



B”H

# BASI L’GANI

– 5715 –



Beis Moshiach presents the maamer the Rebbe MH”M delivered on Yud Shvat 5715, in accordance with the custom established by the Rebbe to review each year a section of the Rebbe Rayatz’s maamer “Basi L’Gani” of 5710. • This year we focus on the fifth section of the profound and foundational chassidic discourse.

**Translated by Boruch Merkur**

## THE EPIC ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE SEVENTH GENERATION

1. “I have returned to My garden, My sister, My bride.” On these words, the Midrash Rabba (in its place) comments: “‘To My garden’ – to My bridal chamber, to the place where My essence was [revealed] in the first days of Creation,” for the *Ikar Sh’china* (the essence of the Divine Presence) was manifest then in the lower realms, in the physical world itself. But with the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which gave rise to subsequent sins, a fundamental change took place: the Sh’china departed from the earth to the heavens.

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Afterwards, when righteous people appeared in the world, they drew down the Sh’china from the heavens to the earth through their service of G-d. This process reached its pinnacle with Moshe Rabbeinu, leader of the seventh generation [from Avrohom Avinu], and as our Sages teach, “all sevenths are beloved.” Moshe Rabbeinu’s epic accomplishment is that he completed the entire process of drawing the Sh’china back down from the first firmament of the heavens to the earth. Similarly with regard to the Divine service of other *tzaddikim*: through their *avoda*, they draw down G-dliness at the level of “*shochan ad marom v’kadosh*,” bringing the Sh’china into the lower realms, reaching even the physical dimension.

This G-dly revelation is achieved through the Divine service of *iskafia sitra achra*, rejecting evil, for “when evil is shunned, the glory of the Alm-ghty is manifest (*istalek*).” Here the meaning of “*istalek*” is that G-dliness is drawn down below in a revealed way but in a manner described as “*istalek* – a departure,” and is manifest in all worlds equally. Here we are speaking about the revelation of Ohr HaSovev Kol Almin, a sublime revelation of G-dliness. On account of its radical transcendence, it is manifest in all worlds equally.

**A NACHAS RUACH TO ME**

Now, in general, drawing down the Sh’china into the world occurred primarily in the Mishkan and the Mikdash, as it is written, “Make for Me a Sanctuary and I shall dwell among them.” [Of course, the main service of G-d that took place in the Sanctuary and the Holy Temple was the offering of sacrifices.] Now, sacrifices comprise two opposite spiritual movements: raising up as well as drawing down [paralleling the dynamic described above of elevating oneself spiritually, by rejecting evil, and the resultant revelation from On High, G-dliness being drawn down into the world]. The twofold motion associated with sacrifices is alluded to in Torah in the verse, “*Ishei*, a burnt offering, a pleasant fragrance to G-d”:

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[Like smoke and flames] a burnt offering ascends from the earth to the heavens. The spiritual counterpart for this motion is the dedication of one's skills and talents towards Divine purpose. Doing so brings about "a pleasant fragrance to G-d" – "a *nachas ruach* before Me, for I have spoken and My will has been done." The *nachas* elicited from On High is described as, "*n'chus darga* – going down a step," drawing down G-dliness from above to below. The same applies to the *avoda* of *iskafa sitra achra*, shunning evil [elevating one's animalistic tendencies]. As a result of this *avoda*, the lofty G-dly light that shines in all worlds equally is drawn down, especially to the lower realms.

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### TO REMOVE THE RUACH SHTUS

Of course, in order for there to be the *avoda* of rejected evil, there must first be the existence of evil. Evil conceals the truth [of the reality of G-dliness], which in turn obscures the function of the G-dly soul. The effect of removing the influence of the G-dly soul is that it opens up the possibility for one to err, wrongly perceiving that he maintains his Judaism even when he transgresses G-d's will.

The forces of evil employ a *ruach shtus*, a spirit of folly, to achieve this end. Once a spirit of folly enters the person, it becomes possible

for him to commit a sin. However, by means of the *avoda* of *iskafia sitra achra*, exerting oneself to reject evil, the *ruach shtus* is dismissed and removed. The result of this effort is that the evil folly is compelled to act in accordance with G-d's will, or it is even transformed [into a force of good].

In the spirit of this confrontation against the *ruach shtus*, the Mishkan was made from standing planks of acacia wood, *atzei shittim*. The word “*shittim*” alludes to the transformation of the *ruach shtus* [for it shares the same linguistic root].

