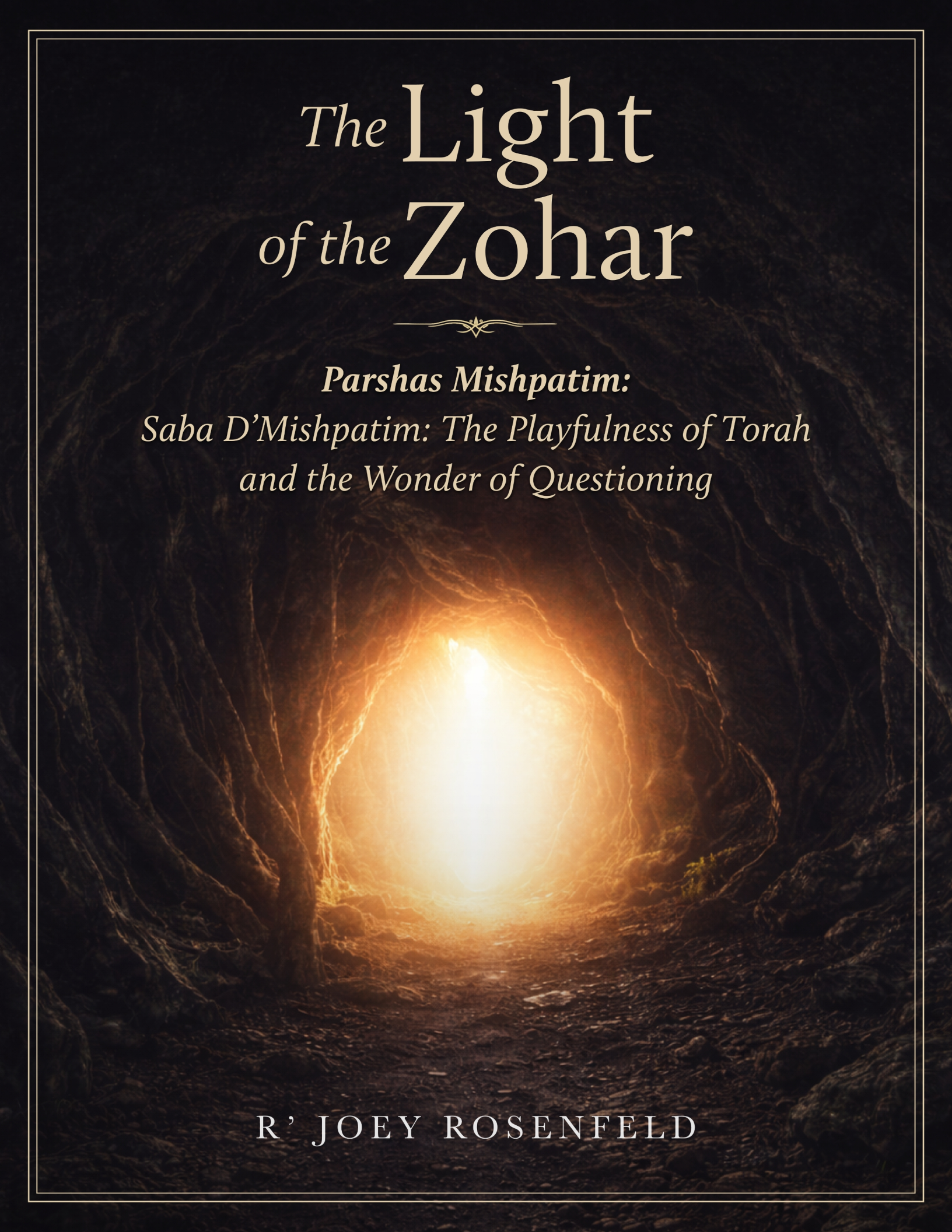


The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a dark, cavernous tunnel. The walls are rugged and textured, with some small plants visible on the right side. A bright, glowing light emanates from the end of the tunnel, creating a strong contrast with the dark surroundings. The light is warm and golden, suggesting a source of illumination or hope.

The Light *of the* Zohar



*Parshas Mishpatim:
Saba D'Mishpatim: The Playfulness of Torah
and the Wonder of Questioning*

R' JOEY ROSENFELD

— *The Light of the Zohar* —

Parshas Mishpatim:

**Saba D'Mishpatim: The Playfulness of
Torah and the Wonder of Questioning**



R' JOEY ROSENFELD

רבי חייא יוסי אָרעוּ חד ליליא במגדל דְּצור. אַתְאַרְחוּ תַּמָּן וְחדו דָּא בְּדָא. אָמר רבי יוסי, כַּמָּה חֲדַינָא דְחַמִּינָא אַנְפִּי שְׂכִינְתָא, דְּהַשְׁתָּא בְּכָל אַרְתָּא דָּא, אַצְטַעֲרָנָא בְּחֲדָא סָבָא, טַיִיעָא, דְּהָהָא שְׂאִיל לִי כָּל אַרְתָּא.

מָאן הוּא גִּחְשָׁא, דְּפֶרַח בְּאוּרָא, וְאֶזֶיל בְּפֶרוּדָא, וּבִין כַּד וּבִין כַּד, אֵית גִּיחְתָּא לְחַד גַּמְלָה, דְּשָׂכִיב בֵּין שְׁנוּי. שְׂרִי בְּחַבּוּרָא וְסִיִּים בְּפֶרוּדָא. וּמָאִי אִיהוּ גִשְׁרָא, דְּקָא מְקַנָּא, בְּאִילָן דְּלֹא הָהָה. בְּנוּי דְּאֶתְגַּזְלוּ, וְלֹאוּ מִן בְּרִיין. דְּאֶתְבְּרִיאוּ בְּאַתֵּר דְּלֹא אֶתְבְּרִיאוּ. כַּד סִלְקִין גִּחְתִּין, כַּד גִּחְתִּין סִלְקִין. תְּרִין דְּאִינוּן חַד, וְחַד דְּאִינוּן תְּלָתָא. מַהוּ עוֹלִימָתָא שְׂפִירָתָא, וְלִית לָהּ עֵינִין, וְגוּפָא טְמִירָתָא וְאֶתְגַּלְיָא, אִיהִי נִפְקַת בְּצַפְרָא, וְאֶתְכַפְּסִיאת בִּימָמָא. אֶתְקַשְׁטַת בְּקִשּׁוּטִין דְּלֹא הָווּ.

