתְחִילָתָן. — since they are called righteous from the very start. Their first rung was not deficient. It was already the service of a tzaddik. עכ"ז — כִּאֲשֶׁר עָלוּ לִמְדִירָגָה הַיּוֹתֵר עֲלִיּוֹנָה. נֶק' הַגְּדֻלּוֹת הָא' יְלָדוּת וְקְטָנוּת נִגְדַּ עֲרָה הַגְּדֻלּוֹת עוֹלָם שֶׁלְמַעֲלָה הֵימָנוּ. — Even so, once they rose to a higher level, that first greatness is called youth and smallness relative to the greatness of the world above it. Greatness is measured against the world one now inhabits. What was full stature below is infancy above. כִּמ"ש בְּכַתְבִּי הָאֶר"י זלה"ה. שֶׁפְּנִימִיּוֹת עוֹלָם הַתַּחְתּוֹן נִצְשָׁה חֵיצוֹן לְעוֹלָם. — as is written in the writings of the Arizal, of blessed memory, that the inner dimension of the lower world becomes the external dimension in relation to the world above it. The Lurianic rule about how adjacent worlds interlock supplies the mechanism: the highest, innermost point of a lower world registers only as the outermost layer of the world above. Applied to a person’s ascent, his deepest attainment on one rung becomes the mere surface of the next. וז"ש אֲשֶׁרִי יְלָדוּתֵינוּ כְּלוֹמַר אע"פ שֶׁבְּעֲרָה וְקָנוּתֵינוּ נֶק' — הַגְּדֻלּוֹת הָא' יְלָדוּת וְקְטָנוּת עכ"ז לא בִּישָׁה וְקָנוּתֵינוּ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם הַתַּחְתּוֹן הִיָּתָה גְּדֻלּוֹת גְּמוּרָה. — This is the meaning of “Happy is our youth”: although relative to our old age that first greatness is called youth and smallness, still it did not shame our old age, for in its own lower place it was complete greatness. The difficulty dissolves. “Youth” here is not sin but an earlier rung, and it carries no shame because it was

¹⁷ *Kiddushin* 32b for *zaken* as one who has acquired wisdom; *Zohar* vol. 3, 28a and 235b for *Chochmah* as *koach mah*; *Tikkunei Zohar* 70 (127a, 133b) and 42 (81b) for *Chochmah* as *mah* and as *ayin*. On habit dulling the tzaddik’s service, cf. §456; on fervor deriving from love, cf. §44.

