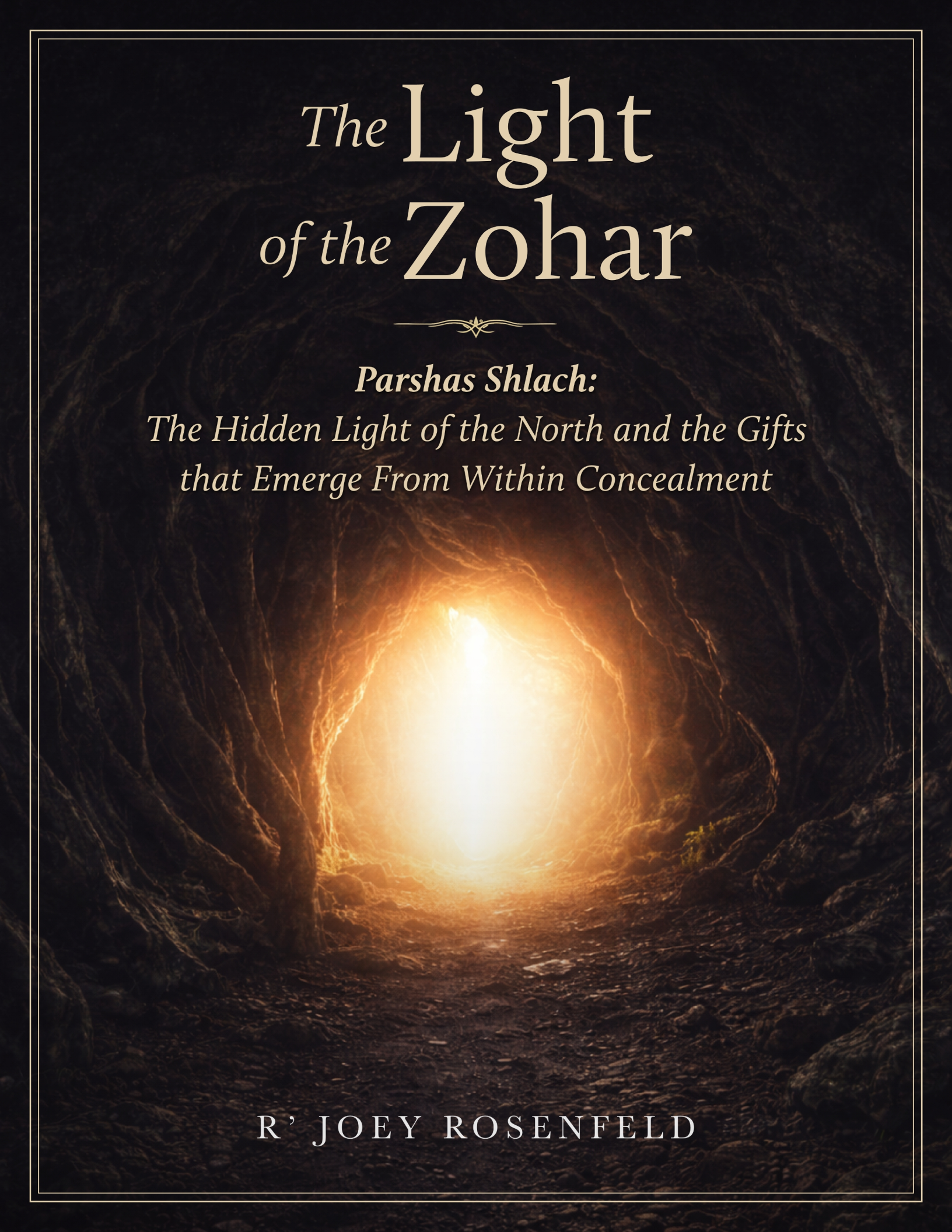




The Light *of the* Zohar



Parshas Shlach:

*The Hidden Light of the North and the Gifts
that Emerge From Within Concealment*

R' JOEY ROSENFELD

— *The Light of the Zohar* —

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The Light of Moshe and the Flame of Rebbe Shimon