כָּל דָּא שְׂאִיל בְּאַרְתָּא, וְאַצְטַעֲרָנָא. וְהַשְׁתָּא אֵית לִי גִיחְתָּא. דְּאִילוּ הָיוּנָא בְּחֲדָא, אֶתְעַסְקָנָא בְּמַלִּי דְּאוּרִייתָא. מַה דְּהָיוּנָן בְּמַלִּין אַתְרָנִין דְּתַהוּ. אָמר רבי חייא, וְהָהוּא סָבָא טַיִיעָא, יְדַעַת בֵּיה כְּלוּם. אָמר לִיה, יְדַעְנָא. דְּלִית מַמְשׁוּ בְּמַלּוּי. דְּאִילוּ הָהָה יָדַע, יִפְתַּח בְּאוּרִייתָא, וְלֹא הָהָה אַרְתָּא בְּרִיקְנִיָּא. אָמר רבי חייא, וְהָהוּא טַיִיעָא אֵית הָבָא, דְּהָא לְזַמְנִין בְּאִינוּן רִיקְנִין, יִשְׁפַּח גְּבֵר וְגִין דְּדַחֲבָא. אָמר לִיה, הָא הָבָא אִיהוּ, וְאַתְקִין חֲמַרְיָה בְּמִיכְלָא.

קְרוּ לִיה, וְאַתָּא לְקַמִּיָּהוּ. אָמר לוֹן, הַשְׁתָּא תְּרִין אִינוּן תְּלַת, וְתַלַּת אִינוּן בְּחַד. אָמר רבי יוסי, לֹא אֲמִינָא לָךְ, דְּכָל מַלּוּי רִיקְנִין, וְאִינוּן בְּרִיקְנִיָּא, יִתִּיב קַמִּיָּהוּ.

אָמר לוֹן רַבָּנָן, אָנָּא טַיִיעָא אֶתְעַבִּידָנָא, וּמִיּוֹמִין זַעֲרִין, דְּהָא בְּקַדְמִיתָא לֹא הָיוּנָא טַיִיעָא, אָכֹל בְּרָא חַד זַעֲרָא אֵית לִי, וְיִתְבִּית לִיה בְּבִי סְפָרָא, וּבַעֲיָנָא דִּישְׁתַּדֵּל בְּאוּרִייתָא. וְכַד אָנָּא אֶשְׁכַּחְנָא חַד מִרְבָּנָן דְּאֶזֶיל בְּאַרְתָּא, אָנָּא טַעֲיִין אַבְתְּרִיָּה, וְהָאִי יוֹמָא, חֲשִׁיבָנָא דְּאַשְׁמַע מַלִּין חֲדַתִּין בְּאוּרִייתָא, וְלֹא שְׁמַעְנָא מְדִי.

אָמר ר' יוסי, בְּכָל מַלִּין דְּשְׁמַעְנָא דְּקֶאמְרַת, לֹא תוֹוֶהָנָא, אֲלֵא מַחַד. אוּ אֲנֵת בְּשִׁטּוּתָא אֲמַרַת, אוּ מַלִּין רִיקְנִין אִינוּן. אָמר הָהוּא סָבָא, וּמָאן אִיהִי. אָמר עוֹלִימָתָא שְׂפִירָתָא וְכו'.

פֶּתַח הָהוּא סָבָא וְאָמר, (תהילים קי"ח:ו'-ז') יי' לִי לֹא אִירָא מַה יַּעֲשֶׂה לִי אָדָם. יי' לִי בַּעֲזָרִי וְגו'. טוֹב לַחֲסוֹת בְּיַי' וְגו'. כַּמָּה טְבִין וְנַעֲמִיִין וְיִקְרִין וְעֶלְאִין מַלִּין דְּאוּרִייתָא, וְאָנָּא הֵיכִי אִימָא קָמִי רַבָּנָן, דְּלֹא שְׁמַעְנָא מִפּוֹמִיָּהוּ עַד הַשְׁתָּא, אֲפִילוּ מִלָּה תְּדָא. אָכֹל אֵית לִי לְמִימֵר, דְּהָא לִית כְּסוּפָא כָּלֵל לְמִימֵר מַלִּי דְּאוּרִייתָא קָמִי כָּלֵא.

Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Yosi happened one night to arrive at the Tower of Tyre. They lodged there and rejoiced with one another.

Rabbi Yosi said:

“How joyful I am that I merited to behold the face of the Shekhinah. For along this entire journey I was distressed by a single old man—a traveler—who kept questioning me the whole way.

He said to me:

‘Who is the serpent that flies through the air and goes in separation, and yet, between this and that, finds rest upon a single ant that lies between states of change? It begins in union and ends in separation.

And who is the eagle that nests in a tree that never was—whose children were stolen and are not among created beings, beings created in a place where they themselves were not created? When they ascend, they descend; when they descend, they ascend—two that are one, and one that is three.

And who is the beautiful maiden, fair in appearance, who has no eyes—whose body is concealed and revealed—who goes out in the morning and is hidden by day, adorned with adornments that never were?’

All of this he asked along the road, and I was distressed. But now I am at ease. For had we been alone, we would have occupied ourselves with words of Torah, instead of these other words—words of chaos.”

Rabbi Hiyya said:

“And that old traveling man—did you understand anything of him?”

He said to him:

“I understood that there is no substance at all in his words. For had he known, he would have opened with Torah, and the road would not have remained empty.”

Rabbi Hiyya said:

“But that traveler is here—for sometimes within those very emptinesses one finds vessels of gold.”

He said to him:

“Here he is,” and he prepared his donkey at the inn.

They called him, and he came before them. He said to them:

“Now the two are three, and the three are one.”

Rabbi Yosi said:

“Did I not tell you that all his words are emptiness, and that he sits before us in emptiness?”

The old man said to them:

“Rabbis, I became a traveler only in recent days. For at first I was not a traveler. But I have one small son, and I placed him in the house of study, and I desired that he exert himself in Torah. And whenever I find one of the sages walking along the road, I follow after him. And today I thought that I would hear new words of Torah—but I heard nothing at all.”

Rabbi Yosi said:

“In all the things that I heard you say, I did not wonder—except for one. Either you spoke in foolishness, or your words are empty.”

The old man said:

“And which one is it?”

He said:

“The beautiful maiden, and so on.”

The old man opened and said:

“Hashem is with me; I shall not fear—what can a human being do to me?

Hashem is with me among my helpers...

It is better to take refuge in Hashem...

How good, and pleasant, and precious, and exalted are the words of Torah! And how can I stand before the rabbis, when I have not heard from their mouths until now even a single word? Yet this I have to say: there is no shame whatsoever in speaking words of Torah before everyone.”

The Unity of Moshe and Rashbi

Be'ezrat Hashem, we are continuing our weekly series of shiurim on the Zohar HaKadosh, where we attempt to illuminate the Torah of Moshe Rabbeinu through the vessels of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. This is not an external comparison between two great Tzaddikim, but an effort to reveal their inner unity: the unification of the *Chochmah* of Moshe with the *Binah* of Rebbe Shimon, which discloses the secret of *Keter*. Moshe Rabbeinu embodies *ayin*, the nothingness of *Chochmah* that precedes articulation. Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai embodies *Binah*, the descent of Torah into separation, structure, and the lived worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah. When these two are held together rather than opposed, the light of *Keter* is revealed.

The unique quality of *Keter* is that it extends fully in both directions at once. It goes all the way above and all the way below. *Chochmah*, the *ayin* of Moshe Rabbeinu, recoils from descent into *yesh*, fearing the density and fragmentation of articulated reality. *Binah*, by contrast, appears externally congealed, bound to the worlds of

separation in such a way that it seems unable to re-ascend into the simplicity

of *Atzilut*. Each perspective, when held alone, becomes impoverished. When a person is only above, they lose the capacity to be below. When a person is only below, they lose access to what is above. *Keter* reveals that this opposition is illusory: *ayin* and *yesh*, above and below, are present simultaneously in a single living reality.

Bittul and the Experience of Distance

On the level of *Chochmah*, this unity appears as *bittul*, the annihilation of concealment. The mind and heart become a *merkavah* for the infinite light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, unobstructed by inner resistance or self-concern. Nothing conceals the light, and nothing needs to be defended. On the level of *Binah*, however, the experience is often fractured and painful. A person may feel that at best they are pretending, gesturing toward a connection that once existed, attempting to spark a memory of what it meant to be close to HaKadosh Baruch Hu in another time or another place.

These two experiences seem to stand in stark opposition, yet together they reveal the singularity of *Keter*. The light of significance, potency, and hyper-essentiality is present both in the nothingness of *Chochmah* and in the somethingness of *Binah*. The innerpoint that a person feels in their heart at any given moment—whether clarity or confusion, elevation or descent—is already an expression of connection. *Keter* holds both states at once, revealing that descent never negates presence and ascent never erases form.

When the Wells Spread Outward

This is the secret of “*Eimatai ka’asi Mar? kesheyefutzu mayanotecha chutzah.*” The wellsprings are not only those of Moshe Rabbeinu, the *maayanot* of Chochmah, nor only those of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, the *maayanot* of Binah. Redemption emerges when both spread outward together, beyond their natural boundaries, beyond the reality in which they operate as opposing sides of the map. When Chochmah and Binah overflow together, a deeper unity is revealed.

The name *Mar*, formed from Moshe and Rashbi, has the gematria of 240, nullifying Amalek, whose gematria is also 240—the force of safek and doubt.

The unification of Moshe Rabbeinu and Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai reveals the power of Abba and Imma Ila’in, which in turn discloses Keter Elyon. Doubt is not defeated through argument, but dissolved through inclusion.

Essential and Incidental

From the perspective of *Chochmah*, reality divides into essential and inessential. From the perspective of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*, everything appears inessential. *Chochmah* looks downward and dismisses detail; *Binah* becomes scattered among particulars it cannot yet integrate. *Keter* reveals that this division itself is false.

When the worlds of separation ascend back toward *Atzilut*, the incidental is revealed as essential. The frames, narrative structures, and seemingly marginal elements of Torah are shown to carry primordial potency. This is the secret of Rebbe Nachma’s *Sippurei Ma’asivot Mishanim Kadmoniyot*. The story itself is not decoration; it is revelation. The light of *Keter* reveals that everything, above and below, central and peripheral is significant, even the Nachash, even the details that appear to obstruct rather than illuminate.

The Narrative World of the Zohar

This is why the Zohar HaKadosh unfolds through strange and wondrous pathways: riddles, donkey drivers, anonymous figures, winding roads, winds through trees, bird sounds, mountains, cities, emotional states, concealments, tears, ambivalence, disgust, and friendship. The walking and talking of the chaveraya, the northern skies of Eretz Yisrael, are all infused with hyper-significance.

When the Zohar is read while holding both the light of Moshe Rabbeinu and the vessels of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, it becomes a text of *geulah*. Redemption is the capacity to look at every aspect of life, even the boring, insignificant, or seemingly worthless, and discover that it was always a meeting point with the infinite light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu through *deveikus* and *emunah*. In that place, *sha'ashuim* emerge: the pleasure and playfulness of rediscovering faith precisely through descent. This is *Keter*, the revelation that what appeared insignificant was always already saturated with hyper-significance.

The Vessels of Mishpatim After the Light of Har Sinai

This dynamic appears concretely in Parshas Mishpatim. After Matan Torah, after *Yitro*, after thunder and revelation, one might expect continued transcendence and ecstatic clarity. Instead, the Torah descends abruptly into Mishpatim: laws, damages, obligations, punishments, and the complex reality of living within a society governed by Torah law.

Mishpatim is detail upon detail, smallness upon smallness, especially when contrasted with the grandeur and general light of the *Aseret HaDibrot*. Yet this descent is not a retreat from revelation; it is revelation itself. Torah unfolds as *Chochmah* followed by *Binah*, Moshe followed by Rashbi. Only by holding both can one uncover *Keter*, the hyper-significance of Divine light embedded within the smallest details of lived reality.

Law, Severity, and the Kafkaesque

When Mishpat is encountered externally, detached from its inner source, it becomes harsh and absurd. Law begins to function as an autonomous force, severed from love and relationship. Franz Kafka articulated this terror with precision: law without intimacy, judgment without presence, a system that crushes rather than redeems. This is Mishpat stripped of its heart.

The Torah insists otherwise. HaKadosh Baruch Hu loves Mishpat deeply, but He loves Klal Yisrael even more. When law and the Jewish people appear to collide, divine compassion prevails. This is what Rebbe Nachman teaches and what the Shpoler Zeide embodied when he demanded justice for the Jewish people by “taking Heaven to court.” Mishpat must be lived as a living Torah. Severed from its source, it becomes a coffin; inhabited inwardly, it becomes a vessel of redemption.

Knowing That We Do Not Know

The Mei HaShiloach teaches that only a fool believes understanding is possible. Wisdom lies in knowing that one cannot know. Even Moshe Rabbeinu reaches the limit of comprehension and must stop. The Torah returns us again and

again to this truth: *lo yada*. I do not know. This is the opening of *Eleh HaMishpatim*. The law itself gestures beyond itself, demanding humility rather than mastery.

When the eyes of Chochmah are given to Malchut, this Torah becomes Torat Chaim. Every letter reveals worlds, souls, and divinity. Torah becomes *techiyas ha'mesim*.

Entering the Inner Chamber of Mishpatim

In Parshas Mishpatim we come in contact with one of the most beautiful and luminous elements of the Zohar, referred to as the *Saba d'Mishpatim*. The Saba—the old teacher, the old man—appears specifically here, and the teachings that gather around this area of the Zohar are seen as some of the most significant expressions of the light of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai in the Zohar itself.

Up there with the *Idra Rabba*, *Idra Zuta*, and *Safra D'Tzniuta*, the *Saba deMishpatim* stands as a fundamental expression of the Zohar's own inner framework, a subtext through which the Zohar describes itself. To enter the *Saba deMishpatim* is to enter the world of the neshama, the five levels of

Naran-Chai that compose the hidden processes of the soul.

In addition to the content, the *Saba D'Mishpatim* always brings us face to face with the heartbreakingly beautiful narrative context through which the secrets are revealed.

The Doubled Portion of the Zohar: Torah and Derech Eretz

The Zohar offers a doubled portion in this world. It offers us Torah, and it offers us *derech erez* that preceded the Torah . That *derech erez* is revealed through the walking tales of the *Chavraya Kadisha*, along the roads of Northern Eretz Yisrael.

It is the joy discovered along the path of companionship, conversation, and mutual connection to a pillar—the *tzaddik*—to Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. It is the opening upon the path of living in the world of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai and to take joy in the friendship of those who find themselves in that world.

It wasn't only the holy Tannaim who lived with Rebbe Shimon, for every person can find themselves in that world. Ultimately, the path is one that reveals the light of friendship, the secret of Rebbe Shimon's

announcement: “*anon b'chavivusa talya milsa*”, by us it is all dependent on love. No matter what is going on, no matter what the Torah is saying, the relationship of the *Chavraya Kadisha*—between a person and their friends, between one person and themselves, is not an incidental narrative context. It is a fundamental element of Torah itself.

Rebbe Akiva's Legacy Revealed in the Life of Rashbi

This is what Rebbe Shimon learned from Rebbe Akiva. Rebbe Akiva understood the secret of *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocha*, the fundamental principle of the Torah. Rav Yitzchak Meyer Morgenstern *shlita* points out based on certain understandings of the Gemara, that Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai is counted in a paradoxical way amongst the students of Rebbe Akiva: he is counted among the twenty-four thousand students who died, and he is also counted among the five new talmidim who came about afterwards..

Rebbe Shimon stands in a transitional space, a bridge between the old path of Rebbe Akiva and the renewed understanding of Rebbe Akiva's path. The first world of Rebbe Akiva's students lost sight of the true meaning

of interpersonal respect and presence; and the second world of his students was the rectification. The fact that the light of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai is reflected at both stages reveals to us that he was able to transform the difficulty into the very source of the rectified light.

Rectifying Respect Through the Secret

It is the recognition that each person carries a secret that I can never fully grasp that leads towards healing. Each person carries a depth that I cannot access, and when I orient myself toward that unknowability of the other, I arrive at a place of graciousness and respect. The self-nullification that emerges from recognizing the other's irreducible secret becomes the place where I encounter *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

That place, which I have no access to, reminds me that each and every person I encounter is a *merkavah* to the *Shechinah*. Each person becomes an opportunity for me to nullify myself in the presence of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* again.

When each person carries themselves with *bittul* toward the other, the secret of friendship is revealed—not as dependency, not as taking, not as a

subtle economy of jealousy and lack, but as a relation that emerges from a sense of trust, enoughness, and vulnerable openness.

Connection Through Mutual Difference

Friendship is the secret of differential-connection: my friend can do this, I can do that, and both of us can't do what the other can do. And through that interconnection and interinclusion of one soul with the other, we become capable of fulfilling each other in a non-competitive way.

Then we can convey to the world what this relationship is meant to convey—the strengthening of spirit that emerges when we touch the secret of “*oh chavrusa oh misusa*,” either friendship or a certain aspect of death. Without mutual appreciation, without love at the heart of all things, the whole structure collapses. This is the light of the Zohar HaKadosh: not only Torah, but the pathway of friendship that leads to the Torah itself.

The Narrative Structure as Torah Itself

In the Zohar HaKadosh, we begin paying attention to the narrative elements—things that are not immediately connected to information, not rooted explicitly in particular teachings. We focus on the posture of experience, the shape in which the Tzaddikim lived their lives. The stances of the companions, the exclamations of joy and excitement, the transitions between teachings, the pauses between the words, the atmosphere of relationship—these are not incidental backgrounds, they are the heart of the Torah itself.

As the *Ateres Tzvi of Ziditchov*, known as the *Sar HaZohar*, points out: every expression of speech, every physical movement, every relational attitude is meant to convey something significant. If a Tanna jumped up in excitement prior to teaching; or if he was silent, if he cried, laughed, smiled, or entered stunned silence—each one represents a different mode of encountering *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

The Zohar is saturated with spiritual moods that can be mined and applied to the phenomenology of everyday life. It contains the secret of *derech eretz* that

precedes the Torah in living and breathing form.

A Surprise Introduction That Displaces the Soul

At the beginning of the *Saba deMishpatim*, before we enter the astonishing teachings themselves, we encounter one of the most poetically evocative introductions in the Zohar HaKadosh. It does something to the person who reads it.

It brings the person into the content by displacing them, returning them to wonderment, forcing them to admit: I don't know. What I thought was up is down, what I thought was down is up. Before we can enter the teachings of the transmigration of souls, we must first encounter it within our inner life, the *galgal* of the mind when it embraces ignorance.

This is the inner language of *Parshas Mishpatim* in the Zohar: "*These are the laws...this is the secret of gilgulim*". It is the secret that the Baal HaSulam refers to when he speaks of the multiple *gilgulim* each person goes through in their lives, each day, each moment: the *galgal hachayim*, the shifts, orientations, and reaction-formations that we must form in response to the spinning wheel of the day. These are *gilgulim*, the

various iterations of self that we express in our daily lives.

Faceless Judgment and the Non-Centrality of Self

The Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh describes this concept as follows: when a person finds themselves held in judgment for something that they know is not fair, they feel they're right, but the world doesn't receive it, they feel unheard. If they are being truly honest with themselves and the unfairness seems immovable, then the work is not to force reality to comply, but rather acceptance.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that the ultimate reason for this type of experience is to remind us of the fact that we are not always the main character in our stories. If we attach ourselves to the *raza de-gilgula*, then we can accept that certain elements, like we learn from Moshe Rabbeinu, stand beyond rational reason.

That is the light of *gilgulim*: that things continue even after they end, and things end even as they continue. Existence and experience is not a static possession. It is a continuity, an ever-evolving process that began before us and will continue after us.

Migdala de'Tzor: Awakening and Impermanence

With that orientation to Parshas Mishpatim, we can now enter the opening of the *Saba deMishpatim*. I cannot claim to have any true understanding of these words, but I can read the words and bring out elements that the Tzaddikim point to—Rebbe Nachman, the Sod Yescharim Radzin, Komarno, Ziditchov, and the Gra.

Rebbe Chiya ve-Rebbe Yossi i'aru chad layla b'migdala d'Tzor. Rebbe Chiya and Rebbe Yossi awoke one evening and set out towards the Migdal of Tzor. The word *i'aru* is awakening, but it is also *arai*—impermanent, happening, passing.

The nightscape of the Zohar, the nighttime of a person's life—contains the deepest significance of friendship, the place where *chavivusa talya milsa* means everything. Yet each awakening is also marked by a sense of transience. This is the clear air of the Zohar, the great depths that are hidden away in the northern night air that blows through things, reminding a person that the main thing is breath and that everything else is merely passing. .

Joy Along the Way

We get a sense of this fleeting presence that remains by way of an irreducible trace when the Zohar ends a teaching with the phrase: “*ilulei lo atinu le'alma ela l'mishma da di*”, *Had we not come to the world except to hear this, it would have been enough*. But even when they are expressing that it is enough, it's never enough, for after the teaching is told they walk along further towards the next incoming light. This is not rooted in dissatisfaction, but rather the soul's craving, not for information but for the root of Torah which is the Giver of the Torah, Who can never fully be grasped.

This sense of endlessness is exactly what gives birth to the Zohar's light of infinite interpretations: every *passuk* becomes a poetic field for spiritual work, on the inside and on the outside.

Izdamnu teman ve'chadayu da be'da.
They met and there was joy, a joy of companionship and connection. When two people meet, something emerges: joy, a settling of the heart, a certain alleviation of the burden of the grind.

The Kotzker Rebbe says that an angel cannot stand where two Jews are together, for there is a deep holiness in the mere act of meeting itself.

Seeing the Face of the Shechinah in the Other

Rebbe Yossi says: ***kama chadina dechamina anpei Shechinta***, *How glad I am to see you, because seeing your face is like seeing the face of the Shechinah*. This is not poetic excess. It is a precise orientation to reality. Each and every person I encounter in this world whether it be the stranger, the friend, the one on the path, the one off the path, the one meandering, the one walking straight—is another *gilgul*, another recycling of meaning placed before me so that I can learn how to respond properly.

When a person learns to see each encounter with the other as a messenger, as a *merkavah* for the Shechinah, then they are able to say honestly: I am glad to see you like one is glad to see the face of the Shechinah. It is not that the other person becomes divine; it is that the place where I relinquish mastery over the other becomes the place of divine encounter.

Joy That Is Also Relief

But Rebbe Yossi's gladness is also layered. It is not only the joy of seeing his friend. It is also the relief from something that preceded it. As Rebbe Nachman writes, the voices of this

world—even the voices of Torah—are still cut through with lack, because this world itself is deficient, for it is not HaKadosh Baruch Hu. *Toras Hashem temimah meshivat nafesh*, the Torah restores the lack, but the lack continues, always so as to ensure that desire remains alive.

There is a sense of joy that comes from something positive, and there is a sense of joy that comes from the relief from something burdensome. Both are present in the Zohar HaKadosh. Both are legitimate movements of the soul, and both are part of the way Torah functions within the human psyche.

The Stranger Who Puts Me Into Question

Istarcha bechada Saba Taya. Rebbe Yossi now explains that this entire trip he was followed by an elderly donkey driver, a carrier, a stranger who bothered him with even stranger questions. But the Zohar is precise: it does not say that he merely asked questions. It says ***dehava she'al li***—he put me into question.

When a person encounters something strange, something foreign, something that does not fit neatly into their framework, the questioning rebounds inward. The presence of the other

destabilizes the self. And as Rebbe Nachman teaches, all questions collapse into one question: *eifo ani ba'olam?* Where am I in the world? Every question posed is the echo of HaKadosh Baruch Hu's call to Adam HaRishon: *Ayeka.*

When I ask myself where I am, I am answering for Adam. I am saying: I don't know where I am either. I am on the path. And that itself is the beginning of the answer.

Riddles That Displace the Mind

And the donkey driver asks: ***Man hu nachsha deparach ba'avira ve'azil b'piruda?*** *Who is the snake that flies in the air and goes in separation? Whether flying or resting, there is a singular ant between its teeth that finds calmness. It begins in connection and ends in separation.*

These are not random riddles. Each one is an awakening from below, the ascension of desire that emerges from a sense of lack. Each question forces the mind to release its grip on prior certainty. It is not destruction; it is reorientation. As Rebbe Nachman teaches in his stories, deep understanding comes through the *nekudat has'chok*, the point of laughter, where the mind cracks because it

realizes it does not know what it thought it knew.

This is the secret of *milsa d'bedichusa* that precedes all revelation. It is the same displacement that preceded Matan Torah, the great “joke” of *kafa aleihem har k'gigis*. As if HaKadosh Baruch Hu could ever want to truly destroy us. The *ke'ilu* is essential for it places us within a world of make-believe and faith. The breath held before the punchline is the very space where the deepest Torah enters.

The Emergence of the Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes

The riddles deepen. *The eagle that rests on a tree that never was. Created and not created at once. Ascending while descending, descending while ascending. Two that are one and one that is three.* And then the central image: ***ma hu ulamta shapirta d'leis lah einin***—*what is the beautiful maiden without eyes, whose body is concealed and revealed at once, who appears at night and hides by day, who adorns herself with adornments that never were.*

Kol da sha'il b'orcha v'itztarna. All of this he asked me along the way, and I was bothered. Being put into question hurts. Before insight comes, there is disorientation. There is resistance.

There is the pain of feeling that something stable is about to be overturned.

This is always the first stage. Before a new way of seeing arrives, the old way must loosen. And that loosening does not feel holy at first. It feels disturbing.

From Disturbance to Rest

V'hashta is lei nicha. *Now I have calm. Now I have rest.* Rebbe Yossi reflects that had he been alone along the path, then at least he would have been engaged in words of Torah. Instead, he says, he was engaged in ***millin achronin d'tohu***—other words, chaotic words.

But this is the irony. The words of *tohu* feel like waste only before their purpose is revealed. The world of *tohu* is ultimately higher than the world of *tikkun* in certain aspects, and its entire function is to bring disorder into a higher form of order—***oros d'tohu b'keilim d'tikkun.*** But before that happens, *tohu* feels like noise, emptiness, and wasted time.

Disorientation and Learning: “Does He Know Anything?”

Rebbe Chiya responds: ***v'hahu saba taya yadas b'klum?*** Does this donkey driver know anything at all? Rebbe

Yossi answers sharply: *there is no substance to his words*. If he knew Torah, he would have opened his mouth with Torah and not dragged me through emptiness.

Yet it is precisely this emptiness that serves as the doorway towards illumination. The donkey driver is teaching the secret of the vacant space, the secret of tzimtzum. At first, every concealment feels like absence of presence. Only later does it reveal itself as a higher form of presence.

The entire *Saba deMishpatim* unfolds this truth: *megaleh tefach u'mechaseh tefachayim*. Torah never allows itself to be fully grasped. Even what we understand remains only a permutation, a turning of the same ancient letters revealing new Names and lights of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Finding the Gold Hidden Among the Empty Ones

Rebbe Chiya answers Rebbe Yossi, and he gently pushes back against his certainty. ***Ve'hahu taya is hacha?*** Is that donkey driver here? Is the one who followed you still with us? And then Rebbe Chiya adds a line that quietly overturns everything Rebbe Yossi just said: ***de'halu zimnan be-inan reikanin yishkach gavar zagen de-dehaba***.

Sometimes, it is specifically among those who appear empty that one finds great treasure.

This is a complete reversal of orientation. What appeared as emptiness, as wasted time, as chaotic words, may in fact be the very place where *zahav* is concealed. Gold does not shine on the surface. Gold is extracted from darkness. And in the inner language of the Zohar, *zahav* is not just wealth; it is *gevurot hamtukim*, severity sweetened from within itself. It is the fullness of the moon, the time of Shlomo HaMelech, when malchut reaches completion and concealment is revealed to have always been a mode of revelation.

The Full Moon of Concealment

This is the secret of *ma'alat ha-zahav al ha-kesef*. Silver shines immediately; gold requires excavation. Silver corresponds to open chesed, to clarity. Gold corresponds to something deeper, something that only emerges after patience, after endurance, after being willing to remain in not-knowing. Rebbe Chiya is teaching Rebbe Yosi that perhaps the donkey driver was not empty at all, but rather operating from a depth that cannot be recognized

through familiar markers of Torah speech.

And this reframing prepares the soul for the central symbol of the sugya: the *ulamata shapirta de-leit bah einin*, the beautiful maiden without eyes. Malchut at its deepest point appears devoid of vision, devoid of *hashgacha*, devoid of illumination. And yet this very absence is the place where the most refined gold can be found.

Calling the Donkey Driver Closer

Amar leh ha'hachi ihu. Rebbe Yosi responds: yes, he is here. And the Zohar notes what the donkey driver is doing at that moment—*v'atkin chamreh be'michla*. He is tending to his animals, preparing their food. The image is precise. The one who carries the deepest secrets is occupied with the lowest, most bodily task.

This is the work of the wandering, hidden tzaddikim. They are not positioned above the world; they are embedded within it. They tend to their animals. They carry burdens. They move slowly. They appear unremarkable. And precisely through that posture they carry something that cannot be accessed through overt spiritual performance.

They call him over, and he comes close. And now the donkey driver begins to speak.

Two That Become Three, Three That Become One

Hashta trein inun tlas, v'tlas inun k'chad. What was once two is now three, and what is three is now one. Again riddles. more displacement. The donkey driver is not offering explanations; he is shifting the ground beneath their thinking.

Rebbe Yossi reacts sharply. *Lo amina lach?* Did I not tell you that all his words are emptiness? That they are words that operate in emptiness? But Rebbe Chiya does not argue. He does something else. *Yasiv kamei.* He sits before him.

This is a decisive moment. Rebbe Chiya chooses posture over argument. He allows himself to be taught. He places himself opposite the other, not above him. This is how Torah is received from a place that does not announce itself explicitly as Torah.

“I Am Only a Recent Worker”: Descending Into the World

Now the donkey driver speaks plainly. ***Rabbanan, anan taya is'avidna.*** Gentlemen, I am a worker. I have only recently taken on this work. Before this, he says, I was not a donkey driver. I was not down here, occupied with carrying and feeding animals.

Why am I here now? Because I have one son. And that son wants to engage in Torah. And in order for him to engage fully, I have descended into this work.

This is one of the most delicate revelations in the Zohar. The descent of the father is for the ascent of the son. The concealment of the teacher is for the revelation of the next generation. This is the secret of Rav Hamnuna Saba and his son, as we will see. The secret of Moshe Rabbeinu and Mashiach. *Mah shemo, mah shem beno.*

The Beit Midrash of the Sea

There are tzaddikim who belong to the land, who teach openly, who clarify. And there are tzaddikim who belong to the sea. The tzaddikim of the sea speak in riddles. They move beneath the surface. They awaken the soul not through explanation but through disorientation.

The Gra explains that before Mashiach, the *nistarot*, which were always likened to the sea, will be revealed as if it were dryland. Not by becoming less hidden, but by becoming accessible through concealment itself. The *yam ha'chochma*, the waters of primordial wisdom, begin to flow into the dry land itself.

This is the lineage of Moshe Rabbeinu—*min ha-mayim meshitihu*, and of Yonah, swallowed by the great fish. It is the secret of the Leviathan, for these are figures who disappear in order to reappear transformed.

“I Thought I Would Hear Something New”

The donkey driver continues. ***V'hai yoma chashvina d'ishma milin chadashan b'oraita.*** Today I thought I would hear something new in Torah. I thought I would hear a chiddush. ***V'lo shamna midai.*** And I heard nothing.

This is a joke, but it is a serious one. He did hear something. He heard the secret of *lo*. He heard the silence beneath speech. He heard the emptiness that precedes interpretation. He heard the white canvas upon which Torah is written. This is the deepest teaching of concealment: *ha'elem hu ha'gilui, v'ha'gilui hu ha'elem*. Revelation is

concealment, and concealment is revelation. When infinity appears openly, it overwhelms. Only when it is hidden can it be received.

The Love Sickness of Torah

This is why the *Saba deMishpatim* must be learned with the Baal HaSulam, with the *Matok Mi-Devash*. Because the sugya is not technical. It is about love. About the love sickness between the soul and the Torah. Each time one feels they have grasped it, it slips away, not to reject the learner, but to draw them closer.

This is the secret of Shir HaShirim. Of *eishet chayil ateret ba'alalah*, the forty-eight ways in which the Torah can be grasped. Torah does not submit to conquest. It invites relationship.

The Maiden Without Eyes Revisited

And so we return to the image that stands at the center of everything: the *ulamata shapirta de-leit bah einin*. Malchut as the beautiful maiden without eyes. A world that appears devoid of *hashgacha* or clarity, devoid of illumination.

The tzaddikim of Izhbitz and Radzin explain that this darkness of Malchus is not a flaw. It is the deepest revelation

through concealment itself. The appearance that there is no providence is itself the greatest hiding. And when a person allows their own eyes to illuminate reality again, they discover that *einei Hashem Elokecha bah me-reshit ha-shanah v'ad acharit ha-shanah*, for Hashem is in truth the only One Who actually exists.

Giving Eyes to the Darkness

During the six days of the week, malchus appears dark. It appears stuck. But when we enter Shabbat and gaze into the blackness of the Kiddush cup, as the Arizal teaches, we give eyes to the darkness. We elevate concealment. We reveal that what appeared empty was never empty at all.

And from that place emerge *kishutin de'lo havu*, adornments that never were. New lights drawn specifically from prior confusion. New Torah drawn from displacement. New clarity born from not knowing. This is the path of the *Saba deMishpatim*. Not certainty, but fidelity. Not mastery, but a relationship. Not light alone, but the courage to dwell in darkness until it reveals itself as light.

The Unanswerable Question

At the core of Mishpat lies Moshe Rabbeinu's question: *tzaddik vera lo, rasha vetov lo*. Is the world fair? Can justice be reconciled with experience? This is not a philosophical abstraction but a wound carried by Klal Yisrael from the moment of leaving Gan Eden.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu answers that this question cannot be resolved within time. Human consciousness sees fragments: past, present, and imagined future, while divine consciousness holds all moments as one. From below, the question burns painfully. From above, it dissolves. The suffering is real, but the answer is withheld, not out of cruelty, but because the answer belongs to a perspective that has not yet been revealed.

Concealment as Revelation

Every revelation of Torah is also concealment. In its essence, Torah is a Name of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, endless and ungraspable. Only through *tzimtzum* can it be received. Concealment and revelation are not opposites; they are mirrors. This dynamic governs Torah and life alike.

Saying Torah Without Fear

The Saba weeps before teaching, questioning whether the words should be withheld. He is answered: the impulse to speak Torah itself proves the presence of the *Shechinah*. Torah seeks utterance. No word of Torah is empty.

Hashem Elokai

The Saba opens with ***Hashem Elokai gadalta me'od***. Mercy and judgment, *ayin* and *yesh*, above and below, uniting as one. Even severity becomes a vessel for goodness. This is the beginning of faith. This is the Torah of the donkey driver, the Torah that redeems everything. Nothing is excluded. We await Mashiach, *oni ve-rochev al ha-chamor*, who will reveal these depths fully. Until then, the *neshama* of Moshe Rabbeinu speaks through the *tzaddikim*, teaching us to recognize significance everywhere and to trust that nothing is ever lost.

The Torah That Belongs to No One

At the heart of the *Saba de'Mishpatim* stands a profound hesitation. Before revealing the depths of Torah, the Saba cries. His tears are not weakness; they are discernment. He asks himself whether these words should be spoken at all. How much effort, how much

inner labor, how much *yegiah* did it take to cleave to these holy words, and now, should they be released in a single moment? The Torah he carries does not feel like a possession; it feels dangerous, precious, almost too alive to be exposed.

Yet he reminds himself of the verse ***al timna tov mi-be'alav***. Do not withhold good from its true owners. And who are the owners of Torah? Not the speaker, not the listener, but *Kudsha Brich Hu* and *Knesset Yisrael*. Every word of Torah belongs to the *yichud* itself, to the unification of above and below. Withholding Torah is not humility; it is a refusal to allow that unification to occur. The words do not belong to the one who speaks them, and therefore they cannot be guarded as private property.

Worthiness and the Impulse to Speak

The Saba questions further: how can he know that the moment is worthy, that the listeners are worthy, that the *Shechinah* is present? His answer is radical in its simplicity. If the impulse to speak Torah is present, then the Presence itself is already there. Torah does not arise in a vacuum. If words are stirring, if light is pressing toward

articulation, that itself is the sign that the *yichud* is taking place.

This overturns the usual anxiety of deservedness. The Saba teaches that the desire to reveal Torah is not generated by ego but by necessity. Torah seeks utterance because the unification of *Kudsha Brich Hu* and *Knesset Yisrael* depends upon it. In that sense, every genuine chiddush of Torah—no matter how small, no matter how private, participates in the ultimate *tikkun*, in the elevation of sparks from within the confusion of *klipat nogah*.

Shabbos and the Irreducible Trace That Remains

The Zohar now turns toward Shabbos, revealing another layer of concealment and revelation. On Shabbos, a *neshama yeseira* descends into a person, an additional soul drawn from the *Ilana de'Chayya*, the Tree of Life. This added soul allows a person to see only good, to inhabit a consciousness that is inaccessible during the week. It rests with the person throughout Shabbos, suffusing existence with calm and delight.

When Shabbos departs, the *neshama yeseira* ascends, but it does not vanish entirely. A trace remains. An irreducible impression is left behind, a memory of

possibility. This residue is not accidental; it is essential. It teaches that higher states are not foreign additions but revelations of what was already present in concealment. The ascent leaves behind a mark that reshapes the descent.

Tears as Transmission

The Saba's tears return here with deeper resonance. They are the tears of someone who knows that revelation always costs something, that every unveiling is also a loss. To speak Torah is to let go of something intimate, to allow it to pass beyond oneself. The tears are the price of transmission.

Yet withholding would be worse. Torah that is not given stagnates. The Saba understands that concealment which refuses revelation becomes its own form of blockage. True concealment serves revelation; false concealment prevents it. The tears mark the crossing of that threshold.

Hashem Elokai: Revealing the Light of the Pasuk

The Saba opens his teaching with the verse *Hashem Elokai gadalta me'od, hod v'hadar lavashta*. This verse is not poetry alone; it is a map of the sefirotic

structure of reality. *Hashem Elokai* signals the unification of mercy and judgment, of the Divine Name as it appears above and as it is experienced below. It is the language of faith at its root, the place where opposites are already reconciled.

Gadalta corresponds to *chesed*, the expansive goodness that precedes all differentiation. *Me'od* introduces *gevurah*, intensity, contraction, and power. This movement from *chesed* into *gevurah* is not a fall but a deepening. The very intensity that threatens harshness is what allows goodness to be forced into visibility within resistance.

When the Unifying Light of Tiferes Hesitates

Yet something striking occurs in the Zohar's reading of this verse. *Tiferet*, the *Ilana de'Chayya*, hesitates to appear explicitly. Why? Because unmitigated *gevurah*, the force of *me'od*, carries bitterness when isolated. *Tiferet* does not reject *gevurah*, but it refuses to stand alongside it until *gevurah* has been reincluded within *chesed*.

This is why Dovid HaMelech continues with *oteh or ka'simlah, noteh shamayim ka'yeriah*. Light is clothed; heavens are stretched. Instead of naming severity directly, the *pasuk*

reframes it within the harmony of *shamayim*, where fire and water coexist. Only then can *Tiferet* emerge without danger. This is not avoidance; it is a spiritual strategy.

Concealment as Compassion

Here the Zohar reveals something essential: sometimes concealment is not a lack of courage but an act of compassion. To expose severity prematurely is to invite collapse. True revelation waits until the vessels can hold what is revealed. This applies not only to cosmic structures but to personal *avodah*. There are truths that must remain concealed until the soul is able to receive them without breaking.

This is why the Torah speaks in riddles, narratives, and detours. Straight lines are not always merciful. The winding path protects both the light and the one who encounters it.

Torah as Living Process

The *Saba de'Mishpatim* is not merely teaching content; he is revealing what Torah is. Torah is not information. It is a living process of concealment and revelation, descent and ascent, *gilgul* after *gilgul*. Each word spoken reshapes

the world. Each silence preserves the possibility of future speech.

Every person, in every moment, stands at their own *Har Sinai*. The mind is *Sinai*. The thoughts are thunder and lightning. The Torah is given anew within the inner life of the individual. *Ki hem chayeinu ve'orech yameinu*, Torah is not something we possess; it is something we inhabit.

The Final Redemption of the Insignificant

All of this returns us to the Torah of the donkey driver. Redemption does not arrive through abstraction but through the refinement of the lowly, the bodily, the overlooked. Mashiach comes *oni ve'rochev al ha'chamor*, poor, riding a donkey—not as symbolism but as method. The final Torah is the Torah of *chumriyut* refined, of the body revealed as vessel rather than obstacle. Nothing is excluded from redemption. No moment is wasted. No descent is meaningless. Everything can be sweetened when seen through the light of *Keter*, where *ayin* and *yesh* are one.

Waiting With Confidence

Until that full revelation arrives, the *neshama* of Moshe Rabbeinu continues to speak through the mouths of the

tzaddikim of each generation. Their task is not to simplify reality but to reveal its depth, to teach us how to see significance where we least expect it, and to trust that even what feels like concealment is already part of revelation.

With this, we wait, not passively, but attentively, waiting for the redeemer, confident that every word of Torah spoken in truth brings that day closer, and that nothing in creation stands outside the possibility of return.