In terms of the service of G-d, confronting the *ruach shtus* is accomplished by the spiritual *avoda* of offering sacrifices, *korbanos*. This *avoda* is described in the verse, “*Adam ki yakriv mi'kem* – a person who offers [a sacrifice] from among you.” The main thing is that the offering of the sacrifice must be “*mi'kem* – from you,” a sacrifice of all aspects of the soul of man, as the verse continues, “From the animals, from the cattle, and from the sheep” [analogous to various aspects of the soul]. The result of this *avoda* is that it brings about “I shall dwell among you” [the Divine presence revealed within the Jew].



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## A SHIFT AWAY FROM REASON

2. In order to transform *shtus d'l'umas zeh*, evil folly, it is specifically by means of *shtus d'k'dusha*, holy folly. Just as in the realm of evil the term “*shtus* – folly” applies to behavior that is foolish, irrational, below reason, similarly in the realm of holiness there is an *avoda* that diverges from what is rational in that it transcends intellect; this too is called “*shtus*.”

Now, the meaning of the word “*shtus*” is “*hetia* – a shift or inclination” (as Rashi comments on the verse, “*Ki sisteh* (which is related to the word “*shtus*”) *ishto*” – “shifting away from the paths of modesty”). Here we see that in the context of intellect, a shift or departure from reason is called “*shtus*.” Stooping below intellect is evil folly, whereas rising above intellect is *shtus d'k'dusha*, holy folly. In the realm of holiness, even behavior that is below intellect, stems from where the concept exists in the essence of the soul, which transcends the intellect, literally at the level of sight [which cannot be disregarded even in the face of seemingly contradictory logic; “seeing is believing”].

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### “HIS FOOLISHNESS HELPED”

A discussion of foolish behavior is found in the Gemara: Rabbi Yehuda b'Rebbi Ila'i would

take a branch of myrtle and dance before the bride at a wedding. Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchok would dance with three branches; he would take three myrtle branches and dance with them. Rav Zeira said: The old man is dishonoring us. Rashi comments on the words of Rav Zeira that Rav Shmuel was dishonoring the Torah through his uninhibited conduct of dancing with three branches.

Rav Zeira was among the leading Amoraim. He felt that, from the perspective of reason and intellect, in the realm of holiness, there is no place for this type of conduct; it is the opposite of rational behavior. However, the Gemara goes on to relate how, when Rav Shmuel passed away, a pillar of fire separated [his burial site from the others], distinguishing Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchok from everyone else. Having witnessed this G-dly sign, Rav Zeira (the same Rav Zeira) admitted: The Sage's branch (*shutei l'sabba*), his foolishness (*shtusei l'sabba*), and his approach (*shitasei l'sabba*) were to his credit. At a wedding he would dance with myrtle branches, yet the Gemara states that "his foolishness was to his credit (*shtusei l'sabba*)"; *shtus d'k'dusha*, the folly of holiness, was to his credit. Indeed, Rav Shmuel Bar Rav Yitzchok reached such a height in this manner of service that he was distinguished by a pillar of fire, G-dly light revealed in the

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physical world.

### HOW DANCING AT A WEDDING IS SHTUS

The Rebbe goes on to explain the significance of dancing at a wedding. For at first glance – although in order to fight and transform *shtus d'l'umas zeh*, evil folly, there must be the *avoda* of *shtus d'k'dusha* – what connection does this *avoda* have to dancing at a wedding?

It was not something spontaneous, spurred on by the festive occasion or joyous environment. Rather, at a wedding, it was his approach and custom to conduct himself with *shtus d'k'dusha*. [Being premeditated, his dancing at a wedding is not something that can be dismissed as trivial. Given its relevance then] it is, therefore, even more significant to determine its connection to the *avoda* of *shtus d'k'dusha*.

Rather, at a wedding, it was his approach and custom to conduct himself with *shtus d'k'dusha*. The Rebbe explains in the *maamer* that since the concept of marriage is so lofty, it is therefore celebrated with dancing: The Alter Rebbe discusses in *Likkutei Torah* how dancing is distinguished from the more typical form of movement, walking, as follows. Although the *avoda* of “walking,” the spiritual sense of walking, entails ascending from level to level and from world to world, nevertheless, the

ascent is gradual and incremental. Dancing, however, signifies a radical departure from the previous level, taking an exponential leap to an entirely new height, as it is written, “They danced like rams” – rams being animals that do not have the power of reason (as the Alter Rebbe writes in *Likkutei Torah* Parshas Tzav). The source for this level of *avoda* transcends reason. Dancing and the approach of *shtus* represents a quantum leap, beyond reason.

