

# How the Ba'al Shem Tov Changed the World: Major Concepts in Hasidic Thought

## Ora Wiskind

### Unit 3

#### Being human and beyond: Holiness in the everyday; corporeity and transcendence

##### R. Zev Wolf of Zhitomir, *Or hame'ir* 7b

Whoever has been granted understanding, and wishes to enter the inner chambers of divine worship, this is the path that one ought to choose for oneself: Wherever one looks or listens, let one see and hear nothing but divinity clothed within.

ר' זאב וואלף מזיטאמיר, אור המאיר, לך לך, ז ע"ב

כי באמת מי שחלק לו אלקים בבינה ורוצה לגשת אל עבודת אלקים פנימה בלב שלם ובנפש חפצה, זהו הדרך יבור לו האדם – אל כל מקום שרואה ושומע אל יראה וישמע כי אם אלקות המלוּבש שם ויקח לעצמו רמיזא דחכמתא ליתן התעוררות לנפשו לדבק ברוממות אלקותו ית'

#### A. Major concepts

##### 1. Immanence / transcendence – theological and mystical foundations

'All the universe is filled with His glory' | 'No place is devoid of His presence'  
לית אתר פנוי מיניה | מלוא כל הארץ כבודו

##### R. Pinhas of Koretz, *Likutei amarim* 14d (*Sefer haBaal Shem Tov*, Vaetchanan 13)

'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One' (Deut. 6:4).

The term *ehad* [one] in the reading of the Shema, which proclaims the unity of God, [requires us to] state that there is nothing in the whole world other than the Holy One, Who fills the whole earth with His glory (after Isa. 6:3). The main intent [of the commandment to recite the *Shema*] is that we should consider ourselves null and void, and recognize that we are nothing but the soul within us – the soul that is part of God Himself. Thus there is nothing in the whole world except God. And so our central thought when reciting the word *ehad* should be that the whole earth is full of His glory and there is nothing in the universe devoid of Him.

ר' פנחס מקוריץ, ליקוטי אמרים יד ע"ב (ספר הבעל שם טוב, ואתחנן ס' יג)

שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד. הכוונה של אחדו של היחוד של קריאת שמע, לכוון שאין בכל העולם רק הקדוש ברוך הוא שמלא כל הארץ כבודו, ועיקר הכוונה, שהאדם ישים את עצמו לאין ואפס, ואין עיקרו רק הנשמה שבו, שהוא חלק אלהי ממעל, נמצא שאין בכל העולם רק הקדוש ברוך הוא אחד, ועיקר הכוונה באחד שיכוון שמלא כל הארץ כבודו, ואין שום דבר פנוי ממנו יתברך שמו

##### 2. The 'breaking of the vessels' - *shevirat ha-kelim*. *Tsimtsum*, *berur*, *tikkun*

*At the beginning of time, God's presence filled the universe. When God decided to bring this world into being, to make room for creation, He first contracted His infinite being. From that contraction darkness was created. And when God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3), the light that came into being filled the darkness, and ten holy vessels came forth, each filled with primordial light.*

*In this way God sent forth those ten vessels, like a fleet of ships, each carrying its cargo of light. Had they all arrived intact, the world would have been perfect. But the vessels were too fragile to contain such a powerful, divine light. They broke open, split asunder, and all the holy sparks were scattered like sand, like seeds, like stars. Those sparks fell everywhere, but more fell on the Holy Land than anywhere else.*

*That is why we were created — to gather the sparks, no matter where they are hidden. God created the world so that the descendants of Jacob could raise up the holy sparks. That is why there have been so many exiles — to release the holy sparks from the servitude of captivity. In this way the Jewish people will sift all the holy sparks from the four corners of the earth.*

*And when enough holy sparks have been gathered, the broken vessels will be restored, and *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, awaited so long, will finally be complete. Thus it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from wherever they are imprisoned and to elevate them to holiness by the power of their soul.*

(adapted from Howard Schwartz, 'How the Ari Created a Myth and Transformed Judaism', *Tikkun* 2011)

