



## Preface

### The Creator Wants Man to Succeed!

*When the Holy One requested of Moses “They shall build for me a Sanctuary and I shall dwell within it” (Exodus 25:8), Moses became overwhelmed with the prospect! How can Man build a Sanctuary fitting for the Name of the Holy One? Is it not written concerning the Holy One (Isaiah 66:1), “Thus declared God: The Heavens are My Throne and the Earth is My Footstool; what Sanctuary could you build for Me, and what place could be My resting place?” The Holy One answered, ‘My request for Man to build a Sanctuary is not according to My power, but rather according to Man’s power’ (Midrash Shemos Rabbah, Parshas Terumah).*

*We understand from here that every person is required to strengthen himself in Repentance according to his personal strength, as we find in Ecclesiastes (9:10), “Whatever you are able to do with your strength, do it.” Note the expression of the verse, “with your strength.” Also, Scripture writes in Psalms (85:9-10), “Let me hear what the Almighty God will speak, for He will speak of peace to His people and to His devoted ones, so that they do not turn back to foolishness. His deliverance is near to those who fear*

*Him, that God's Glory may dwell in our Land" (cf. Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen<sup>1</sup>, Remembrance of Miriam, Chapter 18, quoted by Rabbi Mordecai Goldstein<sup>2</sup>, of blessed memory).*

We clarify in the above passage that when a person engages in Repentance, he should not be overwhelmed by the prospect. He might mistakenly assume that he is required to engage in Repentance according to Heaven's terms and "expectations." This is not true! The Creator only requires Man to repent according to his own strength and capabilities, as the verse states, "with your strength." If he puts his strength — and makes his best effort to correct his ways and return to God — then the Merciful One will surely accept his penitence! If we will only remember that the Holy One's Will for Mankind is to serve Him with joy!

### **The Creator Wants Man to Succeed!**

*The Creator said: Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heaven and over the animals, and over all of the earth.... So the Almighty created Man in His image, in the image of the Almighty He created him, male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27).*

The Creator formed Man with unbounded love, kindness, and compassion.

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1. Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen, known by his epithet — "*The Chofetz Chaim*" — was born two hundred years ago in Grodno, Russia. He is renowned as a man of piety, kindness, Torah Scholarship, Rosh Yeshivah, and a prolific author. He penned the *Mishnah Berura*, *Kisvie HaChofetz Chaim*, and *Shemiras HaLoshon*. He emerged as the generation's leader, and countless stories depict his wisdom and kindness.
  2. Rabbi Mordecai Goldstein was born in New York about ninety years ago. He was the Rosh Yeshivah of the Diaspora Yeshivah on Mount Zion, Jerusalem. He influenced thousands of people to return to Judaism, Torah study, and Mitzvah performance. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asserted that Hashem supremely praises, loves, and grants incomparable merits to one who inspires people to accept Torah and Mitzvot upon themselves.

God instilled dignity and honor within Man by creating us in His image, and by granting us dominion over the earth and its creations. The Merciful One gives us every opportunity to succeed in our spiritual endeavors! Each concept in this book centers on the Holy One's positive perspective of Man. The idea of the Creator gifting us with eternal value and self-esteem — our Holy Soul — inspires us to experience boundless joy in the Holy One!

### **The Premise of Repentance**

We accept Repentance as a basic premise of the Torah. However, the concept of Repentance is counterintuitive! If we committed a misdeed, how can we uproot it from reality? How can we free ourselves from thoughts of despair and strengthen our Trust in the Merciful Creator? How can we fulfill the prayer, "Return us in perfect Repentance before You!"

### **What Is the Fate of a Sinner?**

*They asked the Holy One, May He be Blessed, 'What is the fate of a sinner?' He answered, 'Let him perform repentance and it will atone for him,' as it says (Psalms 25:8), 'Good and upright is the Eternal, therefore He shows sinners the way' — He shows them the path to perform repentance (Yerushalmi Makos 7a).*

*One who admits his sin and abandons his path will receive the Eternal's compassion (Proverbs 28:13).*

## Day One



# The Seven Clouds of Glory

## The Seven Clouds of Glory

*The Seven Clouds of Glory that surrounded the People of Israel in the Wilderness are the same Clouds that surround the Holy One's "Throne of Glory." Because of this, we were graced with Divine Sanctity in the Wilderness. These Clouds of Glory are open and accessible for Teshuvah (Repentance) and Tefillah (Prayer) to rise through them, as the Talmud teaches (Yoma 86b): "Teshuvah ascends to the Throne of Glory." When the People of Israel transgress the Divine Will, the Clouds of Glory transform themselves into a structure similar to a 'Sukah'.<sup>3</sup> The pure souls of Israel are rooted*

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3. On the Festival of *Sukot*, the Eternal charges us to build a temporary dwelling, i.e., a '*Sukah*,' to partake of our meals and to take our repose. The roof of the '*Sukah*' is constructed from vegetation, symbolizing the Clouds of Glory that accompanied Klal Yisrael throughout their forty-year trek through the Wilderness.

*in the Throne of Glory, which thoroughly purifies them (cf. A Jug of Flour<sup>4</sup>, Sukah 49b).*

## The Mystifying Teaching of *A Jug of Flour*

This teaching of *A Jug of Flour* is mystifying, to say the least. Why do the Clouds of Glory form into a *Sukah* even before the People of Israel engage in *Teshuvah* (Repentance)? The answer is the Merciful One knows that the sensitive souls of the People of Israel will be remorseful when they transgress and quickly respond with *Teshuvah*. Therefore, He anticipates their reaction and forms the Clouds into a *Sukah*.

Yet, what is the connection between the Clouds of Glory being receptive to *Teshuvah* on one hand, and forming into a *Sukah*, on the other?

The awareness that our *Teshuvah* ascends to the very Throne of Glory – which requires us to turn to the One Who sits there when seeking forgiveness – may be unsettling and even overwhelming! This is especially so when one recognizes his flaws, thinking, *How can I ask the King of the Universe for forgiveness when I acted so brazenly?*

Responding in kind to our humility and contrite spirit, the Creator mercifully forms the Clouds of Glory into a *Sukah* – a humble and unimposing abode. He welcomes every remorseful soul into His Presence — His very Home — as it says in our prayers, “For Your Right Hand is open to receive penitents.”

## The Practical Takeaway from this Passage

*The practical takeaway from this passage is that when we engage in Teshuvah, the Merciful One immediately awakens His Divine Attribute of **compassion** and accepts us into His humble Sukah. As we ascend to the holy roots of our souls, the Creator thoroughly*

4. *A Jug of Flour (Kad HaKemach)* is a book written by the early authority, Rabenu Bachya ben Asher, composed on ethical principles and arranged in alphabetical order. He also authored a classic, well-known commentary on the five Books of Moses, *Midrash Rabenu Bachya on the Torah*.

*cleanses us with His purifying waters, which uproots the misdeed  
from reality.*

## Day Two



# The Incremental Approach

## Forward

### Orientation and Preparation

#### Rabbi Moshe Cordovero

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero is the saintly author of *Tomer Devorah* (*The Palm Tree of Devorah*), a Kabbalistic and Ethical work that elucidates the wisdom of the *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights) and their appropriate emulations. It is one of the many books authored by the holy and pious Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, a master of Torah and Kabbalah, who resided in Safed about five hundred years ago. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero was a disciple of Rabbi Yoseph Cairo, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Code of Jewish Law*) and Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, who taught him the revealed and esoteric realms of Torah, respectively. Amongst the books that Rabbi Cordovero authored was the *Pardeis Rimonim* (*The Orchard of the Pomegranates*), an encyclopedia of Kabbalistic concepts and their definitions, for which he

is renown as the “*Ba’al HaPardeis*” (*Master of the Orchard*). He was the teacher of the holy *Arizal*, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi.<sup>5</sup>

## The “Incremental Approach”

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero advises us to adapt the “incremental approach” when contemplating the “Esoteric Wisdom of the Torah.” The wisdom of Kabbalah is highly compressed. Therefore, first study and reflect upon a modest portion today, letting it slowly settle into your consciousness. Then tomorrow, a bit more study and further contemplation. The important thing is to take small steps that the mind can assimilate. Then, with patience and consistency, your understanding will slowly but steadily advance, with the Merciful Creator’s assistance!

## Daily Readings

In keeping with this idea, this book has been divided into fifty convenient and digestible daily readings. Our advice is to slowly and deliberately go through one section per day, so you can properly appreciate and assimilate the ideas presented therein. Then, over the course of that day, reflect upon what you’ve learned. The following day, read the next passage in the same considered fashion as the first. Proceed through the whole book in this manner, taking the time to savor the words and feel the beauty of the “journey,” and be inspired!

## Clear and Concise Definitions

To help the reader more readily integrate the information, Hebrew terms and Kabbalistic concepts are clearly and concisely defined in the commentary. Additionally, many parables and analogies have been presented to facilitate understanding and aid in processing the ideas.

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5. The holy *Arizal*, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi, illuminated the world with his Kabbalistic insights, profound wisdom, and seminal formulas. He lived about five hundred years ago and is buried in Safed.

## **Database of Terms, Definitions, and Foundational Principles**

The Introduction of the book builds a database of terms, definitions, and foundational principles to shed light on the concepts of *Tomer Devorah*. While this section is vitally important, it is not replete with “practical lessons,” which are the hallmark of other Salant Foundation publications. We advise our dear readers to view these remarks as if they are “stepping stones” to access the majestic palace of *Tomer Devorah*.

## Day Three



# Knowing the Merciful Creator

## Knowing the Merciful Creator

Many spiritually inclined people refrain from engaging in the study of Kabbalah, the esoteric wisdom of the Torah. Their perspective is valid because its secrets are profound. However, a particular branch of Kabbalistic wisdom concerns opening the sacred gate of “**Knowing the Merciful Creator.**” Indeed, “Knowing the Merciful Creator,” is recorded amongst the 613 Torah Commandments, as the verse states (*Deuteronomy 4:39*): “And you shall **know** today and place upon your heart that the Eternal is the Almighty in the Heavens above and on the earth below.” Opening this gate is a primary component of the Torah, and it is essential for every Jew to both acquire the knowledge of how to do so, and to translate this knowledge into action.

Indeed, concerning the importance of this, *The Book of the Pious*<sup>6</sup> cites

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6. A classic book of Torah ethics, authored by Rabbi Elazar Ezkari, who resided in

the Almighty's reproof of even the Torah scholars (*Jeremiah 2:8*): "The 'Masters of Torah' do not know Me!" Similarly, the blessing we recite daily over Torah study states: "...may we and our descendants and the descendants of Your People, the House of Israel, **Know Your Name.**" What's more, Jeremiah the Prophet states (*9:22-23*): "Only in this may one glorify himself: in perceiving and **knowing Me**, for I am the Eternal."

*Maimonides*<sup>7</sup> states (*The Laws of the Foundations of Torah 1:1*), "The underlying foundation and the pillar of wisdom is to **know** that there is a Primordial Being, Who brought into being all existence." *Nachmanides*<sup>8</sup> also states, "The Creator's sole Will [in creating the universe] is that man should **know** and acknowledge that the Almighty created him" (*Parshas Bo*).

Clearly, "Knowing the Merciful Creator" is an essential aspect of Torah wisdom. By elucidating the essence of the Ten *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights), as taught in Day Four, the *Tomer Devorah* clarifies the essence of this wisdom, making it accessible to all. Indeed, since its initial publication, the greatest of our luminaries, amongst them such eminent personalities as the *Sh'lach HaKodesh*, the *Chidah*, *Rabbi Yisrael Salanter*, the *Divrei Chaim M'Sanz*, and many others have enthusiastically encouraged the study of *Tomer Devorah*.

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Safed about five hundred years ago. *The Book of the Pious* is divided into three sections: 1) The Unity of the Creator, 2) The enumeration and deep elucidation of the Mitzvot, 3) The examination of the principles of Repentance.

7. Rabbi Moshe ben Maiman, *Maimonides*, commonly known by his acronym the *Rambam*, lived in the Middle Ages. He was renown amongst the greatest Torah authorities of his generation. He authored many classic Torah works, including the *Mishnah Torah*, an encyclopedia of Torah Law, spanning the entire Talmud, written in a clear, concise, and organized presentation.
8. The *Ramban*, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, commonly known as *Nachmanides*, was a highly revered Torah scholar born in Spain in the Middle Ages. An esteemed authority in Torah law and Kabbalah, the *Ramban* penned classic commentaries on the Scriptures, the Talmud, as well as authored many other well-known Torah works.

### ***Teshuvah Elyonah*** (Exalted Repentance)

In chapter four of *Tomer Devorah*, the *Ramak* (the acronym for the author's name: Rabbi Moshe Cordovero) reveals the esoteric teaching of *Teshuvah Elyonah* or Exalted Repentance. When a person successfully attains *Teshuvah Elyonah*, he unites with the inherently pure and holy goodness that exists preserved in his soul's root. He is thereby transformed and cleansed of his misdeeds. In turn, these misdeeds ascend with him and are themselves implanted in holiness. They are thus actually converted into Mitzvot, and even the Negative Impulse is purified.

### **Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai**

In truth we find that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the holy author of the *Zohar*, actually alluded to the importance of *Teshuvah Elyonah* almost two thousand years ago in the *Tikkunei Zohar* (6:22a – quoted and discussed on Day Fifty). However, it seems that this teaching remained hidden until the *Ramak* merited to reveal these exalted and esoteric teachings that **“rectifies every flaw.”**

The work before you, dear reader, is based on explanatory notes I wrote for myself as I studied the *Tomer Devorah*. In my great spiritual poverty, I don't delude myself into thinking that I've composed the “last word” on this exalted work. Indeed, it is naught but a drop in the mighty ocean of deep secrets with which it is so replete. Truly, the *Tomer Devorah*, as well as all the holy writings of the *Ramak* are:

***Deep waters without end.***

***The Splendor of the Holy Divine Presence illuminates every letter like  
a Holy Flame;***

***and the very Light of the Seven Days of Creation is hidden within his  
esoteric teachings!***

## Day Four



## A Frame of Reference

### *The Infinite Divine Light and the Ten Sefirot*

The *Ramak*, in his well-known book, *The Orchard of Pomegranates* (Gate 2, Chapter 6), presents an analogy between the sun and a giant lantern, that portrays the relationship between the Holy One's Infinite Divine Light and the *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights).

*Just as the sun is a brilliant luminary, whose intense magnitude precludes our viewing it for more than a few seconds without injuring our eyes, so too, the radiance of the Infinite Divine Light is beyond the comprehension of every created being.*

*This may be likened to a skylight which lets the sunlight shine into a house. Of course, to look up at the sun directly would damage the eyes. Therefore, the rays of the sun are filtered through ten multicolored lenses of a giant lantern which reduce the intensity of the direct sunlight. The brilliance of the sunlight is reduced so that people can enjoy it, without damaging their eyes.*

*Imagine that a person enters the house to enjoy the filtered sunlight. He asks why do you need specifically ten lenses, no less and no more? They answer him, "If there was less than ten lenses the intense sunlight would damage the eyes, and if there was more than ten lenses the light would not be visible."*

In His unbounded Mercy, the Holy One reveals the Infinite Divine Light to the Creations in a limited fashion, filtered to the extent that we can gain the merest glimmer of understanding of His Light. He accomplishes this "reduction" of the Infinite Divine Light through the agency of the Ten *Sefirot* through which His Will is expressed to His Creations.

## **A Frame of Reference**

In order to provide a frame of reference that will help us grasp the notion of the *Sefirot* in a tangible way that relates to our daily lives, we offer the metaphor of a satellite array:

Communication satellites are positioned in space, receiving data from one Earth station and then transmitting it to another. In a manner of speaking, we can say that the *Sefirot* bear a resemblance to these satellites: Just as the satellites receive and send data, so do the *Sefirot* transmit life and spirituality to our souls (moreover, the *Sefirot* are also in constant, uninterrupted, real-time communication with each other, all synchronized in complete harmony and agreement). The Mitzvot (Commandments) we perform send "spiritual signals" to the *Sefirot*. In turn they receive our "signals" and radiate an iota of the Eternal's Light and Holiness upon us and the entire Universe.

## **Introduction to the Infinite Divine Light and the Ten *Sefirot***

What follows is the briefest and most basic introduction to this endlessly deep topic. The *Sefirot* are generally understood to be revealed in a semi-descending order, with complementary pairs and paralleling descents. The most common conceptual understanding lists them as follows, with the **Infinite Divine Light** "descending" Itself into:

1) כתר - **Crown**, which stands by itself. This is followed by the complementary pair of

2) חכמה - **Wisdom** and

3) בינה - **Enlightenment**; followed by the parallel descent to

4) חסד - **Kindness** and

5) גבורה - **Judgment**; followed by the stand-alone

6) תפארת - **Glory**; followed by the complementary pair of

7) נצח - **Triumph** and

8) הוד - **Splendor**; followed by

9) יסוד - **Foundation**; followed by

10) מלכות - **Kingship**. This can be visualized in eight graduated tiers, as follows:

אור אין סוף, ברוך הוא - *The Holy One's Infinite Divine Light*

כתר - **Crown**

בינה - **Enlightenment**

חכמה - **Wisdom**

גבורה - **Judgment**

חסד -

**Kindness**

תפארת - **Glory**

הוד - **Splendor**

נצח

- **Triumph**

יסוד - **Foundation**

מלכות - **Kingship**

## Day Five



# It is Fitting for Man to Emulate the Creator

## Introduction

### It Is Fitting for Man to Emulate His Creator

The underlying principle of *Tomer Devorah* is that Man's central purpose in this world is to emulate his Creator, in Whose image he was created. Indeed, it is with these very words that the *Ramak* begins his work, ***It is fitting for man to emulate his Creator.*** The Torah clearly states that man is created in the Divine Image: "So the Almighty created Man in His image, in the image of the Almighty He created him" (*Genesis* 1:27). Now, this doesn't merely mean that we should emulate the Merciful Creator in a general fashion, as our Sages state (*Sifrei, Parshas Eikev* 11:22): "Just as He is merciful and gracious, so should you endeavor to be merciful and gracious, and act charitably towards all."

Rather, the *Ramak* reveals to us the inner secret of this "emulation": namely, that it is proper for Man to emulate the Merciful One according to

the attributes of the Ten *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights). As we discussed in Day Four, we compared the relationship between the Infinite Divine Light and the Ten *Sefirot* — to a giant lantern that filters the sunlight through ten multicolored lenses. The different color of each lens represents the different attributes of the System of Divine Lights. The emulation of Man to the Creator derives primarily through one's emulating the traits of the *Sefirot*, as will be discussed.

### **The Creator Connected Man to the *Sefirot* With Reciprocity**

The *Ramak* illuminates our understanding with the following sublime words (*Tomer Devorah*, Chapter One): **“According to the manner in which a person conducts himself in this world, he merits to ‘open for himself’ the corresponding attribute Above.”** Meaning, our emulation of the *Sefirot* renders a wondrous effect, awakening the reciprocal aspects of the *Sefirot* to radiate upon us from Heaven!

Heaven set up the system of Creation so that souls are birthed into existence through the agency of the *Sefirot*. Moreover, He desired that the world be perfected through a permanent connection between the souls and the *Sefirot*, with the latter responding to the former with reciprocity. Wondrously, a person's positive intentions and deeds “awaken” the *Sefirot* to bestow the Creator's sanctity, blessing and goodness upon him, his community, and the entire Creation. Truly, every individual is an entire world!

Therefore, man's primary purpose in this world is to emulate God according to the attributes of the *Sefirot*. The intent of this work is to focus on the *Sefira* of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), clarifying and elaborating on its function, and Man's emulation of *Binah*. As the *Ramak* states in the beginning of Chapter Four: **“*Binah* sweetens every Judgment,”** and man's emulation of *Binah* through performing *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) **“rectifies every flaw.”**

### **Sublime and Practical**

Another remarkable aspect of *Tomer Devorah* is that on the one hand, it

reveals sublime esoteric secrets of the Torah; while on the other, it shows us how to emulate the attributes of the *Sefirot* in a concrete and practical way.

## Day Six



# The Principles of *Teshuvah Elyonah*

### The Principles of *Teshuvah Elyonah*

Before we enter the sweet waters of the *Tomer Devorah's* elucidation of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), it's worthwhile to expound upon the following six primary principles. Doing so will greatly facilitate understanding the *Ramak's* terminology and concepts.

1. Joy Opens the Gates of *Teshuvah*.
2. Trust in the Merciful One Is the Key to Successful *Teshuvah*.
3. The Merciful One Preserves the Sanctity of Our Souls.
4. *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) Is the Source of Trust in Heaven.
5. "Intention" Guarantees a Successful Outcome.
6. New Dimensions of the Divine Image.

## 1. Joy Opens the Gates of *Teshuvah* - Joy 1.

### Greater Delight than The World to Come

*The Ethics of our Fathers (4:17) states: One hour of Teshuvah (Repentance) and good deeds in this world is more pleasurable than the entire life of The World to Come. The Book of the Pious (66:54) comments:*

*“Therefore, rejoice intensely and be moved with heartfelt gratitude when engaging in Teshuvah.”*

The pleasure of the World to Come is the ultimate joy, infinitely superseding all earthly pleasures. If so, how can one hour of *Teshuvah* performed in this world be greater than the joy of the World to Come?

The pleasure of the Holy One drawing close to us in this World — and lovingly washing away our impurity and flaws — far exceeds the pleasure of the World to Come! The delight and joy of performing *Teshuvah* exponentially expands when we reflect upon the unbridled compassion Heaven displays by forgiving us.

The pleasure of the Creator lovingly cleansing away our impurity may be likened to a mother lovingly changing her baby’s diaper. She adjusts the water temperature so that it is comfortable for her baby and cleans him with a gentle soap. And then she kisses him when she completes the task! Indeed, the Merciful One’s unbounded goodness — revealed through His accepting our *Teshuvah* — is a greater pleasure than the collective delight of “the entire life of The World to Come” (Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer<sup>9</sup>).

The Talmud states (*Yoma* 38b), “The person who comes to purify himself awakens Divine assistance.” Thus, one who engages in Repentance

9. Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer was one of the Rabbi Yisrael Salanter’s primary disciples. He compiled *Ohr Yisrael*, a book that presents the powerful letters of Rabbi Salanter that he wrote to his disciples and family members. The letters convey the great genius of Rabbi Salanter and his passion for Mussar and personal development. Rabbi Blazer also wrote the *Pri Yitzchak*, a classic work in Jewish law, as well as two ethical volumes entitled *The Stars of Light*.



awakens Divine compassion. He merits the Holy One's assistance to purify himself and perform Repentance! Can there be any joy sweeter than that?

## Day Seven



# Joy Opens the Gates of *Teshuvah*

## Joy Opens the Gates of *Teshuvah* (Repentance) - Joy 2.

### Hope and Happiness – a Self-feeding Loop

In the same vein, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, the *Ramchal*<sup>10</sup> writes (*Otzros HaRamchal, Essay on Hope*):

*One who hopes in the Eternal is always joyous and free of distress; while one who is distressed is always in anguish and grief, for he thinks his problems have no remedy. [In contrast], the optimistic person doesn't experience sorrow, since he always hopes for God's redemption. And even if there is a delay, still he awaits. It emerges*

10. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, the *Ramchal*, lived about three hundred years ago in Padua, Italy. He was a master in Torah and Kabbalah who authored many books, including *Mesilas Yesharim (The Path of the Just)*, which emerged as the central text of the Ethical Torah Movement. The *Vilna Gaon*, Rabbi Eliyahu, attested that the *Ramchal* attained the highest level of Divine Knowledge that is humanly possible.

*that his very hope revitalizes him... Even though I sit in darkness,  
God is my Light (Michah 7:8) — the Eternal specifically! For  
Your salvation do I hope, God!*

What a profound thought the *Ramchal* presents us with: The state of feeling joy reflects a dynamic trust and irrepressible hope in Him. A person's trust in the Eternal is his very safeguard and remedy! Even a person enduring a long-lasting life challenge, be it an issue regarding health, family, livelihood, and the like, will be happy and optimistic if he upholds his hope and trust in our Merciful Father!

### **Let the Heart Rejoice In HaShem**

King David stated (*Tehillim* 105:3), "Let the heart rejoice of those who seek the Holy One." Rabbi Eliyahu from Vilna<sup>11</sup> asks a deep question. One who is actively searching for a physical object, like his car keys, and has not yet found it, is in a state of tension, the opposite of joy. So why does the verse state, "Let the heart rejoice of those who seek the Holy One?" He answers that in the spiritual realm, the opposite is true — the search itself awakens joy in his heart! The search for the Holy One is exalted, in and of itself, because it draws him close to the Holy One.

Rabbi Chaim Voloshin<sup>12</sup> explains that when a person contemplates fulfilling a Commandment, even before he fulfills it, a Heavenly Light illuminates his soul. This imbues him with the Holiness of the Garden of Eden and grants him Divine Assistance to fulfill the Commandment. Thus, the Divine Holiness permeates his being and awakens joy in his heart.

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11. The *Vilna Gaon* -- Rabbi Eliyahu -- emerged as one of the greatest Torah scholars in the last three hundred years. He was a Talmudist, Halachic authority and Kabbalist, par excellence. He was renowned for his kindness. Words cannot express his holiness and wisdom.
  12. Rabbi Chaim Voloshin was the primary disciple of the *Vilna Gaon*. He founded the Voloshin Yeshiva and authored *Nefesh HaChaim*, a Kabbalistic and Ethical work, which emerged as a Torah classic.

(Based on Rabbi Gershon Edelstein<sup>13</sup>)

## King David's Joyful Dance

King David similarly expressed such joy when he exclaimed (*Psalms* 30:12), “You transformed my mourning to dancing (*machol*); You loosened my sackcloth and girded me with happiness!” As Rabbi Moshe Dovid Valli<sup>14</sup> comments,

*King David's dancing is the 'skipping' of the righteous when they emerge from the midst of the Forces of Externality and Negativity to stand before the Divine light of the Shechinah, the Divine Presence.*

King David characterized his joyful dancing as *machol* and not the more common used expression *rikud*. By using a word with the same root as *mechila*, i.e., forgiveness, he's conveying to us that through his faith that the Holy One will forgive his transgressions, he burst into exuberant dance that sprang from the depths of his heart.