whole in its own world. וַיֵּלֶךְ שְׁזָה ג"כ פִּי הַמֶּשֶׁה הַפְּסוּק וַיִּגְדֵּל הָאִישׁ ר"ל תִּיכָף שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה אִישׁ שֶׁהוּא בֶן י"ג. — This also explains the sequence of our verse. "And the man grew great" means that as soon as he became a "man," that is, thirteen years old, he was immediately great. Here is the answer to the first question. *Ish* is not a substitute for the name Yitzchak but a marker of age: the moment he reached the age of obligation he was already in *gadlus*, which is exactly the profile of "happy is our youth." — וַיֵּלֶךְ הָלוֹךְ כְּפוֹל הֶהְלִיכָה. שְׁלֹא עוֹמֵד בְּמַדְרִיגָה א' מִיָּמָיו. רַק הֵלֶךְ תָּמִיד הֶלִיכָה אַחֵר הֶלִיכָה מַעוֹלָם לַעוֹלָם. — "And he went on going," the doubled expression of going, [teaches] that he never stood still on a single level all his life, but constantly went, one going after another, from world to world. The doubled verb answers the second question, and it is the avodah of the passage: the tzaddik's standing is walking. וְזֶה הָלוֹךְ. — This is "going and growing greater," until he reached complete greatness, the level of *Chochmah* and the gate of *ayin*. Each new rung redefines the previous one as smallness, until the ascent arrives at *Chochmah*, where there is no self left to measure. — וְזֶה עַד מָאֵד שֶׁהוּא אוֹתִיּוֹת אֲדָ"ם שֶׁהוּא גִי' מ"ה כְּמוֹ וְנִחְנוּ מ"ה. — This is "until he became very great (*me'od*)," whose letters are the letters of *adam*, which has the numerical value of *mah*, as in "and what are we?" מֵאֵד and אֲדָם share their letters, and אֲדָם equals 45, the value of מ"ה. The verse's final word thus names the destination of the whole ascent: the human being who has become "what?" וְכַמֶּדֶת מ"ה יָכוֹל לְתַקֵּן — With the middah of *mah* one can rectify the entire shattering, and one can rise higher and higher, to the very heights. In the Arizal's account, the Name *Mah*, the filling of the divine Name that equals 45, is the light that repairs the vessels broken in the world of Tohu. In avodah this is *bitul*: only a person who is "what?" is not a vessel that can shatter, and only he can keep rising without limit.¹⁸ — עַד שֶׁהָיוּ אוֹמְרֵי זָכַל פְּרֻדוֹתָיו שֶׁל יִצְחָק וְלֹא כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב שֶׁל אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ. — It may be that this is what Chazal hinted at when they said on this verse, "And the man grew great...", that people were saying: the dung of Yitzchak's mules, and not the silver and gold of Avimelech. The midrash on this very verse becomes the next text to be explained by the same distinction. — הַמִּוֹאֲסִים כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וּבֹחֲרִים זָכַל לְחַלְקָם אִם הַזָּכַל שֶׁנֶּה יוֹתֵר דְּעוֹד אֲמָרָם וְלֹא כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב מִשְׁמִי שְׂאִינָם רוֹצִים כָּלֵל בְּכֶסֶף וְזָהָב וְהוּא כְּעֵין. — Moreover, their words "and not the silver and gold" imply that they had no desire at all for silver and gold, which sounds like exaggeration. The phrasing is exclusive, not comparative, and that is what needs accounting for. — וַיֵּלֶךְ הָלוֹךְ בֵּין הָעוֹבְדֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם מִנְּעוּרָיו. וְכִינּוּ מִי שֶׁהִכִּיר אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ וְשָׁב אֵלָיו. — The explanation lies in the difference between one who serves Hashem from his youth and one who came to recognize his Creator and returned to Him in old age. The midrash is read as a comparison between two kinds of servant, and the Maggid now turns from the merits of the baal teshuvah to his characteristic danger. — כִּי מֵה שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה הַבַּע"ת עֵטֶר לְרֹאשׁוֹ עוֹשֶׂה הַצַּדִּיק עֶקֶב לְסַנְדָּל. — What the baal teshuvah makes into a crown for his head, the tzaddik makes into the heel of his sandal. The same deed occupies opposite positions in the two men's estimation of themselves. This will turn out to be the point of the dung and the gold. — כִּי הַבַּע"ת אֵינוֹ מוֹרֵג לַעֲשׂוֹת מִצְוָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים וּבַעֲשׂוֹת אֵיזָה פַעַם. — For the baal teshuvah is not accustomed to performing mitzvot and good deeds, and when he does perform one on occasion, he thinks and imagines that no one serves like him. The very novelty that fuels his fervor also inflates his self-assessment. — וְטוֹרָה גְּדוֹל עוֹשֶׂה אוֹתָם כִּי לֹא נִיסָה בָּהֶם. — because he performs them with difficulty and great exertion,

¹⁸ *Etz Chaim, sha'ar* 14, ch. 9, for the relation between the inner dimension of a lower world and the outer dimension of the higher; cf. §24. *Niddab* 46a for *ish* as thirteen years old; *Tikkunei Zohar* 7b for *adam* as 45; *Etz Chaim, sha'ar* 10, ch. 1, on the Name *Mah* as the rectifying power; cf. §97.