ר' נחמן מברסלב, ליקוטי מוהר"ן א, סד

א כי השם יתברך מחמת רחמנותו ברא את העולם, כי רצה לגלות רחמנותו, ואם לא היה בריאת העולם על מי היה מראה רחמנותו. ועל כן ברא את כל הבריאה מתחלת האצילות, עד סוף נקודת המרפז של עולם הגשמי, כדי להראות רחמנותו. וכאשר רצה השם יתברך לברא את העולם, לא היה מקום לבראו, מחמת שהיה הכל אין סוף, על-כן צמצם את האור לצדדיו, ועל ידי הצמצום הזה נעשה חלל הפנוי, ובתוך החלל הפנוי הזה, נתהוו כל הימים והמדות, שהם בריאת העולם (כמ"ש בעץ חיים בתחילתו).

וזה החלל הפנוי היה מכרך לבריאת העולם, כי בלתי החלל הפנוי לא היה שום מקום לבריאת העולם כנ"ל. וזה הצמצום של החלל הפנוי אי אפשר להבין ולהשיג כי אם לעתיד לבוא, כי צריך לומר בו שני הפכים: יש ואין.

כי החלל הפנוי הוא עלידי הצמצום, שִׁכְבִּיכוֹל צִמְצָם אֶלְקוֹתוֹ מִשָּׁם, וְאִין שָׁם אֶלְקוֹת כְּבִיכוֹל, כִּי אִם לֹא כֵן אִינוּ פְּנוּי, וְהַכֵּל אִין סוֹף, וְאִין מְקוֹם לְבְרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם כָּלֵל. אֲבָל בְּאַמַּת לְאַמְתוֹ, בְּוֹדָאֵי אֶרְעֵל־פִּיכֵן יֵשׁ שָׁם גַּם כֵּן אֶלְקוֹת, כִּי בְּוֹדָאֵי אִין שׁוּם דְּבָר בְּלַעְדֵי חַיּוֹתוֹ, וְעַל־כֵּן אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְהַשִּׁיג כָּלֵל בְּחִינַת חֵלֶל הַפְּנוּי עַד לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא:

### 3. *Devekut*

**Deut. 4:4** You who cleave to Hashem, your God – all of you are alive today

ספר דברים ד, ד וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בַּיְדוֹד אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם:

**Deut. 11:22**

If only you will observe this entire commandment that I command you, to perform it, to Love Hashem you God, to walk in all His ways and to cleave to Him ...

דְּבָרִים פֶּרֶק י"א, כ"ב כִּי אִם־שָׁמַר תִּשְׁמְרוּן אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְלַכֵּת בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו וּלְדַבְּקָה־בוֹ ...

### B. *Sotah* 14a

Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, says: What is the meaning of the verse: 'After the Lord your God shall you walk, and Him shall you fear, and His commandments shall you keep, and unto His voice shall you hearken, and Him shall you serve, and unto Him shall you cleave' (Deut. 13:5)? But is it actually possible for a person to cleave to the Divine Presence? Is it not written: 'For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God' (Deut. 4:24), and one cannot approach fire!

He explains: Rather, the meaning is that one should follow the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written: 'And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them' (Gen. 3:21), so too, should you clothe the naked. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He visits the sick, as it is written 'And the Lord appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre' (Gen. 18:1), so too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He consoles mourners, as it is written: 'And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son' (Gen. 25:11), so too, should you console mourners. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He buried the dead, as it is written: 'And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab' (Deut. 34:6), so too, should you bury the dead.

**Ramban, Deut. 11:22**

'And cleave to Him'. This is a great secret. ... *Devekut* (cleaving) means to remember God and His love constantly, not to divert your thought from Him in all your earthly doings. In doing so, one may be talking to other people yet one's heart is not with them, but rather in the presence of God. For those who have attained this lofty state – they partake of eternal life even during their earthly existence, for they have made themselves into a dwelling place for the *Shekhinah* as [R. Yehudah Halevi] writes in the *Kuzari*.