## The Joy of the Arizal

In his introduction, the *Book of the Pious* states that the Holy Arizal attested that all of his Divine wisdom and supreme holiness were due to his unbounded joy and happiness in his performance of the Commandments! The Holy Commandments are “precious gifts” that the King of the Universe sends to us. The reward for fulfilling the Commandments in the World to Come correlates to the level of joy and happiness that we have in our performance of His Commandments in this world! Indeed, we strive to rejoice over His Commandments — which grant us eternal life — with

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13. Rabbi Gershon Edelstein ztl was the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivah Ponevezh. He was a venerable Talmudic scholar and a passionate advocate for daily Torah study. He rallied Klal Yisrael to study Torah Ethics because it is the only path of Torah that leads to spiritual development, good character traits, and the awe of Hashem.
  14. Rabbi Moshe Dovid Valli was born in Padua, Italy, and was a renowned Kabbalist who merited to learn Kabbalah with the *Ramchal*. He penned a Kabbalistic commentary on the entire Written Torah, including the five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings.

more happiness than acquiring all the temporal gold and silver in this world.

### **One Thing I Ask**

We learn in the *Mishnah* (*Ta'anis* 26b) that “There are no days as good for the People of Israel as ... the fifteenth of *Av*<sup>15</sup> and *Yom Kippur*...” The Talmud (*ibid* 30b) explains that *Yom Kippur* is beneficial for us because it is a day of absolution and forgiveness. In this light, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter stated, “If they were to offer me one request when I go to the World to Come, I would ask to return to this world for one more *Yom Kippur* (*Kadosh Yisrael*)!”

### **The Primacy of Joy**

This unique redemption is like the exuberance of a prince who's been liberated from a dank and grimy dungeon and reunited with his father, the king. Accordingly, *Teshuvah* must be performed with joy!

Summary: *Joy opens the gates of Repentance.*

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15. A Jewish holiday on the fifteenth of *Av* in which single women would seek a husband.

## Day Eight



# Trust in the Holy One is the Key to Successful Repentance

## 2. Trust in the Merciful One is the Key to Successful Repentance - Trust 1.

### Chavakuk Condensed the Entire Torah Into One Principle

Chavakuk the Prophet expresses the primacy of Trust, and condensed the entire Torah into one principle, exclaiming (*Chavakuk* 2:4): “The righteous person shall live by his trust”. In this light, our steadfast Trust in Heaven and His supreme compassion is truly a gift of life, for through *Teshuvah* (Repentance) we are renewed as if we’d been freshly born!

### The *Book of the Pious*

*The Book of the Pious (Chapter Sixty-One) states:*

*Even though a person is required to be scrupulously careful to observe all of the Commandments, nevertheless, it is*

*appropriate for him to seize one of the Commandments with great determination and diligence, intending that he shall never transgress this injunction all the days of his life. Since the Torah is comprised of 613 Commandments, it is referred to as the “Tree of Life,” as the verse writes (Proverbs 3:18), “It is a Tree of Life to those who grasp it.” One who firmly grasps one branch of the tree, effectively grasps the entire tree because all of the other branches extend from that one branch, for all the branches form one united body. Whereas, if he attempts to grasp all of the branches together, he simply cannot grasp all of them together.*

*This insight is based on the Talmud and the early commentators.*

## Seize the Commandment to Trust In Hashem

The *Book of the Pious* leaves the selection of “the Commandment to seize” up to our free-choice decision. However, as we learned above, Chavakuk the Prophet condensed the entire Torah into one principle, *The righteous person shall live by his trust*. **Therefore, it would be logical to choose “Trust in God” as the one particular Commandment to seize!** It is imperative to remember that our living awareness of the Creator — and His boundless compassion — rests exclusively upon our Trust in Him! As Chavakuk exclaimed, *The righteous person shall **live** by his **Trust!***

When we seize the branch of Trust in God, we grasp the very essence and core of the Torah — the “Tree of Life.” As we do so, we electrify our hearts and souls with a connection to the Creator. The branch of Trust in God opens the world of spirituality for us by granting us access to the Source of Life.

## The Primacy of Trust

The key to successful *Teshuvah* springs from Man’s pure and robust Trust in the irrefutable truth of Heaven’s absolute and unbounded compassion. Although the Holy One shows infinite compassion in general to all of His creations, He reveals new dimensions of compassion and forgiveness to those souls who hope in Him and engage in Repentance. The level of Trust

in the Creator and His compassion to accept our *Teshuvah* is the highest level of Trust in the Holy One.

The concept of Repentance defies human logic. Yet, this counter-intuitiveness is precisely why the idea of Repentance requires the highest level of Trust in the Creator and His infinite levels of compassion. Indeed, the Divine Truth reveals that God mercifully accepts our Repentance! The reality of the Creator mercifully accepting our Repentance revitalizes Man's perspective of himself and inspires him with optimism, hope, and joy.

## Day Nine



# The Lesson of the Rock - Trust 2

### Underscoring Hope in God

*The Ramchal, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, writes (Otz'ros HaRamchal, Essay on Hope):*

*If one **hopes** (i.e., the highest level of trust) in God, then even if his good deeds are negligible, he will not be ashamed. As the Torah states (Isaiah 49:23): And you shall know that I am the Eternal, in Whom those who trust shall not be ashamed. From this we learn that even one impoverished of deeds should still retain hope in God, for through this hope, God will reveal Himself to the person and cleanse his transgressions. And indeed, it is from such hope that the ultimate rectification shall spring: the stalwart hope that all Israel has maintained through the protracted exile, and their unwavering faith in the belief in their final redemption. And this ultimate hope is expressed by the Prophet (Zechariah 3:19): I will remove sin from the Earth; and this is the meaning and fulfillment of the verse (Genesis 49:18): For Your redemption*

*I hope, God! Indeed, the ultimate honor of our King is reflected in the trust that His subjects place on Him. As the Talmud states (Makos 24a): Chavakuk came and condensed the Torah into one principle, as it states (Chavakuk 2:4): The righteous person shall live by his trust: trust in God— this is hope.*

## Moses's Prayers

One of Moses's outstanding traits was his steadfast faith in the endless depths of the Creator's compassion. Whenever *B'nei Yisrael* — the Children of Israel — sinned in the Wilderness, Moses prayed to awaken the Merciful One's compassion and kindness upon His children. Nowhere was this more evident than regarding the sin of the Golden Calf. Since Moses knew that God is infinitely merciful, he intuited that He would reveal ever greater levels of compassion even after such a grievous incident; or perhaps even more correctly, precisely because of it!

He therefore prayed (*Exodus* 33:13), "If I have found favor in Your eyes, make known to me Your ways!" The Eternal accepted his supplication and responded (*Exodus* 33:19), "I shall be graceful to whom I choose to grace, and compassionate to whom I choose to be compassionate." Indeed, as a result of this entreaty Heaven revealed the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy to Moses. We mention these Thirteen Attributes of Mercy on *Yom Kippur* — the Day of Forgiveness, and also whenever we are moved to Repent. The Creator radiates new worlds of compassion upon us and cleanses us like a new creation.

(Based on *Da'as Torah* of Rav Yerucham Levovitz<sup>16</sup>)

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16. Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz was a student of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv. He learned in Kelm for a relatively short period, prior to the passing of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv. On the day Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv died, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz stood next to the deceased and fervently prayed the whole night. In his prayers, amongst many deep thoughts and feelings that he expressed to God, "Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv was the first example of a human being that I saw in my life." He said his heartfelt prayers that expressed to God that night merited him to emerge as master of Mussar. He served as the spiritual advisor of the Mir Yeshiva and produced many

## The Lesson of the Rock

The *Bat Ayin*<sup>17</sup> presents a novel commentary on the *Waters of Striving* over which Moses was deprived entrance to *Eretz Yisrael* — The Land of Israel (*Numbers* 20:7-13). In the course of his exposition, the *Bat Ayin* cites two fundamental principles from the *Zohar* that underscore the importance of Trust in the Holy One to accept our *Teshuvah*. First, the Holy One's very purpose in creating the Universe was to be known as the paradigm of compassion and kindness, as the verse states, "He created the world with kindness" (*Psalms* 89:3). Second, He created *Teshuvah* before He brought the Creation into existence. Therefore, it behooves us to unwaveringly trust in the Holy One's unbounded mercy and take inspiration in the sure knowledge that He accepts our *Teshuvah* at all times.

Miriam died in this episode; and as a result, the rock that had supplied the people with water in her merit dried up. Moses was then faced with the inconceivable pressure of desperate myriads clamoring to him for life-giving water in the burning desert heat. A shock of anguished vexation jolted him, and he cried out, *Rebellious ones! Shall water issue from a rock?*

The instant the words left his lips, Moses deeply regretted his outburst and performed complete *Teshuvah*. However, due to his intense humility, he was "sure" God would not forgive his momentary expression of negativity, no matter how "justified" and brief. More than that, he assumed that since he had corrupted his faculty of speech, he no longer had the merit to draw water from the rock through mere speech. Therefore, he concluded there was no other alternative than to strike it with his staff.

The *Bat Ayin* explains that Moses' primary transgression was that he did not believe that the Eternal, in His unbounded compassion, would ***immediately accept his repentance, forgive*** his expression of anger, and repair the blemish in his faculty of speech.

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great disciples. He penned several ethical works, including *Da'as Torah*, as well as many others.

17. The *Bat Ayin* was authored by Rabbi Avraham Dov Auerbach of Avritch approximately two-hundred and fifty years ago. It is a classic book, containing deep insights gleaned from Chasidic, Kabbalistic, and Ethical sources drawn from the weekly Torah readings and Festivals.

*Summary: How awesome an endeavor it is to internalize this lesson, and strengthen our Trust that the Almighty, in His unbounded compassion, will always accept our Teshuvah and immediately forgive our misdeeds, for “He created the world with kindness” (Psalms 89:3)!*

## Day Ten



# The Merciful One Preserves the Sanctity of our Souls

### 3. The Merciful One Preserves the Sanctity of Our Souls.

Axiomatic to our understanding of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) is the *Ramak's* revelation that through the agency of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), one of the Ten Realms of Divine Lights, the Merciful One forever preserves the sanctity of our souls' holy roots. As we know, *Binah* is the aspect of *Emah Elyonah* — the “Exalted Mother” — Who loves Her child unconditionally and always recognizes his intrinsic goodness. So too, a child feels pleasantness when in his Mother's presence because she loves him. Just as a child can always rely on the unconditional love of his parents, so too, we can always rely on the Holy One's unconditional love for us. His love for us is expressed through His preserving the sanctity and goodness of our souls' holy root in the *Sefira* (One of the Ten Divine Lights) of *Binah*.

What's more, at any given moment, **regardless of one's present spiritual state**, the Eternal One graces us with the opportunity to transform ourselves to pure goodness. This is attained by elevating and attaching ourselves to

our holy root and implanting ourselves firmly within the spiritual realms! Indeed, *Teshuvah Elyonah* awakens the holy *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights) to illuminate man with their purifying light! Just as the Radiance of *Binah* transmutes Divine Judgment to Compassion, so too, *Teshuvah Elyonah* transmutes the negative aspects of man into Holiness, Goodness, and Light!

Engaging in *Teshuvah Elyonah* begins with a person's free-will decision to ascend to the root of his holy soul. This intention stimulates a wondrous process that culminates with him connecting to his pure essence. In the wake of man's sanctifying himself through *Teshuvah Elyonah*, his former misdeeds are transformed into meritorious acts. In the upcoming pages we will clarify how, through the process of *Teshuvah Elyonah*, man elevates himself to his holy root and prompts the light of *Binah* to cast its splendor upon **"all the days of his life."**

### **Man Is Like the Tree of the Field**

The verse (*Numbers* 20:19) states, "Man is like the tree of the field." Our Patriarchs and Matriarchs devoted all their energy to plant the strong and everlasting roots in our hearts of our Holy faith and trust in the Almighty (Based on the writings of Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz). They successfully sanctified and illuminated the physical darkness of the body. All the winds in the world cannot uproot our trust from its place because our holy ancestors planted the roots of our faith like a permanent fortress that is unconquerable. It can withstand cracks in the foundation and quickly repair itself because the foundations are so strong and dynamic.

The *Midrash Tanchumah* states (*Numbers* 23:9), "I [i.e., God] look at their origins and the beginning of their roots, and I see them established and powerful, like these mountains and hills because of their Patriarchs and Matriarchs" (Cited by *Rashi's*<sup>18</sup> commentary).

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18. *Rashi*, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, the French Torah scholar and master commentator who lived in the Middle Ages, who composed the classical — and universally accepted — comprehensive commentary on the entire Torah: the Tanach (Written Torah), Talmud (Oral Law), and Midrash. His brilliant commentary is composed in a concise and lucid fashion.

## Connecting to Our Holy Roots

*The Zohar (Terumah 165a) states: "Rabbi Yose teaches: One who ascends to the Divine Light of Binah must do so with joy, and with no anguish or sadness whatsoever." Four complimentary reasons combine to spark this lofty level of joy:*

First is the joyful awareness that the Merciful Creator will unequivocally accept our *Teshuvah* (Repentance) in His unbounded compassion! This is especially true concerning Man's performance of *Teshuvah Elyonah*, through which man elevates himself to his holy root implanted in the Realm of *Binah*!

Second, the joy of knowing that our Merciful Father forever safeguards the sanctity of our soul's holy roots within the Divine Light of *Binah*.

Third, the joy of knowing that it is possible to purify ourselves from the illusory defilements of this world and its earthly desires, which seem so bright and alluring at first, but which serve only to blacken and coarsen the soul.

Fourth, joy in the awareness that through *Teshuvah Elyonah* and the Secret of the Jubilee, the Merciful One grants us the golden opportunity to access and unite with our holy root and transform our nature back into the pure goodness from whence it sprang.

Summary: *The Almighty Preserves the Sanctity of Our Souls.*

## Day Eleven



# The Source of Trust in God

### 4. *Binah* is the source of Trust in God.

#### An Ever-Expanding River

*“The Holy One Conceals Himself” — “Keil Mistateir” — is an allegorical poem, composed by Rabbi Avraham Maimain, a disciple of the Ramak, alluding to the Ten Sefirot (System of Divine Lights). Concerning Binah (Divine Enlightenment) it states:*

*Expanses of the River; Streams of Faith — the man of understanding will draw forth deep waters that exude the Fifty Gates of Binah. Protected by God are the Faithful!*

The phrase “Expanses of the River” is an allusion to *Binah*, which is likened to a river, whose banks continuously widen and fill with ever more water. Just as every river has a source, so too, our Trust in God must have a source. What is the source of our Trust in God? “*Expanses of the River*”

is paired with “*Streams of Faith*” because *Binah* is the very source of our faith in the Creator and in His unbounded compassion, which fills our hearts and flows like an endless stream. The light of *Binah* continuously strengthens Man’s belief in the Eternal and His wondrous ways, inspiring him to successfully perform *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) and “**rectify every flaw.**”

Through man merging with the Light of *Binah* he draws absolute Trust in the Creator into his heart, as the poem states, “The man of understanding will draw forth deep waters that exude the Fifty Gates of *Binah*.” The Almighty empowers him with new worlds of dynamic Trust that awaken “the Fifty Gates of *Binah*,” the highest level of Holiness and Knowing the Eternal that Man can attain. Moses, the Father of all the Prophets, attained the lofty spiritual heights of the Fifty Gates of *Binah*. What’s more, our Trust in the Holy One will awaken His closeness and protection, as the concluding phrase states: “Protected by God are the Faithful!”

### **The Source of the Fifty Gates of *Binah***

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches in the *Zohar* that the Fifty Gates of *Binah* allude to the fifty times the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt is mentioned in the Torah. The Fifty Gates of *Binah* also allude to the passing of fifty days that began with the Exodus, the first day of Passover, and ended with Heaven giving us His Torah on Mount Sinai on *Shavuot*. The Fifty Gates of *Binah* symbolize the Fifty individual levels of freedom that each individual Gate revealed, as well as their combined effectiveness.

If not for the combined power of freedom that all Fifty Gates of *Binah* released, we would still be enslaved to the Egyptians. The collective combination of each level of freedom granted the Children of Israel eternal liberation from the Egyptian bondage. The Fifty Gates of *Binah* extracted us from the dimensions of impurity and elevated us to Supreme Holiness (Based on *The Orchard of the Pomegranate*, Gate Thirteen, Chapter One).

### **Our Merciful Creator**

Our Merciful Creator bestowed the Torah upon us, His beloved children,

with endless degrees of compassion that were not initially evident. By doing so, He ensured that we will always be forgiven, and thus always be able to fulfill the Torah – whose observance is vital for the continuation of Creation! Thus, the passage of history reveals greater and greater levels of His kindness. For example, after the sin of the Golden Calf, the Creator manifested previously unrevealed dimensions of compassion to Moses. Generations later, He revealed even greater magnitudes of mercy to the Prophet *Michah*. With the advent of the *Geula Sh'leimah* — the Final Redemption — He will reveal even yet new vistas of Divine Compassion, quickly in our days!

Summary: *Binah is the source of our Trust in the Almighty.*

## Day Twelve



# “Intention” Guarantees a Successful Outcome

## 5. “Intention” Guarantees A Successful Outcome.

### Intention Below Bears Fruit Above

The *Tomer Devorah* states as a **rule** that our **intention** has a guaranteed and absolute effect! The *Ramak* makes it crystal clear that our intention to affect the *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights) will *definitely* bear fruit in the Upper Realms. That is, when a person performs an action with the intention to awaken the light of the corresponding *Sefira* (One of the Divine Lights), it will definitely activate the *Sefira* to send forth its Holy outflow. As the *Tomer Devorah* states in Chapter Five:

*The **rule** of the matter is as follows: When one performs good deeds for the inhabitants of the physical realm, and he intends to [awaken the aspect of the Sefira aligned with that particular action], his intention will **certainly** awaken the reciprocal effect in the respective Sefira.*

It emerges that acting with faith and proper intent when performing a good deed **inevitably** awakens the corresponding *Sefira* in which the said deed is rooted. For example, before performing a Mitzvah we intone the following: “Blessed are You God, King of the Universe, Who sanctifies us with His Mitzvot....” The greater our intent that the Holy One sanctify us through the Mitzvah, the more powerful outflow of holiness emerges from Heaven!

Thus it is with *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance): to the extent to which one intends that the light of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) illuminate him, so will it indeed shine upon him. As the *Ramak* states in Chapter Four: “One who contemplates *Teshuvah* all his days causes *Binah* to illuminate all his days ... the days of his life will thereby be graced with the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah*.”

## Verbal Intention

*Moreover, it is advisable to first verbally express one's intention, as the Ramak writes: “It is beneficial for one to verbalize his intention before he acts, in accord with the verse (Deuteronomy 30:14): “It is in your mouth and heart to do” (See the Conclusion after Day Fifty where we offer an example of such a preliminary prayer).*

## The *Bat Ayin* on Forgiveness

*It states in Psalms (2:7), “This day I have given birth to you.” The Bat Ayin comments that King David's unique spiritual attribute was that each day, by virtue of his Repentance, the Creator endowed him with a new soul that emanated from the Throne of Glory. Therefore, it was as if he was “born anew today.”*

## Two Aspects of Repentance

He also writes that the process of Repentance involves two aspects, one of the heart and the other of the mind. When engaging in Repentance, a person feels contrite in his heart over his sin, and at the same time, he

must strengthen his mind in knowing that the Creator is Compassionate, Forgiving, and grants him Atonement. The strengthening of his mind's belief in the Holy One's Compassion, builds the solid foundation of his Trust in Heaven's Forgiveness. This combination of the specific functions of the "heart and mind" leads him to successful Repentance!

In general, the heart's emotions overwhelm the mind's intellect, as Rabenu Yonah explains in the "Foundation of Repentance" (Day Thirty-Six). However, when a person performs the Commandment of Repentance, the emotions and intellect support each other and work together as partners. Regret over the sin he committed awakens Hashem's compassion, as Scripture states (*Yeshaya 55:6*), "Seek Hashem when He is found," and as we find in many other places in the Torah. The heart's joyous feeling of awakening Hashem's compassion revitalizes the intellect's faith in Hashem's compassion to accept Repentance and grant forgiveness. Thus, when he is inspired to perform Repentance, the Commandment's holiness intensifies his faith in Hashem's boundless compassion and transforms darkness into light.

Summary: *"Intention" guarantees Divine Enlightenment will illuminate the World.*

## Day Thirteen



## New Aspects of the Divine Image

### 6. *Teshuvah Elyonah* Reveals New Aspects of the Divine Image.

#### Transformation and Purity

The *Ramak* reveals a sparkling facet of the significance of Man's being created in the Divine Image. As he states in our chapter: "Just as *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) functions to sweeten all of the Judgments and to neutralize their bitterness; so too, Man engages in *Teshuvah* (Repentance) and rectifies every flaw." Meaning, just as the Creator sweetens every Judgment; so too, Man, created in the Divine Image, has the power to rectify every transgression and repugnant character trait. This ability to transform darkness to light and curse into blessing, constitutes a primary aspect of Man's having been created in the Divine Image. Of all created beings, only Man has the capacity to affect and rectify the upper realms through his intents, actions, and words.

## Emulate God's Holiness

Moreover, just as God is utterly holy and pure; so too, it is appropriate for Man to attain refinement in holiness and purity, untarnished by transgression. Therefore, the Eternal opens the gates of *Binah*, granting us the opportunity to perform *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) and “rectify every flaw.” Through this process, a person returns to his original lofty state, cleansed of every trace of iniquity.

Summary: *Teshuvah Elyonah privileges Man with two new aspects of emulating the Almighty.*

### Rabbi Yisrael Salanter<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, of blessed memory, innovated a special technique to impart these foundational concepts into our subconscious (as well as all the other principles included in *Tomer Devorah*). The technique entails repeating the concepts to yourself in a tune, for about five to ten minutes. The musical tones make subconscious impressions, that will imprint these lofty concepts into our hearts. We suggest utilizing Rabbi Salanter's technique to strengthen the integration of these fundamental concepts of belief in the Creator into your heart. [Rabbi Miller to add a link here]

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19. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter was born in Zagare, Lithuania about two-hundred years ago. His writings were incorporated into a volume by his disciple, Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, and entitled *Ohr Yisrael*. He was a great Torah scholar and renowned Rosh Yeshivah. He initiated and developed the Torah ethical movement, and he asserted that this was the very heart and soul of the Torah. He dedicated his life to proliferating its practice and fulfillment. His heartfelt sensitivity, sterling character traits, awareness of God, and Torah brilliance make him the classic Torah role model.

## Day Fourteen



### *Teshuvah* Rectifies Every Flaw.

The text of *Tomer Devorah* - Chapter Four, *Binah*.

*Teshuvah Elyonah* - Exalted Repentance.

Presented in the original Hebrew text and accompanied with the English translation.

The English text is annotated with the commentary of “*Laughter Will Fill Our Mouths.*”

(א) האִיךָ יִרְגִיל הָאָדָם עֲצָמוּ בְּמִדַּת הַבִּינָה ? וְהוּא לְשׁוֹב בְּתַשׁוּבָה שְׂאִין דְּבַר הַשׁוֹב בְּמוֹהָ, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִיא מְתַקֶּנֶת כָּל פְּגָם.

(1) How does one inculcate himself with the attribute of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment)? By engaging in *Teshuvah* (Repentance) — for there is nothing as paramount as *Teshuvah*, as it rectifies every flaw.

## ***Teshuvah* Rectifies Every Flaw**

As a general rule, when the Torah wishes to discuss a derivative concept, it first introduces the primary, essential concept from whence the derivative springs, and only then turns to the derivative itself. For example, consider the Torah's focus on the import of Man's having been created in the Divine Image. First the Torah elucidates (to the extent of our limited ability to grasp) the concept of "the Almighty's power and capabilities," revealed through His affecting the Creation. Only then does it introduce the concept of Man's having been created in the "Divine Image" – and thus mirroring His power in some way, no matter how diminished and limited. Only after the concept of "the Almighty's power" is clear, can we understand the significance of Man's having been created in His Image. If so, we may rightfully ask, why did the *Ramak* **first** present the comparison to *Binah*, man's Repentance, and only **afterward** clarify the power of the Divine Level of Spirituality of *Binah* – that it "sweetens all Judgments and neutralizes their bitterness?"

The answer is that it is human nature to worry and fret over our sins, to lose hope of awakening Divine compassion and attaining forgiveness. Therefore, the *Ramak* **first** emphasizes the power of *Teshuvah* "for there is nothing as paramount as *Teshuvah*, as it rectifies every flaw." This statement proclaims clearly that there is no transgression or negative character trait whatsoever that the Merciful One will not forgive and that man cannot rectify! Therefore, "there is nothing as paramount as *Teshuvah*!" As the Talmud (*Yerushalmi Peah* 5) states, "There is nothing that can stand in the way of *Teshuvah*." In this light, even before learning of *Binah's* power to "sweeten all Judgments," it is essential to first inform and encourage us that *Teshuvah* "**rectifies every flaw.**"

## **Encouragement to Perform Teshuvah**

In *Parshas Shemini* (*Leviticus* 9), the Torah tells us that the Holy One consecrated Aaron to serve as the *High Priest* in the Tabernacle. Moses instructed Aaron to bring a young bull for a sin-offering. The significance of the "young bull" was to convey to Aaron that through this offering, he would be forgiven for his role in the sin of the golden calf (*Rashi, Leviticus* 9:2). When Aaron saw the altar, he imagined it as "the image of an ox,"

and fear seized him because of his involvement in the sin of the golden calf. Therefore, Moses came forward and encouraged Aaron to strengthen himself, approach the altar and offer the calf — and attain the Holy One's forgiveness (*Ramban, Baal HaTurim*<sup>20</sup>, *Leviticus* 9:7-8).

We understand from Aaron's initial hesitation that it is human nature for a person to be overwhelmed by feelings of remorse when engaging in *Teshuvah*. Therefore, just as Moses encouraged his brother Aaron to perform *Teshuvah*, the *Ramak* encourages his brethren to perform *Teshuvah*.