The weekly encounter with the Zohar begins with an act of unification. The light of Toras Moshe, which is the light of the Raya Mehemna (רעיא מהימנא), descends in order to illuminate the realm of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, the Butzina Kadisha (בוצינא קדישא), the holy flame. Moshe Rabbeinu is the faithful shepherd whose Torah flows from above to below in clarity and composure, while Rebbe Shimon embodies the illuminated candle whose fire rises from below to above in yearning and intensity. These are not two separate paths but two complementary movements within a single revelation. The Torah of Moshe provides structure, measure, and stability, while the Torah of Rebbe Shimon awakens longing, passion, and the refusal to remain trapped within concealment. The spiritual task is not to choose one over the other. Rather, it is to unite the descending current of Moshe with the ascending current of Rebbe Shimon. Only through this union can the full light of Torah emerge.

The Danger of Too Much Intensity

The image of Rebbe Shimon as a flame is not merely poetic. A flame possesses a natural tendency toward expansion. It stretches upward, seeking continually to transcend its present condition. Left unchecked, however, even a holy fire can become destructive. This is the secret concealed within the great bonfires of Lag Ba'Omer, which celebrate the heavenly fire associated with Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. The fire of the Zohar is born from below, from the depths of human experience, from the fear of forgetfulness, and from the burning desire to ascend beyond limitation. It is the movement of the soul refusing to accept exile as its final condition. Yet precisely because of its power, this fire requires guidance. The greatest danger of spiritual passion is not weakness but excess, when the flame threatens to consume the very vessels through which its light must ultimately shine.

A Heart Burning Toward Heaven

Rebbe Nachman describes the Jewish heart as a heart that burns up towards the highest point of heaven. The soul naturally longs for its source and desires to transcend every barrier separating it from HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Left entirely to itself, this longing would dissolve every boundary and every measure. Yet spiritual life requires more than ascent alone. There must be vessels capable of containing the light that is revealed. A fire that destroys its vessels ultimately deprives the world of illumination. The challenge is therefore not to diminish longing but to refine it. The heart must continue burning while simultaneously learning how to illuminate rather than consume. The highest spiritual state is achieved when yearning and stability become one.

The Healing Flames of Motzei Shabbos

This tension is revealed every Motzaei Shabbos through the flames of Havdalah. As the expanded consciousness of Shabbos begins to withdraw, the soul becomes aware that it is descending once again into concealment. The flames of the

Havdalah candle symbolize that moment of transition. They contain within them the secret of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai and Eliyahu HaNavi, the mystery of life that persists even beyond death. The descent from Shabbos into the weekday world awakens the fire of longing once again. Yet this fire must be transformed. The goal is not simply to gaze at flames. The goal is to ensure that the flames become illumination. The task is to transform *Me'orei Eish* (מאורי אש) into *Me'orei Ohr* (מאורי אור).

When Fire Becomes Light

This distinction between fire and light lies at the heart of the spiritual path. Fire represents movement, intensity, yearning, and the *Gevuros* (גבורות) associated with Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. It is the power that rises from below to above, refusing to remain trapped within concealment. Light, however, represents clarity, revelation, and stability. Light is what remains when fire has become fully integrated into existence. The purpose of the holy flame is therefore not perpetual burning. The purpose of the flame is illumination. The intensity of the Zohar

must eventually reveal clarity rather than agitation. The passion of the soul must become a source of vision.

The Purifying Waters of Teveria

This is why Rebbe Shimon is associated with the purification of Tiveria. The same tzaddik whose fire burned with extraordinary intensity is also the tzaddik who purified a city associated with healing waters. The waters of Tiveria symbolize the balancing force necessary for the fire of the Zohar. Water softens intensity without extinguishing it. Water allows the flame to remain alive while preventing it from becoming destructive. In this sense, Tiveria itself becomes a symbol of the union between opposite forces. The fire of Rebbe Shimon encounters the waters associated with Moshe Rabbeinu, who is described as being drawn from the water itself (מן המים משיתהו). Through this encounter, passion becomes sustainable. Fire becomes light.