רמב"ן דברים י"א, כ"ב

ולדבקה בו - והוא סוד גדול. ... אולי יאמר לאהבה את ה' ללכת בכל דרכיו עד שתהיו ראויים לדבקה בו בסוף. ... ויתכן שתכלול הדבקה לומר שתהיה זוכר השם ואהבתו תמיד לא תפרד מחשבתך ממנו בלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך, עד שיהיו דבריו עם בני אדם בפיו ובלשונו, ולבו איננו עמם, אבל הוא לפני ה'. ויתכן באנשי המעלה הזאת שתהיה נפשם גם בחייהם צרורה בצרור החיים, כי הם בעצמם מעון לשכינה, כאשר רמז בעל ספר הכוזרי.

**R. Dov Ber, Maggid of Mezeritch, *Tzavaat haRivash* 76**

A teaching of R. Israel Baal Shem [Tov]: 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways' (Isa. 55:8) This means that the moment you separate yourself from God, you are worshipping idolatry. There is no middle ground. This is the meaning of the verse, '...you turn astray and you serve [other gods]' (Deut. 11:16).

צוואת הריב"ש (ר' דוב בער, המגיד ממזריץ, מתורתיו של הבעל שם טוב)

מריב"ש (רבי ישראל בעל שם טוב) - כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי נישעיהו נה, ח). פירוש, כי כאשר האדם מפריד א"ע מהשי"ת מיד הוא עובד עבודה זרה, ולא יש דבר ממוצע, וזה וסרתם ועבדתם.

***Tzavaat haRivash* 127**

Whenever you are afraid of something, or love something, reflect: 'Where does this fear or love come from? After all, everything derives from the blessed Holy One, who put the [aspects of] fear and love even in what seems evil, such as wild beasts. For at the time of the breaking of the vessels (*ha-shevirah*) something fell from all the attributes. The fear, therefore, is from the Holy One, blessed be He. Why, then, should I be afraid of a single spark of His which is invested in that element? It would be better to attach myself to a higher form of awe / fear! The same applies to love, and so, too, with all the attributes: we must extract the spark of holiness hidden within and raise it to its root. For this is the ultimate desire of our soul, to raise the sparks that have fallen from the 'breaking of the vessels' and restore them to their source.

The same applies to your speech: do not imagine that it is *you* who speaks. Rather, it is the vital force within you, which derives from the Creator, blessed is He; that force speaks through you and raises Speech to its source. ... So, too, when eating: your intent should be to draw out the vitality from the food, and elevate it to serve the Creator, blessed be He. And so, too, with everything else. Your intent in all your ways ultimately should be to attach yourself to Hashem.

## B. Body and soul

### 1. Attitudes to corporeity and spirituality before Hasidism

Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah* (Detroit, 2005) 9-10

The first topic that a medieval thinker considered when contemplating the meaning of the body was the relationship of the body to the soul. Neoplatonic dualism was rife with philosophically influenced religious thinking. The following questions emerged: What is the nature of the body as compared to the soul? How does one characterize the adversity between body and soul? Must one subdue the other? Could they cooperate? How were their respective talents to be yoked together for the greatest possible good? How was the body valued with respect to the soul? How is the body viewed as an instrument for gaining mystical experience? Where does the self reside, and how does it imagine that residence? Do scholarly constructions of the kabbalists' notions of the body correspond to broader dynamics within kabbalistic lore? What notions of symbolism are deployed to represent embodiment?

On the most basic level, the *Zohar* can be said to have three primary conceptions of the body: first, the body in principle is evil beyond redemption; second, the body is predisposed to neither good nor evil but is capable of improvement and redemption; third, the body is modelled after the *sefirot* and assists man in his attempts to reach the Divine.<sup>30</sup> These different conceptions of the body lead in turn to different notions of the virtuous life and their impact on the body. The first view leads necessarily to an ascetic vision, one in which the body must be broken and humiliated to give supremacy to the soul.<sup>31</sup> According to the second position, the bodies of the righteous can be transformed rather than merely subjugated. Thus, through the soul's nocturnal, heavenly ascent, descending afterward saturated with divine light, the body can become imbued with the overflow of this light.<sup>32</sup> Harmony reigns between the otherwise hostile body and soul as a consequence of the study of Torah; the body becomes "a holy body." Isaiah Tishby explains, "A holy body such as this—like those of the mystics—is not dependent on gross material food, but can be nourished and sustained by food for souls that emanates from the divine wisdom."<sup>33</sup> According to the third view, in which the human body is patterned after the image of the *sefirot*, one can learn about the divine realm through contemplation of the human body. In this way, there is no requirement for either denigration or transformation of the body: "By carrying out its ordinary functions the body performs as if it were a holy service. This sacramental view of the physical life is mentioned by the *Zohar* in connection with various physical needs, and particularly with regard to the conjugal life, which is depicted as a corporeal representation of sacred intercourse in the world of the *sefirot*."<sup>34</sup> Is the body representational of supernal phenomena, thus furnishing epistemological significance, that is, knowledge of the divine realm? Or does the body operate in a sacramental modality, yielding meaning about being itself, that is, ontological significance?<sup>35</sup> The intersection of knowing and being is a crucial element of the kabbalistic experience of the world and will be a basic assumption of this work. ...