### The Final Redemption

Regarding the importance of *Teshuvah* and its role leading to the final redemption, the Torah states (*Deuteronomy* 30):

*And you will return unto the Eternal, your God, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul. Then the Eternal, your God, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will gather you in from all the peoples to which the Eternal, your God, has scattered you... You shall return and listen to the voice of God, and perform all His commandments that I command you today. God will make you abundant in all the work of your hands — in the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your animals, and the fruit of your Land — for good, when God will return to rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your forefathers, when you listen to the voice of the Eternal, your God, to observe His commandments and His decrees, that are written in the Book of the Torah, when you shall return to the Eternal, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul.*

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20. The *Baal HaTurim* was Rabbi Yaacov ben Asher, who was born in Europe and lived in the Middle Ages. He authored the *Arba Turim* an important work of Torah law that spans the entire Talmud. He also authored the *Baal HaTurim*, a concise commentary of the written Torah, interspersed with Kabbalistic references and numerical calculations. He penned the *Rulings of the Rosh*, the writings of his esteemed father, Rabenu Asher.

*Nachmanides* writes that although the Torah writes this text as a commandment, “And you will return to the Eternal, your God, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul,” nevertheless, it is expressed in the future tense. The Creator intended these verses to be an assurance to the Jewish people living in the far-flung lands of the diaspora, that they have the capacity to repent and *perform all His commandments that I command you today*. For this commandment of *Teshuvah* is not concealed from you, nor is it far away from you; it is very close to you to fulfill at every time and every place.

Let us state clearly and unequivocally that “there is nothing as paramount as *Teshuvah* as it rectifies every flaw,” no matter how bitter and toxic. This is an absolute truth, with no exceptions, for the Merciful One decrees that “*Teshuvah* rectifies every flaw!”

## Day Fifteen



# The Healing Power of Repentance

### How Does One Inculcate Himself With *Binah*?

The *Ramak's* wording is precise: "How does one inculcate himself with the attribute of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment)?" It does not suffice for the person to conduct himself with the attribute of *Binah* sporadically and intermittently. Rather, "inculcate" has the connotation of habituating oneself on a constant basis with the attribute of *Binah*. As a result of his continuous dedication to internalize the attribute of *Binah*, it will continuously strengthen "all the days of his life." Rabbi Yisrael Salanter similarly expressed (*Ohr Yisrael*, Letter Four), "Habit and experience rule over everything." Therefore, a person must habituate himself in the attribute of *Binah*, focusing on its internalization, so that he will inculcate himself with *Binah* "all the days of his life."

### *Teshuvah's* Healing Power

Just as a specific remedy is proven to heal a particular disease, so too, the

effectiveness of *Teshuvah's* (Repentance's) healing power is well-established and undisputed. Just as the Almighty effortlessly transforms curses to blessings; so too, *Teshuvah* is a mighty force that can transform the basest transgression into the most sublime of Mitzvot! Indeed, *Teshuvah* holds the power to transform darkness to light, convert every sin into merit, and transmute all defilement into purity.

### **One Person's *Teshuvah* Affects the Entirety of the People of Israel**

The *Ramak* writes in the first chapter of *Tomer Devorah*:

*The People of Israel are like one united family, each person related to one another because all the souls are interconnected. What's more, there is a portion of each soul contained in every other one.*

In this light, when a person performs a good deed, he sanctifies every other Jew through the “portions” of their souls contained within him.

We now understand that when a person performs *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), he causes the Light of *Binah* to rectify not only himself, but the portions of the souls of all the People of Israel within him. More, if he includes all the souls of the People of Israel in his intention to raise himself to his holy root, he awakens a true wonder – causing **all** the souls of the People of Israel to ascend to their holy roots. Thus, *Binah* casts its illumination over the entire People of Israel.

### **The Book of the Pious**

Similarly, The *Book of the Pious* (66:13) notes that the phrase (*Exodus* 1:5) *Seventy Soul* (which refers to the seventy individuals who descended with Yaakov our Patriarch to Egypt), is curiously written in the singular tense “*Soul*” and not the plural tense “*Souls*.” He explains that this signifies the unity of the People of Israel. Accordingly, he advises us to engage in *Teshuvah* with the intention to inspire all of the People of Israel to join in our vital spiritual venture. Consequently, all the souls of the People of Israel will be influenced to perform *Teshuvah*, with the Merciful One's help.

In the same light, “Rabbi Meir said, “The power of Repentance is great, for on account of an individual who repents, the sins of the entire world are forgiven” (*Yoma* 86b).

### **Ever-expanding Worlds of Compassion**

While human nature is limited in its scope to forgive, the Creator’s infinite compassion continually expands to grant forgiveness for every misdeed and character flaw. The Creator’s example is meant to inspire us to constantly open our hearts to new dimensions of compassion. Moreover, it stirs us to grant forgiveness to even the most ignoble people, (including ourselves), by broadening our capacity to emulate His infinite attribute of Mercy.

### **The “Secret of the Divine Image”**

The Merciful One created man in the “Secret of the Divine Image,” as the *Ramak* writes in Chapter One. This alludes to the idea that the Creator instilled spiritual aspects within Man that correspond to the Ten *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights). For example, Avraham our Patriarch was impassioned with extraordinary loving-kindness because he ignited the inherent spark of Divine Kindness that pulsed in his heart.

Man’s primary purpose in this world is to emulate the Creator, through the corresponding aspects of the *Sefirot* that lie within himself. Man’s emulation of the *Sefirot* awakens the illumination of each individual Divine Light upon himself, his community, and the entire world. Therefore, it is vitally important to clarify the qualities of *Binah* so as to be illuminated regarding its corresponding emulation. Ultimately, this emulation awakens the Exalted Light of *Binah* to shine upon a person “all the days of his life.”

The *Sefirot* reflect the splendor of the *Ohr Ein Sof, Baruch Hu* (the Holy One’s Infinite Divine Light) which is the unbounded goodness that the Creator constantly bestows upon His creations. In His supreme Kindness, the Merciful One “filtered” the Infinite Divine Light through the *Sefirot*, enabling us, His frail and finite creations, to attain the slightest inkling of His Essence: His Light, Compassion, Holiness, and Purity.

## Day Sixteen



## This Is Also For the Good

(ב) וּכְמוֹ שְׂדֵדְךָ הַבִּינָה לְמַתֵּק כָּל הַדִּינִים וּלְכַטֵּל מְרִירוֹתָם, כִּף הָאָדָם יָשׁוּב בְּתַשׁוּבָה וַיִּתְקַן כָּל פְּגָם.

(2) Just as *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) functions to “sweeten all the Judgments” and to neutralize their bitterness; so too, man engages in *Teshuvah* (Repentance) and rectifies every flaw.

### *Binah* Sweetens the Judgment

In the Earthly court system, legal proceedings follow a rigorously prescribed procedure. When a case comes before the judges, they listen to the litigants’ claims, examine the witnesses’ testimony, and evaluate the evidence. Finally, they pronounce a verdict of innocent or guilty and pass sentencing. And although it might seem obvious, it’s vital to point out that if guilty, the litigant’s reaction, whether repentant or defiant, is immaterial to the fact of the conviction and its mark on his record.

In the Heavenly realm there are also two possible outcomes: meritorious

or liable. However, even though Earthly justice is modeled upon Divine Justice, there is a vital difference between the two systems: Divine Justice, regardless of the actual Judgment, is always rooted in Compassion. Accordingly, when a person acknowledges his misdeed and engages in *Teshuvah*, the Holy One awakens His attribute of Compassion. Now, this does not mean that He tips the scales of justice from liable to meritorious, for that would be a perversion of justice! Rather, when a person acknowledges his transgression and its resultant blemish, God causes *Binah* to rectify the harsh Judgment by elevating it to its “sweet root.”

### ***Binah* Sweetens Every Judgment**

Just like the tree that Moses “cast into the bitter waters and the waters became sweet” (*Exodus* 15:25), so too, “it is the way of *Binah* to sweeten all of the Judgments and to neutralize their bitterness.”

### ***Teshuvah* Rectifies Every Flaw**

There are three main categories of *Teshuvah*: a) *Teshuvah* motivated by the fear of God and b) *Teshuvah* inspired by the love of God. These first two categories of *Teshuvah* are classified as “conventional *Teshuvah*.” The third category is c) *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance). *Teshuvah Elyonah* is initialized through Man’s intent to ascend to his soul’s holy root, which resides in the Realm of *Binah*. The Realm of *Binah* is the elevated and sublime dimension of a perfectly spiritual domain. When a person successfully engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, he transforms himself by uniting with his pure and inherent goodness. In turn, his past actions ascend with him and implant themselves in holiness, his misdeeds convert to Mitzvot, and all negativity converts to positivity. This remarkable process will be explained in the upcoming pages.

We will also see that there are many differences that set *Teshuvah Elyonah* qualitatively apart from “conventional” *Teshuvah* – even though they share a connection on a more sublime level!

## “I will bow towards the Sanctuary of Your Holiness”

*Similarly, regarding our Patriarch Isaac, the Ramak writes (Tomer Devorah, Chapter 10):*

*“And I will bow towards the Sanctuary of Your holiness” (Psalms 5:8). This refers to Isaac, who, for his part, bowed down (by submitting himself to be slaughtered at the “Binding of Isaac”) in order to bend his stature before the Attribute of Judgment and surrender himself to it. And as a result, the time of Judgment was deflected from him, for an abundance of compassion was drawn down upon it from Above in order to sweeten it.*

Our Patriarch Isaac acknowledged that the Judgment he submitted himself to was rooted in an exalted level of sanctity, as it says, “I will bow down to your Holy Temple.” Therefore, he surrendered himself to the Holiness of the Divine Judgment.

Similarly, our Sages teach us that *Nachum Ish Gam Zu* met every adversity with the words, “**This also is for the good!**” The *Ramak* reveals that *Nachum Ish Gam Zu* trusted that every adversity springs from the Kindness of the Merciful One. By saying “This is also for the good” he unified the “hardship” with its root in Kindness. So too, when Man performs *Teshuvah Elyonah*, he ascends to his inherent goodness, and “rectifies every flaw.”

## Day Seventeen



# The Power of Contemplating Upon Repentance

(ג) ומי שמהרהר תשובה כל ימיו גורם שתאיר הבינה בכל ימיו. ונמצאו כל ימיו ימי תשובה.

(3) One who contemplates *Teshuvah* (Repentance) all his days causes *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) to illuminate all his days; it thus emerges that all his days are spent in *Teshuvah*.

### The Power of “Contemplating *Teshuvah*”

*Note the Ramak’s choice of words: “One who **contemplates** Teshuvah all his days causes Binah to illuminate all his days.” We might have expected him to write something more along the lines of, “One who **performs** Teshuvah all his days causes Binah to illuminate all his days.” How is it possible that merely **contemplating** Teshuvah suffices to awaken “Binah to illuminate all his days?!”*

The *Ramak* reveals a remarkable insight. The mere contemplation of *Teshuvah* itself makes a powerful impact in Heaven! In truth, this idea is reflected in our Sages's ruling that "if a man says to a woman, 'Be married to me on condition that I am a virtuous man,' then even if he has been utterly corrupt and evil until that moment, the marriage is valid, for perhaps he **contemplated** performing *Teshuvah*" (*Kiddushin* 49b).

Similarly, the verse (*Exodus* 12:28) regarding the Paschal offering, states, "And the Children of Israel went and fulfilled as God commanded Moses and Aaron." They did not fulfill this precept because this verse refers to the Commandment to eat the Paschal offering which God commanded the Children of Israel on the first day of *Nisan* (the name of a Hebrew month). However, the actual eating did not take place until the fifteenth of *Nisan*. If so, what is the meaning of the verse, "The Children of Israel went and fulfilled as God commanded Moses and Aaron?" Rather, since they **accepted** to fulfill the Commandment to eat the Paschal offering, the Merciful One credits them with performing the Commandment on the first day of *Nisan*!

(Based on *Rashi's* commentary)

So too, when one contemplates on *Teshuvah*, the Merciful One credits him with fulfilling the Commandment from the time of his acceptance to repent! Therefore, whenever we "contemplate performing *Teshuvah*," even without performing *Teshuvah*, we cause the Divine Light of *Binah* to illuminate "all our days." The mere contemplation of *Teshuvah* awakens *Binah* to sanctify a person's soul and arouses the Divine attributes of compassion and forgiveness! Even more, it reverses our status in Heaven from iniquitous to righteous.

### **Illuminating All a Person's Days**

The *Ramak* informs us that engaging in *Teshuvah* causes *Binah* to cast its radiance upon a person. What is behind this wondrous relationship between *Teshuvah* and *Binah* radiating its luminescence? Intriguingly, the *Ramak* repeats the phrase "all his days" three times in this short passage. Perhaps he is hinting that, in general, "the days" are an allusion to being under the dominion of the sun, as the Torah states (*Genesis* 1:16): "and the **great luminary** that rules over the **day**." No matter how unimaginably

potent it may be, the sun is a mere physical, limited light. However, the *Ramak* is conveying that *Teshuvah* awakens the infinite spiritual light of *Binah*. As a result of *Teshuvah*, Man enters into the dominion of ***Binah***, a spiritual sun that is more incalculably powerful than the physical one. Indeed, it has the spiritual magnitude “to illuminate all his days.”

### ***Binah* Converts Every Indiscretion Into Goodness**

What’s more, the phrase “he causes *Binah* to illuminate all his days” implies that *Binah* literally illuminates every instant of the person’s life, converting every previous indiscretion into goodness. Incredibly, by engaging in *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) one causes past misdeeds and blemishes to transform to wholesome virtues.

### **“It Thus Emerges That All His Days Are Spent in *Teshuvah*”**

The Light of *Binah* not only “rectifies every flaw”; it also illuminates “all one’s days” with a significantly greater magnitude of light than before he erred! The Creator shines a magnitude of Divine Radiance upon a person in his normative status (i.e., devoid of sin). However, if he commits a sin, he is relegated to a status of disfavor with Heaven. Yet, when he contemplates *Teshuvah Elyonah*, the Merciful One shines Divine Illumination upon him, exceeding in magnitude beyond his status **before** he sinned. Thus, one who contemplates *Teshuvah Elyonah*, attains a superior magnitude of Divine Radiance!



## Day Eighteen



### The Secret of Repentance Rests On Two Pillars

(ד) דְּהִינּוּ לְכָל עֲצָמוֹ בְּבִינָה, שֶׁהִיא תְּשׁוּבָה.

(4) That is, he merges himself with *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), which is *Teshuvah* (Repentance).

#### The Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance)

These words embrace the enigma of *Teshuvah Elyonah*. Success in attaining this sublime level of *Teshuvah* is contingent on one's ascending and binding himself to *Binah*. Imagine the thrill of Columbus and his fellow explorers upon discovering new lands across the sea. After months of uncertainty, dwindling supplies and mutinous murmurings from the crew, the lookout suddenly raises a heartening cry, "Land ho!" In an instant, crushing despair transformed to joyful euphoria: an entire New World had been discovered! They were bursting with excitement and exuberance, not to mention weeping with unrestrained relief. Now understand that even

such vivid and genuine emotion pales to nothingness in comparison to the sublime delight of “merging oneself with *Binah*!”

In his infinite mercy, the Almighty allows a person to reconnect with the untainted essence of his soul. The elation of this experience is the exquisite ecstasy attained through ascending to the realm of *Binah*. By “merging with *Binah*” one crosses the threshold into a sublime dimension of holiness, healing, and life, the joy of the very World to Come!

### **The Effectiveness of *Teshuvah Elyonah***

The effectiveness of achieving *Teshuvah Elyonah* rests on two pillars:

**1) Steadfast trust in the Creator that *Binah* truly holds power to “rectify every flaw.”**

**2) Intent to ascend to the holy root of one’s soul, which resides in *Binah*.**

**By virtue of one’s faith and his intention “to merge with *Binah*,” Its light shines upon him and arouses the wonder of *Teshuvah Elyonah*.**

### **Planting a Seed**

It can be likened to a farmer planting a seed. The farmer knows that in order for the seed to sprout, it’s critical for him to plow the field, plant and water it, and tend to the seedlings. However, he is also well aware that these are the limits of his efforts, and that it is God and God alone Who engenders the incomprehensible wonder of wheat sprouting from a seed. At that point, success is in the hands of the Almighty, and “all” he can do is pray! So too, man’s role in performing *Teshuvah Elyonah* is to have Trust and utilize his gift of free-will to ascend to his holy root. However, it is the Merciful One alone Who performs the actual wonders affected by *Teshuvah Elyonah*, through the *Sefira* (One of the Ten Divine Lights) of *Binah*.

As soon as Man performs and fulfills his tasks relevant to *Teshuvah Elyonah*, the Merciful Creator responds by revealing the Fifty Gates of *Binah*. The Secret of the Jubilee joins the redemptive process, granting Man freedom to elevate to his intrinsically good and Holy roots. Consequently,

his soul experiences spiritual rebirth, scintillates with infinite levels of joy, and delights in closeness to the Eternal One, as stated in our prayer of Silent Devotion, “And return us in perfect Repentance before You.”

### **A Series of Marvels**

In other words, when a person engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, a series of marvels occur:

Just as *Binah* “sweetens all the Judgments,” so too, *Teshuvah Elyonah* “rectifies every flaw.”

2) When *Binah* casts its sublime illumination upon him, a series of miracles is initiated whereby he is now free to ascend to his holy root and transform himself entirely to goodness. His past misdeeds and indiscretions follow his lead, similarly ascending and converting to goodness. Even if he committed an intentional grave misdeed, the liberating power of the Secret of the Jubilee will elevate him to the pure root of his soul and convert the sin to a *Mitzvah*. Moreover, his transformation inspires the Accusing Forces created as the byproducts of his misdeeds, to similarly ascend to their roots and implant themselves in holiness. These lofty concepts will be elaborated in the upcoming pages.

## Day Nineteen



# Divine Enlightenment Functions in a Dual Capacity

### ***Binah* which is *Teshuvah*.**

The *Ramak* stated previously: “*Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) functions to “sweeten all the Judgments” and to neutralize their bitterness; so too, Man engages in *Teshuvah* (Repentance) and rectifies every flaw.” We see that while *Binah* functions to “sweeten all the Judgments,” Man’s emulation is to “rectify every flaw.” How does he accomplish this? By engaging in *Teshuvah*. It seems clear from this that *Teshuvah* is the function of Man.

Subsequently, however, the *Ramak* writes: “One who contemplates *Teshuvah* all his days causes *Binah* to illuminate all his days; it thus emerges that all his days are spent in *Teshuvah*. That is, he merges himself with *Binah*, which is *Teshuvah*.” The contradiction is glaring: previously we understood that *Binah* “sweetens the Judgments,” whereas *Teshuvah*, performed by man “rectifies every flaw.” This indicates that there is a

powerful distinction wherein it is Man's function to perform *Teshuvah*! If so, we need to understand why the *Ramak* asserts that "*Binah* is *Teshuvah*:"

The answer lies in a proper understanding of the wonder that is *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), which functions to elevate the bitterness of transgression to its sweet root. It is true that when a person's heart stirs him to return to his Father in Heaven, he intends to elevate his soul to the Realm of *Binah*. That "effort" is where Man's role in his *Teshuvah Elyonah* finishes. Only *Binah* itself holds the astounding ability to elevate the bitterness to its sweet root. Accordingly, by raising Man's soul to its holy source, *Binah* plays an integral role in the process of *Teshuvah Elyonah*. When a person "contemplates *Teshuvah*" he elevates his soul to *Binah*, which holds the key to elevate a bitter element to its sweet root.

### ***Binah* Functions in a Dual Capacity**

Therefore, *Binah* functions in a dual capacity: vis a vis the *Sefira* (the Divine Light) of *Binah*, it "sweetens all the Judgments." Simultaneously, regarding Man's *Teshuvah*, "Man engages in *Teshuvah* and rectifies every flaw." Yet, Man has his limitations attaining the sanctification of *Teshuvah Elyonah*, like the farmer planting the seed, as we mentioned above. Now, with *Teshuvah Elyonah*, one contemplates engaging in *Teshuvah* with Trust in the power of *Binah* and the intention of ascending to his soul's root. He thus awakens *Binah's* light to shine upon him. This causes the sweetening of the bitter blemish, through its elevation to the sweet source of the soul's sanctity. Hence, the *Sefira* of *Binah*, its effects, and *Teshuvah Elyonah* are all bound together.

### **The Three Stages of *Teshuvah Elyonah***

When Man strengthens his faith in the wondrous power of *Binah* and intends to ascend to his holy root stationed in *Binah*, the Light of *Binah* illuminates upon Man and purifies him from all his blemishes. He thus attains *Teshuvah Elyonah*. This wondrous process occurs in three stages. Firstly, it is fitting for Man to intend to elevate himself to his pure root stationed in *Binah*. And when he does so, he elevates himself significantly to the heights of the spiritual realm. Therefore, his faith and intention elevate him to the highest level attainable for Man. However, the final ascent

wherein he “sweetens the judgment and neutralizes the bitter” — when he accesses his innate Holiness — is beyond human capacity. His ascent to his spiritual root awakens the second stage, wherein the Light of *Binah* illuminates upon him. Thirdly, the purifying Light of *Binah* illuminates upon him and elevates him to his holy and pure root, stationed in *Binah*. As the *Ramak* writes, “One who contemplates *Teshuvah* all his days causes *Binah* to illuminate all his days; it thus emerges that all his days are spent in *Teshuvah*.”

### Like a Beneficial River

It’s vital to point out that *Binah* serves as an independent, general force that does not necessarily merge with a given individual. A river, which flows unceasingly, provides water to the earth and its creatures. As the verse in *Psalms* (104:10-11) states: “He Who sends springs into rivers; between the mountains they flow; to water all the beasts of the fields; the wild creatures quench their thirst.” **However, a person can only enjoy a river’s benefits if he is willing to go there.** If not, then he obviously can’t tap into its resources, no matter how bountiful and life-saving they may be. **So too, there is a continual outpouring from *Binah* which functions “to sweeten all the Judgments” – but only to the extent to which we avail ourselves of it.** To paraphrase the popular expression, “A man must not only lead himself to water, but also force himself to drink!”

We have the opportunity and the free-will choice to tap into the holiness of *Binah* whenever we choose. We initiate the process of *Teshuvah Elyonah* by intending to ascend to our holy root. At the very moment we choose to contemplate *Teshuvah Elyonah*, *Binah’s* light shines upon us and elevates our soul to its pure source.

## Day Twenty



# The Miraculous Splitting of the Sea of Reeds

### Echoes in the *Ramchal*

These ideas are also reflected in the *Ramchal's* comments regarding the miraculous

Splitting of the Sea of Reeds (*Otzros HaRamchal, Beshalach*). In that episode, we find the Egyptians rapidly pressing in on the Children of Israel. With nowhere to turn and their backs to the sea, the Children of Israel cried out in utter desperation to the Almighty. He replies to Moses (*Exodus 14:15*), “Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall journey forth!”

The *Ramchal* explains that the Jewish People were under the stewardship of the Divine configuration of the Seven Lower-tiered *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights). As such, they were vulnerable to the attribute of Judgment. Under these conditions, the nation did not merit redemption. As our Sages state (*Zohar Parshas Beshalach 170b*): “The Ministering Angel of Egypt

petitioned before the Almighty, ‘[In what way are the Israelites better than the Egyptians that they should be saved? After all], these are idolaters and those are idolaters?!’”

In response, the Almighty enabled access to a different, more sublime system, wherein the attribute of Judgment is irrelevant and inoperable. This higher system is comprised of the three *Sefirot* of *Keter* (Crown), *Chochmah* (Wisdom), and *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), and its pure compassion and mercy, with no severity or strictness whatsoever.

The *Ramchal* concludes:

*And this is why the verse states: And they shall journey forth!; meaning, “[They should transport themselves] to a different Divine configuration.” In other words, at that moment, Israel existed under the default jurisdiction of the Seven Lower-tiered Sefirot. However, [in order to merit redemption] they needed to ‘travel’ from their place and ascend in merit and cleanliness to the guardianship of the Upper Configuration of the Sefirot. There, they would obtain the power to be redeemed. Indeed, it was upon this that the Redemption depends, as is known through the Secret underlying the verse (Zecharia 14:7): And there shall be one day that is known to God.*

*Thus, at the time the Almighty wants to redeem us, He commands, “Journey in your Divine configuration,” i.e., “Raise yourselves up from the lower strata of Sefirot to your root in the upper ones!” And this is the esoteric teaching underlying the Prophet Zecharia’s statement, “And there shall be one day that is known to God.” Meaning that the time of the Final Redemption – when the Almighty will once again command us “Journey forth!” and the entire nation will do so perforce – is known only to Him!*

## **Without Delay!**

The *Ramchal* further enlightens us regarding the redemption from Egypt in a different passage. He writes (*Otzros HaRamchal, Parshas Devarim*):

*What is the meaning of the verse (Deuteronomy 16:3): In haste*

*they departed from Egypt? When the souls ascend, it is impossible for them to do so slowly; for if [they were to slowly do] so, the “Accusers” would sense their movement and lodge accusations against them. Therefore, they must instantly transport themselves to the upper levels so that the “Side of Evil,” cannot interfere. For this reason, it wasn’t enough for them to merely rise up to the highest level of the lower configuration of the Sefirot; rather, they ascended to a more sublime place, through the Secret of Binah – where the “Accuser” cannot gain admittance. It is for this reason that (shortly after the Exodus) the verse states (Exodus 19:1): In the third month of Israel’s departing from Egypt, on **this day** they came to the Wilderness of Sinai – for there was no need for further delay; rather, on that very day they would ascend to the Wilderness of Sinai, which is the Secret of Binah... For this is the power of Israel, to ascend from a lowly level to an exalted place of holiness.*

Thus, the *Ramchal’s* words echo those of the *Ramak*, that the People of Israel have the power to rapidly ascend from the base tendencies of their body to the roots of their holy soul, located in the lofty realm of *Binah*. The Talmud (*Yoma* 20a) states in the name of Elijah the Prophet, "Satan has no permission to act as the accuser on the day of Atonement." So too, through man's attainment of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), that elevates him to the holy realm of *Binah*, there is no permission for Satan to act as the accuser. Indeed, the *Ramak* asserts that since the Holy One unifies and integrates the Ten *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights), there is direct access to the Realm of *Binah* and *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

### **Man Merges Himself with *Binah***

In *Teshuvah Elyonah*, our responsibility — and privilege — is to “merge with *Binah*.” *Binah*, the third *Sefira*, connects to *Chochmah*, the second *Sefira*, which in turn connects to *Keter*, the most exalted of the *Sefirot*. *Keter* connects to the *Ohr Ein Sof*, the Infinite Divine Light, the very Source of Good. Therefore, by “binding oneself to *Binah*” i.e., engaging in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, one will surely succeed, for unbounded dimensions of Divine compassion and holiness will shine upon him! Reflect on this deeply.