In light of the above we can understand the connection between *shtus*, which transcends reason, and dancing at a wedding in terms of the sublimity of the concept of marriage. The Rebbe continues in the *maamer*, citing the saying of our Sages: If a husband and wife are meritorious, the Divine presence dwells among them. For the husband, *ish*, is the fire of Yud, *eish Yud*, and the wife, *isha*, is the fire of Hei, *eish Hei*. When they merit, they form G-d’s name Yud-Hei. That is, there is an extremely lofty manifestation of the Divine presence among a meritorious couple, a lofty degree of G-dly revelation, represented by the letters Yud-Hei, the higher part of G-d’s name Havaya.

Moreover, beyond the revelation of the letters Yud-Hei that extends to the couple, the root and source of this revelation is far loftier still (as will be discussed). In virtue of this sublime spiritual source, marriage is eternal,

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an everlasting edifice, as my revered father in-law, the Rebbe, adds in the *maamer*, the words, “and it comes to be openly revealed: an everlasting edifice, etc.” Here the Rebbe invokes the concept of infinity and eternity, transcending time and space.

The Mittlerer Rebbe develops this concept in his *Siddur Im Dach*, elaborating on the words of the blessings said at a wedding, “Be joyful, rejoice, friends, beloveds, as the joy bestowed unto you in Gan Eden by the One Who Formed you, from primordial times”: “from primordial times” refers to the level of Adam Kadmon, Primordial Man, which precedes the natural order, the Seider Hishtalshlus. On account of the lofty source of the wedding blessings, the joy of a wedding not only entails, “He bestows joy upon the groom **and** the bride,” where the bride is secondary to the groom, but more than that, as stated at the end of the blessing: “He brings the groom to rejoice **with** the bride.” Here we see that the main joy shall be from the bride, etc., and from the bride it extends to the groom, as it will be in the Future Era, when “the female will surround the male.” (In anticipation of that future reality, even nowadays there is the concept of the bride encircling the groom under the *chuppa*, the wedding canopy.)

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The joy of a wedding is drawn down

from a level that transcends the entire Seider Hishtalshlus (“from primordial times”). Within Seider Hishtalshlus, male is above and female is below. The joy of a wedding, however, is drawn down in such a way that not only is the bride on equal footing with the groom (“the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride” equally), but the bride is higher than the groom. The groom actually draws down G-dliness from the bride; the groom here is the recipient. This reversal is only possible through reaching “primordial times,” drawing down from a dimension of G-dliness that transcends the Seider Hishtalshlus.

**AN EVERLASTING EDIFICE OF FUTURE GENERATIONS**

Thus, the Rebbe adds in the *maamer*: “and it comes to be openly revealed: an everlasting edifice, etc.” Since marriage stems from a dimension that transcends Creation, beyond the Seider Hishtalshlus, therefore, a manifestation that transcends Creation and Hishtalshlus takes place even within Hishtalshlus. In marriage, this G-dliness is expressed as an everlasting edifice, ongoing procreation throughout the generations, a revelation of the infinite within the [finite] worlds. Thus, the ultimate purpose of marriage is for there to be an everlasting edifice, “a generation of upstanding people will

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be blessed.”

According to what has been said – that a wedding draws down from a level that transcends Seider Hishtalshlus – it is understood that this *hamshacha* requires conduct that transcends reason [for it to be fully manifest in the physical world]. Thus, the approach of Rebbi Yehuda b'Rebbi Ila'i and Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchok was to dance at weddings, an activity that transcends reason. By going beyond reason, they were able to draw down to the physical world a dimension of G-dliness that transcends Hishtalshlus.

Thus, it was said of Rav Shmuel that his approach “was to his credit,” to the extent that “a pillar of fire distinguished Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchok from everyone else.” Since his conduct transcended the regular order of the world [reason, structure, concern for his own “dignity”], there was an overt revelation indicating his distinction above everyone else.



### HOW SHTUS D'K'DUSHA CONTRIBUTES TO MAKING A DWELLING PLACE FOR G-D

3. It would seem that the intent of *shtus d'k'dusha* is simply to enable a person to fight against and nullify *shtus d'l'umas zeh*, evil folly.

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However, since in general, the purpose of the world, as well as the war that takes place within it (meaning the struggle between *shtus d'l'umas zeh*, which covers over and conceals the truth, and *shtus d'k'dusha*, which vanquishes it and eradicates it), is to become a dwelling place for G-d, Creation at its quintessence, it follows that the concept of *shtus d'k'dusha*, which transcends reason, must be connected with the general concept of making a dwelling place for G-d in the lower realms.

In order to trace this connection, my revered father in-law, the Rebbe, continues in the *maamer*: Thought simply cannot fathom the Infinite Light, the Ohr Ein Sof; it is utterly beyond the realm of comprehension ... Intellect cannot grasp it at all ... In order to reach G-d's essence, it is by means of utterly forgoing one's will, transcending reason, which is why it is called *shtus*, folly.

It is worthwhile to elaborate on the precise wording here – that not only is thought unable to fathom the Infinite Light, the Ohr Ein Sof, but, “it is utterly beyond the realm of comprehension.” To “comprehend” means that one grasps a concept. A concept may, however, be beyond the capacity of one to comprehend, although he may in some way be cognizant of it, knowing what to rule out from it, what it is not.

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The Rambam explains at length, in *A Guide for the Perplexed*, that in general, there are two types of descriptions: positively stated descriptions and negations. The adjective “wise,” for example, being a positively stated description, means that those who are called “wise” possess all qualities connected with wisdom. Likewise, with regard to the term “benevolent,” or others such terms. The fact is though that positive descriptions do not apply to G-d; only statements that rule out qualities do. Chassidus calls this *yedias ha’shlila*, knowledge of what something is not. Thus, even when, regarding the Alm-ghty, the [positively stated] adjective “wise” is invoked, or “benevolent,” or “living” or “omnipotent,” and the like [it is not meant to be directly describing G-d], it is actually only negating those qualities that are the opposite of wisdom, and likewise regarding other terms.

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Knowing what something is not, of course, is not knowledge of the thing itself (as is the case with direct knowledge, knowing something’s properties); it is merely ruling out from the thing in question qualities that may apply to other things. Nevertheless, Rambam writes that through many statements of negation – meaning, acquiring much knowledge in a manner that negates qualities, ruling out numerous properties from the subject at hand

– it is possible to approach knowledge of the subject as it is. Although indirect knowledge of a concept, knowing what it is not, does not entail a grasp and understanding of the idea itself (like direct knowledge of a concept, knowing positively stated qualities about it), nevertheless, since many properties can be negated, it is [at least] within the realm of understanding.

The capacity for having indirect knowledge through negation applies not only to physical things but also to spiritual matters. According to the teachings of Chassidus, positive descriptions can be stated even about aspects of G-dliness, but their application is limited to the level of Memaleh Kol Almin, meaning the level of *keilim* (vessels), which invest themselves in the world.

### **RAMBAM VS. THE MAHARAL OF PRAGUE**

It is well known that Rambam maintains that G-d is the Source of knowledge, the One Who knows, and the knowledge itself. In this way, Rambam explains how G-d's knowledge does not amount to a change in Him, insofar as His knowledge is not something that is external, outside of Him. Rather, He is the intellect, the source of intellect, and the intelligence itself.

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Rambam. The Maharal of Prague explains at length that it is impossible to say about the Alm-ghty that He is the intellect, the source of intellect, and the intelligence itself, all as one, for intellect is actually a creation, like other created entities. [So how can Creator be equated with His creation?] Rather, the Alm-ghty is entirely beyond the realm of intellect, the Maharal asserts.

However, there are those who disagree with Rambam. The Maharal of Prague explains at length that it is impossible to say about the Alm-ghty that He is the intellect, the source of intellect, and the intelligence itself, all as one.

Commenting on this dispute, the Tzemach Tzedek offers that although the Alter Rebbe said explicitly that the words of the Maharal are correct – that intellect is also a creation and not, *chas v'shalom*, tantamount to G-d's essence – nevertheless, it is impossible to say that G-dly intelligence is a creation like other creations. If that were the case it would follow that G-d possesses knowledge of something that is outside of Himself [yet all of Creation exists within G-d]!

The resolution of this quandary is that even after the creation of G-dly intelligence, it is not separate from G-d; it remains united with the Creator in a manner described as, “He is one with His vitality; He is one with His vessels [that contain it].” The Alter Rebbe himself addresses this in a note in *Tanya*. There he states that the concept of *tzimtzumim*, concealments of G-dliness, as well as the concept of Hishtalshlus, gives rise to a dimension where He is the Source

of knowledge, the One Who knows, and the knowledge itself. [That is, at this lower level of G-dliness, it can be said that He is one with His intelligence.]

The same is true of all the descriptive terms said of G-d in *t'filla*, in prayer. When these Divine names are uttered, the intent is G-d's very essence, but as It is invested in the particular quality associated with that particular name, and not in a manner whereby G-d and His qualities are separate. Thus, in this sense, at this level, positively stated descriptions, such as "He is the Source of knowledge, etc.," also apply to G-dliness.