How do the medieval kabbalists approach the problem of the body? Medieval Jewish thinkers wrestled mightily with the problem of carnality.<sup>40</sup> While Neoplatonism and neo-Aristotelianism and their concomitant spiritualizing influences most certainly had an impact on medieval thinkers, the body still retained its place as a significant focus for spiritual development.<sup>41</sup> In medieval Jewish literature, Maimonides excoriates the body's sensuality, following Aristotle, who refers to the sense of touch as the vilest sense, setting a touchstone for later discussants of the body.<sup>42</sup> In such a context, eating is treated functionally, as the activity that provides nourishment, instrumentally enabling more noble activity. The kabbalists, as we will see, designed a more complex conception of the body's significance. Among the kabbalists of Gerona, in the decades preceding the emergence of the *Zohar*, we find a range of approaches to the body. In Azriel of Gerona's soteriological discussions of Primordial Adam and the messiah, we find a desire, similar to that of Maimonides, to flee the body. Azriel teaches that, as at the beginning of time, so at its end will humanity reach its potential when it finally leaves the body for a purer existence.<sup>43</sup> This position has been contrasted with that of Moses ben Nahman.<sup>44</sup> In the eschatological treatise *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*, Moses ben Nahman describes Adam not as a spiritual entity but rather as a spiritualized body. In this text, one finds a utopian vision of the body, one that is no longer in need of physical food and that is sustained from the supernal splendor.<sup>45</sup> According to Moses ben Nahman's conception of the idealized body, Adam's "spiritualized body" can be regained through union (*devekut*) with the *Shekhinah*.<sup>46</sup>

### 2. Holy – profane, inner – outer; the task of transforming materiality to holiness

R. Moshe Hayyim Luzatto, *The Path of the Just*, chapter 26

The matter of holiness is dual. Its beginning is service of G-d while its end is reward; its beginning is exertion while its end is a [divine] gift. That is, its beginning is that which a man sanctifies himself, while its end is his being sanctified. This is what our sages, of blessed memory, said: 'If one sanctifies oneself a little, one becomes much sanctified. If one sanctifies oneself below, one becomes sanctified from above' (Yoma 39a). ...

You can now see the difference between the Pure man and the Holy man. The physical actions of the pure man are only to him as necessity. His only intent in doing them is on their necessary aspect. Through this, his actions escape the evil side of the physical and remain pure. But they do not enter the realm of Holiness, for if it were possible to do without them, it would already have been better for him.

But for the Holy man, who constantly clings to his G-d, whose soul treads freely among true thoughts in love of his Creator and fear of Him, behold, it is considered as if he is walking before G-d in the Land of the Living, while still here in this world.

Behold, you can see that the way to acquire this trait is through much solitude and separation, intense study of the secrets of divine providence, the hidden matters of the creation, and knowledge of His exaltedness, blessed be He, and His praises, until one clings mightily to Him, and directs one's thoughts with proper intention ...

Impediments to attaining holiness are lack of true knowledge and much association with other people. For the physical meets its kind, awakens and strengthens, and the soul remains trapped in it and will not escape its prison. Yet when one separates oneself from others, remaining in solitude, and prepares oneself to receive His holiness – indeed, such a person will be led in the way they wish to go; with G-d's help, their soul will gain strength within them and defeat the corporeal, cling to His holiness, blessed be He, and be rendered whole (perfect) through Him.