## The Kind King

This is analogous to a king who is renowned for his kindness and compassion. When one of his subjects receives a death sentence, he realizes that his only recourse is a royal pardon. Upon receiving an audience with the king, the man is filled with hope and joy, confident that the merciful monarch will absolve him. So too, as soon as one uplifts himself to his holy root in *Binah*, he may be confident that the Creator will mercifully assist him to “rectify every flaw.”

This inspiring concept aligns with the axiom of Rabbi Yose mentioned in the introduction: “One who ascends to the Divine Light of *Binah* must do so with joy, and with no anguish nor sadness whatsoever.” As we clarified there, this joy comes from the awareness that the Merciful Creator, in His unbounded compassion, will surely accept our *Teshuvah!* Our trust in God’s infinite dimensions of mercy awakens scintillating joy in our hearts that precludes every notion of sadness.

## Day Twenty-One



## Rising to the Upper Realm of Existence

(ה) וַיִּמֵּי חַיָּיו מִצַּטְרִים בְּסוּד הַתְּשׁוּבָה הָעֲלִיּוֹנָה.

(5) The days of his life will thereby be crowned with the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance).

### Rising to the Upper Realm of Existence

As we saw, there are three main categories of *Teshuvah* (Repentance): a) *Teshuvah* motivated by the fear of God and b) *Teshuvah* inspired by the love of God. The third category is c) the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah*. The term “*Elyonah*” is an allusion to the *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights), which dwell in the the Upper Realm of existence, as we discussed above. Accordingly, the unique quality of *Teshuvah Elyonah* is that it grants us access to the *Sefirot*, particularly to the Divine Realm of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment).

We learned on Day Five that the Almighty established an aspect of

reciprocity between Man's soul and the *Sefirot*. *Teshuvah Elyonah* is initialized through Man's intent to ascend to his soul's root, which resides in the Divine Realm of *Binah*. When one successfully attains *Teshuvah Elyonah*, he transforms himself by uniting with the pure and inherently incorruptible goodness that characterizes his spiritual root. New worlds of powerful love for Heaven are awakened in his heart, when he accesses his spiritual root. In turn, his past actions ascend with him and implant themselves in holiness, his misdeeds convert to Mitzvot for everything follows after the sweet root. Indeed, *Binah's* brilliant light will illuminate upon all his days from the moment of his inception and span until eternity, as the *Ramak* writes, "The days of his life will thereby be crowned with the *Secret of Teshuvah Elyonah*."

### **It's Easy to Ascend to Our Roots**

We might assume that the sublime achievement of ascending to one's holy root, residing in the exalted Light of *Binah*, is a most challenging and difficult endeavor. Surely it is suited only to those immersed in the most rarified levels of Divine service – the righteous figures of legends and the Torah scholars whose lives are uncompromisingly dedicated to Divine service and Torah study. However, nothing could be further from the truth! The *Ramak* reveals that the mere contemplation of *Teshuvah Elyonah* causes *Binah* to radiate its luminescence upon us and transport us to our holy roots – no matter who a person is and what he has done until now.

### **The Power of Intention**

**It is vital to always recall that intention alone is sufficient to awaken reciprocation from the *Sefirot*.** As the *Ramak* writes (*Tomer Devorah*, Chapter 5):

*The rule of the matter is as follows: When one performs good deeds for the inhabitants of the physical realm, and he intends to [awaken the aspect of the*

*Sefira aligned with that particular action,] his intention will **certainly** awaken the reciprocal effect in the respective Sefira (One of the Ten Divine Lights).*

We see from this passage that acting with trust and proper intent when performing a deed **inevitably** awakens the corresponding *Sefira* in which the said deed is rooted. Therefore, it is unquestionable that Man's intent to ascend to his holy root in *Binah* will awaken the *Sefira* to cast its splendor upon him and elevate him to a higher plane of existence.

### It Is “Easy”

We might assume that if climbing to the top of a towering mountain demands “sweat and tears,” how much more intense struggle is required to ascend to the root of our soul, which exists in the lofty realm of *Binah*. As the Talmud teaches (*Chagiga* 13a):

*Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakai taught...From the earth to the firmament is a distance of five hundred years, and between each firmament is a distance of five hundred years, and the thickness of each firmament is five hundred years.*

The distance from the earth to the firmament of *Binah* is an unimaginable traverse, beyond our ability to calculate. If so, it would seem extremely challenging to ascend to the root of our soul!

However, the truth is the very opposite of what we imagine! The root of our soul already resides in the Realm of *Binah*, similar to the concept that we will mention regarding the pleasant fragrance of the sacrifice that returns the breath to its source (Day Twenty-Five). Indeed, the *Ramak* does not mention the notion of “intense exertion” regarding *Teshuvah Elyonah*. Hence, our mere **intention** to repent, causes the Sanctity and incandescent radiance of “*Binah* to illuminate all the days of our life.”

## Day Twenty-Two



### The Root of Man's Holy Soul Bestows Life Upon Him

(ו) וְרֵאָה כִּי כְמוֹ שֶׁהַתְּשׁוּבָה יֵשׁ בָּהּ שְׂרֵשׁ כָּל הַנְּמָצְאוֹת בְּסוּד הַיּוֹבֵל.

**(6) And see, that *Teshuvah* (Repentance) contains within it the root of every Being, by virtue of the “Secret of the Jubilee Year.”**

The *Ramak* tells us that every person has their root in the lofty realm of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment). Consider a tree, comprised of trunk, branches, leaves and fruits. Disparate though these parts may be, they all derive from the same source, the root. Indeed, the tree that both grows forth from and receives nourishment through the root could not exist without it. The *Rashbah*<sup>21</sup> also expresses this idea, albeit more briefly

21. The *Rashbah*, Rabbi Shlomo ibn Aderet, was born in Barcelona in the Middle Ages. He was a disciple of the *Ramban* and Rabenu Yonah, and authored a classic commentary of the Talmud, elucidating both the legal as well as the Haggadot

(*HaRashbah, Brachos* 7): “The branches of the tree derive solely from the power contained within the root!”

Similarly, the root of man’s holy soul bestows life upon him, as the verse states (*Genesis* 2:7), “And He blew into his nostrils the **soul of life**, and Man became a living being.” We can conclude that a person’s corporeal aspects resemble nothing more than the branches of a tree. Whereas his root – his holy soul – imbues him with life and establishes the true reality and essence of his being. Therefore, when a person intends to ascend to his holy root in *Binah*, he will assuredly be transformed to pure goodness.

### The Holy of Holies Alludes to Man’s Soul

In his *Mishnas Rebbi Aaron*, Rabbi Aaron Kotler<sup>22</sup>, presents an idea that dovetails beautifully with this concept, based on the verse (*Ezekiel* 13:10): “You, Son of Man, tell the Children of Israel about the *Beis HaMikdash*” (Holy Sanctuary). Rabbi Kotler notes that the *Beis HaMikdash* is not only the Creator’s dwelling place on earth; it also serves as a microcosm of the Universe itself. As such, every component of the Sanctuary corresponds to a different element of Creation. For example, the Golden *Menorah* (Candelabra) alludes to the Luminaries; the ever-present blue fabric alludes to the Heavens, etc. If so, what does the *Kodesh HaKodashim* – the Holy of Holies – represent? The answer is – Man’s soul!

This insight reveals that just as the *Kodesh HaKodashim* is the spiritual core of the *Beis HaMikdash* and is supremely holy, so too, Man’s soul is eminently sanctified. More, just as holiness radiated from the *Kodesh HaKodashim* and permeated the entire *Beis HaMikdash*; so too, the holy soul serves as a wellspring to fill a person’s entire being with Sanctity! However, this blinding radiance is almost completely obscured by the

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aspects. He also penned extensive responsa and is renowned amongst Torah scholars for his authoritative rulings.

22. Rabbi Aaron Kotler founded the Lakewood Yeshiva about 75 years ago and served as the Rosh Yeshiva for many years. Rabbi Kotler authored many books and responsa on Torah subjects. *Mishnas Rebbi Aaron* was a book focusing on Torah ethics. Rabbi Kotler emphasized the importance of Torah ethics, asserting that he worked harder on *Mishnas Rebbi Aaron* than any of his other volumes.

nearly overwhelming nature of our base corporeal existence. The coarse thickness of our physicality effectively conceals our inner light, making us virtually oblivious to our innate holiness.

Therefore, the Merciful One commanded His Prophet, *Tell the Children of Israel about the Beis HaMikdash!* The spiritual impressions made in the Holy Sanctuary are deeply ingrained in our national psyche, and the sanctity of the *Beis HaMikdash* resonates eternally in the consciousness of the People of Israel. Even today, almost two thousand years after its physical destruction, the Sanctuary remains the focal point of our prayers. By meditating on the *Beis HaMikdash* – by contemplating its structure, components, and the Divine service performed therein – we stimulate these impressions and recall the experience of being in the presence of the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence). An awareness of the powerful holiness of our souls is aroused within us, inspiring us to return to our Father in Heaven.

### **The Maharal From Prague**

Indeed, one of the primary functions of the *Beis HaMikdash* was to grant people a miraculous glimpse into their souls and to connect them with their own innate sanctity. The experience of communing with the *Shechinah* awakened new vistas of inspiration in the hearts of the Jewish people. As the *Maharal M'Prague*<sup>23</sup> explains (*Gevuros HaShem*, Chapter 5), one of the epithets for the *Beis HaMikdash* is “The Mount of Lebanon.” This is because just as a mountain rises above its surroundings, so does the spiritual dimension manifest in the *Beis HaMikdash* tower over every other facet of Creation. Only in that rarified atmosphere is the *Shechinah* revealed to the fullest extent possible in this world, and in an ongoing fashion. When the People of Israel entered that sacred domain, they were literally charged with holiness, rising above the strictures of nature and the bonds of physicality. They experienced a glimmering of their true essence and an inkling of the Almighty’s sanctity!

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23. The illustrious *Maharal M'Prague* was born over five-hundred years ago in Posen, Poland. He was a renown Talmudic scholar, Kabbalist, and original thinker. He authored the multi-volumed set of books, entitled *Sifrei Maharal*, the *Gur Ayrei* on *Rashi*, and many other classic works.

## Day Twenty-Three



# The Secret of the Jubilee Year

### The Secret of the Jubilee Year

What is the *Ramak* hinting in his esoteric words, “The **Secret** of the Jubilee Year?” In these few words, the *Ramak* reveals the very secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance). Our holy soul is rooted in the Light of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), which is the *Ima Elyonah*, i.e., the Exalted Mother. Just as an earthly mother always perceives the goodness of her child, so too, *Binah* always perceives the infinite levels of goodness that comprise the essence of Man. When we engage in *Teshuvah Elyonah* we align our consciousness with *Binah* and view ourselves as Holy. As a result, we initiate the process of transformation and we ascend towards our Holy essence that is rooted in the Realm of *Binah*. Yet, how do we disengage from the defilement of our past?

***Teshuvah Elyonah* merges with the Secret of the Jubilee Year and generates a true miracle — Spiritual Freedom!** The *Ramak* reveals that *Teshuvah Elyonah* embraces the concept of the Jubilee Year, the fiftieth-year

culmination of the Sabbatical year cycle<sup>24</sup> that evokes the idea of freedom. On the Jubilee Year, Jewish slaves are granted freedom.

So too, when a person engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, the Creator opens new worlds of freedom for him, which liberates him from the physicality of this world and the impurity of transgression. After disengaging from the material aspects of this world, one ascends to the holy root of his soul and the essence of his being is sanctified.

The Holy Light of *Binah* grants us the freedom to ascend to our holy roots that are housed in *Binah* and awaken the incandescent light of *Binah* to elevate and sanctify us to the highest level of Holiness. That is, the liberation from all defilement and transgression that we accumulated during our lifetime in this physical world, as the verse writes, “And He is compassionate and grants atonement for transgressions” (*Psalms* 78:38).

### **In the Words of the *Ramchal***

*The Ramchal states similarly (Otzros HaRamchal, Parshas Vayeira):*

*There can be no redemption without illumination from the Light of Binah. And this is the Secret of the Jubilee, which liberates the slaves and takes them out to freedom.*

This idea also finds expression in the ninth blessing of the prayer of Silent Devotion: *Sound the Great Shofar for our freedom*. “Our freedom” is an allusion to *Teshuvah* (Repentance). The Secret of the Jubilee assists Man in returning to his holy root. It thus behooves us to contemplate this idea and strengthen our Trust that the Creator, in His infinite compassion, liberates us from the strictures of this world through the Secret of the Jubilee.

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24. The Torah decrees once every seven years the prohibition against agricultural undertaking, an imperative to cancel debts, and the reversion of properties to ancestral ownership.

## The Fiftieth Year and the Fifty Gates of Binah

Apart from granting freedom to slaves, the Jubilee Year also mandates the reversion of ancestral lands according to their original tribal distribution. This cyclical fifty-year occurrence corresponds to the “Fifty Gates of *Binah*.” Thus, the Secret of the Jubilee Year opens the Fifty Gates of *Binah* so its light can shine upon a person and release him from the shackles of his earthly body and the bonds of material existence. More, we find that the Jubilee Year affects a property’s return to ancestral ownership despite the existence of debts. So too, the Jubilee Year alludes to the “Fifty Gates of *Binah*” which elevates a person to the holy root of his soul despite his “debt-load” of impurity. Not only that, but the Light of *Binah* actually rectifies human nature and cleanses the impurity, just as the sun’s light dispels the darkness.

## Clearance for Entry is Readily Available

There is an essential difference between the “Earthly Jubilee Year” and the “Secret of the Jubilee” aroused by *Teshuvah Elyonah*: Whereas the former occurs but once every fifty years; the latter, wherein the “Fifty Gates of *Binah*” are opened, is available to a person **whenever** he arouses himself to do *Teshuvah*! Also, the gates of *Teshuvah Elyonah* are opened **immediately** for the person who intends to rise to the holy root of his soul.

## The Liberating Power of the Jubilee

Moreover, *Teshuvah Elyonah* applies even to a person who perceives himself as so spiritually defiled that he has virtually no chance of mastering the perversions of his nature. Through the Secret of the Jubilee he can free himself from all the impurity that previously seemed indelibly ingrained in the very fiber of his being.

## Day Twenty-Four



### The Profound Kindness of the Holy One

(ז) וְהָרִי שֶׁרֶשׁ הַחִיצוֹנִים – סוּד נְהַר דִּינוּר הַנִּכְלָל בְּקִדְשָׁהּ בְּסוּד הַגְּבוּרוֹת  
נִשְׂרָשׂ שָׁם. וְיִתְפַּשֵּׁט מִשָּׁם וַיִּקְרָא הַתְּפִשְׁטוֹת חֲרוֹן אַף.

(7) And behold, the source of the External Negative Forces – the “Secret of the River Dinur,” which is joined to Sanctity through the “Secret of the Forces of Judgment” – is also rooted therein (*Binah*) and spreads forth from there; and this outspreading is called “Flaring Wrath.”

#### The Blazing River

“*Nahar*” means river in Hebrew. “*Dinur*” is a compound word, comprised of: “*Di*” meaning “of” and “*nur*” meaning “fire.” Hence, the *Nahar Dinur* is a River of Fire, and not like a river flowing lazily on its way; rather like a raging torrent of incandescent lava and smoking choking sulfur, only infinitely more so. What is the source of this roiling inferno? The Talmud (*Chagiga* 13b) informs us: it is nothing less than the “perspiration” that

drips from the *Chayos HaKodesh* (the Order of Angels tasked with bearing the Divine Throne on their shoulders) in the performance of their exalted duty. Upon whom does it flow? Upon the heads of the wicked souls in *Gehinom* (Purgatory).

## Profound Kindness

The question cries out, what does *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), the paradigm of unconditional love and understanding, have to do with this severity?! The answer is, the counterintuitive contrast between the cool, sweet waters of *Binah* and the fiery turbulence of *Nahar Dinur* reveals the Merciful One's profound kindness. The "natural" place of the External Evil Forces would seem to be directly under the province of the *Sefira* (One of the Ten Divine Lights) of Judgment, which is positioned in the Lower Realm, wherein Judgment is operative. But if that were the case, it would be impossible for a flaring of Divine wrath to ever be subdued, for there would be no channel to the upper *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights) through which it could be sweetened.

Therefore, in His infinite mercy, God placed the External Negative Forces under *Binah's* sphere, predominated by pure compassion – for being so rooted, they have the ability to return to their holy source. The *Ramak* revealed this secret to us with his earlier words: "*Binah* functions to sweeten all the Judgments and to neutralize their bitterness." Thus the Judgment is sweetened and the Divine wrath placated. In light of this, the *Ramak* writes: "The source of the External Forces – the "Secret of the River *Dinur*," which is joined to Sanctity through the "Secret of the Forces of Judgment" – is also rooted therein (*Binah*)."

## The Judge is Gentle

We can compare this to a king with ten ministers in his cabinet. Each minister has his own temperament and personality: one is known for his wisdom, another renowned for his might; one famous for his merciful nature, and another for his unbending nature. Each one is appointed to the position most fitting his talents and abilities. The Minister of Defense is known as a master of military logistics and strategy, while the Minister of Commerce is celebrated for his acumen and business savvy. As for the

post of Chief Magistrate, the king appointed the gentlest and most tender-hearted of his ministers. When this man, the highest judicial authority in the land, notices even the slightest trace of remorse in a defendant's conscience, the chambers of his heart are flooded with love and compassion. He personally advocates passionately on the defendant's behalf and clears him of all charges, restoring his honor and dignity – even making him fit to be a royal dignitary!

Of course, in this earthly plane of existence, mere regret does not generally suffice to exonerate a defendant's reputation, much less rectify his transgressions! However, in the upper realms, in the highest Heavens, Exalted compassion abounds and reigns supreme. There, the slightest arousal of remorse awakens Divine mercy upon one who regrets his misdeeds (see Day Sixteen).

### **They Are Inscribed in the Book of Life**

We find a similar idea regarding the prophet Ezekiel's exhortation to the People of Israel to repent (*Ezekiel* 33:11): "As I live, says the Lord God, I do not desire the death of the wicked; rather that the wicked one return from his path and live!" In *Ohr Yisrael* (Letter 30), Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, writes:

*Let him repeat the ethical teachings of our Sages several times, until the feeling to change is awakened in his soul. And even if a person's "return" does not stir him to improve his ways, he is still considered as being inscribed in the Book of Life! Since he is alive with the feeling [the desire to change], he fulfills the verse, "For he who is attached to all the living has hope" (Koheles 9:4), and he is numbered amongst those who repent.*

## Day Twenty-Five



### A Sweet Aroma

(ח) ובסוד "וַיִּרַח ה' אֶת רִיחַ הַנִּיחָח", יחזר ההתפשטות ההוא (שֶׁל חֲרוֹן אַף) אֶל מְקוֹרָו.

**(8) And through the secret underlying the verse (*Genesis 8:21*): *And God smelled the pleasant aroma* [of the offering made by Noach after exiting the Ark], this outspread [of Divine wrath] returns to its source.**

#### A Sweet Aroma

The notion that the enticing scent of a roasting offering should appease the Almighty's wrath seems extraordinary, to say the least! The Torah is obviously alluding to something deeper than a physical scent. How can we begin to understand this? To shed light on this enigmatic phenomenon, we refer to a relevant passage in the holy *Zohar* (*Noach 70a*):

*The verse regarding the incense offering states (Deuteronomy 33:10): They (the ministering Kohanim) shall place incense in Your nose. For the fire (i.e., the pleasant-smelling smoke of an*

*incense offering), returns to its place, that is, the “Divine Nostril.” The aroma is drawn through that breath into the inner recesses, to the point where all is unified and returns to its place, and the entirety is drawn into [the realm of] thought, and becomes a unified will. And this is similar to [the concept that God finds the aroma of offerings] to be a “scent [that is] pleasant;” meaning, “Wrath was put to rest and became Pleasantness”... And regarding this it is written: “God smelled the pleasant aroma:” like one who smells a pleasant scent and inhales it in its entirety and brings it all inside, to its place.*

### **The Ramak’s Elucidation**

The *Ramak*, in his *The Orchard of Pomegranates* (Gate 8, Chapter 12) sheds light on this esoteric passage. He explains: “When a person smells a fragrance, it ascends to his brain, wherein the sense of smell is centered. It thus transpires that ‘that breath,’ which delivers the pleasant fragrance of the offering, returns to its source.”

In the previous passage, regarding the *Nahar Dinur* (River of Fire), the *Ramak* revealed that the Divine Wrath was discharged — or “exhaled” — from *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment). By stating “the breath **returns** to its source,” the *Ramak* indicates that it was not inherently separated from its root in the pure goodness that is *Binah*; rather, it was drawn out from there and is now merely returning to its original, proper location. We can express this as follows: When Judgment awakens, the “breath” is “exhaled,” descending from *Binah* and the Upper Realm and entering into the Lower Realm, where Judgment is operative. Thus is the Divine Wrath, i.e., “the fire” kindled. However, the pleasant aroma of the offering transmits the fiery breath back to its root. The fragrant smoke ascends to the “Divine Nostril” in *Binah*, where it converts back into a sweet fragrance.

In keeping with this, the verse states: “And God smelled the pleasant aroma,” meaning, through the sweet fragrance of the offering, the bitter judgment converts to sweet forgiveness.

## The Sweet Wine of *Binah*

The *Ramak* enlightens us further regarding the secret of an offering's ability to "sweeten all the Judgments." He writes (*ibid*):

*"There are two phases of Judgment. One is "Wrath and Judgment"; while the other [i.e., the source of Judgment] is the Wine of Binah, which brings Joy and not drunkenness. And now, through the return of the Judgment to its source, it becomes pleasantly scented, and reverses into Joy."*

The *Ramak* thus reveals that the Wine of *Binah* is the attribute of Joy – the polar opposite of Wrath. Therefore, the primary classification of "Judgment" is literally an expression of Joy – the Wine of *Binah*. Judgment may be likened to the opposite effects that drinking wine has on different people. Some people become happy, loving, and compassionate when they ingest wine, while others become belligerent. So too, the source of Judgment is the "Wine of *Binah*", which "brings Joy and not drunkenness." The source of Judgment is the sweet "Wine of *Binah*," the retraction of the Divine Wrath to its proper place in the Compassionate Realm of *Binah*. As stated in the *Zohar*, "God smelled the pleasant aroma: like one who smells a pleasant scent and inhales it in its entirety and brings it all inside, to its place."

## Rejoicing on Rosh HaShanah

Similarly, although Rosh HaShanah is the Day of Judgment, its observance is marked by joyful practices and behavior. For example, we freshly groom ourselves and don our finest attire. We feast and rejoice, and even eat foods that we hope will serve as an omen for a good and sweet year, like an apple dipped in honey. Trusting that the Merciful One will gaze favorably upon us and miraculously pronounce us for "Life."

In part four of the Introduction, we noted the principle brought in the *Zohar* that joy opens the gates of *Binah*. These teachings regarding the Wine of *Binah* and the joy we experience on Rosh HaShanah align perfectly with this idea. As the *Zohar* states (*Terumah* 165a): "One who

ascends before the *Sefira* (One of the Ten Divine Lights) of *Binah* must do so with joy, and with no anguish nor sadness whatsoever.”

### **The Awesome Task That God Entrusted to Man**

In making his point on how the Divine Wrath is converted into Sweetness, the *Ramak* cites the verse (*Genesis* 8:21): “And God smelled the pleasant aroma.” As we noted, this verse refers to the sacrifice offered by Noach upon exiting the Ark. In this we see confirmation of another idea mentioned in the Introduction; namely, that *Binah*’s ability to “sweeten Judgment” depends solely upon Man’s initiative. The Divine Wrath was only sweetened and appeased after Noach’s action awakened *Binah*, for the *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights) only function in consonance with Man’s actions.

How awesome is the privilege the Merciful One entrusted to us! Even though the *Ramak* writes: “*Binah* functions to “sweeten all the Judgments and to neutralize their bitterness,” the *Sefira* doesn’t spring into action on its own accord. Rather, *Binah* awaits to be awakened by us. Just as *Noach* did by offering his sacrifice, so too, we are privileged to do so by our prayers, *Teshuvah* (Repentance), and Divine Service. In this light, there is little wonder that Man holds the power to perform *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) and “rectify every flaw” by activating the Light of *Binah*.

## Day Twenty-Six



### Man's True and Eternal Nature is Good

(ט) וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַדִּינִים וַיִּשְׁקֹט הַחֲרוֹן וַיִּנָּחַם ה' עַל הָרָעָה.

**(9) The Judgments are thereby sweetened, the flaring calmed, and God relents concerning the evil.**

The *Zohar* quoted on Day Twenty-Five tells us that Noach's Elevation offering reversed the attribute of Judgment to Compassion. His offering made a powerful rectification, reversing the Divine Wrath that destroyed the world to the polar opposite attribute of Divine Compassion. So too, if a person performs *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), he uplifts himself to his sweet root and converts himself and his past actions to goodness. Even “the intentional transgressions become like merits to him!”— as the *Ramak* writes ahead. More, *Teshuvah Elyonah* transmutes his Negative Impulse to goodness, as the *Ramak* writes,

*“Therefore, one purifies the Negative Impulse and gathers it into goodness, and he becomes implanted in Exalted holiness.”*

Thus, a person's *Teshuvah Elyonah* establishes a more powerful rectification than an Elevation offering! Since Noach was a holy and righteous man, his Elevation offering transformed Judgment into Compassion. He was like a sea captain who masterfully steers his ship through a fierce storm and brings it into peaceful waters. However, when someone performs *Teshuvah Elyonah*, his flaw awakens the diabolical schemes of the Negative Impulse to wage war against him.

