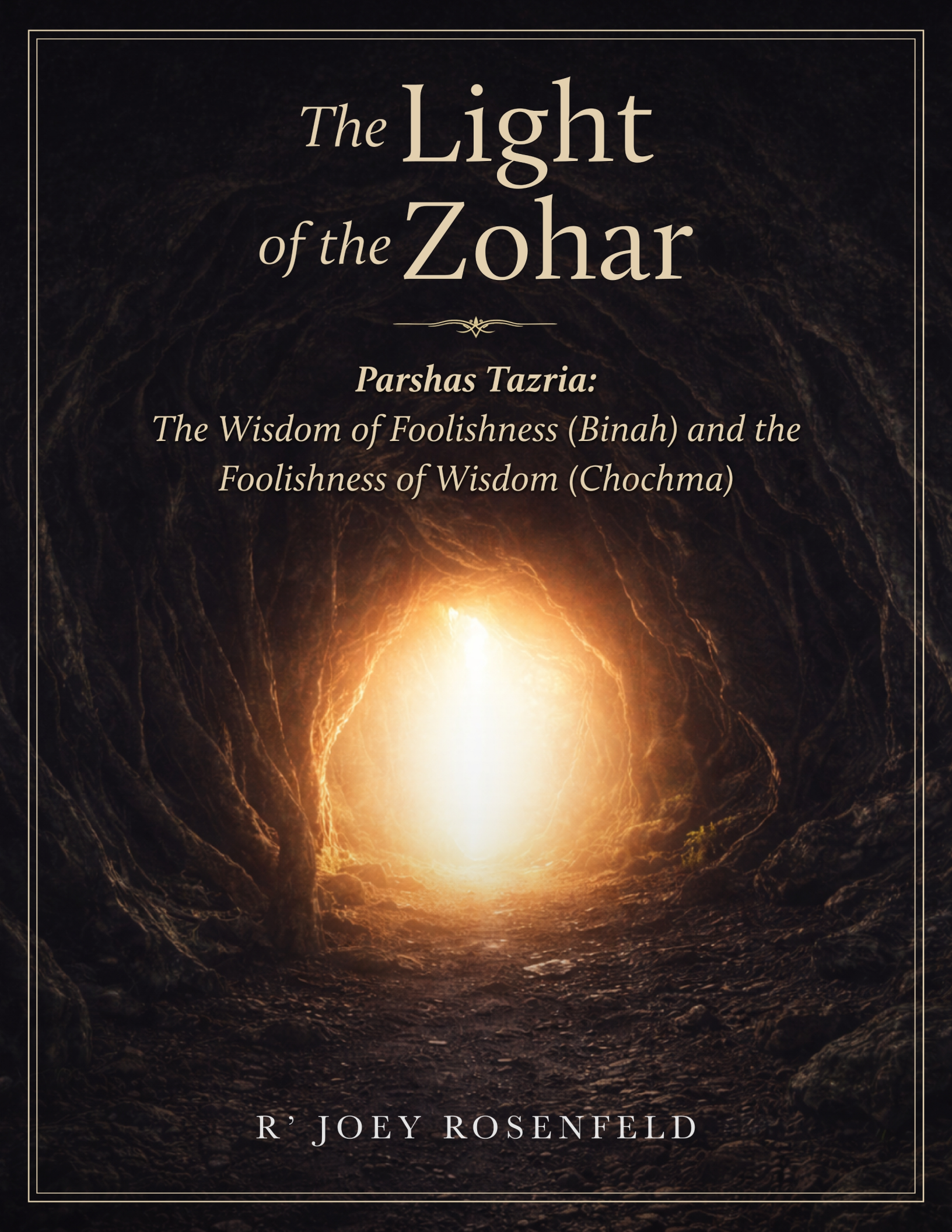




The Light *of the* Zohar



Parshas Tazria:

*The Wisdom of Foolishness (Binah) and the
Foolishness of Wisdom (Chochma)*

R' JOEY ROSENFELD

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רבי חייא פתח ואמר (קהלת ב' י"ג) וראיתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה מן הסכלות וגו', בכמה אתר אסתפלגא במלוי דשלמה מלכא, ואשגחנא בחכמתא סגיא דיליה, ואסתים מלוי בגו, לגו היכלא קדישא. האי קרא אית לאסתכלא ביה, אמאי אמר וראיתי אני, וכי שאר בני עלמא לא ידעי ולא חמאן דא. אפילו מאן דלא ידע חכמתא מן יומיו, ולא אשגח בה, ידע האי שיש יתרון לחכמה מן הסכלות פיתרון האור מן החושך. והוא שבת גרמיה ואמר ראיתי אני.