### רמח"ל, מסילת ישרים, פרק כו

ענין הקדושה כפול הוא, דהיינו: תחלתו עבודה וסופו גמול, תחלתו השתדלות וסופו מתנה. והיינו: שתחלתו הוא מה שהאדם מקדש עצמו, וסופו מה שמקדשים אותו, והוא משז"ל (יומא לט ע"א) אדם מקדש עצמו מעט מקדשים אותו הרבה. מלמטה מקדשים אותו מלמעלה. ...

ותראה עתה ההפרש שבין הטהור לקדוש: הטהור, מעשיו החומרים אינם לו אלא הכרחים, והוא עצמו אינו מתכוין בהם אלא על צד ההכרח, ונמצא שעל ידי זה יוצאים מסוג הרע שבחומרות ונשארים טהורים, אך לכלל קדושה לא באו, כי אילו היה אפשר בלתי, כבר היה יותר טוב. אך הקדוש הדבק תמיד לאלהיו, ונפשו מתהלכת בין המושכלות האמתיות באהבת בוראו ויראתו, הנה נחשב לו כאילו הוא מתהלך לפני ה' בארצות החיים עודנו פה בעולם הזה ... והנך רואה שדרך קניית זאת המדה הוא על ידי רוב הפרישה, והעיון העצום בסתרי ההשגחה העליונה ומצפוני הבריאה, וידיעת רוממותו יתברך ותהלותיו עד שיתדבק בו דבקות גדול וידע לכוין מחשבתו בהיותו הולך ומשתמש בדרכים הארציים כמו שהיה ראוי לכהן שיתכוין בעודו שוחט הזבח או מקבל דמו או זורקו עד שימשיך בזה הברכה ממנו יתברך החיים והשלום. וזולת זה אי אפשר שישגי מעלה זו וישאר על כל פנים חומרי וגשמי ככל שאר בני אדם. והנה מה שעוזר להשגת המדה הזאת הוא ההתבודדות והפרישה הרבה כדי שבהעדר המטרדים תוכל נפשו להתגבר יותר ולהדבק בבורא מפסידי המדה הם חסרון הידיעות האמתיות ורוב החברה עם בני האדם כי החומרות מוצא את מינו וניעור ומתחזק, ונשארה הנפש לכודה בו ולא תצא ממאסרה. אך בהפרדו מהם והשארו לבד ויכין עצמו אל השראת קדושתו, הנה בדרך שרוצה לילך בה יוליכוהו, ובעזר האלהי אשר יותן לו תתגבר נפשו בו ותנצח את הגופניות, ותדבק בקדושתו יתברך ותשלם בו.

### 3. Hasidism: Experiential dimensions of the body-soul dialectic

#### a. 'Running and returning' – the dynamic nature of being human

Ezekiel 1:14 And the living creatures ran to and fro like the appearance of lightening.

יחזקאל א, יד וְהַחַיִּיּוֹת רָצוּא וְשׁוּב כְּמֵרָאָה הַבָּזָק:

#### R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoye, *Toledot Yaakov Yosef, Tazria 2*

I heard from my master (the Baal Shem Tov) an explanation of the verse, 'And the living creatures ran and returned' (Ezek. 1:14). It is fitting that the soul, having been hewn from a holy source, will always yearn to return to its origin. Yet, lest its existence be annihilated (being drawn back into its spiritual source), the soul it was ensconced in matter so that it might also engage in material acts such as eating, drinking, business and the like, so that it not be constantly aflame in serving God. This in keeping with the mystery of *tikkun* and the balance of body and soul. And so it is in the world of the *sefirot* – from 'smallness' to greatness (*katnut ve-gadlut*).

#### ר' יעקב יוסף מפולנאה, תולדות יעקב יוסף, תזריע ס' ב

ממורי שמעתי ענין החיות רצוא ושוב (יחזקאל א, יד) - כי הנשמה אחר שחוצבה ממקום קדוש ראוי שתתלהב תמיד אל מקום מחצבתה, ופן תתבטל ממציות, לכך סיבבה בחומר שתעשה גם כן ענינים חומריים כמו אכילה ושתיה ומשא ומתן וכיוצא שלא תתלהב תמיד בעבודת ה' יתברך בסוד תיקון וקיום הגוף עם הנשמה. וכן הוא במדרגת הספירות קטנות וגדלות, ודברי פי חכם חן:

#### b. Redeeming the sparks

Psalms 107:5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul grew faint within them – *nafsham bahem titataf*.