The Marriage of Water and Fire

The Torah of Moshe and the Torah of Rebbe Shimon move in opposite directions. Moshe's Torah descends

from above to below. It arrives with clarity, order, and calmness. Rebbe Shimon's Torah ascends from below to above. It emerges from struggle, concealment, and the effort to transform darkness into light. These two movements appear opposite, yet they are destined for union. The water of Moshe tempers the fire of Rebbe Shimon, while the fire of Rebbe Shimon animates the water of Moshe. Each requires the other in order to reach completion. Together they reveal the possibility of living "days of heaven upon earth" (כימי השמים על הארץ).

The Arrival of Redemption

This union is reflected in the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov concerning his encounter with Mashiach. When he asked, "*Eimasai ati Mar?*" the word Mar (מ"ר) can be understood as an acronym for M'oshe Rabbeinu and R'ebbe Shimon bar Yochai. Redemption depends upon the union of these two dimensions of Torah. The compassion of Moshe must descend into the intensity of Rebbe Shimon, while the passion of Rebbe Shimon must awaken the compassion of Moshe. This is the meeting point of

Chesed and Gevurah, of *Mayim* and *Eish*, rooted in Chochmah and Binah. It is a state in which movement and stillness coexist together as one. The soul burns with longing while simultaneously resting in complete tranquility.

The Ark Within the Flood

The Zohar illuminates a path through the chaos of existence. The Ramchal explains that the Zohar functions as a pathway within the stormy sea itself. Its purpose is not to eliminate turbulence but to reveal stability within turbulence. This is the secret of the Teivah (תיבה). The flood did not cease when Noach entered the ark. The waters continued to rage. Yet within the flood there existed a protected space where life could endure. The ark was not an escape from chaos. It was a sanctuary within chaos.

This is the secret of the Zohar HaKadosh. The world remains turbulent. Concealment remains concealment. Difficulty remains difficult. Yet within the flood there exists a place of calmness that cannot be shaken by external conditions. The illumination of Binah, the supernal

source of the Zohar, creates an *Ir Miklat* (עיר מקלט), a city of refuge that emerges precisely where refuge should be impossible. The Zohar does not promise a world without storms. It reveals how a person can remain anchored within the storm itself. The flood continues, but the soul discovers an ark hidden within its waters. There, in the midst of chaos, the light of redemption quietly begins.

Redemption Hidden Within the Book of the Zohar Itself

One of the most remarkable teachings of the Zohar is that it speaks about redemption while simultaneously presenting itself as the instrument through which redemption unfolds. The declaration of *BeHai Sifra Yifkun Min Galusa BeRachamim* (בהאי ספרא יפקון מן גלוּסָא ברחמים) is not merely praise for a holy text. It is a revelation concerning the role of the Zohar itself within history. The sefer becomes self-aware. The story begins to tell its own story. The text does not merely describe redemption from a distance; it places itself at the center of the redemptive process. To enter the Zohar is therefore to enter a current of compassion flowing

beneath the turbulence of exile. The redemption begins not only at the end of history but within its midst, through the consciousness awakened by the *sefer* itself.

The power of the Zohar lies in its ability to reveal calmness within instability. A person enters its language and discovers a different relationship to time, anxiety, and movement. The soul begins to stroll rather than rush. Eternity starts dripping into temporality. The person becomes someone who can be “*metayel b'Gan Eden*”, strolling within a reality that remains purposeful while simultaneously transcending the pressure of purpose. The Zohar teaches the secret of movement and rest occurring at the same moment. One continues living, striving, and acting, yet beneath all activity there emerges a profound stillness. This inner calmness is itself a form of redemption. “*Karva el nafshi ge'alah*” means that personal redemption is experienced first as the restoration of inner calmness.

Seeing the World Through the Light of the Torah

Most of the time the Zohar speaks in concealed language. It reflects the realities of the world without openly announcing what it is describing. Its teachings correspond to events unfolding within history, but these correspondences remain hidden from ordinary perception. A person may look at the Zohar and encounter the deepest truths of contemporary reality without realizing it. The same is true of the Written Torah. Everything is present, yet not everyone possesses the eyes required to see it. Only the true tzaddikim perceive how the inner structure of Torah reflects the unfolding drama of existence. They look into the text and discover worlds.