At a higher level, negatively stated descriptions, negations, signify a higher dimension of G-dliness. In general they refer to Ohr HaSovev Kol Almin. Although by means of negations one cannot grasp the subject itself (as is the case with direct knowledge), nevertheless, by having knowledge of what it is not, it is at least within the realm of understanding. [Thus, Ohr HaSovev maintains some connection to knowledge, albeit one of negation.]

### **BEYOND THE REALM OF REASON**

As discussed, these two kinds of descriptions of G-dliness – positively stated descriptions and negations – correspond to Memaleh Kol

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Almin and Sovev Kol Almin respectively. But beyond these two levels, when we speak about the very essence of G-d, It transcends even the **realm** of intellect (as my revered father in-law, the Rebbe, states in the *maamer*). Not only is it beyond direct, positively stated descriptions, but even negations fail to yield knowledge of G-d's essence. G-d's essence is absolute negation [i.e., totally beyond any possible description, utterly beyond the realm of intellectual grasp]. Even negations are negated [for they fail to convey any knowledge of G-d Himself].

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These three categories exist also when talking about the *oros* (G-dly illuminations) themselves, as elucidated at length elsewhere. However, in general, direct descriptions, knowledge derived from positively stated descriptions, apply to *keilim* ("vessels," which contain G-dly illuminations); knowledge derived though negations applies to *oros* and G-dly revelations, which is not something that is grasped, but still has a connection to the realm of intellect; and absolute negation applies to G-d's essence, which is beyond both *oros* and *keilim*, for the concept of descriptions does not apply to It at all – not direct descriptions and not negations.

The above sheds light on how *shtus d'k'dusha* is connected with making a dwelling place for G-d in the lower realms. Since we are

speaking about a dwelling place for the very essence of G-d, which transcends the realm of intellect, there also must be effort on the part of man in a manner that transcends reason, *shtus d'k'dusha* (which nullifies and transforms *shtus d'l'umas zeh*). Also, just as the role of making for G-d a dwelling place in the lower realm is something that is required of each and every individual, the same is true of the *avoda* of *shtus d'k'dusha*. This lofty *avoda* is demanded of even simple Jews, for it does not pertain to intellectual prowess; it is totally beyond reason.



#### ALL OF EQUAL CONSEQUENCE

4. Consider the Baal Shem Tov's teaching on the verse, "*Shivisi Hashem* (I have placed G-d) before me constantly." Here "*shivisi*" relates to the word "*hishtavus* – equalizing," meaning that a person must view all matters [the entire spectrum of good or bad fortune that could befall him] as being of equal consequence. The inspiration for this elevated state is the recognition that "G-d [is] before me constantly."

Now, this principle can readily be understood to apply to material matters: having "G-d before me constantly" uplifts the person, to the point where he totally transcends

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worldly affairs, viewing all that befalls him with equal indifference. But how can there be total indifference to everything, including all spiritual dimensions and achievements? How can a person regard all matters that exist in Creation and within Seider Hishtalshlus as being equal? Also, how can it be demanded of a mortal being to maintain this profound indifference in a constant, unwavering state?

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The explanation is that this state of indifference is only unattainable when considering a mortal as he [and his *avoda*] exists within the framework of Seider Hishtalshlus. But since the *avoda* required is to establish in the lower realms a dwelling place for G-d – meaning His very essence, Which is entirely beyond the realm of reason and beyond variation and change – the containing vessel [the framework of *avoda*] must likewise be utterly transcendent. It is the unique *avoda* associated with having “G-d before me constantly” that cultivates this kind of radical impartiality to literally all affairs, and in a constant way, without any compromise.

In light of the above we can also understand the story told by the Alter Rebbe, which he had heard from the Mezritcher Maggid, about the Baal Shem Tov. The Baal Shem Tov’s approach to reaching out to Jews was to journey from town to town and from village to village, and

ask the Jews he encountered about their health and welfare, about their livelihood, their families, and the like. (My revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, would add when telling this story that the Baal Shem Tov would enquire of the welfare of both men and women, the elderly and the young, as well as scholarly and uneducated Jews.) His intent was to arouse in them the concept of *t'hillos Yisroel*, the thanksgiving of Jews to their Creator (as in the verse, “And You, O holy One, are enthroned upon the praises of the Jewish people”). The Baal Shem Tov would enquire of Jews in this way simply to elicit in them the response of “*baruch Hashem* – thank G-d,” and the like, in praise of the Alm-ghty.