תהלים קז, ה רַעֲבִים גַּם-צְמָאִים נַפְשָׁם בְּהֵם תִּתְעַטֵּף:

#### Rabbi Dov Ber, the Magid of Mezeritch, *Sefer Baal Shem Tov, Yitro*

On the verse (Psalms 107:5): 'The hungry and thirsty, in them does their soul envelop itself.' The meaning of this is a profound mystery. Why did the Holy One create food and drink, things that people desire? For nestled within every form of existence – inanimate, vegetative, animal, human - are the primordial divine sparks, and those sparks yearn to cleave to holiness. A person desiring food may sense only the body's hunger. In truth, however, enveloped within one's physical hunger and thirst is the soul's longing for the inner essence, the 'soul' of the food – that is, the sparks of holiness imprisoned within it. And it is our mission to redeem them.

### ספר בעל שם טוב שמות פרשת יתרו (בשם המגיד ממזריץ)

רעבים גם צמאים נפשם בהם תתעטף. פירש בכאן סוד גדול ונורא, והוא, למה ברא הקדוש ברוך הוא עניני מאכל ומשתה שאדם תאב להם לאכול ולשתות, והטעם שהם ממש ניצוצי אדם הראשון שהם מתלבשים בדומם ובצומח ובחי ובמדבר, ויש להם חשק לדבק בקדושה, והן מעוררין מיין נוקבין, בסוד אין טיפה יורדת מלמעלה שאין טיפיים עולים כנגדה מלמטה (זהו ח"ג רמ"ז ב), וכל אכילה ושתיה שאדם אוכל ושותה הוא ממש חלק ניצוצות שלו, שהוא צריך לתקן, וזהו שאמר הכתוב רעבים גם צמאים, כשאדם רעב וצמא להם, למה זה, וזהו שאמר נפשם בהם תתעטף, בסוד גלות, בלבושים זרים, ויחשבה לזונה כי כסתה פניה (בר' לח, טו), ובאמת היא צדקה, והבן, וכל הדברים שהם משמשים לאדם הם ממש סוד הבנים שלו שהולכים בשביה, והבן:

#### c. The material world: illusion or reality?

R. Shlomo of Lutsk, *Dibrat shlomo, Behukotai 292-294* - translated in Ariel Even Mayse, *Speaking Infinities: God and Language in the Teachings of Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezrich* (2020) 67

It may seem that this world is visible to the eyes, and the spiritual world and its pleasures cannot be seen. . . . But the physicality of each thing is only a vessel and a boundary that defines its appearance, taste and smell. The spirit [inside it] is the vitality of the Creator, drawn into and bounded by this physical thing. It is the letters and the holy words of the Divine, for these letters are spiritual, sweet and full of wondrous taste and smell. . . .

The words of the Holy One inhere in all things, as it is written, "the heavens were made by the word of Y-H-V-H" (Ps. 33:6). They are the names of each thing, like "bread" (*lechem*) and "water" (*mayyim*), and so forth. This is the vitality and the taste, and the smell, and the appearance of each word (*dibbur*). The vitality is drawn forth according to the letters and combinations of words of each thing. . . . Each thing is created and emanated from the blessed One's vitality, and therefore everything must be uplifted to its Source by means of eating and drinking, through the deeds of God's sacred people with great attachment to the holy Creator. Even impure things and forbidden foods, and all prohibited things, which are dark and lacking, have a little vitality. These are uplifted through keeping the negative commandments. . . .

Everything is the illumination, divinity and vitality of the blessed Creator. . . . "It is like the silkworm whose garment is both a part of it and upon it,"<sup>121</sup> as it says in the Zohar.<sup>122</sup>

#### d. Matter, physicality – impediment or vehicle?

R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoye, *Toledot Yaakov Yosef, Mishpatim s. 42*

To achieve proper *devekut* with God, materiality must be indulged by means of happiness in God. Otherwise, the darkness of matter will impede form from attaining *devekut*.