### **The Advantage of *Teshuvah Elyonah***

This advantage of *Teshuvah Elyonah* is attributed to two tiers of uncompromising trust. Firstly, his acceptance of the *Tomer Devorah's* revelation, that Man's true and eternal nature is in fact good, despite the externally manifested negativity of his nature. This test requires a high level of Trust because the Negative Impulse will use our past indiscretions as "proof" that we are not inherently good. Yet, we counter his "proof" by saying, "Do not think that since you derive from the side of Evil there is no rectification for you - this is falsehood!" as the *Ramak* will write (Day Thirty-Five).

Why is this notion "falsehood?" The *Ramak* writes when he performs *Teshuvah*, "Man transforms the past [negative] actions into Goodness, and the intentional transgressions become like merits to him!" The truth is that you are inherently and eternally good, in the holy root of your soul, as the *Ramak* writes ahead, "For all bitterness is sweet in its Exalted root, and one can enter through his root in order to unite with his intrinsic goodness." By performing *Teshuvah Elyonah*, man uplifts himself to the root of his soul, which is stationed in the pure, immutable goodness of *Binah*.

### **Trust in God's Unbounded Compassion**

The second tier is his Trust in God's unbounded compassion, which is revealed especially to the person contemplating *Teshuvah* (Repentance). The Holy One showers infinite vistas of Compassion upon us when we engage in *Teshuvah*.

Please remember that both these tests require the highest level of Trust in the Creator because the Negative Impulse will do everything in its power

to compromise our belief in our inherent goodness as well as our trust in the awakening of the Creator's Compassion for the penitent. His most powerful weapon is to attack us by inciting a "guilt complex" within us that tears our hearts apart. This is an intense war and take note that Moses, himself, fell victim to despair at the *Waters of Striving*, which deprived him entrance into the Land of Israel. **Therefore, strengthen your trust both in your inherent Goodness as well as in God's unbounded Compassion that is awakened for those engaged in Repentance!**

### ***Teshuvah Elyonah* Impacts the Entire World**

Just as Noah's Elevation offering rectified the entire world, so too, *Teshuvah Elyonah* rectifies the individual and impacts the entire world. Even more, by engaging in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, we accomplish more than Noah's Elevation offering. Why? On the merit of our exalted trust in the Merciful One we merit two advantages over Noah. Firstly we overcome the Negative Impulse's accusations and reminders of our past indiscretions, which did not challenge Noah with the same level as intensity. Secondly, we perform *Teshuvah Elyonah* giving us a firm grasp on our true and eternal Goodness and Holiness which resides in the firmament of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment). We thereby awaken the Divine Light of *Binah* to sanctify and purify all of Mankind.

### **Extricated From the Depths**

A wondrous sequence of rectifications was initiated through the impetus of Noah's sacrifice. The Secret of the "pleasant aroma" was awakened, "the Judgments ... thereby sweetened," and as a result "God relented concerning the evil."

The fiery waters of the *Nahar Dinur* (the River of Fire) retract up to their source in *Binah* and transform back into the cool, clear waters of the "Expanses of the River," i.e., *Binah*. Indeed, this cooling of Divine wrath is so absolute that it extends even if a person has been sentenced to the fiery depths of *Gehinom* (Purgatory) for the severity of his transgressions. As the *Ramak* states: "And God relents concerning the evil," and as the Talmud teaches (*Nedarim* 22a): "And evil is naught but a reference to *Gehinom*, as

the verse states (*Koheles* 11:10): “And the wicked are destined for the day of evil.”

The *Ramchal* expounds on a similar concept in discussing the virtue of hope in God. He writes (*Otzros HaRamchal, Essay on Hope*):

*One who hopes in God, even if he has entered Gehinom, is liberated by virtue of his hope in God. As the verse states (Isaiah 40:31): “Those who hope in God, their strength will be revived and eagle’s wings will uplift them.” Meaning, God will shine His light upon him, and a company of the most exalted Angels will uplift a person whose hope is in God. This is the intent of the words: “eagle’s wings will uplift them:” they will fly up with him. Verily, his hope is his purification!*

## Day Twenty-Seven



# Repentance Functions Unceasingly to "Sweeten All the Judgments"

(\*) כִּי הָאָדָם בְּסוּד תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ עוֹשֶׂה סוּד זֶה.

**(10) So, too, with Man: through the Secret of his *Teshuvah* (Repentance), he affects this Secret.**

### Flaws Forgotten and Blemishes Abolished

The *Ramak* compares *Teshuvah* to the pleasant fragrance of Noach's offering, which transformed the Judgment of the generation of the Flood and elevated it to its sweet source in *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment). So too, *Binah* holds the sweet root of every blemish. Through man's intention to elevate himself to his soul's source in *Binah*, the blemish he promulgated ascends to its holy root and is cleansed.

*Binah* functions unceasingly to "sweeten all the Judgments." Man has the opportunity and free-will to tap into *Binah* whenever he is so inspired.

As soon as he does so, *Binah's* Light shines upon him and uplifts him to his holy root, "rectifying every flaw."

The Creator has granted us the ability to make mid-course corrections and rectifications, and to heal ourselves by ascending to the holy root of our soul. As the *Ramak* writes ahead: "But [in the future], all its 'branches' are destined to be sweetened, and they will return and become sweetened. And this is precisely due to the reason I previously explained: a man implanted within himself the Secret of Evil, and sweetens it, and gathers it into Goodness."

### **Encouragement from the Wisest of Men**

King Solomon writes (*Koheles* 7:20): "There is no righteous person in the world who does good and does not sin." What wonderfully inspiring words from the sage of men! King Solomon advises us not to despair if we sin, for the imperative of free-will almost guarantees the certitude of transgression. This predisposition should ostensibly lead to the dissolution of all Creation, for the standards of *Midas HaDin* (the Divine Attribute of Judgment) are unforgiving and uncompromising. However, this does not mean there is room for despair! On the contrary, before Creation of the Universe, God, in His boundless compassion and all-knowing foresight, first conceptualized the principle of and possibility to perform *Teshuvah*. Truly an example of the Almighty's "preparing the remedy before the affliction" (cf. *Megillah* 13b).

### **Man's Precarious Existence Serves to His Benefit**

Man's precarious existence actually serves to his benefit by imbuing him with a sense of humility. Without the tendency to sin that is part and parcel of the distractions of physical existence, Man would have been tainted with a sense of arrogance. Whereas, by recognizing his vulnerability to stray after the allusions of this world, he has at least a chance of forestalling hubris with humility. Only Angels, purely spiritual beings unhampered by the desires and distractions that characterize physical existence and therefore lacking free-will, are immutably holy.

Man, on the other hand, must constantly battle the unrelenting diversions of physical reality in order to not only achieve, but to also

continuously maintain his holiness and purity. As our Sages teach in the *Ethics of our Fathers* (4:2): “Do not trust yourself until the day of death.” Ultimately, if a person leaves this world having successfully passed the myriad tests that comprise life here, he will enter the World to Come on an infinitely higher level of holiness, purity, and closeness to the Merciful One than even the most exalted of Angels.

## Day Twenty-Eight



### The Creator Grants Us the Privilege to Transform Ourselves from Darkness to Light!

(יא) שְׁלֵא תֹאמַר שֶׁהַתְּשׁוּבָה טוֹבָה לְחֵלֶק הַקְּדוֹשָׁה שֶׁבְּאָדָם אֲלֵא גַם לְחֵלֶק הָרַע שֶׁבוֹ מִתְּמַתֵּק כְּעֵין הַמִּדָּה הַזֹּאת.

(11) Thus, you should not say that *Teshuvah* (Repentance) is beneficial [only] to man's sacred side; rather, it is also beneficial to his evil side, in accord with this Attribute.

#### *Teshuvah* Rectifies All Aspects

How tragic – and easy – it is to pass through life oblivious to the full scope of *Teshuvah*! For it might be assumed that *Teshuvah* only rectifies the “positive” aspects of Man's nature, i.e., the “sacred side” that we generally associate with all that is intrinsically good and holy about a person. But perhaps the “negative” traits with which we are saddled are irredeemable.

Consider, for example, a person possessed of a generous spirit on the one hand and a quick temper on the other. In the course of his life, he freely expresses both these aspects of his personality: an easy touch for lending or donating respectable sums, and quick to go out of his way to help people in need of a ride. On the other side, he has no tolerance for life's little inconveniences and little patience for fools. Not that his quick temper doesn't bother him; and not that he doesn't do plenty of *Teshuvah* for his other indiscretions. However, regarding his quick temper, he feels like he can't do anything about his nature and doesn't bother trying.

As the years pass by, his family grows, and expenses mount concurrently. With rationalization mode in full gear, his charitable contributions eventually dry up to a trickle. Aided and abetted by his high-strung nature, the new norm for offering rides becomes, *Who has time, for Heaven's sake, I've got to get to work so I can pay the bills!*

At one point, however, a crisis occurs, and feelings of *Teshuvah* stir within him. Now, it would be a mistake for him to think that he can only do *Teshuvah* for the laxity he displayed in his inherently good traits, and that the best he can manage is a return to his previously generous behavior – because only that which is intrinsically good can be redeemed. As for his quick temper, it still doesn't occur to him to do *Teshuvah*, for how can an inherently negative trait be transformed to goodness?!

The *Ramak* corrects this false notion, as he states: “rather, it is also beneficial to his evil side!” There can be no trace of doubt that the **entirety** of Man's purest essence, the holy root of his soul, is immutably good. The negative trait that has reigned over his behavior until now is really only a “temporary” phase, like an (admittedly) grievous wound that will nevertheless surely heal with time. Just as the *External Forces* are ultimately rooted in the holiness of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), so is Man's soul eternally rooted in and sanctified by *Binah*. Therefore, the *Ramak* encourages us with the knowledge that *Teshuvah* rectifies even Man's base traits.

### Classic Examples of Transformation

In truth, we needn't search hard for examples of this wondrous phenomenon. The Torah relates the lofty elevation of Ruth, the Moabitess princess. She

ascended from the depths of impurity to the heights of Holiness. She was drawn after Naomi's pure spirit and followed her to the Land of Israel. Remarkably, she married Boaz, the most eminent man of his generation. And Ruth merited to be the Matriarch of King David (*Ruth* 4:17), as the verse tells us regarding the child she bore — “and they called his name Obed, he is the father of a Jesse, the father of David.”

Another example, the Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 84a) relates the famous incident of how Reish Lakish was induced to repent after an encounter with Rabbi Yochanon. Reish Lakish, a notorious thief, dramatically transformed his personality from one extreme to the other. Elevating himself from the depths of wickedness, he ultimately emerged as one of the holiest Talmudic Sages. There are countless other examples of such astonishing reversals throughout the long and varied history of *Klal Yisrael*.

**Rather than be resigned to accept our negative traits, we are inspired by the Creator's unbounded Kindness in granting us the privilege to transform ourselves from darkness to light!**

## Day Twenty-Nine



## Returning Everything to Its Source

### Returning Everything to Its Source

The *Ramak* designates the *Sefira* (One of the Ten Divine Lights) of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) as “*Teshuvah*” (Repentance), which means “**return,**” because its primary function is to “return” **everything** to its root. The “sweetening of the Judgment” referred to by the *Ramak* is the return of the Divine Wrath back to its sweet source in *Binah*. So too, when man engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), “he merges with *Binah*” and ascends to the root of his holy soul.

### Powerful

With the above in mind, let’s turn for a moment to the first chapter of *Tomer Devorah*, where the *Ramak* discusses the *Sefira* of *Keter* (Crown) and the Thirteen Attributes of Exalted Compassion (*Micah* 7:18-20). One of these Attributes is *He Will Again Show Us Compassion*, which teaches that the Merciful One reveals even greater dimensions of love for a person after

he repents than before he transgressed! The *Teshuvah* under discussion there is not *Teshuvah Elyonah*, but “conventional” *Teshuvah*, which is a qualitatively different nature – not having direct access to *Binah*. We can thus understand that if “conventional” *Teshuvah* results in a greater revelation of the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) than before, then *Teshuvah Elyonah*, which traces back to the Upper-tier of the *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights), surely causes *Binah* to cast its radiance upon a person with a far greater magnitude than previously.

### **The Advantages of Teshuvah Elyonah Over Conventional Teshuvah**

Indeed, the virtue of *Teshuvah Elyonah* is far more sublimely encompassing and holy than that of “conventional” *Teshuvah*. This is so despite the fact that the latter emulates the attributes of *Keter*, the most exalted and transcendent of the *Sefirot*, higher even than *Binah*! There are three factors that account for this anomaly.

First, conventional *Teshuvah* is very specific and restricted in nature, focusing on the rectification of individual misdeeds. In His boundless compassion, the Creator forgives the penitent, cleanses the blemish under consideration, and causes the *Shechinah*'s radiance to shine upon him with an even greater intensity than it did previously. On the other hand, with *Teshuvah Elyonah* a person ascends to the root of his soul, which resides eternally within *Binah*. This engenders a basic transformation of his entire essence wherein he emerges as an entity of goodness, purified from the impurity of all his previous transgressions.

Second, “conventional” *Teshuvah* doesn't involve establishing a connection with the *Sefirot*. Even though in Chapter One the *Ramak* addresses the emulation of the attributes of *Keter*, the most eminent of the *Sefirot*, the emulation does not facilitate a direct connection to the *Sefirot*. On the other hand, the essence of *Teshuvah Elyonah* is to merge with the *Sefirot*; with intention to awaken and to emulate them, particularly *Binah*. Through man's engagement in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, the Holy One causes the Exalted Light of *Binah* to shine upon the entire world. This lofty level of Sanctity enables a person to free himself from the shackles of physical desire. Ascending to his holy root, he emerges created anew, purer than the

loftiest Angel. With the coarseness of the body mastered by the refinement of the soul, his entire being becomes aglow with Divine light.

Third, when a person intends to ascend to his source in *Binah*, the Creator causes the other two Upper-tier *Sefirot* of *Keter* (Crown) and *Chochmah* (Wisdom) to complement *Binah's* function. Thus, the unbounded compassion characterized by *Keter* and the life-giving grace characterized by *Chochmah* supplement *Binah* and facilitate the unprecedented wonder that is *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

## Day Thirty



## Cain and Abel

(יב) תִּדַע שֶׁהָרִי קִיַן רַע הָיָה וּמִנֶּחֱשׁ הָיָה וְנֹאמַר לוֹ, "הֲלֹא אִם תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת".

(12) Know [that this is so], for Cain was evil, and he originated from the *Nachash* (the Primordial Serpent who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of *Eden*). Nevertheless, God said to him (*Genesis 4:7*):

“Surely if you will make yourself good — Elevate!”

### Cain and Abel

The Talmud (*Shabbos 146a*) informs us that the *Nachash* (Primordial Serpent) infused Eve with spiritual venom. We are also taught (*Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Rachel v'Leah*, Chapter 2) that Adam conducted himself improperly by engaging in relations with Eve without waiting for the onset of Shabbos. Why was it so critical for Adam to wait for Shabbos to start? If he had restrained himself until the onset of this holiest of days, it's magnificent radiance would have burned the contamination out of Eve's

system, cleansing her of the Serpent's defilement. Instead, she conceived before the poison could be cleared from her system, and as a result the contamination was transferred to her offspring. And although she gave birth to twins, the toxicity was concentrated primarily in Cain, for his soul threaded through Judgment on its way down to this world, making him more susceptible to the influences of the *External Forces*. As the *Ramak* states ahead (Day Forty-Six), this resulted in Cain being born as a "Nest of Impurity."

As the twins matured, Cain chose to work the land, while Abel engaged in animal husbandry. The *Saba Kadisha* of Kelm<sup>25</sup> (*Chochmah U'Mussar* 2:207) tells us that amazingly it was Cain himself who innovated the idea of sacrifices, bringing an offering to God from "the fruits of the field" (*Genesis* 4:3). Abel followed suit, bringing offerings from "the firstlings of his flock, and from their fattest" (*ibid* v. 4). The Torah's description indicates that Abel took greater care than Cain regarding the quality of his offering. As a result, despite following his brother's lead, his superior offering was accepted, while Cain's inferior one was rejected. As a result, "it anguished Cain exceedingly, and his countenance fell."

We might assume that with so many knocks against him: his soul hardened through its affinity to Judgment and the noxious venom of the *Nachash* spreading through his system, Cain's free-will would be circumscribed and he would be precluded from performing *Teshuvah* (Repentance). In fact, the Torah tells us, God forbid, to think along such lines, for there is no room for despair – even for one in such a "lowly state" as Cain! Indeed, God immediately proceeds to divulge the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah* to him: "Surely if you will make yourself good – Elevate!" As the *Ramak* explains, "Elevate yourself to your holy root and transform yourself to goodness!"

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25. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv was one of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter's primary disciples. Rabbi Salanter appointed Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv to establish Yeshivat Kelm, an institute founded on ethical principles and their integration into the human personality. His successful efforts produced giants of Mussar ethics and it was said about Yeshivat Kelm, "A student of Kelm could not be recognized by someone who knew him before he entered Kelm." Many of his disciples became leaders of the Yeshivat of the next generation. He authored the classic Mussar book, *Chochmah and Mussar*, and several other Mussar works.

## **No Room For Despair**

Despite the toxicity and darkness pervading Cain's very essence, the Merciful One assured him that through the wonder of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) the pathway to redemption is always open. Cain received the main brunt of the Serpent's venom – and was told there is no room for despair. And although we are also tinged with the toxin of the *Nachash*, it is of a level qualitatively less than of Cain. If so, how much more do we have the ability to “sweeten and rectify” ourselves through the wonder of *Teshuvah Elyonah*. May this inspiring lesson from the Almighty be an encouragement to us all!



## Day Thirty-One



## The Shot of An Arrow

### Elevate!

The *Ramak* explains that the Merciful One's address to Cain reveals the wonder of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance). Cain fell into a deep depression when his offering went unaccepted. The Merciful One consoled him, "Surely if you will make yourself good – Elevate!"

The *Ramak* clarifies that God didn't inform Cain that he should bring a new offering of a higher caliber. Rather, He advised him, "Transform your negative nature by ascending to your soul's holy root." The Merciful One was telling Cain, "By transforming yourself into an entity of holiness, you will retroactively rectify the rejected offering. A further one is unnecessary, for your newfound inner sanctification will elevate the status of your past actions."

So too, **absolutely anyone** who engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah* will ascend to the holy root of his soul, where both his nature and his past actions will transform to goodness.

## Tense Discrepancy Reconciled

The *Ramak* reconciles the tense discrepancy found in the verse, the Holy One said to Cain, “Surely if you will make yourself good,” i.e., future tense, and “Elevate,” i.e., present tense. Only by looking into the future of one’s life does Man have the perspective to improve himself, for he sees the rest of his days before him. Indeed, his future spans to eternity! Notwithstanding, his impetus to improve himself is to take action in the now, “Elevate!” uplift yourself to your good root, stationed in *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment).

The Torah’s formula for growth is a combination of seeing how he can improve himself in the future, while initiating the process by elevating himself in the now! This “time balancing” perspective is the impetus of uplifting his very past: for the past, the future, and the present all converge at the intersect of Man’s true good. Thus, by viewing himself through the Creator’s instructions and guidance, a person merges with his own inherent, infinite goodness!

## Like a Rocket Flight

“Elevate,” meaning, “Ascend to your holy root in *Binah*.” The “journey” to *Binah* is analogous to the two forces involved in a rocket’s flight: 1) The thrust of the rocket that overcomes the gravitational attraction of the takeoff planet; and 2) The gravitational force of the destination planet that pulls the rocket towards it, progressively strengthening as it draws nearer. The spiritual realm acts in a similar fashion. One force is the free-will choice of a person to overcome his nature by engaging in *Teshuvah* (Repentance): the mere contemplation to repent. This motivation to engage in *Teshuvah* comprises a spiritual function – the performance of a *Mitzvah*. The second force is the Splendor of *Binah* that radiates from the spiritual realm and elevates him to an infinitely higher plane of existence.

Understand that the second force, the power of *Binah* to pull the soul into its holy “gravitational field,” is beyond human comprehension. Imagine, a rocket hurtling through space while attracted to the gravitational field of the destination planet. Its velocity accelerates to a blinding speed. How much more so is the power of *Binah*’s attraction upon the soul! The soul rises up to *Binah* in a flash, traveling over “light years of space” in

a mere instant. Of course there is no concept of “space” in the spiritual realm. We refer to ‘light years of space’ to make it comprehensible to the human mind.

### **The Shot of an Arrow**

The concept of “Elevate!” can be likened to the shooting of an arrow. An arrow’s direction and distance depends on two factors: 1) The archer’s aim to hit object “x” located in place “y”, and 2) How hard the bowstring must be pulled back in order to propel the arrow to its intended target. So too, there are two factors relevant to *Teshuvah Elyonah*: 1) How far a person intends to separate himself from the darkness of this world, and 2) How high he strives to ascend to unite with his soul’s root in *Binah*.

*Teshuvah Elyonah* converts all of one’s past to goodness and light. Like a prize date palm with luscious fruits, firmly planted and lovingly nurtured, with deep and healthy roots from which it is simply impossible to produce a bitter yield. So too, by ascending to his holy root, firmly implanted in the nurturing “Expanses of the River,” a person produces total goodness – not only in the present and future, but in the past as well!

## Day Thirty-Two



## Absolute Positivity

### Absolute Positivity

It's important to realize that the *Ramak* presents only the positive option: "Elevate!" The *Ramak* is telling us that regarding true *Teshuvah* (Repentance) there is only one sure path to success: by focusing on the positive; on elevating ourselves. Similar to the way a fragile mail parcel is clearly labeled: "This side up"; or how a "one-way" street sign is clearly marked with an arrow indicating the proper direction, the *Ramak* advocates only a positive perspective of the Creator and His absolute compassion. This is the essential meaning underlying the concept of "**Knowing God,**" for the Upper Realm, in which *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) resides, is total compassion and kindness, and at that level our *Teshuvah* is **always accepted** (and "never rejected")! Therefore, a person should always incline himself to ascend to his holy root, for in that place, he is always welcome in the Holy One's presence.

In keeping with this, we find Rabbi Akiva's exclamation (*Yoma* 85b):

*Fortunate are you, O Israel! Before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies*

*you? Your Father in Heaven, as it states (Ezekiel 37:28): And I sprinkled purifying waters upon you and purified you, and (Jeremiah 17:13): A mikveh (ritual pool) for Yisrael is God: Just as a mikveh purifies the impure, so does the Holy One, May be Blessed purify Israel.*

**Let us state again, clearly: not only does *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) rectify every sin, no matter how bitter and toxic, it also elevates every person to the source of his goodness, and there are absolutely no exceptions to the truth of this rule.** As God said unequivocally to Cain: “Surely if you will make yourself good – Elevate!”

### **The Moment of Truth**

We mentioned above that Cain was evil from his origin. If so, why did Heaven only reveal to him the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah* after his intensely negative response to having his offering rejected? Why didn't He inform him from the beginning that there was hope for his defilement to be cleansed, even though it pervaded his entire being? The answer is, prior to this visceral rejection, Cain was only dimly aware of his negativity, which lay dormant in the deep recesses of his subconsciousness.

Only after being jolted by the unpleasant reality of the Almighty rejecting his offering – while accepting his brother's – did Cain experience the true bitterness of his impurity. The intense pain of this wrenching test inflamed the latent toxicity that crouched at the entranceway to Cain's heart. After the venom of the *Nachash* (Primordial Serpent) blazed within him, he perforce acknowledged the true extent of his inner corruption. Now the time was ripe for God to reveal to Cain that the power to transform himself to goodness lay within his own heart. If only he would choose to seize the moment and utilize his inner goodness.

### **The Endless Journey**

The Holy One beckons us to journey upwards higher and higher to the sacred realm of *Binah*, where the root of our souls are stationed. The root of our soul's journey extends forever. Our intention to ascend is celebrated with new levels of joy, as we discover new worlds of Holiness.

## Day Thirty-Three



## You Control Your Destiny

### ***The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh***<sup>26</sup>

The *Ohr HaChaim*, sheds light on the episode of Cain with a penetrating insight. Isn't his depression upon seeing his brother's offering accepted, and his own forsaken, readily understandable? Why, then, did God query him (*Genesis 4:6*), "Why are you anguished and why has your countenance fallen??" Isn't it obvious?

### **You Control Your Destiny**

The *Ohr HaChaim* explains that the Creator was perfectly aware of the

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26. Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar was born in Sale, Morocco over three-hundred years ago. He is renowned as a great Torah and Talmudic scholar of both the revealed and esoteric aspects of the Torah. His masterpiece is the *Ohr HaChaim*, a commentary on the five Books of Moses, written on a very deep and scholarly level, citing original insights from both the revealed and esoteric aspects of the Torah. He took residence in the Land of Israel and is interred on the Mount of Olives.

misdirected self-pity in which Cain wallowed: “Why did God hurt me by accepting my brother’s offering and rejecting mine?” The Almighty’s intent was to correct Cain’s false notion, telling him, “It’s not My fault that Abel’s offering was accepted while yours wasn’t! Don’t blame Me!”

Human nature instinctively “blames” God for the agony of our failings and flaws. The Merciful One revealed to Cain that the source of his sore frustration was manifest in his misplaced “blaming” God for rejecting his offering while accepting Abel’s. Cain was also “aggrieved” with the Almighty for “unfairly” creating him with his toxic nature because he was “certain” it was irredeemable. However, the Merciful One advised Cain that “blaming” Him is a futile reaction, which only intensifies the negativity. Indeed, the full accountability for one’s ultimate fate rests squarely on Man’s shoulders!