The significance of the Baal Shem Tov's approach is understood in light of the concept of “the name of Heaven is on everyone's lips.” Praising G-d in this manner [“the name of Heaven”] does not pertain to G-dly illuminations and revelations, for being relative to the level of the individual, only those of very lofty spiritual stature are privy to G-dly revelations. Rather, the verse refers to the very essence of G-d, which is [ironically] accessible to everyone [“on everyone's lips”]. It is only in virtue of Atzmus HaMaor – G-d's very essence, “*Ha'shavei u'mashvei katan v'gadol* – He is immutable and treats small and great alike”

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Indeed, the Baal Shem Tov’s entire purpose was to introduce to the world the concept of “And You, O holy One, are enthroned upon the praises of the Jewish people”: In response to “the prayers of the Jewish people” – that all Jews, erudite and uneducated alike, laud and praise G-d – G-dliness is manifest below, in the physical world. (Thus, “*t’hillos* – prayers” is linked to the word “*b’hilo*,” as in the expression “*b’hilo neiro* – when He lit His candle [over my head]” (Iyov 29:3), which entails drawing down to the world G-dly light.) And this G-dly manifestation is not only at the level of *keilim*, illuminations, and revelations; it reaches the very essence, which is totally beyond the realm of intellectual grasp.



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### THE PROPHET: STRIPPED OF REASON

5. Continuing on the theme of transcending reason, the *maamer* discusses why a prophet is called “*meshuga* – mad,” as in the verse, “Why did this madman (*meshuga*) come to you?” (Melachim II 9:11). During prophetic revelation, the prophet transcends physicality (as discussed in Zohar, prophecy resides upon one who has surpassed the corporeal

dimension of reality), divesting himself of [even] the intellect and emotions. Embodying the attainment of this spiritual height, the prophet removes his clothing during prophecy, as stated regarding Shaul, “He too removed his clothing and prophesied.” (Radak comments: this is because prophets become devoid of their senses and faculties (*bittul ha’hargashos*, etc.)) During prophecy, the prophet attains *bittul*, negation of self, a state that transcends reason, which is why it is called *shtus*.

An aspect of prophecy, however, remains to be understood: Although there needs to be the nullification of the senses and soul-powers of intellect and emotions, to the point that, in the literal sense, the prophet removes his clothing, nevertheless, prophecy employs speech [a faculty which is, therefore, not utterly transcended]. Prophecy is the revelation of a material voice and speech below, in the physical world, as it is said, “the spirit of G-d spoke within me and His word was upon my tongue.” [Why does the faculty of speech hold a special status in prophecy?]

A possible explanation emerges from the Mezritcher Maggid’s interpretation of the saying of our Sages, “If the righteous wanted [to be free of all sin —Rashi], they could be creators of a world,” for was it not with the word of G-d that the heavens were made?

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And it is written, “He blew into his nostrils a living spirit, *nishmas chayim*.” The Targum translates this a “*ruach memalela* – a speaking soul.” Now, regarding G-d, there is no concept of “portions” [of Him], for He is infinite. And regarding the Infinite, one cannot say that the aspect of speech alone was blown into the nostrils of man. Rather, within the gift of speech, everything was included. Thus, “If the righteous wanted, they could be creators of a world,” for the speech of the righteous is pure and clean, without any interference (for only “your sins have caused separation, etc.”). The speech of the righteous cleaves to and is bound to its Divine source, and it is literally like the speech of G-d Himself, from which the heavens were made, etc.

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The speech of a *tzaddik* can be bound to its root and source to the extent that it results in “creating a world.” The power to achieve this is none other than the very essence of G-d, as discussed in *Igeres HaKodesh*: “The existence of the Maatzil, blessed be He, comes from His essence; it is not brought about as an effect of some antecedent cause. Indeed, it is within the power and capacity of G-d’s essence alone to create ex nihilo.” And it is this G-dly power that is drawn down and revealed through the faculty of speech [the pure and holy speech of *tzaddikim*].



## THE SHAME OF MORAL AMBIGUITY

The Rebbe continues to discuss in the *maamer* the concept of removing garments at the time of prophecy, saying that the need for garments is a result of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Originally, Adam and Chava had no shame in being unclothed, as it is written, “They were both naked...but they were not ashamed.” The relevance or need for clothing came about in the wake of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

The main result of the sin was the feeling that good and evil are intermingled. Thus, it is written, “They knew that they were naked.” Introduced to their consciousness was moral ambiguity [recognizing, in this case, the potential for shame in being unclothed].

The Rebbe Rashab elaborates further about how clothes are emblematic of moral obscurity. Ironically, the sin of the Tree of Knowledge added wisdom to Adam HaRishon, as it is written, “your eyes will be opened, and you will be like angels, knowing good and evil,” and it is written, “The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew, etc.” (i.e., they acquired wisdom). Here the one who sinned benefited!

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The intent of these verses, however, is not that Adam was initially bereft of wisdom prior to the sin and then he gained it. For had he had no wisdom prior to then, how could G-d have commanded him to not eat from the tree? Surely one who does not possess any wisdom is not fit to observe prohibitions! Rather, Adam was rich with wisdom from the moment he was created. In fact, he was endowed with a profoundly developed knowledge of G-dliness, wisdom of the Divine. What he was lacking, however, was the infamous form of knowledge he acquired through the sin. Namely, [the moral ambiguity of what is called] knowledge of good and evil, and everything related to the physical faculties and senses, as well as earthly desires.

**What he was lacking, however, was the infamous form of knowledge he acquired through the sin. Namely, the moral ambiguity of what is called knowledge of good and evil.**

Prior to the sin, Adam was free from the slightest trace of any of these temptations. (Thus, it is written, “they were not ashamed,” for these matters were of absolutely no consequence to them; they were completely indifferent to such earthly preoccupations. Adam HaRishon’s wisdom and knowledge was only of G-dliness, true wisdom.) However, after the sin, Adam fell from his spiritual height, and he acquired knowledge of good and evil, etc.

His new mindset functioned as a “garment” that covers over and conceals knowledge of G-dly wisdom [providing a distraction from

the singular G-dly focus he had had; Adam was now forced to struggle against temptation]. In order to ward off temptation, clothing became necessary (“And G-d made...leather tunics and clothed them”), covering up the potential for evil. Without clothing there would be “shame,” which would cause them to veer from the straight path [of G-dly service and purpose].

Thus, the revelation of G-dliness associated with prophecy is accompanied by “and he removed his clothing,” for prophecy entails the attainment of something akin to the original condition of [holiness that prevailed in] the world prior to the sin, when there was no need for the concept of clothing.



**TO TRULY TRANSFORM**

6. Continuing in the *maamer*, the Rebbe writes that the ultimate *avoda* is to transform darkness into light, so that the darkness itself shines. This transformation is achieved by substituting evil folly with *shtus d’k’dusha*. (Supplanting evil folly with the folly of holiness is not done merely by compelling oneself, but through *bittul*, and *bittul* to the point that the darkness itself shines.)

To elaborate: In general, there are various

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approaches to the war against evil. The war begins with *iskafia*, engaging and overcoming the evil inclination, compelling it to follow G-d's will. Here goodness prevails over evil, bringing about its submission and compelling it to act in accordance with the forces of good within the person. Despite being overpowered, however, the evil maintains its presence and strength within the person; it is just that it has no dominion over the three garments of the soul – thought, speech, and action. This description, for the most part, portrays the *avoda* of the *beinoni*, as explained at length in *Tanya*.

At this level, not only does evil not have any authority over the three garments of thought, speech, and action, but the force of good is so prevalent in the person that he battles against the evil and manages to weaken it, diminishing its presence even where it typically rules.

But there is a superior *avoda* in the war against evil: *is'hafcha*. At this level, not only does evil not have any authority over the three garments of thought, speech, and action, but the force of good is so prevalent in the person that he battles against the evil and manages to weaken it, diminishing its presence even where it typically rules. Here evil is subdued at its core, but only on account of the prevalence of goodness.

There is, however, a higher level of *is'hafcha*. At this spiritual height, not only is evil diminished – having a lesser presence, being a minority in the face of a majority of good – but the evil itself is transformed and becomes good.

To elaborate on these two levels of *is'hafcha* in terms of *avoda*: It is apparent that when there is one who is in a negative state, a lowly spiritual standing, his passion burns with a “foreign fire” for unholy desires. Should this person attain the *avoda* of *iskafia*, the desire and passion of “foreign fire” may still be kindled to burn within him at full strength. It is just that his temptations do not succeed in gaining dominion over his thought, speech, or action; he immediately pushes them away and nullifies them, as explained in *Tanya*. But when he truly applies himself in his *avoda*, exerting himself body and soul, then, on account of the strength of the good within him, he brings about a change (*is'hafcha*); he eliminates all the passions of the “foreign fire” and stands unaffected in the face of all temptations.

This *avoda*, however, still falls short of the level of *is'hafcha* that transforms one’s very nature, that his nature itself becomes good. At the first level of *is'hafcha*, one’s nature is only weakened and nullified (in sixty parts, or a thousand, or a myriad, as explained in *Tanya*) to the goodness within him, which is stronger. The higher approach to the *avoda* of *is'hafcha* is where one applies himself to such a degree that his previous passion becomes holy fire.

This concept finds expression in the Future Era – that in place of the worldly passion of a

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man and a woman there will then be the holy fire of man (*eish Yud*, the fire of Yud) and the holy fire of woman (*eish Hei*, the fire of Hei). The fire itself, the passion, will be transformed into holy fire, as it is written, “Night shall shine like day,” meaning that the darkness itself shall become light.



### THE ACCUSER BECOMES THE DEFENDANT

The above discussion about transforming evil is supported by what is written in this week’s *parsha*: “And they arrived at Mara. They could not drink the water of Mara for it was bitter ... and G-d instructed him [i.e., Moshe] ... to cast wood into the water, and the water became sweet.” The Rebbe Rashab, *nishmaso Eden*, comments that it says in the Zohar that here “*eitz* – wood” actually refers to Torah, as it is written, “it is a tree of life, etc.” However, in the Midrash it says that it was “*eitz mar* – a bitter type of wood.” (To be precise, there are a variety of opinions on the matter, one of which maintains that it was Hardofni (Nerium Oleander), a toxic plant. But the general consensus is that it was a type of “bitter wood.”) It was specifically through this “bitter wood” that the bitter water was transformed into sweet, fresh water,

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an expression of the concept of “the accuser becomes the defendant,” as the Midrash states: With the object that caused the wound (*izamel*, blade or scalpel) he heals.

The Rebbe concludes this *s'if*, Section Five, by elaborating on the *avoda* of transforming that which is beneath reason into conduct that is above and beyond reason. Many things are done as part of a routine, (not because logic dictates that they should be done, but simply) because that is what people do. (I.e., it is accepted as being the way of the world.) For example, the common outlook is that meals and sleep patterns are set and established for certain times, scheduled into one's day with little flexibility. Even in the context of work, a life priority, these set times maintain their rigidity for most people, and certainly they are not neglected outright. (That is, even when eating and sleeping are obstacles to business objectives, work obligations typically do not displace them. In fact, they are usually not even delayed.) Set times for the study of Torah and prayer, on the other hand, are often pushed aside and not scheduled in as a priority. (Trivialities are given priority and lead to the postponement or shortening of designated times for Torah study or prayer.) Sometimes they are missed out altogether, G-d forbid.

Of course, a person who is introspective

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and scrutinizes his own spiritual standing asks himself whether there is any wisdom in this conduct, for “who knows his time, the moment he faces mortality?” As stated in Midrash Rabba, one does not have the authority to say, “Wait for me until I have made an accounting and until I can provide a will and testament to my household, etc.” How then could one forsake his own soul for that which is vacuous, devoid of substance, things that have no value at all?! Irrespective of their irrelevance, these triflings are granted permanent fixed times, whereas scheduled times for Torah and Mitzvos, which are of supreme importance, are neglected and postponed, diminished and outright discarded.

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In recognizing this massive error, one must summon within himself the discipline to redirect and refocus the energy he had invested in unholy activities and dedicate it towards holiness. One should instead devote himself to maintaining times for Torah study and times for prayer, and to fulfilling Mitzvos *b'hiddur*, doing Mitzvos in the finest possible manner.



#### THE REBBE IS THE KEY

7. By perfecting the *avoda* of *is'hafcha*, transforming evil *shtus* into *shtus d'k'dusha*,

one builds for G-d the Mishkan and Mikdash, the Holy Temple. This *avoda* entails replacing foolish conduct, behavior that is below reason, with holy conduct that transcends reason. The holy counterpart of *shtus* is symbolized by *atzei shittim*, the Mishkan's planks that were made of acacia wood.

Through this *avoda*, one makes a dwelling place for G-d in the lower realms, for “when evil is shunned” (and this itself is not only in a manner of weakening and eradicating, but in a manner of transforming it into holiness), the glory of the Alm-ghty is manifest in all worlds,” the light of Sovev Kol Almin shines and is revealed, a revelation that transcends all worlds equally.

From this sublime manifestation, G-dliness is drawn down and revealed in this physical world through the leaders of the Jewish people, who connect the generation with the very essence and being of G-d, as it is written, “I stand between G-d and you...to tell you the word of G-d.” Here the leader of the generation serves as a connecting intermediary, bonding the Jewish people with G-d. This bond thus establishes a dwelling place for G-d in this physical world.



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