In keeping with this insight, I heard a resolution of a difficulty raised by the Tosafot to the Talmud, tractate *Beitsa* 15b. The Talmud teaches that the Holy One says to Israel, 'Borrow on My account (to buy wine) so as to recite the Kiddush, sanctifying the Sabbath day; have faith in Me and I shall pay you back. Now, the Tosafot raise the question that this conflicts with another statement by the Sages: 'Better make your Sabbath like a weekday than resort to the help of others' (*Pesachim* 112a; *Shabbat* 118a).

I heard from the Magid, R. (Menahem) Mendel (of Bar) that *levu alai* has two meanings; one, 'borrow for Me' (on My account), and two, 'be attached to Me' and that one depends on the other. That is, to bind and attach oneself to God, it is necessary to make the body and material substance joyous so that they not impede the happiness of the soul and its attachment - *devekut* to Him.

In this manner, the answer to our question may be understood. *Levu alai*, if you will borrow money so that you can attach yourself to Me, then I shall pay you back. However, if you borrow only for your own pleasure, then better make *your* Sabbath into a weekday, and do not rely on others.

If you will ask: What do bodily needs such as eating and drinking have to do with *devekut* and attachment of the soul to Him, when the soul is altogether spiritual and not in need of eating and drinking? . . . The answer is that matter and body experience joy in *devekut* with the Lord only through the corporeal acts of eating and drinking. When this is lacking, the body is in sadness, and this prevents the soul from attaching itself to Him, for such a union can take place only in joy. Thus, 'Borrow on My account' to keep matter happy, so that both matter and spirit will be satisfied.

This is like the parable of the prince who was exiled by his father and fell in with people of low station. After many years, a letter from the king finally arrived for him. The prince wanted to celebrate and invite the others to share his happiness, but he knew that they would not understand his joy from the letter. And so he ordered drinks for all the lowlife, so that they might rejoice with the material while he rejoiced with the spiritual.

e. 'Worship through corporeity' – *Avodah be-gashmiyut* and repairing the world

Proverbs 3:6 Acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will guide your paths.

משלי ג, ו בכל־דרכיך דעהו והוא ישר ארחתיך:

R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, *Me'or einayim*, Beshalah 170-171 (in the name of R. Dov Ber, Magid of Mezerich) – translation by Ariel Even Mayse, *Speaking Infinities*, p. 65)

My teacher often referred to this as “mundane matters conducted in a purely holy manner.”<sup>114</sup> Even acts that appear to be mundane should be carried out in a pure and holy way, since there is Torah in everything. In eating, for example, how much Torah and how many paths [of service] are to be found, [beginning with] washing one's hands. So too in matters of business.

My master said that the lifeblood of these things lies in the Torah and laws that are to be found within them. God and Torah are one, so that everything has some relationship to Torah, even the lowliest creature.<sup>115</sup>

R. Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoye, *Ben porat yosef* 16a

“Moshe spoke to Hashem, saying: ‘May Hashem, God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly, who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and bring them in; and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd.’” (Numbers 27:16-17)

In the name of my master, on the verse, ‘A man who shall take them out and in’: For the leader of the generation is empowered to raise up all the words and all the stories of the people of his time, to re-join the physical to the spiritual, like those two jesters etc. (*Taanit* 22a). So he taught.

ר' יעקב יוסף מפולנאה, בן פורת יוסף דף ט"ז ע"א  
(במדבר כז, טז-יז) יפקד ידוד אלקי הרוחת לכל בשר איש על העדה: אשר יצא לפניהם ואשר יבא לפניהם ואשר יוציאם ואשר יביאם ולא תהיה עדת ידוד כצאן אשר אין להם רעה.  
כתבתי בשם מורי זלה"ה ביאור פסוק 'פקוד ה' איש אשר יוציאם ואשר יביאם': כי ראש הדור יוכל להעלות כל הדיבורים והסיפורים של אנשי דורו, לקשר הגשמי ברוחני כמו תרי בדחי וכו' (תענית כ"ב א), ודברי פי חכם חן: