

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric illustration. It depicts a path or tunnel that recedes into the distance, illuminated by a bright, golden light at the far end. The walls of the tunnel are dark and textured, with vertical lines suggesting tree trunks or rock formations. The light at the end creates a strong sense of depth and hope, casting a warm glow that fades into the surrounding darkness.

The
Healing Light
— *of the* —
Baal Shem Tov

Walking One's Own Path

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The Purpose of These Teachings

Be'ezras Hashem, we continue our weekly shiurim on the healing light of the Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh. Each week we study teachings, stories, and themes that possess the capacity to transform the lived experience of the soul within the body. These teachings are meant to penetrate the *keilim* of human experience. They are not intended to remain suspended above reality as abstract ideals, but to descend into our actual lives until they become embodied within our thoughts, emotions, and actions—*mibesari echezeh Eloka*.

The medicinal quality of the Baal Shem Tov's Torah lies in its ability to draw increasing measures of *emunah* into a person's life, enabling a Jew to inhabit this world with greater safety, comfort, and awareness of Divine unity. It nurtures faith in oneness, hope for redemption, and an affirmative perspective toward all that has happened, all that is happening, and all that will happen. This is the medicine, the light, and the elixir of life flowing from the Etz Chaim that the Baal Shem Tov revealed to the world. He taught us how to live from the consciousness of *Chochmah* rather than *Binah*, from unity rather than duality, and from awareness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's presence rather than the illusion of separation.

The Medicine of Emunah

The Torah of the Baal Shem Tov must be approached medicinally. When a person struggles with anxiety, it is often rooted in anticipatory fear of an unknown future. Frequently there is no practical danger requiring action and nothing the individual can presently do to prepare or protect himself. Yet the mind imagines an impending difficulty while simultaneously recognizing its inability to control it. Worry gradually becomes confused with protection, and the anxious person becomes trapped in endless anticipation, hoping that persistent concern will somehow shield him from whatever he fears may occur.

The tzaddikim teach that if anxiety actually accomplished something, perhaps there would be reason to continue worrying. In reality, however, it is an exhausting and fruitless process because existence itself remains unknowable, rooted in the unknowability of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Once a person accepts that the future is unknown, a deeper question naturally emerges: why is it unknown? At precisely that point, *emunah* begins entering the narrative. The mystery of the future is no longer interpreted as evidence of impending darkness but as an expression of the hiddenness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself.

These teachings gradually sweeten the framework through which a person thinks. They reshape not merely the content of thought but the entire context surrounding thought until consciousness itself becomes saturated with awareness of the concealed Divine Presence. *Achein Atah Kel Mistater.*

Learning to See Differently

The Baal Shem Tov understood more deeply than anyone how hidden Hakadosh Baruch Hu's presence truly is. Yet, at the very same time, no one possessed greater certainty of that hidden Presence. Concealment and revelation illuminate one another. The Torah of the Baal Shem Tov therefore creates a backdrop of faith against which every human experience unfolds. This is true not only for anxiety but for every prison of perspective and every habitual pattern of thinking that confines a person.

Through these teachings we begin to see the world differently. We learn to relate to ourselves differently. We ask different questions regarding our identity, our mission, the relationship between process and destination, and the meaning of our lives. When a person orients himself toward *Hashgachah Pratis*, recognizing Divine Providence extending into every conceivable detail of existence, every moment becomes an encounter with revelation. Life may still appear ordinary or even meaningless, but beneath those appearances

one begins to perceive an inexhaustible backdrop of meaning. Faith uncovers that hidden significance and allows existence itself to become illuminated.

Joy as the Response to Heaviness

One of the greatest gifts the Baal Shem Tov introduced into the world was a radical affirmation of joy. This joy does not ignore suffering, nor does it deny that people require healing. The Baal Shem Tov saw human pain with complete clarity. Nevertheless, he revealed a joy rooted in affirmation, a willingness to affirm this very moment because Hakadosh Baruch Hu is present within it. This joy emerges from recognizing that Avodas Hashem is fundamentally process-oriented. Rather than measuring ourselves solely by outcomes, we learn to value the ongoing relationship with Hashem that unfolds through every stage of the journey.

The Baal Shem Tov drew into the world a light of well-being and calmness that remains available regardless of where a person presently finds himself. These teachings fundamentally alter the way we relate to ourselves. We cease identifying ourselves exclusively with what we accomplish and instead discover our truest identity within our innermost essence, where a *nitzotz* of the Shechinah burns continuously. At that point of *mesirus nefesh*, the Divine spark remains

untouched by external circumstances. From this perspective, the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov become profoundly practical. They deepen spiritual practice through greater intention, joy, and enthusiasm while simultaneously easing the burden of existence itself.

Reality can feel exceedingly heavy. Although *tzimtzum* is *lav kipshuto*, its concealment certainly appears *kipshuto*. No one disputes the lived experience of hiddenness. *Achein Atah Kel Mistater*. The world feels heavy because Hakadosh Baruch Hu is concealed, and recognizing that heaviness is not a contradiction to Avodas Hashem but its beginning. Chazal teach that, on one level, it would have been more pleasant to not to have been created than to have been created. That existential burden becomes the very force that drives a person toward the healing pharmacy of the Baal Shem Tov.

The issue is never the absence of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, God forbid, but His concealment. As the Baal Shem Tov explains, creation is a game of hide-and-seek. The hiddenness exists so that we may discover Him within the darkness. Yet concealment remains concealment, and at times it becomes even *bastarah besoch bastarah*. The heaviness of existence can draw a person toward sadness, despair, and every poisonous state that imprisons him within externality and dualism. The only genuine response is the *simchah* that grows from *emunah*. That joy becomes the foundation of *dveikus*.

Every Moment Becomes Eternal

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that attachment to Hakadosh Baruch Hu can be discovered in every circumstance, no matter how small. Every mitzvah, every word of Torah, every moment of progress, every success, and every fleeting experience of spiritual vitality possesses eternal significance. Even if the feeling disappears in the next moment, it has not been lost. It remains permanently engraved within eternity.

Each of these teachings represents another shelf within the pharmacy of the Baal Shem Tov. They are not merely ideas to be admired but medicines to be contemplated, davened over, and integrated through *hisbodedus* until they reshape the imagination itself. Whether we describe the process as retraining the mind, educating perception, or cultivating creative imagination through faith, the goal is the same: to learn to see reality through the lenses of the Beis Medrash of the Heilige Baal Shem Tov.

The Ohr HaGanuz

The Baal Shem Tov is identified with the *Ohr Shiv'as Yemei Bereishis*, the concealed light that filled creation at its beginning. This refers to the light that originally permeated existence, enabling the tzaddikim to see from one end of the

world to the other. The world, however, could not sustain its apparent separateness in the presence of that illumination, and therefore the light was hidden. It became concealed within the Torah, within Chassidus, within Pnimiyyus HaTorah, and within the Etz Chaim that accompanies every Jew throughout the journey beyond Gan Eden. Chassidus is the revelation of that *Ohr HaGanuz*. The Baal Shem Tov came to give the world a taste of the Etz Chaim—the books of Gan Eden themselves.

Confidence in One's Own Avodah

One of the areas in which this hidden light is most desperately needed is our concern for how we appear in the eyes of others, particularly regarding our Avodas Hashem. We become preoccupied with how our inner work is perceived, whether the forms of Torah that inspire us or the methods of serving Hashem that awaken us will receive validation from those around us. Yet Chazal teach that a person should learn Torah *bemakom shelibo chafetz*. Every individual possesses his own spiritual pathway. One person may be drawn toward deep Gemara learning while others criticize him for not learning enough Chassidus. Another may devote himself to Chassidus while others question why he is not focusing elsewhere. One person requires an emphasis on joy and affirmation, while another needs greater awareness of

brokenness. Every individual has been entrusted with his own spiritual toolbox and his own unique relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Finding Strength Within One's Own Path

Certainly, our paths must remain aligned with authentic Torah and the ways of those who fear Heaven. Yet alongside humility there must also exist a holy confidence, a willingness to validate the particular path that Hashem has entrusted to us. A person must be able to say that he is serving Hashem to the best of his ability, according to the understanding of his mind, the sincerity of his heart, and the integrity of his intentions. Every individual possesses a unique portion in Torah, a unique spiritual offering to bring into the world, and a unique expression of Malchus waiting to be revealed.

Each of us stands as the final chapter of an endless story that began with creation itself. Wherever our souls were situated within Adam HaRishon's primordial soul at the time of the sin of the Eitz HaDaas determines the particular rectification entrusted to us. Every soul agreed to undertake the work of healing this unique formation of consciousness. Every person therefore has his own path, his own letter in the Torah, and his own world. Chazal teach, *Bishvili nivra ha'olam*—the

world was created for me. Every individual must learn to say these words with sincerity.

The Rebbe Rashab, as well as Rav Soloveitchik, teach that a person should imagine himself as the final Jew remaining in the world. Similarly, Reb Simcha Bunim describes the entirety of humanity as a vast forest filled with countless trees. Every person encountered is simply another tree, while outside the forest stand only oneself and Hakadosh Baruch Hu. There is no one else to speak to besides Him, and there is no one for Him to speak to besides us. Every individual must discover the *nekudah ha'penimis* that belongs uniquely to his heart at this particular moment. We receive guidance from teachers and trustworthy sources, yet we must also cultivate the architecture of our own inner spiritual life, identifying what awakens us, what strengthens us, and where our avodah presently lies. We must become confident in our relationship with Hashem, in the ways we genuinely connect to Him, and in the manner through which we process the challenges of worldly existence.

The Illusion of Other People's Eyes

Every person must learn to feel comfortable within his own lane. *Samcheinu bigvuleinu*. The opposite experience is living beneath the imagined gaze of others, constantly feeling judged, evaluated, and scrutinized. More often than not, this is a projection of our own imagination rather than reality. Very few people are truly watching us. Most are simply trying to survive within their own worlds.

Nevertheless, a person can become consumed by the sense that countless eyes are fixed upon him, silently asking: Who gave you permission to learn this? Who told you that you may serve Hashem in this way? Who authorized you to speak about these secrets? Who said that you are worthy of drinking from the wells of the Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh?

If a person is not firmly rooted within his own spiritual foundation, he will constantly feel inadequate. He will imagine that he must become someone else, alter his path, or reshape himself in order to satisfy the imagined expectations of others. In doing so, he cuts away authentic parts of himself and gradually loses confidence in the unique offering that only he can bring before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Genuine avodah requires vulnerability, not posturing. It requires showing up honestly before Hashem in the present moment

rather than attempting to perform a version of spirituality designed for someone else's approval.

When a person lacks confidence, he inevitably begins living someone else's spiritual life. He sings another person's niggun. He imagines another person's relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu instead of cultivating his own. That is a tragedy. Every day and every hour are gifts entrusted to us by Hashem. To spend those gifts living beneath the shadow of someone else's expectations is to forfeit the unique life that Hashem intended for us.

Leaving One's Own World

This is the deeper meaning of Chazal's statement that *kinah*, *ta'avah*, and *kavod motzi'in es ha'adam min ha'olam*. Jealousy, desire, and the pursuit of honor remove a person from the world. Obviously they do not remove him from the physical world, for countless people continue living while struggling with these traits. Rather, they remove him from **his ownmost inner** world.

Every person has been given a unique world to cultivate. Once we begin measuring ourselves against others, longing for their gifts, craving their accomplishments, or pursuing their honor, we abandon our own world in favor of someone

else's. Our own unique spiritual landscape begins to decay because it is no longer receiving our attention. The particular light we were sent into creation to reveal remains concealed.

The avodah of the Baal Shem Tov therefore requires a profound spiritual confidence, drawn from the light of Dovid HaMelech, expressed in the verse, *Vayigbah libo b'darchei Hashem*. His heart became elevated in the ways of Hashem. This is not arrogance but *ga'avah d'kedushah*—holy confidence—and *azus d'kedushah*, the courage to believe that one deserves to stand before Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Dovid HaMelech knew his own unworthiness. He described himself as the king's jester, the *badchana d'malka*. Yet the jester also knows that he serves the King. When he recognizes that the King delights in his service, his confidence grows. Dovid understood that his unique task was to reveal the light of Malchus and prepare the way for the Beis HaMikdash. In that sense, every Jew is Dovid HaMelech. Every Jew carries within himself the responsibility to reveal Mashiach and to build the Beis HaMikdash through the revelation of his own spiritual fingerprint rather than suppressing it.

This is the meaning of Hillel HaZaken's declaration, *Im ani kan, bakol kan*. If I am truly here, then everything is here. It is the same light expressed by Rebbi Yehudah HaNasi, by the Heilige Baal Shem Tov descending from the lineage of Dovid

HaMelech, and by the Komarna Rebbe, who as a young child confidently reached for the shank bone at the Chozeh of Lublin's Seder. *Tzaddikim lokchin bizro'a*—the righteous grasp with strength. There is a holy confidence that belongs to those who know Whom they serve.

Nothing is more damaging than *anavah pesulah*, false humility. As we will see, the Baal HaTanya warns against it in the *Hakdamas HaMelaket*. Spiritual guides must beware of fostering counterfeit humility. A person must become confident in the offering that only he can bring, recognizing that every individual is a *mashpia* capable of illuminating the world.

The Confidence of Avraham Avinu

Rebbe Nachman describes this same quality through the verse, *Echad hayah Avraham*. Avraham Avinu became one because he attached himself to the One. How did he accomplish this? By living as though he were the only person in the world. He refused to allow either real criticism or imagined judgment to interfere with his service of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Rebbe Nachman illustrates this idea in the wondrous tale of the king who set out with his soldiers to capture a deer. As

they journeyed, the weather suddenly changed. Dark clouds gathered, rain began to fall, and the soldiers pleaded with the king to return, insisting that it was no longer safe to continue. The king responded by telling the general that he and his men were free to return, but he himself would remain until he caught the deer. *Tzaddik be'emunaso yichye*. The tzaddik draws down the confidence necessary for every individual to continue walking his own path despite every external voice urging retreat.

This is the meaning of *Vayigbah libo b'darchei Hashem*. Every day a person should be able to say before Hashem: "Today I am the apple of Your eye. Whatever I succeed in offering You today, however my mitzvos appear, whatever spark of spiritual light I am able to draw from the heaviness of this day—that is my *nekudah tovah*. That point outweighs the entirety of history because it is the offering You requested specifically from me."

This is the confidence of *Echad hayah Avraham*: refusing to allow anything to obstruct one's relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It is *azus d'kedushah* expressed through attaching oneself to the tzaddikim, constantly turning toward them, constantly turning toward Hakadosh Baruch Hu, drinking from the teachings of every tzaddik, learning books beyond one's current comprehension, and contemplating ideas that forever remain greater than ourselves. We know from the

outset that we do not truly grasp anything. Everything is beyond us. Even the *alef-beis* is beyond us. We know nothing with certainty; all we possess is emunah. Precisely because of that, every level of Torah, every secret, every source of confidence can ultimately be drawn into emunah until a person can sincerely say: "Spiritually I am okay. Mentally I am okay. In this moment I am okay."

Binah will always incline the mind toward preparation, worry, and endless analysis. That is its natural tendency. Our avodah is therefore to enter more deeply into the light of Chochmah—the light of simplicity, confidence, well-being, and *Vayigbah libo b'darchei Hashem*.

The Hungry Guest

The Baal Shem Tov illustrates this principle through a remarkable story.

A certain Jew was traveling near Mezhibuzh when he became intensely hungry. He had nowhere to stop and no possibility of finding food. Someone advised him to travel to Mezhibuzh, explaining that the Baal Shem Tov maintained an open home where every guest was generously fed. Although it required leaving his planned route, the traveler accepted the suggestion and arrived shortly before Shabbos.

He first entered the Baal Shem Tov's shul for Kabbalas Shabbos. The Baal Shem Tov's davening was lengthy, and as the prayers continued the traveler became weaker and weaker from hunger. After davening, everyone gathered around the Shabbos table. They waited for the Baal Shem Tov to enter, sang *Shalom Aleichem*, recited Kiddush, and only then prepared to begin the meal. By that point the guest felt as though he might faint.

The moment *HaMotzi* was made, he devoured every piece of bread placed before him. Seeing that those around him were eating slowly, he consumed their portions as well. His hunger was so overwhelming that he even finished the large challah that had been placed before the Baal Shem Tov himself.

When the Baal Shem Tov observed this, he immediately understood that the man was not acting out of greed but out of genuine hunger. He instructed the *shamash* to serve him double portions of every course. Even after the meal concluded, however, the guest remained unsatisfied. The Baal Shem Tov therefore instructed his wife to bring him some of the cholent that had already been prepared for the following day's meal. Since it was still somewhat firm, he knew it would finally satisfy the man's hunger, and indeed it did.

The Baal Shem Tov's Explanation

The Baal Shem Tov had a custom that once each week someone should lovingly rebuke him regarding anything that required correction. Since no one would presume to rebuke the Baal Shem Tov, he generally appointed his holy wife, Sarah, to fulfill this role after the Friday night meal.

On this occasion she questioned his unusual conduct. Why had he shown such extraordinary attention to a stranger who had only just arrived? Why had he instructed them to serve him even the cholent prepared for the following day? Would people not assume that he was trying to attract followers?

The Baal Shem Tov explained that this was precisely why he had given the guest additional food. He had recognized immediately that the man possessed exceptional honesty. When he was physically hungry, he ate exactly as much as he needed without allowing embarrassment or concern for public opinion to interfere. Such a person, the Baal Shem Tov explained, would behave the same way spiritually. When he became hungry for Elokus, he would pursue nourishment without allowing the opinions of others to stand in his way.

That man eventually became one of the Baal Shem Tov's exceptional chassidim.

Spiritual Hunger and Holy Confidence

The lesson of this story reaches far beyond physical hunger. The Baal Shem Tov is revealing the secret of an insatiable spiritual appetite, the honesty to acknowledge that appetite, and the courage to nourish it. A person must never be ashamed of longing for Elokus, for greater faith, for more light, for calmness, stability, patience, goodness, and the light of Eretz Yisrael. These are not weaknesses to suppress but holy desires to cultivate. They emerge from *Vayigbah libo b'darchei Hashem*.

Just as this traveler arrived consumed by hunger, eating everything before him until the Baal Shem Tov served him even tomorrow's food, so too the soul must learn to hunger for holiness without embarrassment. This, the Baal Shem Tov teaches, is the secret of the doubled portion of Shabbos.

The Baal HaTanya writes that Chassidim are souls that remained in Gehinnom for an extended period. In Gehinnom, there exists a prohibition against experiencing Elokus. When such a soul is finally released and once again encounters the possibility of Divine closeness, it becomes ravenous. It cannot be satisfied. It longs to eat and eat and eat from the light of Hashem without concern for the opinions of others.

This is the path upon which we continue until the coming of Mashiach Tzidkeinu: the path of *azus d'kedushah*. We strive to remove the final concealment that prevents a person from revealing Hashem's light, namely *anavah pesulah*, false humility. Counterfeit humility imprisons a person within himself. It convinces him that he should remain silent, hidden, and hesitant rather than revealing the particular light Hashem entrusted to him.

The avodah is therefore to become spiritually confident. *Re'eh Anochi*—Hashem places before us life and death and asks us to choose life. We must become genuine *ba'alei bechirah*. We must live with *Vayigbah libo b'darchei Hashem*, choosing again and again to eat from the Etz Chaim.

Respecting Our Own Spiritual Growth

To eat from the Etz Chaim means allowing ourselves to experience the pleasure and delight that emerge from an honest relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It means respecting the bond we already possess instead of endlessly attempting to reshape ourselves into some imagined version of spiritual perfection. Rather than carving ourselves into an artificial ideal, we learn to live within the natural fluidity of spiritual growth. We become witnesses to the gradual

revelation of our own souls, watching new dimensions of the neshamah emerge as we continue serving Hashem.

Every day becomes another departure from Mitzrayim. Every day becomes another release from imprisonment. Spiritual growth is not the creation of a new self but the gradual unveiling of the self that has always existed beneath the layers of concealment.

Eating Without Shame

May we merit to eat as much as we truly need without shame. May we no longer be embarrassed by our hunger for holiness or intimidated by what others may think, especially when, in truth, most people are not thinking about us at all. More often than not, it is our own imagination that stands in our way.

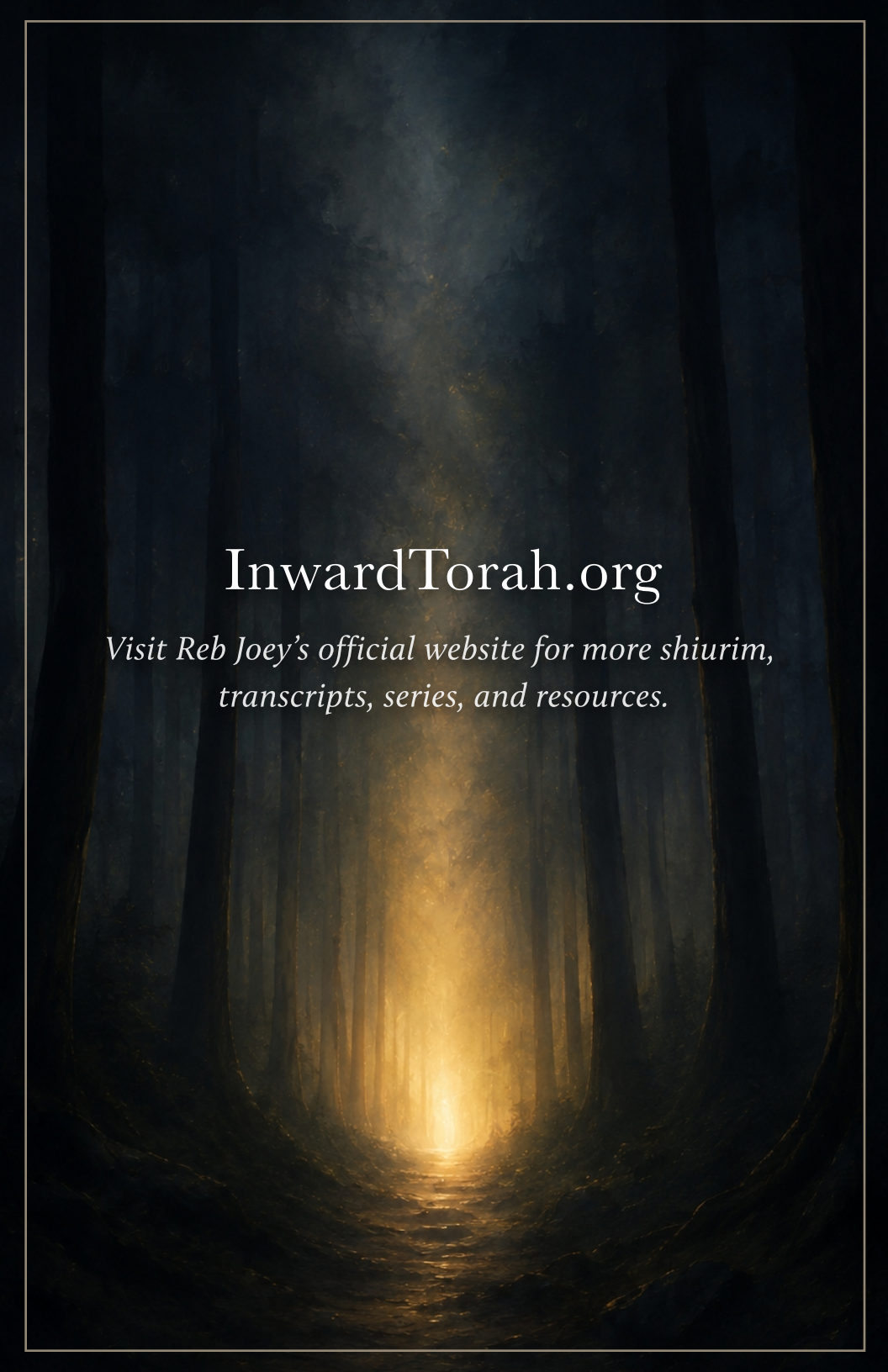
We must simply open our mouths and eat, recognizing that we are already participants in the *Seudas HaLivyanan*. The revelation of the secrets of Torah before the arrival of redemption is itself that feast. We are hungry because the road has been long, the world is heavy, and the journey has demanded much from us. Yet, by the kindness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we have been invited to the table.

May we continue to eat and drink from the light of the Heilige Baal Shem Tov and all of the tzaddikim emes, including the point of tzidkus that exists within every one of us. May we strengthen ourselves with *Vayigbah libo b'darchei Hashem*, believing in the truth of *Ameich kulam tzaddikim*, and through that merit to reveal the spark of Mashiach Tzidkeinu that rests within each soul, b'ezer Hashem.



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