The Creator compassionately conveyed to Cain: “I have endowed you with the control over your destiny. Namely, your free-will to acknowledge that you were created in the Divine Image! You have the choice to define yourself as good, which is the root of your essence. Perceiving yourself as good activates your innate holiness and transforms all of your past misdeeds to goodness.” Instead of “blaming” the Almighty for his flaws, it befits Man to thank Him for creating him with a Holy Soul and granting him the opportunity to elevate himself by his free-will.

In the *Ohr HaChaim’s* own words (*Genesis 4:6-8*):

*God said to Cain, Surely if you will make yourself good — Elevate! Meaning, “If you will consider yourself as “good” then goodness will rest upon all your actions. As a result, they will ascend on their own accord, for holiness does not require the assistance of others to rise. We learn this from the throne of Rebbi Chiyah, which ascended Heavenward by its own power (Bava Metziyah 85b). This is the message that the Creator conveyed to Cain: Elevate! meaning, “Elevate on your own accord through the power of your own, innate, holiness!”*

## **The Pivot of Free-Will**

We understand from the *Ohr HaChaim* that the “pivot of free-will” rests

on defining ourselves as holy and good. The inner strength and conviction to do so is predicated on the Torah's irrefutable testimony that we were created in the Divine Image, as it states (*Genesis* 1:27): "In the Image of the Almighty He created him."

Moreover, defining ourselves as good and holy is the fundamental purpose of *Teshuvah* (Repentance). When we engage in *Teshuvah*, our inherent Sanctity is activated. The resultant holiness raises us Heavenward, like the throne of Rebbi Chiyah. This is the explanation of the words: "Surely if you will make yourself good — Elevate!" By choosing to classify ourselves as good, we will automatically ascend to our holy root.

Even though the Merciful One created us in the Divine Image, it is incumbent upon us to actively define ourselves as good and holy. Until we do so, our Divine Image is merely a latent force, stored in potential. Only upon acknowledging our innate goodness does it become active; and as a result, the essence of our being is **immediately** sanctified. This can only occur because the Creator endowed us with a holy soul. As soon as we recognize our intrinsic goodness, we are automatically uplifted to the abode of our spiritual essence. This validation of our inherent goodness is the refinement and completion of our creation.

### **Externally Diametric Opposites**

Rebbi Chiyah personified goodness and good deeds, while Cain was the embodiment of evil. The Talmud (*Sukkah* 20a) tells us that Rebbi Chiyah single-handedly revived Torah study amongst the People of Israel, whereas Cain was born as a "nest of impurity." Nevertheless, the *Ohr HaChaim* asserts that had Cain accepted the Creator's guidance to repent, he would have ascended to the Upper-tiers of Heaven. Just as Rebbi Chiyah's throne ascended to Heaven on the virtue of his intrinsic holiness, so too, Cain's repentance would have elevated him to the highest level of holiness. In conclusion, Cain's evil was manifested externally. The root of his soul was holy, and had he heeded God's advice to repent, he would have ascended to the Upper-realms of holiness and goodness!

## Day Thirty-Four



## The Secret of Happiness

### The Secret of Happiness

The *Ohr HaChaim* teaches that the secret to happiness is to define ourselves according to our holy essence. The choice of defining ourselves by our inherent goodness automatically establishes the reality of our being. Accordingly, God said to Cain, *If you will make yourself good — Elevate!* Meaning, if you choose to define yourself by your inherent goodness, your Divine Image will perforce be actualized!

To summarize until now, the *Ohr HaChaim* explains that God revealed to Cain that his externally directed negativity was misguided. In fact, the opposite was true: Cain needed to turn inside. Like all of us, the Almighty created him with all the internal resources he required to succeed in his life's mission. All he needed was to acknowledge the truth of his essence and define himself as good and holy. By choosing not to do so, he alone was responsible for his offering's rejection.

## The Future is Now

The *Ohr HaChaim* notes another anomaly in the verse: Cain was anguished over a **past** action. In contrast, the Almighty's exhortation was in the **future tense**: "If you *will* make yourself good." The obvious question: It's all good and well to consider that "from henceforth I will transform to good"; but what help does a future transformation offer to rectify a past action and neutralize Cain's mortification?

Although it seems beyond human logic, the *Ohr HaChaim* shows that this amazing phenomenon is indeed so:

*And He said to him, 'Elevate!' meaning, 'Automatically'! You should explain thusly: "Elevate!" refers to the past action; and it refers to Cain himself as well, [informing him] that in addition, he should not let his countenance fall, for one's countenance reflects the beauty [of the Divine Image, and as such, a display of negativity is unseemly and unbecoming]. Rather, he should let his virtue ascend – and this is the "aspect of good," which is Nobility and Greatness.*

In summation, the *Ohr HaChaim* explains that the essence of our free-will is to choose to define ourselves as good. By doing so, we unite with our true, holy essence, and all of our past deeds are automatically elevated to goodness – for the Holy One turns both to us and to the actions that lead us to where we are today!

## Sin Crouches at the Entranceway

In the continuation of the verse we've discussed until now, the Creator carries on His loving admonition to Cain: "And if you will not make yourself good, sin crouches at the entranceway". The *Ohr HaChaim* finds this phrase cryptic and almost incomprehensible. What is this "entranceway," and what does it mean that "sin crouches" there?

He explains:

*[God said to Cain,] "If you shun the 'aspect of your inherent goodness,' then, 'sin crouches at the entranceway.'" Meaning, "You will be considered evil from your very inception, for behold, the aspect of evil, which is termed sin, 'crouches over you' and upon*

*all your actions, and will strip your mastery and control over all your deeds. Why, then, should you be distraught, since you alone are the cause of the matter!"*

Meaning, "If you do not exercise your free-will to define yourself as good, you will immediately annul the Divine Image from your being. And since "nature abhors a vacuum," your being will automatically be inundated with evil. As a result, both you and all of your deeds will be considered "evil."

### **You Are the Master**

Let's conclude *Ohr HaChaim's* elucidation with his comment of the verse's final phrase: "And you can rule over it [the Negative Impulse]." He paraphrases, "You have the power to rule over the Negative Impulse. Accordingly, why are you distraught, since it is within your hands to rule over him and to uplift the 'stumbling block,' i.e., the sin?!"

The *Ohr HaChaim* explains that God's address to Cain was crafted to instill the confidence that he had within himself the power to master the Negative Impulse: "There is no reason to be sad, for the choice to transform to goodness is in your control, and you can master it! As a result of choosing to be good or evil, you effectively choose to be joyful or anguished."

## Day Thirty-Five



## Good Till the End!

(יג) אל תחשב מפני שאתה מצד הרע שאין לך תקנה, זה שקר.

(13) [God conveyed to Cain], ‘Do not think that since you derive from the side of Evil there is no rectification for you - this is falsehood!’

### He’s Lying to You!

The *Ramak* enlightens us with a precious insight! After Cain’s offering was rejected, the Negative Impulse flooded him with toxic thoughts until he considered himself to be irredeemably evil. It is truly a relentless challenge to contend with the “enemy within,” i.e. the Negative Impulse. As our Sages comment on the verse (*Psalms* 81:10): “There shall not be found within you a foreign god: This refers to the Negative Impulse, which resides within man” (*Shabbos* 105b).

The Merciful One therefore encouraged him to resist this Negative Impulse: “It’s a lie! At its root, all spiritual bitterness is sweet!” Even though Cain was a Nest of Impurity from the outset of his existence, that was only

true regarding his external being. His inner core, however, derived from a holy place that remained pure and accessible.

## Till the End!

Indeed, so potent is the soul's purity that one can still do *Teshuvah* (Repentance) after a lifetime of transgressing. As we find in the Talmud (*Kedushin* 40b): "Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, 'Even regarding an immoral person who engaged in *Teshuvah* at the end of his days, we no longer recall his immorality.'" Commenting on this passage, Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel<sup>27</sup> states (*Kovitz Sichos*): "Through his *Teshuvah*, this person was transformed from an immoral person into a righteous one. Even though he acted immorally for most of his days, nevertheless, he transformed into a righteous person!"

Cain, however, demurred the inspiration, tragically falling susceptible to the onslaught of self-negativity that "proved" he was irredeemably evil. Believing he had no other path to follow, he was needlessly lost – the paradigm of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

## Smoke and Mirrors

If only we could internalize this message: **All the Negative Impulse's power is illusory. And this is so even after it appears to have successfully dragged a person into the gutter – it's still nothing but a bluff!** It's like a hologram so sophisticated, it would never occur to you to pass your hand through it. From Cain onward, how many untold multitudes have fallen prey to its pretensions! But like a hologram, if one just realizes it for what it is, he understands he can pass right through it easier than a burning blade through butter.

Our Sages tell us that Avraham our Patriarch was the first person to realize that the Negative Impulse's power is all an illusion. Realizing that it

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27. Rabbi Nosson Meir Wachtfogel was born just over hundred years ago in Kuliai, Lithuania. He took the post of spiritual supervisor of the Lakewood Yeshiva. A revered mentor to thousands of students, he was a strong advocate of Jewish ethics and working on one's spiritual development.



has no real power whatsoever, Avraham overcame his nature and soared to the most exalted heights of Heavenly Fear and Divine Service. In doing so, he accrued the reward of all those who came before him and failed even to try. Such is the reward of those who hope in the Almighty!

When a person is despondent over his spiritual shortcomings, it's a great challenge not to be swept away by the torrent of toxic messages unleashed by the Negative Impulse. But that is exactly what it wants to happen! And there can be no greater encouragement than for us to realize that in reality we can stand strong, for the Creator endowed us with an eternally holy soul!

Through the miracle of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), the holiness of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) grants us the ability to discern between our holy soul, which is eternally good and pure; and between our temporal flaws, which are the non-essential aspects of our being. It can be likened to a pearl covered in mud. As soon as the mud is washed away, the stunning jewel is revealed in all its magnificence. So too, our flaws are like shells covering over our holy essence. As soon as the blemishes are removed, the blinding splendor of the soul is revealed.

## Day Thirty-Six



# King David Always Viewed Himself From a Positive Perspective

### It's All in How You Look at It

The word “*Binah*” (Divine Enlightenment) literally denotes the intellectual quality of “understanding.” It is one of the qualities we praise the Almighty for in our morning blessings: “Who instills within us *Binah* to discern between day and night.” One of the most important distinctions we can make in life is to recognize and validate our true, good spiritual identity – and *Binah* endows us with the ability to do so. Indeed, this is a moral imperative. As our Sages teach (*Pirkei Avos* 2:13): “And do not view yourself as evil.” Comments Rabenu Yonah: “For by doing so, one will be unable to perform *Teshuvah* (Repentance), since his negative self-perception causes him to despair of repenting.”

The Talmud (*Brachos* 4a) notes King David’s mastery of always viewing himself from a positive perspective. The verse states (*Psalms* 86:2): “Guard my soul, for I am pious, deliver Your servant, my God, who trusts in

You!” Elucidating this passage, *Rashi* explains that King David invariably viewed himself as righteous and devout. This positive perception inspired him to consistently strive to be pleasing to God, strengthen his spiritual pursuits and elevate himself to supreme holiness. So too, we are encouraged by Heaven to always see ourselves from a positive perspective.

### Uncertainty Resolved – the Greatest Joy!

The Talmud states (*Zevachim* 90a): “There is no joy like the removal of uncertainty.” There is no agony like the fetid doubts that noxiously bubble up when a person ponders his worthiness. The *Ramak* puts such doubts to pasture: “This is falsehood!” There is no joy in the human experience like that of the enlightenment taught by the *Ramak*, which releases us from all self-doubt. When a person performs *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), *Binah’s* light shines upon him and frees him from the corrosive influence of the Negative Impulse. He ascends to his holy root, the absolute good and true essence of his being.

Similarly, the Talmud (*Pesachim* 86b) states regarding a guest: “All that a host requests of a guest, he should fulfill, except if he says to him, ‘Leave!’” The Talmud is well known for being concise and precise; if so, there’s a glaring contradiction: how could it be on the one hand that a guest must observe “**all** the host tells him”, but if his host tells him to leave, the guest needn’t heed him? Which is it?! It is counterintuitive to assert that if there is **one** thing that a guest shouldn’t do for his host, it is to heed his request “to leave”!

The *Ramak* teaches that the Talmud is alluding to *Teshuvah*. Sometimes when we engage in *Teshuvah*, it seems as if the very Heavens are rejecting our efforts. *Go away, you’re not wanted!* Our Sages therefore exhort us, *Don’t capitulate! It’s not God Who’s telling you to leave; it’s the Negative Impulse!* In this light, the intent of the dictum is, *You assume that it is God – the ‘Host’ – who is rejecting your attempts. But this simply isn’t so, for ‘God’s arm is always extended to those who wish to return to Him’ (cf. Isaiah 65:2)! Rather, it’s the diabolical scheme of the Negative Impulse. Therefore, even if he tells you ‘Leave!’ i.e., ‘Abandon your efforts to rectify yourself, for I have no interest in you,’ do not listen to him!*

## Day Thirty-Seven



## Let Joy Be Your Path

### **The Fiercer the Battle Rages, the More *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) Emanates**

The greater the intensity of the Negative Impulse's onslaught, the harder one must resist. This, however, is not cause to despair but reason to celebrate, for the more intensely a person battles, the more *Binah* casts its radiance upon both him and the entire world! More, his courageous effort opens new vistas of freedom and purpose within his soul. This can be compared to a woman experiencing severe labor pains while giving birth. The pain she endures only increases her love for the ultimate, precious outcome; and rather than associating the infant with her suffering, she loves him like the apple of her eye. So too, the more our distress, the greater does *Binah* increase the flow of holiness to "rectify every flaw."

### **Mar Ukva was a *Ba'al Teshuvah***

Consider the example of Mar Ukva, the famed *Av Beis Din* (Head of the

Rabbinic Court) in Bavel in Talmudic times. He is known variously as, “Rav Nosson, the Sparkling One” and “The one who shines like Moses.” Unlike Moses, Mar Ukva was a penitent. **Indeed, his very *Teshuvah* (Repentance) is what caused him to attain the same unimaginable heights similar to Moses himself!** *Rashi* relates the story in his commentary to *Sanhendrin* (32b):

*I found in an Hagaddic text that Mar Ukva was a penitent. He once beheld a certain woman and longed for her so intensely that he fell ill. She was married. Once, she needed to borrow money from him, and out of desperation she flirted with him. He, however, overcame his Negative Impulse, and she departed in peace. Subsequently, he was healed, and when he would venture out in public, a Heavenly radiance shone upon his head.*

What was the secret of the “Heavenly Radiance that shone upon his head?” His intense battle with the Negative Impulse granted him access to the highest realm of *Binah*. The Divine Light of *Binah* illuminated upon Mar Ukva! When he ventured in public its magnitude was so powerful that everyone was able to see it, as clear as the radiance that illuminated the countenance of Moses!

## Let Joy Be Your Path

The *Ramak* gives us masterful guidance on the successful path to self-rectification: When engaging in *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), it does not serve our best interest to reflect on our base nature or our transgressions. If we do so, the Negative Impulse will invade our minds to bring us to utter despair. This is why the *Ramak* does not mention the concept of “regret,” which is one of the essential elements of “conventional” *Teshuvah*. Once a person initiates the process of *Teshuvah Elyonah*, yearning not just to improve oneself; but on a more basic level, to connect to the Creator and transform himself at his holy root – no further remorse is required.

Still, a person must proceed with great caution, lest the Negative Impulse fling poisonous darts at him that fill one’s heart with hopelessness. Indeed,

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, writes (*Ohr Yisrael*, Letter Six): “Despair is the most dangerous of all illnesses!”

In part three of the Introduction, we mentioned Rebbe Yose’s revelation that *Teshuvah Elyonah* must be performed “with joy, and no sadness whatsoever.” Therefore, the *Ramak* advises us to proceed on the goodly path of *Teshuvah Elyonah*. Specifically, to reflect on connecting to the Radiance of *Binah*, for it is within that *Sefira’s* (One of the Ten Divine Lights) holy province that lies the root of our souls. When we do so, *Binah’s* light shines forth and “rectifies every flaw.” Consequently, all the “shadows” of our past are transformed to light!

## Day Thirty-Eight



## Make for Yourselves a New Heart

### The Foundation of *Teshuvah* (Repentance)

Rabenu Yonah<sup>28</sup> (*Yesodei HaTeshuvah*) presents a similarly positive approach to *Teshuvah*:

*God sent us a message through His servants, the Holy Prophets, and particularly through the Prophet Ezekiel (18:30-33): “Says the Eternal Almighty, ‘Repent and return from all of your sins, and they shall not be an obstacle of transgression to you! Cast away from yourselves all your transgressions that you’ve transgressed in them; and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit – and why should you die, House of Israel?!”*

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28. Rabenu Yonah was born in Gerona in the Middle Ages. He authored “*The Gates of Repentance*,” which illuminates the path of repentance. Rabenu Yonah was an eminent Torah scholar and is revered to this very day for his piety, wisdom, and holiness.

*Regarding one who has rebelled and sinned, and now comes to take shelter under the wings of the Shechinah (Divine Presence) and to enter the paths of Teshuvah: "I will enlighten you and illuminate for you the path on which you should follow" (Psalms 32:8): On that day, he should discard all the sins that he committed. He should make himself as if he were born on that very day and has in his hand neither merit nor liability. This day is the beginning of his deeds. From today, he shall consider all his ways, so that none of his paths should stray from the "Good Path." This is the way that will bring him to return in perfect repentance, for he makes himself as one who has cast off himself the burden of the sins and the essence of the transgressions he has committed.*

*Let his thoughts not confuse him and prevent him from repenting out of embarrassment, thinking, "How can I make myself so brazen as to repent – I, who have sinned, transgressed, and trespassed; ...how, then, can I ever again come before Him, disgraced like a thief caught in the act! Woe, for I'm embarrassed to stand before Him; more, how can I even tread in His courtyard, and how can I observe His statutes?!"*

*One should **not** entertain such thoughts! For the Negative Impulse sits like a fly by the entranceways to the heart, constantly renewing [its attack] upon a person, probing and planning how to cause him to stumble and turn his heart to this evil counsel.*

*Rather, he should think, "For thusly is the attribute of the blessed Creator: His "arm" is outstretched to receive penitents." Therefore, it is good for one to cast off his transgressions, and to make for himself a new **heart!***

## Day Thirty-Nine



## Purification by a Different Process

### Purification by a Different Process

In his discourse on *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), Chapter Four, the *Ramak* doesn't mention the concept of "forgiveness." However, in the first chapter on *Keter* (Crown), where he discusses the "Thirteen Attributes of Compassion," the *Ramak* does speak of this concept. Particularly in the Attribute of *And He Forgoes Transgression* (Attribute 3) the *Ramak* explains that the Creator Himself forgives the penitent by "*washing away his sin.*" In contrast, *Teshuvah Elyonah* involves a different process of purification. The penitent intends to ascend to his holy root in *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment). As a result, *Binah* shines upon him and assists him in his endeavor. He transforms to pure goodness and he himself purifies his actions. He emerges before God like a person "filled with Mitzvot like a pomegranate," with no trace of sin whatsoever.

## Detaching and Reattaching

When Moses approached the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai, the Eternal said to him (*Exodus 3:5*),

*“Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you are standing is holy ground.”*

In his commentary on the Torah, Rabbi Moshe Dovid Valli writes:

*God intended to inspire Moses to detach himself from the physicality of “this world,” since he was fit and ready to attach to the spirituality of the Shechinah (Divine Presence). Like a bride modestly inviting her husband to be with her for the rest of his life, so did God lovingly beckon to Moses.*

The “shoes” alludes to the body which is the “vessel” of the soul. We could suggest that the *Shechinah* lovingly summons each and every one of us, pleading, “Detach yourself from physical temptation! Ascend to the holy root of your soul and unite with Me!”

The uncorrupted Sanctity of the soul remains faithfully preserved in *Binah*, and through the wonder of *Teshuvah* (Repentance), a person ascends to true completeness. Before engaging in *Teshuvah Elyonah* one is like a developing embryo. Afterwards, *Binah* shines its radiance upon him and births him to holiness.

Indeed, his true essence already exists in *Binah*, and by ascending to his holy root, he is merely re-discovering his true self. His sanctification depends on his desire and free-will choice to heed the *Shechinah's* message and ascend to his soul's holy root. Again, we find that in His boundless kindness, God “prepares the remedy before the affliction” (*Megilah 13b*), for He established *Binah* as the repository for Man's soul prior to creating the “flaw” that is its earthly receptacle, i.e., the body.

## Day Forty



## Two Exceptional Principles!

(יד) "הלא אם תיטיב" ותשריש עצמך בסוד התשובה "שאת", תסתלק שם בסוד הטוב המשרש שם.

(14) "Surely if you will make yourself good" and implant yourself within the Secret of *Teshuvah* (Repentance), then "Elevate!" – you shall rise up to there through the Secret of the good that is rooted there.

### You Know the Truth!

The *Ramak* uncovers the Merciful One's care and love, embedded in the words He communicated to Cain. "Surely" a word introducing an indisputable, undeniable statement, implies that Cain subconsciously knew his soul was good and holy. It was towards this subconscious awareness that God directed His words: "Surely if you will make yourself good and root yourself in the Secret of *Teshuvah* — 'Elevate!' – you shall rise up to there through the Secret of the good that is rooted there." The Creator conveyed to him, "Cain, you know in your inner being that you

are good! By consciously validating your goodness, you will access the essence of true *Teshuvah*.<sup>9</sup>

## Two Exceptional Principles

Two exceptional principles emerge from the *Ramak's* profound words, perhaps the two most essential insights of this book:

**The Creator revealed to Cain that *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), the realm where the “root of his soul” is stationed, contained a powerful and boundless reservoir of Holiness. Indeed, his soul’s Sanctity contained the potential to rectify even the supreme bitterness and undiluted evil that was the legacy of the Serpent’s venom. How much more so does the inherent Holiness of our souls, not born as a Nest of Impurity, contain the power and potency of Holiness that prevails over all impurity. Indeed, the “roots of our souls” generate infinite worlds of Holiness, just as the living root of a tree produces countless fruits!**

**A person is not defined by his actions, words, or thoughts, rather by his intrinsic goodness. By defining himself as good, and aligning his consciousness with *Binah*, he transforms his actions, words, and thoughts to goodness — past, present, and future! His misdeeds are likened to “suitcases” which contain his possessions, but do not reflect his essence. By intending to elevate himself to his intrinsic essence, his actions will also ascend and transform into Holiness.**

## The Symptoms and the Source

The fundamental purpose of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) is to affect man’s **universal rectification and sanctification**. By ascending to his holy root, a person’s authentic essence is revealed. Implanting his being in goodness, his past negative actions are retroactively transformed to goodness, and he attains complete sanctification. In contrast, conventional *Teshuvah* only rectifies particular actions, rendering a limited rectification.

This can be compared to different aspects of medical treatment: One aspect focuses on alleviating the patient’s symptoms, while another focuses on treating the illness’ underlying cause: “Conventional” *Teshuvah* can

be compared to the former, while *Teshuvah Elyonah* is comparable to the latter, and results in a perfect spiritual healing.

## Man's Holy Soul

The Creator told Cain,

**“Surely if you will make yourself good” — and implant yourself within the Secret of *Teshuvah*... you shall rise up to there through the Secret of the good that is rooted there.”**

If we analyze this statement, we see that the essence of Man is his holy soul, i.e., “the Secret of the good that is rooted there.” The *Ramak* reveals that “the Secret of the good” refers to Man's holy soul. Yet, on the other hand the Creator told him “if *you* will make yourself good,” implying that “you” and “your holy soul” are two different entities. In light of this, if Man's true essence is his holy soul, who then is the “you” in the phrase “if you will make yourself good?”

Without question, the essence of Man is his holy soul, a free gift that the Holy One bestows upon every human being. Whereas, “if you will make yourself good” refers to the free-will of man to define himself as good by virtue of his holy soul. His intention “to make himself good” harmonizes his free-will with his holy soul!

## The Super Speed of Thoughts

Thoughts travel at a super velocity and rocket to the lofty heights of Heaven. Scientists calculate the speed of light to be 186,000 miles per second. This is the greatest velocity of any material entity. Whereas thoughts are spiritual entities that God creates, and they are unencumbered by any material element. Who can ponder the mystery of a thought? When we attain *Teshuvah Elyonah*, we **immediately** access Eternity and Gan Eden!

## Confidence!

We mentioned above that *He Washes Away Sin* is one of the thirteen Attributes of Compassion discussed in relation to *Keter* (Crown). As we saw, when a person performs *Teshuvah*, the Creator forgives him by virtue of *Washing Away His Sin*.

In his discussion on another of the thirteen Attributes: *He Vanquishes Our Iniquities*, the *Ramak* explains that Mitzvot have a special energy that allows them to **ascend** Heavenward. In contradistinction, transgressions are Divinely relegated by the Merciful One to exist in a low state, so that the person who committed them can rectify them. Of course, the imperative to engage in *Teshuvah* is one of the most important Mitzvot, as the Talmud (*Brachos* 17a) states, “A pearl from the mouth of Rava: ‘The purpose of wisdom is *Teshuvah* and good deeds.’” We might have thought that Torah wisdom is the primary Mitzvah, as it says (*Peah* 1), “Torah study is equal to them all.” However, Rava clarifies that the purpose of Torah wisdom is to contemplate *Teshuvah*! If so, the Mitzvah of *Teshuvah* certainly “rises before Him.”

Therefore, the Merciful One both (1) *Washes Away His Sin*, and (2) brings his Mitzvah of *Teshuvah* into His Presence. A person performing *Teshuvah Elyonah* automatically awakens these two aforementioned attributes of *Keter*, simply by intending to “elevate himself.” The activation of the purifying and elevating aspects of *Keter* enhance and augment his quest to perform *Teshuvah Elyonah*. Thus, his intention “to elevate” will certainly uplift him to his holy root, “causing *Binah* to illuminate all of his days” and “rectify every flaw!”

## Day Forty-One



### A Miracle You Can Rely On

(טו) שְׁפֵל מֵר עֲלִיּוֹן שְׂרִישׁוֹ מִתּוֹק, וְיָכוֹל לִכְנֹס דְרָךְ שְׂרִישׁוֹ וּלְהֵטִיב עֲצָמוֹ.

(15) For all bitterness is sweet in its Exalted root, and one can enter through his root in order to unite with his intrinsic goodness.

#### Rotten Branches and Sweet Fruits

Feelings of bitterness or negativity within a person do not represent his true essence. Remarkably, the bitterness is like a rotten branch that stems from a sweet root. Through *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), one can access his sweet root and transform the “rotten branch” into a healthy bough laden with luscious fruits!

#### A Miracle You Can Rely On

God alone works the miraculous wonder that is *Teshuvah Elyonah*. When He created the Universe, He established the root of everything in holiness. A seed rots in the ground before producing a sweet fruit because the

Creator so decreed. So too, the negativity and bitterness within us are transformed to sweetness, for they are rooted in goodness.

The *Ramak* cites two examples of “evil” rooted in goodness, one spiritual, the other material. The spiritual example is the flaring of the Divine Wrath, the harshest of Judgments, discussed above in Day Twenty-Four. The material one is Cain, who was born as an “Entity of Evil.” Nevertheless, the *Ramak* categorically asserts that “**all bitterness is sweet in its Exalted root.**”

If the nature of Cain, the paradigm of negativity and bitterness, is rooted in sweetness; how much more so must our own negativity be rooted in sweetness. Again, the *Ramak* encourages us to engage in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, with success guaranteed!

### **Engineered Encouragement**

Despite all this, it is an undeniably difficult challenge to overcome our negative outlook and view ourselves as truly sweet. Therefore, the Holy One provided numerous instances of the greatest amongst us who stumbled in the worst way and still rose up out of the dust. Could there be a more inspiring message that we too can engage in *Teshuvah* (Repentance)!? For example, Our Sages tell us (*Avodah Zarah* 4b) that if “left to his own devices,” King David never would have stumbled with Bas Sheva. He was far too refined and holy to have been involved in such base indiscretions. Similarly, the Generation of the Exodus, which received the Torah and experienced the most sublime level of existence, yet almost immediately thereafter fell prey to the sin of the Golden Calf. That such bizarre things could occur boggles the mind! Under normal circumstances they never could have happened!

However, God desired to encourage potential penitents to not fall prey to despair. Therefore, He orchestrated these events as an objective lesson for future generations. If our holy ancestors fell from their unimaginably exalted levels; surely, we, who are as far from them as a donkey is from an angel, are certainly capable of slipping! Yet even if we fall to the depths of

shamelessness, still there is hope that we can pick ourselves up and mend our ways.

The *Ohr Ein Sof*, the Holy One's Infinite Light, is the source of an unlimited supply of Sanctity that powers the *Sefirot* (System of Divine Lights). *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) channels its refreshing waters from this ever-flowing wellspring of goodness to man's soul, with an abundance that suffices to "rectify every flaw."

## The Holy Soul and the Earthly Body

The Almighty created man as a compound of two dynamically opposed components: a holy soul and an earthly body. The soul, which emanates from *Binah*, is a spiritual creation, while the body is a product of the physical realm. Just as the magnitude of the sun's light decreases as it descends towards the earth, so does the soul's emanation diminish as it descends into the body.

What's more, the "vessel" of the soul is the material body, which craves every physical pleasure. As a result, the coarse earthliness of human nature eclipses the ephemeral splendor of the soul and dominates it with overwhelming force. Sadly, a person can pass an entire lifetime sunken in the intoxicating allures and attractions of this world with absolutely zero awareness of his holy essence. Nevertheless, in His great compassion, the Holy One always leaves open the possibility for us to escape the entrapments of this world and ascend to our inherent holiness.

## Perpetual Renewal

The Merciful One constantly renews the root of our soul. As we recite in the Morning Prayer Service: "He renews in His goodness every day, constantly, the work of Creation." If so, the Sanctity of our holy root is perpetually preserved in its pristine state, in *Binah*! King David prayed to God (*Psalms* 51:12): "Create for me a pure heart, Elokim, and renew a becoming spirit within me."

The Creator grants a person the free-will to access his sweet root and

transform to goodness at every moment. Attaining clarity regarding his holy essence, he transforms into a new creation, detached from the material world and infused with the radiance of the *Sefirot*. He emerges in his true state and eternal reality, perfectly pure and holy. In this light, the *Ramak* writes: “and one can enter through his root in order to unite with his intrinsic goodness.”

## Day Forty-Two



## The Reality is in Our Hands

(טז) וְלִזְהַר הַפְּעֻלוֹת עֲצָמָן מִטֵּיב הָאָדָם. וְזִדּוֹנוֹת נַעֲשֵׂי לוֹ כְּזָכוֹת.

**(16) Through this, Man transforms the past [negative] actions into Goodness, and the intentional transgressions become like merits to him!**

### The Reality is in Our Hands

The *Ramak* reveals that when a person desires to engage in *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance), the Merciful One grants him Divine powers: “Through this,” meaning, through the process of *Teshuvah Elyonah* that man himself performs, his misdeeds are miraculously transformed into good. Truly an exquisite ability bestowed upon us by the Almighty!

The investiture of such a wondrous capability is analogous to the Torah’s teaching that God revealed the entire Torah to Moses, as the Mishnah teaches, “Moses received the Torah from Sinai.” Moses, in turn, conferred holiness and wisdom upon his student and successor, Joshua (cf.

*Deuteronomy* 34:9); and the Almighty bequeathed extraordinary wisdom upon King Solomon.

So too, when a person engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, the Creator imbues him with such holiness that he acquires the ability to transform his past transgressions into merits. If only we could keep this staggering idea in mind: the Merciful One has endowed us with the ability to alter reality! Just as God performs miracles through the actions of men, as when Avraham our Patriarch vanquished the four powerful kings (*Genesis* 14), and Moses caused the plagues to happen, so does God perform miracles through a person who engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

### **State of Flux**

Keeping in mind that the *Ramak* is very precise in his wording reveals a beautiful idea: He writes that a person transforms his previous *actions* into goodness. Why didn't he state that the person transforms his previous *misdeeds* into goodness? The *Ramak* reveals a unique insight: when a person commits a sin, Heaven does not regard it as a completed action. Rather, as a work in progress, like clay on a potter's wheel, which can be shaped and reshaped countless times before its final form is set by the heat of the kiln. So it is with our deeds. A negative action is always considered as being in formation and is never irrevocably stamped and sealed as "negative." Only in this world do we have the opportunity to rectify our misdeeds. Therefore, it is still possible — and highly recommended — to reverse it to goodness. *Teshuvah Elyonah* gives us the opportunity to rectify the "action" and ensure it's not marked as a transgression.

### **The Deep Insight of the *Ohr HaChaim***

The *Ohr HaChaim* presents a beautiful concept regarding the phenomenal splendor of the Divine Light. The planets and stars are locked into a specific orbit pathway because they seek to delight in the ultimate pleasure of the Divine Light. Now, God has endowed the planets, which are inanimate objects, with a minimal level of consciousness. Nevertheless, they yearn for the great goodness and supreme pleasantness of the Divine Light. How much more so should man, whom God has endowed with a significantly higher intelligence, seek to draw close to the great pleasure and radiance



of the Divine Light. Similarly, Man's high level of intelligence gives him the power and potential to convert his gross physicality to pure spiritual goodness and holiness.

## Day Forty-Three



## Like the First Fruit of the Fig Tree

### Like the First Fruit of the Fig Tree

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (*Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 30) presents an elegant concept that relates to *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance). Indeed, his lofty thoughts assist us to fathom the esoteric secrets of the *Ramak's* sacred writing on *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment). Rabbi Yisrael quotes the Midrash (Genesis 1:4):

*Six things preceded the creation of the world. Some of them were actually created, while others entered God's thoughts... The Patriarchs entered God's thoughts to be created. From where do we know this? From the verse, "Like the first fruit on a fig tree in its beginning I saw your Patriarchs" (Hosheah 9:10).*

Rav Yisrael elucidates the text:

*It is known that concerning the performance of an action, the cause precedes the effect. The effect develops from the causes that preceded it. On the other hand, the opposite is true concerning the mechanics of thought. Here the*

*effect, the ultimate outcome, precedes the cause! After the ultimate outcome is envisioned, the appropriate steps are taken to engender it.*

## **The Distinction Between an Action and a Thought**

Let us clarify this profound concept. Rav Yisrael explains that when a person performs an action, the cause precedes the effect. For instance, consider a carpenter driving a nail into a wooden table with a hammer. The blows of the hammer are the causes that drive the nail into the wood. Hence, the cause, i.e., the blows of the hammer, precedes the effect, i.e., the nail driven into the wood.

Whereas, concerning a thought, the effect, meaning the vision of the ultimate outcome, precedes the cause. For instance, an architect envisions a beautiful edifice. Afterwards, he organizes a team of engineers, craftsmen, and workers to bring his plan into reality. So too, before creating the world, the Almighty envisioned the sublime purity of our holy Patriarchs, i.e., the ultimate outcome. Subsequently, He created the world, i.e., the cause to actualize His vision, the emergence of “the sweet fruit of our Patriarchs.”

## **Every Person Can Reach the Level of the Patriarchs**

Rav Yisrael dramatically expands the application of this concept by referring us to the famous statement of *Tana D'vei Eliyahu* (25): “Therefore, I say that every member of the People of Israel is obligated to say, ‘When will my deeds reach the level of the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.’” Rav Yisrael concludes:

*The central purpose of creation is for the exalted man who fulfills his obligation to rise to the level of the Patriarchs, i.e., the ultimate outcome. Every person has the power within himself to rectify all aspects of human nature!*

In summation, Rav Yisrael reveals that the Creator envisions every person in his perfected state, the level of purity and holiness attained by the Patriarchs! Just as the Holy One views each person through His vision of perfection, so too, it is incumbent upon each individual to view himself through the lens of the Creator’s vision. The Creator’s vision of each person’s ultimate goodness, the purity of the Patriarchs, manifests the True

Reality of our existence. Seeing ourselves through the Holy One's vision of our purification annuls all notions of imperfection and elevates us to the sublime purity of the Patriarchs.

In the same line, Rav Yisrael's renown maxim states, "As long as the candle is burning it is still possible to make repairs." As long as a person is alive, it is always possible for him to rectify his actions and character traits. So too, our "sins" are not locked into place, and the possibility always exists for them to be transformed into merits! King Solomon's wise tenet rings ever true (*Ecclesiastics* 9:4), "Whoever is attached to all the living has hope!"

## Day Forty-Four



### The Lower Branches Strengthen the Roots

(יז) כִּי הִנֵּה אַתֶּם הַפְּעֻלוֹת שֶׁעָשָׂה הָיוּ מְקַטְרָגוֹת מִסִּטְרָא דְשְׂמַאלָא, שָׁב בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה, הָרִי מְכַנִּיס וּמְשָׂרִישׁ אוֹתָן הַפְּעֻלוֹת לְמַעְלָה.

(17) For behold, those actions which he committed were prosecuting him from the Left Side (reflected in Judgment). [Yet] if he returns in perfect *Teshuvah* (Repentance) – behold, he brings and implants those actions on High.

#### The Lower Branches Strengthen the Roots

The *Ramak* writes: “[Yet] if he returns in perfect *Teshuvah* – behold, he brings and implants those actions on High.” Now, “perfect *Teshuvah*” is different — and less potent — than *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance). Nevertheless, the *Ramak* alludes to another astounding phenomenon: **in reality, all *Teshuvah* stimulates *Teshuvah Elyonah*!** As he writes (*Sidur Tefilot Moshe*): “Those souls that are humbled through *Teshuvah* – they

cause an arousal of *Teshuvah Elyonah*. For thus is the way of roots: to be influenced by the lower branches.<sup>29</sup>

The “lower branches” of the tree are analogous to “those souls that are humbled through *Teshuvah*,” for both share the attribute of Lowliness. Tree roots indeed provide an apt analogy to those of the soul, for both are the agency through which life-force is transmitted to an entity. The “lower branches” are dependent on the life-giving power of the roots to flourish and blossom. Therefore, they signal and stimulate the roots to transmit this power to them. Similarly, when a person humbles himself to engage in *Teshuvah*, he awakens his holy root to stimulate the rectification and sanctification of his entire being.

### The Ascending Dew

Avraham, our Patriarch, feared and said to God, “I sinned by worshipping idols all those years of my youth.” The Holy One responded, “You possess the dew of your youth (*Psalms* 110:3) — Just as the dew ascends, so too, your sins ascend’ (*Midrash Raba Bereisheis, Lech Lecha* 1).”

The People of Israel sinned and requested that God be to them like rain. The Holy One responded, “I will be to you like the dew that coats the plants with a mist and then ascends.” Rain has the quality of soaking into the ground, suggesting that the rain will wash away the sin and restore the People of Israel to God. Whereas, the dew coats the plants with a mist and then ascends, symbolizing that the dew stimulates and awakens the soul’s inner essence. The phenomenon of returning to God is found in the innate power that every soul possesses. Once the soul performs penitence, the sin ascends to Heaven and transforms into a meritorious deed!

Avraham worshipped idols in his youth, and that very sin brought him to recognize the truth of Divine Service. Therefore, God likened his sin to “dew that ascends.” The Holy One declared, “Just as dew revitalizes the leaf and then ascends, so too, Avraham realized the falseness of idol worship and recognized the truth of Divine Service.” Avraham’s sin of idol worship

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29. As cited by Rabbi Ben Zion Epstein, in "*Tomer Devorah*, Hakdamot and Sha'arim."

transformed into his true faith in the One God and the performance of worthy deeds. He thus fulfilled the Will of the King of the Universe, as Scripture states (*Deuteronomy* 4:39): You shall know today and place upon your heart that God is Elokim in the Heavens above and on the earth below — there is none other!

(Based on the *Shem Mishmuel*<sup>30</sup>)

### ***Holistic Versus Atomistic***

Above in Day Fourteen, we discussed the difference between “conventional” *Teshuvah* and *Teshuvah Elyonah*. In light of the *Ramak’s* words here, let’s explore this idea a bit further. When a person engages in “conventional” *Teshuvah*, the best he can do is confront every misdeed and negative character trait individually, in order to uproot the evil that is at the source of each one. This technique can be termed as “atomistic.” From this perspective, it can be compared to a person who has fallen and suffered unrelated injuries all over his body: each particular wound must be treated separately, and what works for one injury doesn’t help any of the myriad remaining ones. This is certainly a valid way to view one’s imperfections and can certainly be effective. However, it is piecemeal, a long and tedious process.

In contrast, *Teshuvah Elyonah* views transgression in a different light, which we can characterize as “holistic,” in that the intent is to heal the very essence and entirety of one’s being. From this perspective it can be compared to a person who suffers from a crippling disease affecting his whole body. His treatment is to take a single medicine that will completely cure him. We find an example of this in the instantaneous healing of Miriam. After she was stricken with a spiritual skin disorder, Moses prayed for her full recovery. Immediately, the Merciful One healed her entire body (*Ohr HaChaim*). As the *Ramak* states: “[Yet] if he returns in perfect *Teshuvah* – behold, he brings and implants those actions on High.”

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30. Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein was born around 200 years ago and was the son of the Avnei Nezer. He authored the *Shem Mishmuel*, a nine-volume homiletical work, and was the second Sochatchover Rebbe.

*Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) is the “Master Physician,” and its incandescent radiance is the “medicine” that completely heals a soul ravaged by the travails of transgression and negativity. The sanctity and splendor of the renewed soul in its pure and pristine state scintillates with wellness and holiness. Man’s free-will intention to perform *Teshuvah Elyonah* initiates this wondrous redemption, healing, and joy.

## Day Forty-Five



## Totally Transformative

(יח) וְכֹל אַתֶּם הַמְקַטְרָגִים אֵינֶם מְתַבְּטְלִים אֶלָּא מְטִיבִין עֲצֻמָּן וּמְשַׁתְּרָשִׁים  
בְּקִדְשָׁה כְּעֵין הַטְּבַת קַיִן.

**(18) And all of those Accusers are not neutralized; rather, they make themselves good and implant themselves within holiness, as [would have been] with the [unrealized] betterment of Cain.**

### The Accusing Forces Transform Themselves to Goodness

This teaching seems to contradict an idea presented by the *Ramak* in the first chapter: “When a person performs *Teshuvah* (Repentance), they (the Accusing Forces) are neutralized and obliterated through the consternations of *Teshuvah*.” Here, however, we see that they “make themselves good and implant themselves within holiness!”

This apparent inconsistency can be reconciled by noting a fine distinction between “conventional” *Teshuvah* and *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance). When a person engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, he

defines himself as good and ascends to his holy root. Consequently, all of his past actions and character traits are automatically transformed to goodness, harmonizing themselves with his authentic, holy essence.

If so, *Teshuvah Elyonah* literally recreates a person, and he emerges as a new entity of holiness. The Accusing Forces follow his lead, for they are influenced by the power and beauty of his transformation and sanctification. As the *Ramak* writes: “they (the Accusing Forces) make themselves good and implant themselves within holiness.”

In contrast, “conventional” *Teshuvah* does not function to reconnect a person with his root. Rather, the focus is on rectifying a particular misdeed or negative trait. He does not yet have the yearning and inspiration to reach inner perfection. Therefore, the Accusing Forces are not inspired to “transform themselves to goodness.” Rather, they continue to exist as an evil entity until the trials of *Teshuvah* neutralize their existence.

### **Totally Transformative**

The *Ramak* teaches us that the healing energy the Holy One provides through *Teshuvah Elyonah* is even more miraculously powerful than we dreamed! As we’ve seen, a person’s intention to engage in *Teshuvah Elyonah* arouses *Binah*’s (Divine Enlightenment) radiance to shine upon him, causing him to ascend to his holy root. As a result, not only is **he** transformed into an entity of holiness; his past actions are also drawn in his wake to be similarly uplifted and transformed.

However, the *Ramak* tells us here that the sublime wonder of *Teshuvah Elyonah* doesn’t end there. Its transformative power is so eminent that the Accusing Forces themselves (which are actually an aspect of the Negative Impulse and his schemes to bring us to transgress) also ascend and are implanted in holiness, converting to complete goodness. One of the more particularly noxious aspects of the Accusing Forces is the devious way they act like our best friend when enticing and seducing us – only to subsequently stab us in the back for having succumbed to their allures – the “tempter and accuser.” Is there anything more wicked and treacherous?! Yet through the power of *Teshuvah Elyonah*, even a person’s Accusing Forces are ultimately purified!

## Day Forty-Six



### A Child Confers Merit Upon a Parent

(יט) וְהָרִי אִם קִיֵּן שָׁב בְּתַשׁוּבָה וְנִתְקַן, הִנֵּה זְדוֹן אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן שָׁבוּ הוֹלִיד  
אֶת קִיֵּן קִינָא דְמִסְאָבוּתָא, הָיָה נֶחֱשֵׁב לוֹ זְכוּת, בְּסוּד "בְּרָא מְזִכָּה אָבִיא."

(19) Indeed, had Cain returned in *Teshuvah* (Repentance) and been rectified, *Adam HaRishon's* intentional transgression – through which Cain was born as a “Nest of Impurity” – would have been transformed for him (Adam) into merit, through the Secret of the Talmudic dictum (*Sanhedrin* 104a): “A son confers merit upon the father.”

#### A Nest of Impurity

As we noted above (Day Thirty), Adam acted improperly by having relations with Eve before the onset of the holy Shabbos, which would have purged her of the Serpent’s defilement. As a result, the venom was passed on to her offspring. Cain was more vulnerable to this toxicity since his soul threaded through Judgment on its descent to “this world.” As a

result, he was born as a “Nest of Impurity.” Nevertheless, had he engaged in *Teshuvah*, Cain would have attained a “double” rectification: 1) His own defilement would have been transformed to holiness, and 2) The sin of his father, Adam, would have been converted into a merit.

## A Child Confers Merit Upon a Parent

The simple meaning of the tenet, “A child confers merit upon his father,” is that merit accrues to a person’s parents when he performs Mitzvot, even if they are no longer in “this world.”

The *Ramak* reveals the secret of the teaching vis a vis the Mitzvah of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance): Not only does it sanctify the penitent, it also uplifts his father. What’s more, even if it was the father’s misdeed that caused the son’s flaw, *Teshuvah Elyonah* still rectifies both of them.

How sublime is the power of *Teshuvah Elyonah*! When a child engages in *Teshuvah Elyonah* in response to a flaw in his nature, it atones both for the misdeed of his parents that precipitated the flaw; as well as the child’s subsequent trespass, with the very flaw transmuting to goodness. Even more, just as the flaw itself is transformed, so is the very misdeed of the parent converted into a meritorious act!

Hence, Adam’s misdeed of having relations with Eve before the onset of Shabbos resulted in Cain being born as a Nest of Impurity. Had Cain heeded God’s advice and performed *Teshuvah Elyonah*, a series of wonders would have been precipitated based on the tenet, “A son confers merit upon his father.” 1) Cain would have reversed his status in Heaven from a Nest of Impurity to an Entity of Holiness. 2) Adam’s indiscretion which caused the flaw in his son would have retroactively transformed the flaw to goodness. 3) Moreover, Adam’s misdeed itself would convert to a Mitzvah! *Teshuvah Elyonah* has the potency of holiness to facilitate these wonders, even without Adam contemplating on *Teshuvah*!

## God Wants the Heart

We find, regarding the Tabernacle, that whoever awakened enthusiasm in his heart to know how to make the intricate craftsmanship of forming the

sacred vessels, God would fill his heart with this knowledge! As Scripture states: “And Moses called to Betzalel and to Ohaliav, and to every wise hearted man whom God gave wisdom in his heart, every person who uplifted his heart to come close to the craftsmanship to do it” (*Shemos* 36:2). As our Sages declare (based on *Sanhedrin* 106b), “The Merciful One wants the heart”. This ideal applies to all types of goodness and holiness, such as Torah study, kindness, and the performance of the Commandments. Whoever awakens his heart to know a specific area of wisdom, the Merciful One will fill his heart with that wisdom.

(Based on the *Chofetz Chaim, Toras HaBayis*, Chapter 7)

So too, whoever uplifts his heart to know how to perform *Teshuvah Elyonah*, the Holy One will help him attain the holy wisdom of how to do so!

## Day Forty-Seven



## It's All On Us!

(כ) אָמַנְם לֹא רָצָה לָשׁוּב וּלְכַךְ כָּל סִטְרָא דְשִׁמְאֵלָא נִמְשָׁךְ מִשָּׁם.

**(20) However, he (Cain) didn't want to return. Therefore, the entire Left Side (the attribute of Judgment) is drawn from there (Cain's transgression).**

### Don't Preclude Yourself

Although it was the Almighty Himself Who revealed the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) to Cain and encouraged him to repent, Cain incomprehensibly rejected the overture! How can we possibly understand his refusal to heed the words of the Holy One, May He be Blessed! In a similar light, there is the sorry tale of Yeravam ben Navat. After King Solomon's death, Yeravam split the kingdom, set up golden calves for his subjects to worship, and prevented them from ascending to Yerushalayim. Indeed, so grievous were his sins he is one of the few notorious individuals noted for losing their entire portion in the World to Come.

Nevertheless, he was still granted a golden opportunity: In order to inherit a portion in the World to Come rivaling that of King David himself, all he had to do was engage in *Teshuvah* (Repentance)! As the Talmud states (*Sanhedrin* 102a): “Rebbi Abba said, ‘God grabbed Yeravam by his garment and said to him, saying “Repent, and I, and you and ben Yishai (King David) will stroll together in Gan Eden!” Yeravam asked, “Who will be first?” God responded, “Ben Yishai will be first.” Yeravam declared, “If so, I do not wish to [repent].” Yeravam suffered the “indignity” of settling for second place – and found it too intolerable to bear. What underlay Yeravam’s refusal to repent after hearing God’s explicit promise?

### **The Only Way is Joy**

The *Zohar* sheds light on this enigma with a penetrating insight into human nature. As we quoted in Part Three to the Introduction, “One who ascends to the Divine Light of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment) must do so with joy, and with no anguish nor sadness whatsoever” (*Terumah* 165a). Cain and Yeravam were consumed by negative emotions and oversized egos. Cain was in anguish over God’s having accepted Abel’s offering and rejecting his; while Yeravam burned with jealousy over his “rival’s” perceived primacy. Their lack of joy and negativity precluded them from accepting even the Almighty’s encouragement to repent!

### **The *Saba Kadisha M’Kelm***

Additionally, the *Saba Kadisha M’Kelm* (*Parshas Balak*) advances a concept asserting that there are two forces in man: one the power of the intellect, and the second the power of the will. The intellect is founded on the pursuit of truth, whereas the will is founded on desire and devoid of all knowledge of good and evil. If one does not strengthen and sharpen his intellect, his intellect will be nullified because desire will dominate it. Hence, if he doesn’t continuously sharpen his intellect, foolishness and the Negative Impulse will overtake him.

We can apply this principle to explain why Cain refused to repent. From one perspective, Cain was a genius who innovated the concept of giving a portion of his possessions as a sacrifice to the Almighty. Yet, from the other perspective he did not reflect on how to make an offering that is fitting

to honor the Creator. Since he did not exercise his intellect with all his strength, his desire vanquished his intellect and reversed it to foolishness. Therefore, he refused to accept the Holy One's advice to return.

Yet there is no doubt that the preeminence of *Teshuvah Elyonah* is such that it holds the power to transform even the most impenetrable darkness to light – else the Almighty wouldn't have exhorted them to try. Unlike Cain, Yeravam and their ilk, may we follow the Eternal One's inspiration, and experience firsthand His great compassion in revealing the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah*! With His help, we surely will succeed to ascend to our holy roots and “rectify every flaw.”

### **Alacrity is the Key**

In the wake of Cain's refusal to repent, the spiritual venom spread to all his offspring throughout the generations, until today. The lesson is clear: if a person neglects to rectify himself, the damage affects not only him, but his descendants as well. It is therefore incumbent upon us to engage in *Teshuvah Elyonah* forthwith! The more one delays, the more the venom spreads. It is vital for a person who commits a misdeed to repent as soon as he realizes his error and stop the “disease” in its tracks.

For this reason, Cain is held accountable for the corruption of all future generations, since he didn't rectify his flaw through *Teshuvah* – for despite all the (admittedly) formidable obstacles in his path, he still possessed the power to master his nature. It therefore behooves all of us to learn from his mistake, while we yet have the opportunity to do so.

### **It's All On Us!**

If this is not enough, consider the following: Our Sages teach (*Yerushalmi Yoma* 1:1):

*“Every generation in which the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Sanctuary) is not rebuilt in its days is considered as having destroyed it.”*  
*Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel explains (Kovitz Sichos): “The reason is because it is [always] possible to transform evil to good. Therefore, ‘every generation in which the Beis Hamikdash is not built in its*

*days is considered as having destroyed it' because each generation has the power to transform evil to good." Let us grasp the import of this lesson and "transform evil to good," and thereby build the Beis HaMikdash soon and within our days.*

## Day Forty-Eight



### All Its Branches Are Destined to Be Sweetened

(כא) וְכֹל עֲנַפָּיו עֲתִידִין לְהִתְמַתֵּק וְהֵם שְׂבִים וּמִתְמַתְּקִים, וְהִינּוּ מִמָּשׁ מִן הַטַּעַם שֶׁפִּרְשֵׁתִי, שֶׁהָאָדָם מְשַׁרֵּשׁ בְּעֶצְמוֹ סוּד הָרַע, וּמְמַתְּקוֹ וּמְכַנִּיסוֹ אֶל הַטוֹב. לְפִיכֵךְ הָאָדָם מְטַהֵר יֵצֵר הָרַע, וּמְכַנִּיסוֹ אֶל הַטוֹב. וְהוּא מְשַׁתְּרֵשׁ בְּקִדְשָׁה לְמַעַלָּה.

(21) But all its branches are destined to be sweetened, and they will return and become sweetened. And this is precisely due to the reason I previously explained: a person implants within himself the Secret of Evil and sweetens it and gathers it into goodness. Therefore, one purifies the Negative Impulse and gathers it into goodness, and he becomes implanted in Exalted Holiness.

### Then Our Mouths Will be Filled with Joy

The *Ramak* reveals that ultimately, the Merciful One will reveal the absolute Goodness shrouded within even the most inscrutable evil. In the

Messianic era “the branches are destined to be sweetened and they will return and become sweetened.” At that time, the bitter offshoots – the “branches” – precipitated so very long ago will finally be rectified. It is worthwhile stressing the *Ramak’s* assertion that all is dependent on Man’s initiative. Our performance of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) will effect the sweetening of the “branches” by reconnecting them to their source in *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment).

### **The Secret of Evil: All Is Good!**

As we’ve seen, the Secret of Evil is that in reality, all evil is rooted in absolute goodness! Of course, this notion is counterintuitive! Our minds perceive “evil as evil,” so how can evil be rooted in goodness? Yet, the Torah testifies upon the completion of Creation (*Genesis* 1:31): “And Elokim saw **all** that He created, and behold it was very good!” The *Ramak* explains the Secret underlying this verse is that the **root of everything** God made is perfectly good!

By engaging in *Teshuvah Elyonah*, a person purifies not only himself and his deeds; but even the Negative Impulse itself. By intending to ascend to his sweet root preserved in *Binah*, he uncouples from the Negative Impulse’s noxious influence. In turn, *Binah* is aroused to cast Her radiance upon him, assisting him to attach himself to his sweet root and thereby transform to pure goodness, holiness and refinement. *Binah* even enrobes his Negative Impulse with its irresistibly blinding splendor, transforming it to virtue as well. Ultimately, once he purifies his Negative Impulse, “he becomes implanted in Exalted Holiness,” exponentially increasing and enhancing his sanctification.

## Day Forty-Nine



### Incremental and Steady Wins the Race

(כב) וְזוֹ הִיא מַעֲלַת הַתְּשׁוּבָה, שֶׁהָאָדָם הַמְתַּנְהֵג בָּהּ, צָרִיךְ שֶׁבְּכֹל יוֹם וַיּוֹם יִהְיֶה בָּהּ וַיַּעֲשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה בְּצַד מֵה, כְּדֵי שִׁיְהִי כֹל יָמָיו בַּתְּשׁוּבָה.

(22) And this is the virtue of *Teshuvah* (Repentance), for one who engages in it must contemplate it every day and perform some manner of *Teshuvah*, so that all of his days will be spent in *Teshuvah*.

#### Incremental and Steady Wins the Race

When the Children of Israel departed from Egypt, they were on the forty-ninth level of impurity. Had they slipped to the fiftieth level of defilement they would have been irredeemable. As they journeyed through the Wilderness, the Creator compassionately elevated them from the forty-nine gradations of defilement to the fiftieth level of Sanctity. After fifty days, they were elevated to the lofty Fiftieth Realm of Holiness. They

arrived at Mount Sinai and the Almighty gave them the Torah, the very Divine Wisdom.

Just as the Children of Israel ascended to the ultimate heights of holiness and purity during the fifty days prior to receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, so too, in the time of our final redemption, we will ascend to the ultimate heights of holiness, purity, and Divine Knowledge by virtue of the exalted formula of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance).

### **The Convergence Between *Teshuvah Elyonah* and the Fifty Gates of Binah**

*Teshuvah Elyonah*, converges with *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), where Judgment is inoperative. Therefore, it reaches a higher level than the “Awe of the Divine Majesty,” because it leads to the realm where only the Creator’s pure Love and unconditional Compassion are operative. Of course, this pure Love of God merges with the Awe of the Divine Majesty.

In light of this, there are three levels of *Teshuvah*:

(1) *Teshuvah* motivated from the Fear of God, this Fear relates to the Fear of Punishment.

(2) *Teshuvah* inspired by the Love of God, which also has aspects of the Awe of the Divine Majesty.

(3) *Teshuvah Elyonah* which is rooted purely in the Light of *Binah*’s unbounded Love and Compassion of God, which also has aspects of the Awe of the Divine Majesty.

Once a person attains *Teshuvah Elyonah*, he is surrounded with the Creator’s absolute Love and Compassion. *Binah* is synonymous with The World to Come, and one who attains *Teshuvah Elyonah* merges with the holy root of his Soul. He reaches and experiences an aspect of the exalted spiritual heights of Joy, Holiness, and Compassion that comprise the World to Come.

### **Moses Our Master**

As we noted in Day Eleven, Moses attained the sublime level of the Fifty

Gates of Binah. Even so, he was well aware of his shortcomings, as the Torah states (*Numbers* 12:3), “The man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any other person on the face of the earth!” The merit of his extreme humility granted him access to the holiness of the Fifty Gates of Binah. (Based on the *Bat Ayin*, Essay on Chanukah).

### Yoseph’s Striving for Inner Refinement

Similarly, “The house of Yoseph shall be a flame, and the house of Esau shall become stubble” (*Ovadiya* 1:18). Yoseph’s name signifies “increase.” Yoseph continuously refined his character so that he increased in holiness each day. On the other hand, Esau’s name connotes “finished.” Esau saw himself as perfect and had no reason to strive for inner improvement. The key to Yoseph’s power was realizing there was no end to spiritual growth. Ultimately, Yoseph emerged as a flame of goodness that defeated and overcame the evil quest of Esau (Based on the Shem M’Shmuel as explained by Rabbi Dov Yaffe<sup>31</sup>).

### Emulate God’s Holiness

As we mentioned in the Introduction, one aspect of emulating the Creator is to strive to be holy and pure, untainted by even a trace of sin. The quintessential merit of engaging in *Teshuvah* every day awakens *Binah* to illuminate “all the days of a person’s life.” This incremental and steady practice leads to the perfect fulfillment of the Mitzvah of *Teshuvah Elyonah*, the very revelation of the Fifty Gates of *Binah*.

“ברוך השם לעולם אמן ואמן”

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31. Rabbi Dov Yaffe was born in Poland in 1928. He emigrated to Israel with his parents at the age of 7. He emerged as a leader of the Torah Ethics movement and taught thousands of students. His writings were published in *Divrei Chachamim* as well as other books.

## Day Fifty



## Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

### *Teshuvah Elyonah* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

We noted in the forward that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai speaks of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) in the *Tikunei Zohar* (6:22a). It states there as follows:

*Woe to those people [of Israel] with whom the Holy One, May He be Blessed is imprisoned with them! And concerning Her it states (Brachos 5b): "A Prisoner cannot extricate Himself from the prison." And Her redemption, which is awakened by Teshuvah Elyonah – [that is,] the Realm of Binah (Divine Enlightenment) is in their hands. . . . [As the verse states (Exodus 2:12):] "And he (Moses) turned therein and therein," looking to see if there is one who is aroused to do Teshuvah (Repentance) and destroy their prison, regarding him it is written (Isaiah 49:9): "Say to the imprisoned, 'Flee!' and to those in darkness, 'Be revealed!'" "And he turned therein and therein, and he saw that there was no man:" rather "each man to his way they've turned" (cf. *ibid* 53:6):*

*to their own interests and their own endeavors; "...each man to his profit, from his corner" (ibid 56:11): [That is,] the gains of "this world," to inherit "this world." And such ones are not from the aspect of those about whom it states (Exodus 18:21): "Men of valor, fearers of Elokim, men of truth, haters of profit."*

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai reveals that the one and only way to liberate the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) from the dungeon of our long and bitter exile is for the People of Israel to engage in *Teshuvah Elyonah*. By breaking out of our dark prison of impurity, we will merit to free the *Shechinah* from Her shackles and intolerable suffering.

### **The Nefesh HaChaim**<sup>32</sup>

Rabbi Chaim Voloshin writes that when a person sins, he causes great anguish to the Divine Presence on two accounts. One, for the anguish he caused to the Divine Presence when he sinned. Secondly for his suffering, which comes to him as a consequence of the sin, and the Divine Presence feels and suffers his anguish. When the person does not feel his pain because he is otherwise consumed by the bitterness of the Divine Presence that feels his pain, then the Holy One grants him forgiveness. Indeed, He grants him a double portion of forgiveness — for the two anguishes that he empathized with the Divine Presence!

### **The Power of Teshuvah Elyonah**

Our Sages tell us (*Gittin* 55b) that the Holy Sanctuary was destroyed due to the sin of baseless hatred. Moreover, as long as we haven't eradicated this insufferable transgression from our midst, it cannot be rebuilt! This is the reason for our bitter and protracted exile. If *Teshuvah Elyonah* is the key to releasing the *Shechinah* from its imprisonment, it follows that it has the power to rectify baseless hatred. The Mitzvah to "love your friend like yourself" pulsates throughout and is the culmination of *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

32. The *Nefesh HaChaim* was authored by Rabbi Chaim Voloshin, and the section on "Intentions regarding Prayer" was condensed into a short essay by Rabbi Yoseph Zundel Salant, the pious mentor of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter.



As Rabbi Akivah states (*Genesis Rabbah* 24:7; *Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:5; *Sifra* 2:12): “The Mitzvah of ‘And you shall love your fellow like yourself’ is a major principle of the Torah.”

May unconditional love for every person be awakened within us, whereby we will merit to experience the Complete and Final Redemption quickly in our days, with the help of our Merciful Father in Heaven. Amen!

May all the People of Israel at the end of days perform *Teshuvah Elyonah* and cause the Light of *Binah* to illuminate upon the entire world. At that time, may we join together with all Mankind and sing joyously to the Holy One.

(Based on the *Chayey Adam* 155:41)

”אז ימלא שחוק פינר”

## Summary



## The Seven Aspects of Repentance.

### **In Summary: The Seven Aspects of *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment)**

In conclusion, we can summarize the Mitzvah of *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) as being comprised of seven aspects of *Binah* that the Merciful One awakens to grant a person success in this holy endeavor:

(1) *Binah* has transcendent power: *Binah* has the power to uplift the soul's bitterness to its sweet root through the Fifty Gates of *Binah*. Therefore, the Almighty requires Man to perform *Teshuvah Elyonah* with joy.

(2) *Binah* grants Man insight into his holiness: The Light of *Binah* grants Man an awareness of the Sanctity and goodness of his holy root. As the Mishnah states (*Avos* 3:14): "Beloved is Man [to God], for he was created in the Divine Image." *Binah*, which literally denotes "understanding," grants Man the ability to recognize the exquisite Sanctity and nobility of his true essence.

(3) *Binah* safeguards one's Sanctity: *Binah*, which is the essence of Divine compassion, safeguards the sacredness of the soul, ensuring that it remains eternally pristine and pure. If not for the Almighty's great kindness, the holiness of the soul would continually deteriorate and degrade.

(4) *Binah* ensures an infinite supply of Sanctity to "rectify every flaw": The soul's root has access to unlimited stores of holiness to purify one's entire being from even the slightest taint of defilement and restore it to its original pristine state – no matter how entrenched the befoulment. Man's intention to awaken the radiance of *Binah* invariably facilitates the outpouring of *Binah* to descend upon him and successfully perform *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

(5) *Binah* provides the freedom of the "Secret of the Jubilee": Without the gift of the "Secret of the Jubilee" provided by *Binah*, Man would never be able to liberate himself from the shackles of his impurity and the earthliness of "this world."

(6) *Binah* is a filter for the *Ohr Ein Sof* (The Infinite Divine Light): If not for the unbounded supply of holiness continuously transmitted through *Binah* by the *Ohr Ein Sof*, Man could not perfectly and utterly sanctify himself. Since *Binah* serves as a channel for the Almighty's "Unbounded Holiness," Man can always rely on the Sanctity of *Binah* to purify even the Negative Impulse itself.

(7) *Binah* will ultimately affect the Final Redemption: Before the outset of Creation, the Creator established that in the future, every sin will be rectified by the holiness of *Binah*. Man can therefore be confident that he will indeed succeed in his quest to "rectify every flaw." Regardless of the severity of one's sins, every person always has the option to attain *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

## Conclusion



# The Practical Methodology of Performing Repentance.

## The Practical Methodology of Performing *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance) *[insert link to step by step guide]*

1. **Joyfully** Trust in God's infinite compassion and intend to transform yourself to pure goodness by ascending to your holy root implanted in *Binah* (Divine Enlightenment), "for all bitterness is sweet in its Exalted root." Keep in mind that your Trust in the Eternal's infinite compassion and your intentions to elevate to your sweet root is the impetus that initiates the wonders of *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

2. Visualize your soul ascending away from the body, assisted by the freeing power of the Secret of the Jubilee. See your soul soaring above the earth, past the sun and the stars, hurling like a laser-beam until it penetrates the Heavens and reaches its source, rooted in the holy dimension of *Binah*,

incandescent with Exalted Light. Experience the Holy Light of *Binah* and see yourself transform to pure goodness.

3. **Joyfully** envision uniting with the intrinsic goodness and purity manifest in your soul's holy root. Integrate particular virtues in your heart, such as: love and reverence for God; holiness and wisdom; and positive character traits, such as trust, joy, compassion, generosity of spirit, humility, friendliness, modesty, and unconditional love for your fellows.

4. Imagine yourself transforming into an entity of pure goodness, holiness and truth, emulating the attributes of our Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov. Your past inappropriate actions ascend with you and transmute into good deeds. The Accusing Forces "make themselves good and implant themselves within holiness." Purify your Negative Impulse and gather it into goodness and implant yourself in Holiness. Envision the release of the Holy *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) from the dungeon of our exile and rejoice in the splendorous revelation of the Divine Light — the Fifty Gates of *Binah*.

5. After fulfilling the above steps to the best of your ability, visualize that your effort to attain *Teshuvah Elyonah* awakens *Binah's* incandescent Light to illuminate "all of your days." Then all your days will be renewed and filled with *Binah's* infinite compassion, holiness, and **joy**. Live a life of Sanctity, Torah study, Mitzvah observance, Loving Kindness, and closeness to God, as King David proclaimed, "For me closeness to the Almighty is my good."

**May it be the Will of the Holy One that all of the People of Israel will merit to fulfill the Mitzvah of *Teshuvah Elyonah* swiftly in our days, and the Radiance of *Binah* will fill the entire world. Amen!**

~ לדוד אליך השם נפשי אשא ~

## A Prayer to Facilitate *Teshuvah Elyonah* (Exalted Repentance)<sup>33</sup>

In order to enter a proper state of mind for engaging in the exalted Mitzvah of *Teshuvah Elyonah*, it's conducive to offer a brief preliminary prayer. For example:

*I hereby intend to joyfully fulfill the Mitzvah of the Creator, of Teshuvah Elyonah, in accord with the guidance of the Ramak in his holy Sefer Tomer Devorah, concerning Binah. With heartfelt love of the Creator and reverence of God, I stand in supplication before the Holy Infinite Divine Light, King of the Universe, hoping and intending to awaken Binah, that encompasses boundless dimensions of Sanctity, light, compassion, and freedom. I hereby intend to ascend with joy to the root of my soul which is stationed in Binah. I accept on myself to rectify every blemish in my soul, and to renew its true Sanctity that is preserved in Binah, pulsating with powerful forces of infinite holiness. May Binah's light awaken and open new vistas of holiness and light within my soul, to sweeten all the bitterness within me, and rectify all the misdeeds and improper thoughts that have been with me until now. May my entire being, my previous actions, and the Negative Impulse itself — transform into pure goodness, holiness, and light — elevating me and all the People of Israel. May we merit to see the immediate liberation and freedom of the Shechinah from the dungeon of Galut. And may merit to see the great light of the Mashiach illuminate the entire world and fill the hearts of all mankind. Amen!*

אני מתכוון לקיים בשמחה מצות הבורא יתברך שמו של תשובה ובמיוחד "תשובה עליונה" כפי הדרכת רבינו הרמ"ק בספרו הקדוש והטהור "תומר דבורה", פרק רביעי, "הבינה". אני עומד ומתחנן לפני האור האין סוף,

33. Reciting this prayer at the beginning of the day inspires one to be aware — and strive to fulfill — the Mitzvah of *Teshuvah Elyonah* throughout the course of the day. Alternatively, this prayer may be evoked at any time during the day when one is moved to engage in *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

ברוך הוא, מלך העולם, באהבת השם וביראת השם, והינני מתכוין לעלות בשמחה לשורש נשמתי שנשרש באור הבינה. ואני מקבל עלי לתקן את כל פגם בנשמתי, ולהתחדש לקדושת אמיתתו הנשמר בבינה, המעורר כוחות אין סופיים של קדושה. יהי רצון שאור הבינה יעורר ויפתח עולמות חדשים של קדושה ואור בתוך נשמתי, למתק כל המר בתוכי, ולתקן כל העברות והמחשבות הזרות שהיו לי עד עכשיו. יהי רצון שכל כולי, וכל מעשי, והיצר הרע עצמו — יחליפו לטוב, קדושה, ואור — ויעלני יחד עם כל ישראל. יהי רצון שנזכה לראות במהרה שיחרור השכינה מבית האסורים של הגלות. ושנזכה לראות באורו הגדול של משיח צדקנו שיאיר את העולם כולו, וימלא אורו את לבבות כל בני אנוש. אמן!

## תומר דבורה

פרק רביעי

### מידות הבינה

1. האיה ירגיל האדם עצמו במדת הבינה? והוא לשוב בתשובה שאין דבר חשוב כמוה, מפני שהיא מתקנת כל פגם.
2. וכמו שדרך הבינה למתק כל הדינים ולבטל מרידותם, כך האדם ישוב בתשובה ויתקן כל פגם.
3. ומי שמתהרר תשובה כל ימיו גורם שתאיר הבינה בכל ימיו. ונמצאו כל ימיו ימי תשובה.
4. דהינו לכלל עצמו בבינה, שהיא תשובה.
5. ומי תניו מעטרים בסוד התשובה העליונה.
6. וראה כי כמו שהתשובה יש בה שרש כל הנמצאות בסוד היובל.
7. והרי שרש החיצונים - סוד גהר דינור הנכלל בקדשה בסוד הגבורות נשרש שם. ויתפשט משם ויקרא התפשטות חרון אף.
8. ובסוד "וירח ה' את ריח הגיחח", יחזר ההתפשטות שהוא (של חרון אף) אל מקורו.
9. ומתקו הדינים וישקט החרון וינתם ה' על הרעה.
10. כך האדם בסוד תשובתו עושה סוד זה.

11. שלא תאמר שהתשובה טובה לחלק הקדשה שבאדם אלא גם לחלק הרע שבו מתמתק כעין המדה הזאת.
12. תדע שהרי קין רע היה ומנחש היה ונאמר לו, "הלא אם תיטיב שאת".
13. אל תחשב מפני שאתה מצד הרע שאין לך תקנה, זה שקר.
14. "הלא אם תיטיב" ותשריש עצמך בסוד התשובה "שאת", תסתלק שם בסוד הטוב המושרש שם.
15. שכל מר עליון שרשו מתוק, ויכול לבגס דרך שרשו ולהטיב עצמו.
16. ולזה הפעלות עצמן מטיב האדם. וזדונות נעשו לו כזכיות.
17. כי הנה אתם הפעלות שעשה היו מקטרגות מסטרא דשמאלא, שב בתשובה שלמה, הרי מכניס ומשריש אותן הפעלות למעלה.
18. וכל אתם המקטרגים אינם מתבטלים אלא מטיבין עצמן ומשתרשים בקדשה כעין הטבת קין.
19. והרי אם קין שב בתשובה ונתקן, הנה זדון אדם הראשון שבו הוליד את קין קינא דמסאבותא, הנה נחשב לו זכות, בסוד "ברא מזכה אבא".
20. אמנם לא רצה לשוב ולכהן כל סטרא דשמאלא נמשך משם.
21. וכל ענפיו עתידין להתמתק והם שבים ומתמתקים, ותינו ממש מן הטעם שפרשתי, שהאדם משריש בעצמו סוד הרע, וממתקו

וּמְכַנְיִסוֹ אֶל הַטּוֹב. לְפִיכֶן הָאָדָם מְטַהֵר יֶצֶר הָרַע, וּמְכַנְיִסוֹ אֶל הַטּוֹב. וְהוּא מְשַׁתְּרֵשׁ בְּקִדְשָׁהּ לְמַעַלָּה.

22. וְזוֹ הִיא מַעֲלֵת הַתְּשׁוּבָה, שֶׁהָאָדָם הַמְתַּנְהֵג בָּהּ, צָרִיךְ שֶׁבְּכָל יוֹם וְיוֹם יִתְרַהֵר בָּהּ וַיַּעֲשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה בְּצַד מֵה, כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיוּ כָּל יָמָיו בְּתְשׁוּבָה.

## *Tomer Devorah*

### *Chapter Four*

### *The Attribute of Binah*

(1) How does one inculcate himself with the attribute of *Binah*? By engaging in *Teshuvah* — for there is nothing as paramount as *Teshuvah*, as it rectifies every flaw.

(2) Just as *Binah* functions to “sweeten all the Judgments” and to neutralize their bitterness; so too, man engages in *Teshuvah* and rectifies every flaw.

(3) One who contemplates *Teshuvah* all his days causes *Binah* to illuminate all his days; it thus emerges that all his days are spent in *Teshuvah*.

(4) That is, he merges with *Binah*, which is *Teshuvah*.

(5) The days of his life will thereby be crowned with the Secret of *Teshuvah Elyonah*.

(6) And see, that *Teshuvah* contains within it the root of every Being, by virtue of the “Secret of the Jubilee Year.”

(7) And behold, the source of the External Evil Forces – the “Secret of the River *Dinur*,” which is joined to sanctity through the “Secret of the Forces of Judgment” – is also rooted therein (*Binah*) and spreads forth from there; and this outspreading is called “Flaring Wrath.”

(8) And through the Secret underlying the verse (*Genesis* 8:21): “And God smelled the pleasant aroma” [of the offering made by Noach after exiting the Ark], this outspread [of Divine wrath] returns to its “source.”

(9) The Judgments are thereby sweetened, the flaring calmed, and “God relents concerning the Evil” (cf. *Exodus* 32:14).

(10) So, too, with Man: through the Secret of his *Teshuvah*, he affects this Secret.

(11) Thus, you should not say that *Teshuvah* is beneficial [only] to man’s sacred side; rather, it is also beneficial to his evil side, in accord with this attribute.

(12) Know [that this is so], for Cain was evil, and he originated from the *Nachash*, (the Primordial Serpent who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of *Eden*). Nevertheless, God said to him (*Genesis* 4:7): “Surely if you will make yourself good — Elevate!”

(13) [God conveyed to him], ‘Do not think that since you derive from the side of Evil there is no rectification for you - this is falsehood!’

(14) ‘Surely if you will make yourself good’ and implant yourself within the Secret of *Teshuvah*, then ‘Elevate!’ – you shall rise up to there through the Secret of the good that is rooted there.’

(15) For all bitterness is sweet in its Exalted root, and one can enter through his root in order to unite with his intrinsic goodness.

(16) Through this, Man transforms the past [negative] actions into Goodness, and the intentional transgressions become like merits to him!

(17) For behold, those actions which he committed were prosecuting him from the Left Side (the “Side of Exactitude and Severity”, reflected in strictness in justice and Judgment). [Yet] if he returns in perfect *Teshuvah* – behold, he brings and implants those actions on High.

(18) And all of those Accusers are not [merely] neutralized; rather, they make themselves good and implant themselves within holiness, as [would have been the case] with the [unrealized] betterment of Cain.

(19) Indeed, had Cain returned in *Teshuvah* and been rectified, *Adam HaRishon's* intentional transgression – through which *Cain* was born as a Nest of Impurity – would have been transformed for him (Adam) into merit, through the Secret of the Talmudic dictum (*Sanhedrin* 104a): “A son confers merit upon the father.”

(20) However, he (Cain) didn't want to return. Therefore, the entire Left Side is drawn from there.

(21) But all its branches are destined to be sweetened, and they will return and become sweetened. And this is precisely due to the reason I previously explained: a person implants within himself the Secret of Evil and sweetens it and gathers it into goodness. Therefore, one purifies the Negative Impulse and gathers it into goodness, and he becomes implanted in Exalted holiness.

(22) And this is the virtue of *Teshuvah*, for one who engages in it must contemplate it every day and perform some manner of *Teshuvah*, so that all of his days will be spent in *Teshuvah*.

~האדם ראוי שידמה לקונו~