אלא הכי תאנא, מאן חכים בשלמה דבשבועה דרגין דחכמה אתקרי בגוונא דלעילא. שיתא יומין לעילא, שביעאה עלאה עליהו. שיתא יומין לתתא, שביעאה עליהו. שיתא דרגין לכורסייא, הוא על פורסייא, דכתיב, (דברי הימים א כ"ט: כ"ג) וישב שלמה על כסא יי' למלך. שבועה כתרין דיומין לעילא, וכדין לקבליהון שבועה שמעון לשלמה. לאתחזאה ביה חכמתא קדישא. ובגין כך אתקרי שבע שמעון: שלמה ידידיה. אגור. בן יקה. למואל, איתא, קהלת.

ואמר שבועה קבלים. ומה דאיהו חמא לא חמא בר גש אחרא, וכד כנש חכמתא ואסתלק בדרגין דחכמתא, אקרי קהלת. ושבועה קבלין אמר, לקביל ז' כתרין דלעילא, וכל קבל קלא אתעביד מניה, ועלמא לא מתקיימא אלא בקבל.

ותאנא משמיה דרבי שמעון, קבל אפיק קלא ברוחא ומיא דביה, ולית קלא אלא בקבל. ותאנא בשבועה קבלין אתקיימין עלאין ותתאין. ותאני רבי יצחק, תא חזי, דעל קבל מתקיים עלמא, דאלמלא לא הנה קבל דנפיק מפומא, לא אתקיים בר גש אפילו שעתא חדא.

Rabbi Chiya opened and said:

“And I saw that wisdom has an advantage over foolishness...” (Kohelet 2:13).

In many places I have contemplated the words of King Solomon, and I have observed the great depth of his wisdom, and I have set his words deep within—inside the inner chamber of the holy palace. This verse requires careful reflection: why does he say, “And I saw, I”? Do other people not know this? Do they not see this? Even someone who has never known wisdom in their life, and has never reflected upon it, still knows that there is an advantage to wisdom over foolishness, just as there is an advantage to light over darkness. So why does he praise himself and say, “I saw”?

Rather, this is what was taught:

Who is wise like Solomon? For he was called by seven levels of wisdom, corresponding to the supernal pattern above. There are six days above, and the seventh stands over them. There are six days below, and the seventh stands over them. There are six levels of the throne, and he sits upon the throne, as it is written: “And Solomon sat on the throne of Hashem as king” (Divrei HaYamim I 29:23). There are seven crowns of the supernal days, and corresponding to them are seven names of Solomon, through which the holy wisdom is revealed in him. And because of this he is called by seven names: Solomon, Yedidya, Agur, Ben Yakeh, Lemuel, Itiel, and Kohelet.

And he spoke of seven “hevels” (breaths/vanities). What he saw, no other person saw. And when he gathered wisdom and ascended through its levels, he was called Kohelet. And these seven hevels correspond to the seven supernal crowns. From each hevel, a voice is formed, and the world endures only through hevel.

And it was taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon:

Hevel produces sound through the רוח (breath/spirit) and the מים (moisture/water) within it, and there is no sound except through hevel. And it was taught that through these seven hevels, both the upper worlds and the lower worlds are sustained. And Rabbi Yitzchak said: Come and see—on account of hevel the world stands. For if not for the hevel that comes out of the mouth, a person could not exist even for a single moment.

Drawing Down the Light into the Fire

Be'ezras Hashem, we continue the unfolding of the Zohar Hakadosh, drawing the light of Moshe Rabbeinu into the vessels of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. This movement is not merely conceptual, but existential: a transition from the stillness of wisdom (חכמה), where everything is already present, into the dynamic, shifting terrain of understanding (בינה). In wisdom (חכמה) there is no movement, no fragmentation, only a seamless unity that requires nothing to change. Yet the divine will is not that we remain suspended in that nothingness, but that we descend from it deliberately. This descent into understanding (בינה) introduces process, differentiation, development, and all the fluctuations of experience. It is the world of caves, of smallness (קטנות), of counting and becoming, of movement and transformation. And yet, as has been said again and again, this descent is only for the sake of an eventual ascent. The purpose is to draw the nothingness of Moshe into the somethingness of Rebbe Shimon, so that the process itself

becomes a revelation of a light even greater than the original unity.

The Return Beyond the Beginning

The journey is not a simple return to where we began, but a penetration into a deeper interiority of wisdom (חכמה) itself. Through descent into understanding (בינה) and the re-ascent, one reaches the interiority of wisdom (פנימיות חכמה), which is bound with the light of Atik and ultimately with the unknowable head (רישא דלא אתידע). In that place, where above and below are unified, wisdom (חכמה) and understanding (בינה) are no longer opposites but are unified completely. This is the essential goal of the Zohar Hakadosh: to draw the light of calmness into vessels of intensity. The vessels themselves, once filled, reveal that their intensity was only ever a deeper form of calmness waiting to be revealed. The concealment of divine light is not a game, heaven forbid, but rather the only context in which the fullness of Hashem's goodness can manifest. Only within concealment can goodness reveal itself in its most potent form. Thus, the descent is itself the structure through

which good (טוב) becomes known in its deepest sense. And this is the unfolding of divine intention within creation.

The Demand for Revealed Goodness

At the root of all existence lies the will of the ultimate Good of Hashem to bestow goodness upon creation. Whether or not we perceive it as such is secondary to its objective reality. Yet within the world of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, there emerges a demand: that goodness not remain abstract, but become visible and tangible. We know that the principle is the nature of the Good is to do good (חוק הטוב להיטיב), but we seek goodness below ten handbreadths (טוב למטה מעשרה טפחים), goodness that is seen and felt. In the world of emanation (אצילות), everything is inherently good, even that which appears otherwise. There, vessels are so nullified that they are indistinguishable from light. But in creation, formation, and action (בריאה, יצירה, עשיה), separation emerges, and with it the apparent division between light and darkness. It is in this realm of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (עץ הדעת טוב ורע) that we seek understanding according to our

own reasoning. We no longer accept abstract good- we demand that it pass through the subjective vessel of the soul. And this demand itself is part of the divine process.

The Zohar as a Journey Through Concealment

Every engagement with the Zohar is an enactment of this descent and ascent. Each learning is a drawing down of clarity into complication, so that complication itself becomes transparent to unity. The Zohar is therefore a book of walking and of nighttime wandering, unfolding specifically in darkness and concealment. It is within these hidden spaces that love is illuminated and the human spirit rises beyond even angelic clarity. Specifically within the lower realms, in the dwelling below (דירה), (בתחתונים), the deepest light is revealed. From the place of “from the north evil emerges” (מצפון תפתח הרעה), we dig downward to uncover the hidden good. The greatness lies not in avoiding darkness, but in discovering the light embedded within it. And in doing so, we transform even the days of affliction into sources of joy. This is the secret of

gladden us like the days You afflicted us
(שמחנו כימות עיניתנו).

Memory Transformed into Light

The goal is not to erase suffering, but to transform its meaning. We retain the impression (רשימו) of pain so that it can be reinterpreted through the lens of goodness. Every past difficulty becomes illuminated retroactively with purpose and light. These are the vessels of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, expanding endlessly to receive more of Moshe's light. Every place of constriction, every knot of struggle, is itself a vessel. The fires of Rebbe Shimon are not destructive, but refining- small bonfires in the soul meant to be navigated and elevated. With faith (אמונה), self-nullification (ביטול), and humility (ענווה), one rides these waves rather than being consumed by them. And through this movement, every descent reveals itself as part of a deeper unity.

The World of Fallen Letters and Hidden Light

The world of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai is a world of fallen letters (אותיות נפולות), a world that emerges after rupture, concealment, and fragmentation. It is a reality marked by destruction and rebuilding, by judgment and severity, and the long journey of counting within Sefiras HaOmer (ספירת העומר). It is a world of hiding and fleeing, of exile and pursuit, of existence under the shadow of Rome. And yet, within this very brokenness lies the deepest secret of illumination. Each fallen letter is not merely a fragment, but a complete expression in miniature, containing within it the totality of the whole. This is the secret of fractalized infinities, where every shard reflects the entirety. Every break, every concealment, becomes the site of further revelation. The scattered letters themselves become engines that drive the unfolding of divine light.

Opening the Eyes to Wonder

When we say “reveal my eyes and I will see wonders from Your Torah” (גל עיני), (ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך), we are asking not for new information, but for a transformed perception. The wonders (נפלאות) are already present, hidden within the fallen letters (נפל-אות as נפלאות). Each broken piece of reality contains not only its own meaning, but the entire structure of existence within it. The task is to uncover that depth, to perceive how even fragmentation is saturated with divine intention. Every piece, no matter how small or broken, becomes a pathway to infinity. This is not poetic metaphor but ontological truth, rooted in the structure of creation itself. The letters fell so that they could reveal more than they could have in their original unity. And through this process, the light of Hakadosh Baruch Hu becomes more visible, not less. The breaking becomes the very mechanism of revelation.

Mind and Body, Unity and Division

The world of Moshe Rabbeinu is the world of intellect (שכל), pure and undivided. The world of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai is the world of the body (גוף), differentiated, dynamic, and experiential. Between them lies the mystery of transition, where the mind descends into the body and the body ascends into the mind. This is the secret of the thirty-two pathways of wisdom (ל"ב נתיבות חכמה), where unity begins to express itself as multiplicity. Wisdom (חכמה) is inherently indivisible, a seamless oneness that contains no separation. Yet somehow, from within it emerges understanding (בינה), the realm of division and differentiation. How can something divided emerge from something that is completely unified? This paradox lies at the heart of existence. It is resolved only through the secret of understanding-within-wisdom and wisdom-within-understanding (הבן). (בחכמה וחכם בבינה). Through this chiasmic interplay, opposites are not canceled, but integrated.

The Emergence of Division Within Unity

The thirty-two pathways of wisdom (ל"ב) (נתיבות חכמה) represent the first stirring of differentiation within unity. The heart (לב), associated with understanding (בינה), is the place of division, where experience is split into categories and distinctions. It is here that concealment (העלם) begins, that duality emerges, that good and evil, right and left, become distinct. The heart operates through contrast, through tension, through the interplay of opposites. And yet, even this division is rooted in the unity of wisdom (חכמה). The separation is not external to unity, but an expression of it. Through the process of contraction (צמצום), unity gives rise to multiplicity while never losing itself. And within the very place of division, there exists the potential to return back into unity with hitherto unrevealed strength. The heart itself becomes the pathway back to the source.

Ascending Through the Heart

Within the divided heart of human experience lies the potential for ascent into the heart of the world (לב העולם), the place where all divisions are unified. This is the secret of Keter, the crown that transcends both intellect and emotion. It is accessed not by escaping division, but by fully inhabiting it and seeing through it. The same heart that experiences conflict becomes the vessel (כלי) for unity. Through its struggles, it refines perception and opens to a deeper awareness. The multiplicity of experience becomes a map leading back to oneness. Every distinction becomes a thread woven into a larger tapestry. And through this process, the person rises beyond duality into a space of integrated awareness. The journey through division becomes the path to unity itself.

The Paradox of Wisdom and Foolishness

Rebbe Chiya opens with the statement that "wisdom is greater than foolishness, just as light is greater than darkness". Yet this seems obvious, almost trivial. Even one who lacks wisdom entirely understands that light

is preferable to darkness. So what is the deeper teaching here? The Zohar reveals that this is not a statement of hierarchy, but of relationship. Wisdom is not simply greater than foolishness, it is revealed through it. The true depth of wisdom emerges only when it encounters its opposite. Shlomo HaMelech's greatness was not in recognizing the superiority of wisdom, but in perceiving how foolishness itself contains the potential for wisdom. The distinction is not external, but internal. Wisdom includes within it the seed of its opposite.

The Depth Within Chochmah

Shlomo HaMelech perceived that even within wisdom (חכמה) itself, there are levels upon levels. What appears unified from a distance reveals internal gradations upon closer inspection. Within wisdom lies the beginning of differentiation, the emergence of the seven emotional attributes (ז' מידות). These layers represent the unfolding of unity into multiplicity. The unity of wisdom is not static, but dynamic, containing within it the potential for expansion. This is the secret of the

sevenfold structure that permeates creation. Everything unfolds in patterns of six leading to seven, of process culminating in completion. The unity of wisdom expresses itself through stages, through an order of development. And Shlomo HaMelech grasped this internal complexity. He saw how division emerges from unity without ever leaving it.

The Sevenfold Structure of Reality

All revelation follows the pattern of seven. There are six days of activity and a seventh of rest (שבת), six directions of space and a transcendent center. There are six stages leading to a seventh that contains and elevates them. This pattern reflects the structure of existence itself. The six represent differentiation, movement, and multiplicity, while the seventh represents unity and integration. Shlomo HaMelech understood how these levels operate both above and below. He perceived how unity gives rise to division and how division returns to unity. The throne of God (כסא ה') itself is built upon these gradations. And it is precisely within this structured differentiation that the

possibility of Kingship emerges. True leadership lies in the ability to unify within multiplicity.

The Wisdom of Not Knowing

At the height of his wisdom, Shlomo HaMelech declared: “I said I would become wise, but it is distant from me” (אמרתי אֲחִכְמָה וְהִיא רְחוּקָה מִמֶּנִּי). This is not a failure of knowledge, but its culmination. The deepest wisdom is the recognition of its own limits. To know that one does not know is the gateway to a higher understanding. This paradox holds together knowledge and ignorance simultaneously. It is the place where certainty dissolves into openness. And from that openness emerges a deeper connection to the infinite light of Hashem. Wisdom is no longer a possession, but a relationship. It becomes a vessel for something beyond itself, the wisdom of faith. And in that space, true knowing begins.

The Seven Names and the Infinite Ascent

The seven names of Shlomo HaMelech- Shlomo, Yedidya, Agur, Bin Yakeh,

Lemuel, Ithiel, and Kohelet- are not merely titles, but expressions of seven distinct modalities of wisdom. Each name reflects a different posture, a different grasp, a different way that wisdom manifests within reality. Together they form the totality of holy wisdom (חִכְמָה קְדוּשָׁה), encompassing all dimensions of perception. Yet within this completeness lies a deeper teaching: that even totality is not total. The name *Lemuel* reveals this most clearly, pointing to a level that stands above all levels. It expresses the recognition that no matter how high one ascends, there is always a higher level beyond it. This awareness does not diminish wisdom, but deepens it infinitely. It transforms knowledge into yearning, and attainment into longing.

Transcendence Beyond Transcendence

Lemuel teaches that even the highest level, even that which appears ultimate, is still subject to transcendence. The divine reality is described as higher than the highest (גְּבוּהָ מֵעַל גְּבוּהָ), endlessly surpassing every level that can be conceived. Each attainment reveals the presence of something beyond it. This

structure ensures that the journey never ends, that desire remains alive, that movement continues indefinitely. Instead of arriving, the soul learns to yearn. Instead of grasping, it learns to hope (לייחל) for divine kindness. This is the deepest form of connection- not possession, but orientation. The individual stands in openness, awaiting the unfolding of infinite light. And in that openness, the relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu becomes dynamic and alive.

From Lowest Place to Infinite Connection

Even from the lowest place, a person has the ability to cry out and draw down divine presence. The self, the “me” (איח), becomes a vessel through which the divine name (קל) is revealed. This is not dependent on spiritual achievement, but on sincerity and connection. From below all levels (למטה מן כל המדרגות), one can reach above all levels. The cry itself becomes the bridge between finite and infinite. Through praise and acknowledgment, a person draws the divine into their own experience. The distance collapses, and presence

becomes immediate. And in that place, the love of Hakadosh Baruch Hu is revealed as unbroken and eternal. The descent itself becomes the foundation of connection.

The Secret of Hevel and the Collapse of Certainty

When Shlomo HaMelech declares vanity of vanities, all is vanity (הבל הבלים הכל הבל), he is not dismissing existence, but unveiling its depth. The word hevel (הבל), meaning breath or vapor, points to the fleeting and ungraspable nature of reality. Each level of existence, each of the seven emotional attributes (ז' מידות), ultimately reveals itself as *hevel*. This is not nihilism, but liberation from false solidity. What appears fixed is in truth fluid, what appears graspable dissolves upon contact. The person realizes that what they thought they possessed was never truly held. Every structure, every certainty, becomes permeated with openness. And in that openness, a deeper truth begins to emerge.

Grasp and Non-Grasp as One

The teaching of *hevel* is not that nothing exists, but that existence cannot be

possessed. A person may grasp something, but must simultaneously recognize that it remains beyond grasp. This paradox holds together knowing and not knowing, holding and releasing. It is not a contradiction, but a higher synthesis. The certainty of knowledge is softened by the humility of unknowing. And the unknowing itself becomes a form of deeper awareness. This dual state allows for a true relationship with reality. One engages fully, yet without attachment to ownership. And in that balance, the soul becomes aligned with truth.

The Breath That Sustains the World

The Zohar teaches that the entire world is sustained through *hevel* (הבל), through breath. Without this constant flow of breath, existence itself could not endure. The breath represents the underlying nothingness that animates all being. It is the subtle space that allows for movement, for change, for life itself. If reality were completely solid, without any trace of nothingness, it would collapse under its own weight. It is the emptiness within that sustains the fullness without. Each breath renews

existence, reintroducing openness into structure. And through this continual renewal, the world persists. The *hevel* is not incidental, it is foundational.

Living Through Emunah Beyond Daas

In each moment, a person enters with knowledge (דעת) and exits with faith (אמונה). What begins as understanding dissolves into trust. The person realizes that they do not truly know how to sustain themselves, how to navigate the next moment. And yet, they continue. This continuation is not based on certainty, but on faith (אמונה). The breath itself becomes an act of faith, an acceptance of uncertainty. In this state, the individual learns to be okay without knowing. They borrow strength not from clarity, but from openness. And through this, they access a deeper resilience. The unknown becomes not a threat, but a place of possibility.

The Inner Light Within the Lowest Level

Even in the lowest levels of reality, the highest light is concealed. The seven breaths (ז' הבלים) correspond to the flow of divine energy from Keter (כתר)

through wisdom (חכמה) and understanding (בינה) into the emotional realm. What we encounter in our lived experience is only the outer expression, the expansion (מילוי) of that light. The source remains hidden, beyond direct perception. And yet, it is fully present within what we experience. The lowest level enclothes within itself the highest origin. Every moment, every encounter, carries within it the imprint of infinite light. And through awareness, that light can be revealed.

The Illumination of Emes Through Hevel

The rectification (תיקון) of truth (אמת) is expressed specifically through *hevel*. Emes rooted in keter (כתר), descends through the structure of reality and becomes accessible within the breath of existence. The sevenfold structure of emes manifests as the seven breaths that sustain the world. Each breath carries within it the imprint of divine truth. Yet this truth is not rigid or fixed- it is fluid, dynamic, alive. It expresses itself through paradox, through the coexistence of being and non-being at once. And in this expression, truth

becomes something lived rather than possessed. It is encountered in motion, in openness, in breath.

The Foundation of Existence is Breath

Rebbe Yitzchak teaches that without breath, a person could not endure even a single moment. The heaviness of existence would overwhelm them completely. It is the hevel, the unbearable lightness of being, that allows life to continue. The breath creates space within the density of experience. It introduces flexibility into rigidity, movement into stillness. And through that space, the person is able to persist. Every moment is upheld by this subtle balance. The world itself rests upon this breath, this constant interplay between something and nothing. And in recognizing this, one begins to live differently. Not by grasping, but by breathing.