The greatness of such tzaddikim lies not merely in their knowledge but in their vision. They perceive relationships where others perceive separation. They uncover unity where others encounter fragmentation. Torah becomes a lens through which the hidden architecture of reality is revealed. The world no longer appears as a collection of

disconnected events. Instead, everything becomes part of a single living structure. The deeper one enters Torah, the more impossible it becomes to imagine existence as random. The concealed unity underlying all things gradually begins to reveal itself.

The Torah of Rav Moshe Wolfson

Among the great masters who embodied this capacity was Rav Moshe Wolfson, whose memory serves as a living testimony to the power of Torah vision. The greatness of the “Masgiach”, *Baal Emunas Itecha zy”a* was his ability to reveal how everything fits neatly together. His Torah consistently demonstrated that the most distant ideas were, in truth, intimately connected. What appeared fragmented became unified. What appeared unrelated became facets of a single structure. Every insight carried a unique quality. It felt simultaneously surprising and entirely self-evident.

This was the wonder of the Mashgiach's Torah. His *chiddushim* rarely felt artificial or forced. Rather, they created the sensation that one had suddenly

encountered a truth that had always been present but remained hidden until that moment. The reader was left wondering how such a connection could have remained concealed for so long. Yet there was also the recognition that it would have been impossible to arrive there independently. This was the *sha'ashu'ei Torah* that characterized his teachings. The Torah itself seemed to delight in revealing its own hidden unity through him.

The World Woven Together

The Torah of Rav Moshe Wolfson revealed the eternal life concealed within Torah itself. It taught a generation to trust its capacity for creativity while remaining rooted in tradition. The hidden connections he revealed were never merely intellectual exercises. They were revelations of the underlying unity of existence. Through simple foundations he would uncover relationships extending across vast distances of thought. Every revelation testified to the fact that all wisdom ultimately emerges from a single source. The world was shown to be woven together by invisible threads of Divine

purpose. Ultimately, everything in the Mashgiach's Torah returned to two fundamental themes: *tefillah* and *emunah*. The highest wisdom culminated in surrender. The deepest insights led toward *bittul*. The purpose of understanding was not mastery but humility. The purpose of uncovering unity was not self-importance but dependence upon HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Through *tefillah* and *emunah*, all fragmentation could be gathered back into wholeness. Through *tefillah* and *emunah*, the soul learned how to live within the Divine unity concealed beneath the apparent multiplicity of the world.

The Challenge of Eretz Yisrael

The transition into Parshas Shelach introduces one of the central struggles of spiritual life: the challenge of perceiving Eretz Yisrael properly. The sin of the Meraglim was not merely a historical event. It revealed a perpetual tendency within the human heart. A person looks at Eretz Yisrael and sees limitations. A person encounters holiness and becomes overwhelmed by its demands. The land appears difficult,

intimidating, and beyond reach. The heart asks how such a reality can possibly be inhabited. This reaction continues to reverberate throughout Jewish history.

Rebbe Nachman expressed this paradox when he arrived in Eretz Yisrael and remarked that it appeared to be a land like every other land. Only after accepting its ordinary appearance was he able to discover its extraordinary essence. The holiness of Eretz Yisrael does not initially announce itself. It conceals itself beneath familiarity. The Meraglim looked at the external form and failed to perceive the inner reality. They saw the land but not its soul. They encountered Malchus in concealment and mistook concealment for absence. Their error continues to echo whenever a person encounters holiness and sees only its exterior garments.

The Land at the Center of Divine Desire

Eretz Yisrael occupies the center of HaKadosh Baruch Hu's desire for creation. The unity of Nishmas Yisrael, Toras Yisrael, and Eretz Yisrael

represents one of the deepest structures within existence. Every great tzaddik directed their gaze toward this point. The land is not merely geography. It is the revelation of Divine desire within the world. Yet because it embodies such depth, it often appears concealed. The greater the treasure, the deeper the concealment protecting it. The challenge is therefore not simply to arrive in Eretz Yisrael. The challenge is to learn how to see Eretz Yisrael.

The anxiety experienced by the Meraglim continues to surface whenever a person confronts the demands of faith. The feeling that reality is too overwhelming, that the obstacles are too large, and that one is too small to succeed all emerge from the same root. The heart becomes frightened by the apparent magnitude of the task before it. Yet this fear results from looking only at external appearances. The inner reality remains hidden. The Meraglim lacked the capacity to refine the external and perceive the internal. They saw the obstacles but not the promise concealed within them. They saw the concealment but not the revelation hidden inside the concealment.

There Is Only Eretz Yisrael

The correction of the Meraglim begins with a radical shift in perception. Eretz Yisrael is not merely a destination located somewhere in the world. It is the inner truth of every step a Jew takes. Wherever a person walks, they are walking toward Eretz Yisrael. Wherever a person finds themselves, they are being guided toward the revelation of Divine desire. The deepest faith consists of recognizing that one's current place is itself part of that journey. Nothing is outside the movement toward Eretz Yisrael. There has never been anything outside that movement.

The Meraglim feared losing themselves. They feared the dissolving power of the land. Eretz Yisrael is indeed described as an *eretz ocheles yoshveha*, a land that consumes its inhabitants. It swallows up every separate identity. It refuses to allow a person to remain attached to superficial forms of selfhood. This is precisely why the land appears threatening. Yet the very process that feels like loss is actually revelation. Eretz Yisrael strips away what is unnecessary in order to reveal what is

essential. The apparent descent becomes the gateway to a higher ascent.

Chabad and Breslov

The distinction drawn between Chabad and Breslov illuminates two dimensions of this journey. Chabad teaches a person how to live in Eretz Yisrael before arriving there. Through contemplation, understanding, and inward refinement, one enters the consciousness of the land prior to physical arrival. Breslov teaches a person how to remain in Eretz Yisrael after arriving there. Through simplicity, faith, and constant renewal, one learns how not to lose sight of the holiness concealed beneath familiarity. These are not opposing paths. They are complementary stages of a single movement.

Every step of Jewish existence is therefore a step toward Eretz Yisrael. Every moment contains the possibility of repairing the sin of the Meraglim. The task is to learn how to see the goodness of the land even when concealment dominates perception. *Tovah ha'aretz me'od me'od* includes the very forces that appear opposed to

holiness. The doubled *me'od* encompasses the Yetzer Hara, the Malach HaMaves, the Gevuros, and every experience of uncertainty. The correction of the Meraglim occurs when a person learns to perceive goodness precisely where goodness appears absent. There, within concealment itself, the light of redemption begins to emerge.

The Spiritual Labor of Waiting for What is Already Present

The Zohar's discussion of redemption turns toward a subject that appears simple but contains immense depth: waiting. The future redemption is described together with the reward reserved for those who have waited properly. Waiting, however, is not passive. Waiting is one of the most demanding forms of spiritual labor. To wait means that the thing I desire has not yet arrived. It means that fulfillment remains concealed and inaccessible. It means that I continue existing despite not possessing what I believe I need. The secret of waiting is the discovery that life itself does not depend upon immediate satisfaction.

This is the meaning of *Tzipiyah LiYeshuah* (ציפיה לישועה). A person learns how to draw the future into the present by recognizing that the hidden light always already exists, even if it has not yet become revealed. Redemption is not absent. It is concealed. The act of waiting becomes the vessel through which the hidden future begins entering present consciousness. The person who waits properly discovers that hope itself is already a form of possession. The redemption begins to appear long before its final revelation because the soul has already learned how to live from its light. In this way, waiting itself becomes an experience of redemption.

Opening Through Chochmah

The Zohar introduces this teaching with the phrase *Pasach Ve'Amar* (פתח ואמר). Every opening begins with Chochmah. Before entering the depths of Rebbe Shimon's Torah, one must first attach themselves to the clarity of Moshe Rabbeinu. The Zohar belongs to the realm of Binah. It emerges from below to above. It descends into complexity, concealment, and the apparent fragmentation of reality. Yet Binah must

always remain rooted in Chochmah. The descent into multiplicity can only remain holy when it never loses contact with underlying unity. The opening of wisdom precedes every exploration of complexity.

This is why the Zohar is written in Targum. It speaks the language of the translational threshold. It inhabits the space between revelation and concealment. It enters regions that straightforward language cannot fully reach. Yet the purpose of the descent is never fragmentation itself. The purpose is always to reveal the deeper unity concealed within fragmentation. Every movement into complexity serves the revelation of simplicity. Every descent into concealment serves the revelation of hidden light. The Zohar enters darkness only in order to uncover the unity already present there.

The Mountain of the Hidden Daas

The verse that opens this section speaks of ascending a great mountain in order to announce redemption to Tziyon. The Zohar identifies this mountain as Har HaAvarim (הר העברים), the place

associated with the burial of Moshe Rabbeinu. This identification transforms the verse entirely. Redemption emerges specifically from the place where Moshe appears hidden. The mountain is not merely a geographical location. It is the concealed point of Daas itself. It is the place where connection remains hidden beneath the surface of awareness.

The teaching of the Meor Einayim reveals the deeper meaning of Moshe's unknown burial place. *Lo Yada Ish Es Kevuraso* (לא ידע איש את קבורתו) does not merely mean that nobody knows where Moshe is buried geographically. It means that the deepest point of Moshe remains concealed within every Jew. The innermost dimension of Daas cannot be grasped directly. Just as a person cannot locate Moshe's grave externally, they cannot fully locate the deepest point of themselves internally. The secret of Moshe remains buried within the heart. Spiritual life becomes the process of uncovering that hidden Daas and allowing it to emerge into revealed existence.

Drawing Moshe into Eretz Yisrael

The sin of the Meraglim prevented Moshe Rabbeinu from entering Eretz Yisrael. Moshe remained buried opposite Beis Pe'or while the nation continued its journey. Yet the task of later generations is to continue what was left unfinished. The work of redemption consists of drawing the soul of Moshe into Eretz Yisrael. The hidden Daas must become revealed. The concealed wisdom must descend into lived experience. The burial place must become a source of revelation. What appears hidden must emerge into life.

Har HaAvarim therefore becomes the meeting point of Chochmah and Binah. It is simultaneously above and below. Viewed from one perspective it appears elevated; viewed from another it appears concealed. It belongs to the realm of the Shaar HaNun (שער הנון), the hidden gate that transcends ordinary comprehension. This is the place of *Nesiv Lo Yada Ayit* (נתיב לא ידעו עיט), the path that cannot be charted through ordinary understanding. Redemption emerges specifically from this hidden point. The concealed Daas of Moshe

becomes the source of the future revelation.

The Announcement of Redemption

From this hidden mountain the Shechinah ascends to announce redemption to the world. The Zohar teaches that the lowest point becomes the source of the highest revelation. The Shechinah, Malchus in her apparent concealment, rises upward and proclaims the coming *geulah*. What appears abandoned reveals itself as the very center of Divine purpose. The lowest dimension of existence proves to be inseparable from the highest. The place that seemed most distant becomes the place from which redemption is announced. Concealment itself becomes the herald of revelation.

This paradox lies at the heart of the redemptive process. The emergence of Mashiach is connected to the mystery of *Lo Yada* (לא ידע), the place beyond ordinary knowledge. The future cannot be fully known in advance because it belongs to a dimension constantly being born in the present moment. The light of Mashiach appears as something

entirely new while simultaneously revealing what was present from the beginning. The concealed point becomes visible. The hidden Daas emerges into awareness. The burial place becomes the birthplace of redemption.

The Reward of Mesiras Nefesh

The Zohar then describes a celestial gathering in which HaKadosh Baruch Hu summons the heavenly hosts and asks about the reward of those who sacrificed themselves for His name. Heaven itself pauses to consider the value of Mesiras Nefesh. The question is not rhetorical. It reveals the extraordinary significance of self-sacrifice within the Divine plan. The response repeatedly given is *Kach VeKach* (כך וכך), an expression that conceals more than it reveals. The reward is so profound that it cannot be adequately named. It can only be indicated indirectly.

The Arizal explains that there are two dimensions of Mesiras Nefesh hidden within this expression. One is literal self-sacrifice, exemplified by Rebbe

Akiva and the Asarah Harugei Malchus. The second is the ongoing sacrifice demanded of every Jew in exile. Every act of faith amidst concealment is a form of Mesiras Nefesh. Every refusal to surrender hope is a form of Mesiras Nefesh. Every moment of persistence despite confusion is a form of Mesiras Nefesh. The anonymous phrase *Kach VeKach* hints at both dimensions simultaneously.

The Hidden Treasury of the North

The Zohar now arrives at one of its deepest teachings through the verse “*Mah Rav Tuvcha Asher Tzafanta LiRe'echa*” (מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראך). The word *Tzafanta* ordinarily means hidden away. Yet the Zohar reads it through the language of *Tzafon* (צפון), the North. The North always represents concealment, difficulty, judgment, and uncertainty. It is the region associated with coldness and absence. It is the place from which anxiety arises. It is the place where a person feels distant from clarity and security. Yet it is precisely here that the Zohar uncovers its greatest secret.

The goodness is hidden within the North itself. HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not need to hide treasures from thieves. The concealment is not a protective measure. Rather, the goodness itself is concealed within the very place that appears to oppose it. The cure is hidden within the wound, and the lock itself is revealed to be the key. The sweetness is hidden within the bitterness. The redemption is hidden within the exile. What appears to be the source of difficulty contains the source of healing. The North becomes the treasury of Divine compassion precisely because it appears to be its opposite.

The Cure From Within the Wound

The Zohar explains that HaKadosh Baruch Hu creates healing through the very forces that initially appear as concealment. *Minei U'Bei Aba Nagrei*, from the forest itself comes the handle for the axe. The instrument of repair emerges from the place of brokenness. The Gevuros themselves become the source of their own sweetening. The force that conceals ultimately reveals. The very difficulty that wounds becomes

the pathway toward healing. Nothing lies outside the Divine unity.

This principle transforms the entire experience of suffering. The left side, the side of judgment, appears to push away. Yet it contains within itself the resources required for return. The North gives rise to difficulty, but it also contains all hidden rewards. The place from which concealment emerges becomes the place from which redemption emerges. Every descent secretly contains the possibility of ascent. Every darkness secretly contains the possibility of illumination. The deepest healing arrives not despite the wound but through the wound itself.

Omer LaTzafon Teni

The culmination of this teaching appears in the prophetic declaration *Omer LaTzafon Teni* (אמר לצפון תני)—"Say to the North: Give." The North is commanded to release its hidden treasure. The concealment itself must reveal its secret. The place that once appeared to generate only difficulty becomes the source of consolation. The hidden goodness concealed within

Gevurah emerges into revelation. The North gives forth the reward hidden within it from the very beginning. What once appeared as exile reveals itself as preparation for redemption.

This is the deepest secret of the Zohar HaKadosh and the deepest secret of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. The Gevuros are not merely obstacles to overcome. They are gateways to a deeper revelation. The constant movement, instability, and concealment experienced within life become the very place where the greatest light is uncovered. HaKadosh Baruch Hu is so utterly present that He can be found even within concealment itself. The North conceals Him and simultaneously reveals Him. The darkness hides the light and simultaneously gives birth to it. Redemption emerges from the very place where it appeared impossible.

The Light Revealed Through Concealment

This is the meaning of Rebbe Shimon's declaration that only those capable of transforming bitterness into sweetness and darkness into light may enter these

chambers. The work of the Zohar is not an escape from concealment. It is the revelation of what concealment has been hiding all along. The secret of *Mah Rav Tuvcha Asher Tzafanta LiRe'echa* is that the hidden goodness was never somewhere else. It was always concealed within the experience itself. The North was never separate from the treasury. The wound was never separate from the cure. The exile was never separate from the redemption.

Through the merit of the tzaddikim, through the Mesiras Nefesh of generations, through the hidden Daas of Moshe Rabbeinu, and through the fiery compassion of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, the concealed goodness begins to emerge. The North is commanded to give. The hidden treasure is revealed. The bitterness becomes sweet. The darkness becomes light. And from within the concealment itself the announcement of redemption begins to be heard.