

BS"D Soul Prayer, Class #4, October 29, 2019¹

Ascending Up and Entering Within

We have just traveled through the High Holidays. Now, on *Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan*, the work of internalizing what we achieved continues. Without setting aside time to go back and review and reexperience some of those special moments, they will simply fade away into the mists of time and be lost. To recapture something precious, some precious moment, some important thought or feeling, we must put in the effort. This is crucial to the internalization process.

Start by choosing one special moment. Where were you? Who were you with? What day was it? What were you doing? What were you thinking? The more detailed your recollection, the more you get from it. Although seemingly hard at first, once you get the hang of it, you'll want to remember other special moments. Memories of amazing moments will pop up out of nowhere. They were there the whole time waiting to be summoned. Waiting to be opened and appreciated.

Things are moving fast all around us. Everything is accelerating. If there is one thing we learn from the High Holidays, it is that Hashem's hand is the guiding force behind every event. [Not the hands of presidents and prime ministers!] *Hashem melekh, Hashem malakh, Hashem yimlokh le'olam va'ed! Hashem Hu HaElohim!* As a formula, this verse thus speaks from the top down. It tells us that YKVK, the name that embodies Hashem's eternal existence, His transcendence, and His overriding love of all His creations, is the One who descends through many stages of concealment to reveal Himself to us as *Elokim*, the master director of the historical drama who guides creation to its true goal, the Messianic Age and beyond. As Yeshaya said in Hashem's name, "*Ani Hashem, be'itah achishenah*—I, Hashem, in its due time, I will accelerate it" (Isaiah 60:22), which the Gaon of Vilna takes to mean "Even if we are not worthy of pure *achishenah* ('I will accelerate the unfolding of the messianic process' in one swift jump), and entered the period of *bi'itah* ('in its due time'), nevertheless, even the period of *be'itah* has an accelerated *achishenah* aspect: *achishenah d'be'itah*." In other words, although, in the *achishenah d'be'itah* mode we aren't worthy of bypassing and *skipping* over history, still, the speed at which events unfold will be accelerated tremendously. History will move faster and faster.

How achishenah d'be'itah unfolds and plays out depends on how much we connect to our inner being. Stated otherwise: depends on how much we want to connect directly to *Hashem Hu HaElokim* through the inner pipelines of our soul, through our own personal, vertical, inner connection with the Source. In the least, we must try to maintain some degree of inwardness through it all. Practice inwardness. Don't look for excitement and inspiration outside yourself. Seek it within. Remember the *Cohen Gadol* entering the *Kodesh Kodashim* of the *Beit HaMikdash* numerous times on *Yom Kippur*. Remember the sacred space of the *succah*. Imagine yourself in a physical *succah*; imagine yourself in the spiritual *succah* of Hashem's clouds of glory. Know that there is a core place within you through which and from which you receive your vitality. It is actually all around you (your own personal *ohr makif*) and also within you (your own personal *ohr penimi*). It is your own personal *kodesh kodashim* (holy of holies) at the core of your being, at the same time that it encompasses you. Enter that inner holy of holies as often as possible. Love it. Rejoice in it. Guard it. Guard its sanctity. Live your life from that sacred core. This is where one plus one equals one, where your essence merges in the Divine Essence. Ask to bring more of that essence into every aspect of your life, into all you do.

From that place, ask to be able to see the essence behind all the passing forms. Ask, as Rabbi Nachman teaches, to be able to penetrate to and connect with the Divine Essence, Divine Light, and Divine Wisdom that lies at the heart and core of every experience, the soul of every single human being you encounter.

Some of the subjects we will discuss tonight and in the coming weeks:

- Prayer against the backdrop of the High Holidays
- Prayer against the backdrop of completing Devarim and beginning Bereshit, Noach, Lekh Lekha, etc.
- *Hitkashrut l'nishmot ha'tzadikim*—connecting to the souls of the *tzadikim* through their stories in the *Tanakh*
- *Elohenu v'Elohei Avotenu*—the Vertical and Horizontal Transmission
- *Makif and Penimi*—constantly reaching up to and internalizing higher levels of our own soul
- One plus One equals One—Man's Oneness is a mirror image of Gd's Oneness
- The *Mishkan* and *Mikdash* as embodiments of the entire Universal System
- The Mountain/Ladder of Prayer—Ascending Up and Entering Within

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Ascending Up and Entering Within

The *Siddur HaTefillah* (Prayer Book) was composed in a way that could facilitate our going *up* and entering *in* to *devekut* (ecstatic union with the Divine), a state of consciousness in which we see behind the superficiality of our lives to the guiding hand and loving providence of Hashem that leads our people and each one of us to the fulfillment of our highest potential.

In one sense, the prayer service is like Yaacov's ladder, at the summit of which he saw a vision of Gd. Like the angels in Yaacov's vision, we too ascend and descend. We ascend to the higher worlds to connect there to the higher, subtler aspects of our own soul. While there, we are allowed to view our life from the point of view of the soul, the point of view of eternity. We then to return to earth with greater clarity of the mission we have been given as souls.

The prayer system is also like Mount Sinai.ⁱ Like Moshe we ascend the Mount Sinai of prayer to enter *shamayim* (heaven, the spiritual dimension) to meet Hashem and receive the Torah, the higher vision of our life.ⁱⁱ Again it is clear that the purpose of prayer is to ascend and transcend—to attain the peak experience, to merge our tiny “i am” with the Great I AM—in order to return transformed, to make a *dirah ba'tachtonim*, literally, a home for Gd down here in this lowest dimension,ⁱⁱⁱ to embody the highest spiritual potential and to use it to transform earthlife into a veritable Garden of Eden.

It is for this reason that Moshe was taken up into the spiritual dimension and shown the *tavnit HaMishkan*, the spiritual “pattern” or “blueprint” of the *Mishkan* that he was to construct in the desert. What exactly was Moshe shown? The Torah answers this important question: “*Ve'assu li Mikdash*—they [Israel] shall make Me a Temple, *ve'shakhanti betokham*—so that I may dwell within them. *Ke'khol ani mareh ot'kha*—according to all that I am showing you [Moshe], *et tavnit ha'Mishkan v'et tavnit kol kelav*—the design/blueprint of the Tabernacle and the design of all its furnishings, *ken taassu*—thus shall you do” (Exodus 25:8-9).

According to tradition, the phrase “*ke'khol ani mareh ot'kha*—according to all that I am showing you,” alludes to the fact that Hashem showed Moshe the spiritual *tavnit* (design, pattern, blueprint) of the universe. Only thus would he be able to build the *Mishkan* as a miniature or microcosm of the entire creation.^{iv} Moshe was to make a *mishkan* (home) in this world for the highest spiritual experience. This would be a place wherein the *Shekhinah* would *shokhen* (dwell, indwell) in the very heart of the people.^v

The *Mishkan* that Moshe constructed was a traveling home for the *Shekhinah*. Eventually the time came when we were able to return to the exact spot where Yaacov had had his vision of the ladder. It was there, in the heart of Yerushalayim, on Mount Moriah, that Shlomo HaMelekh built the first *Beit HaMikdash*. It was there that Ezra and Nechemiah built the second *Beit HaMikdash*. It is there that the third *Beit HaMikdash* will stand, may it be soon in our days.

In the meantime, until the third *Beit HaMikdash* is built, the prayer system that the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* (Men of the Great Assembly)^{vi} constructed is our virtual *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) at the foot of Mount Sinai and our virtual *Mikdash* (Temple) at the foot of Yaacov's Ladder. In prayer, in addition to ascending and transcending, we thus also enter within the *kodesh kodashim* (inner sanctum) of our own being—the equivalent of the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) of the *Mishkan* and *Mikdash*—in order to meet and merge with the Source of our existence. This is what we mean when we say that the *Siddur HaTefillah* was composed in a way that could facilitate our going *up* and entering *in* to *devekut* (ecstatic union with the Divine). It is not either/or. On the contrary, as we shall see, *entering within* is the only way to *ascend above*.

We see this in the blueprint or floorplan of the *Mishkan/Mikdash* where the *Azarah* (Outer Courtyard) corresponds to *Olam HaAsiyah* (the physical dimension, the world of action). Entering the *Heikhal* or *Kodesh* (Holy Sanctuary) where the Golden Menorah, the Golden Table, and the Golden Incense Altar are located, corresponds to *Olam HaYetzirah* (the world of formation, the angelic world). Entering further within into the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) where the Golden Ark of the Covenant is located, corresponds to *Olam HaBeriah* (the world of creation, the world of the Divine Throne). The space between the *keruvim* (cherubs) atop the Ark is where the Glory (*Malkhut d'Malkhut d'Atzilut*, the lowest extremity of the world of emanation, the dimension of pure Divinity) enters the Holy of Holies of *Beriah*, the world of the Divine Throne.

In describing the Ark, Hashem thus told Moshe, “I will commune with you there, speaking to you from above the ark-cover, from **between the two *keruvim*** that are on the Ark of Testimony” (Exodus 25:22). Similarly, “When Moshe entered the communion tent (*ohel moed*) to speak with Him, he would hear the voice speaking to him from **between the two *keruvim*** on the Ark-cover over the Ark of Testimony” (Numbers 7:89). In both verses, the space between the

two *keruim* is emphasized. This space is where the light of the *Shekhinah* (the Indwelling Presence of *Ein Sof*) enters the world.^{vii}

The first lesson or point of the above is that *entering* from the *Azarah* (Outer Courtyard) into the *Heikhal/Kodesh* (Holy Sanctuary), and further into the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) corresponds to *ascending* from *Asiyah* (the physical dimension) to *Yetzirah* (the angelic world) to *Beriah* (the world of the Throne) and *Atzilut* (the dimension of pure Divinity). Entering within = ascending above, to the extent that entering the holy of holies of our own being is the equivalent of ascending into the higher worlds to enter before Hashem in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly *Mikdash*.

But there is a second lesson here that is perhaps even more important. As the *Zohar* teaches, *Atzilut* is not only above *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*. A measured ray or illumination of *Atzilut* also descends and enters into these lower dimensions as well.^{viii} Simply stated, this means that when you stand in *Atzilut*, and you turn around to look out and down into *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*, you are amazed that they look very different. The immediate effect of this is so powerful that the walls (limitations) you encountered on your way up to *Atzilut*—as you traveled through *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*—appear to you now as absolutely illusory with no substance or reality. In such an expanded state, your first impulse might be to hurriedly return to these lower dimensions with the truth you have just discovered, to awaken the beings of these lower dimensions from the illusion of what they *think* is reality.

This is extremely laudable, but it won't work. The second you make your decision and set your sights on leaving *Atzilut* (even while still *in Atzilut*), it's gone. ***Atzilut-vision is gone because there is only so much Atzilut-consciousness you are permitted to bring back with you into Beriah.*** This is what we meant when we said that only a *measured* ray or illumination of *Atzilut* descends into and permeates these lower dimensions. There is only so much *Atzilut* that *Asiyah* can handle. But not to worry. Even if you bring back what's called a *reshimu* (residual impression) of *Atzilut*, that's glorious. This is what the prophets and righteous masters of all the generations did. They ascended into the higher worlds, meaning, they were allowed to enter into higher states of consciousness in which they experienced pure Divinity. When they returned to normal consciousness, they returned transformed. ***There was only so much they could bring back, but even that tiny bit changed them and all around them.*** And of course, the more frequently they entered within—until it became the most normal thing to live and generate their lives from that deep core place—the more real and powerful the light they were able to channel down.

In psycho-spiritual terms, the holy of holies experience is a state of consciousness called *deveikut* wherein whatever physical, emotional, mental, and/or spiritual blocks that are preventing us from realizing that we are always standing in Hashem's presence dissolve. Seen from this holy-of-holies perspective, our normal experience of the world is really a necessary illusion that Hashem created so that we could think, feel, and act as if we exist separately from Him. Here in the holy of holies, the illusion disappears and we realize that we are always *lifney Hashem*—in Hashem's presence. Again, our *avodah* (inner work), after having entered *lifney ve'lifnim*, is to return with as much of that higher awareness as possible into all the outer courtyards of our life.^{ix}

All these different models and metaphors of higher consciousness come together in the *Siddur*. When we speak about reaching the top of the ladder and the mountain, and entering the Holy of Holies (*Kodesh Kodashim*) in the *Beit HaMikdash* in the *Amidah* (the Standing Prayer), this means that we are entering the Holy of Holies of the heavenly *Mikdash*, and it means that we are entering the holy of holies of our own inner sanctum.

Most important, once we reach the top of the ladder and the mountain, and enter into the holy of holies, it is essential to stop all extraneous speech and thought. Here, in order to hear the godly voice, we need to BE IN SILENCE. For this is the place where heaven touches earth, where we transcend our earthly life to RECEIVE the heavenly vision of our life. Beyond anything, prayer is about how to meet Gd in that holy of holies and to know that, in that place, which is not a place, because it transcends place as we know it, IN THAT PLACE, THERE IS NO SEPARATE EXISTENCE. This is where we realize "*ein od mi'levado*—there is nothing but Gd" (Deuteronomy 4:39). THERE IS ONLY HASHEM. In this inner place we realize that our little "i" is an extension of the Great "I". We nullify our existence to the Source of existence, in order to receive much greater and truer existence in return.

This is the core experience toward which all Jewish prayer and meditation aims. The work is then to internalize this experience and take it with us as we walk back *down* and *out* into the outer courtyards of our life.

ⁱ The Midrash (*Bereshit Rabbah* 68:12) establishes a direct parallel between Yaacov's prophetic vision of a *sulam* (ladder) and Israel's receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. See *Temple of Prayer*, Chapter 6, note #150.

ⁱⁱ In the text of the written Torah we are informed that Moshe ascended to the peak of Sinai and remained there for forty days and forty nights without food and drink (Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:9). In numerous places in the oral tradition that accompanied the written text, the sages inform us that Moshe ascended to *shamayim*, the spiritual dimension (see *Shabbat* 88b; *Zohar Vayak'heil*, 2:197a; *Zohar Beshalach*, 2:58a). There is no contradiction. As Ramban expresses it, "According to the way of *emet* [the true wisdom of Kabbalah], the written Torah speaks openly about the *tachtonim* (that which is below; concrete, physical reality) but refers covertly to the *elyonim* (that which is above; spiritual reality)" (Ramban, Genesis 1:2 end).

The Zohar clarifies this distinction between the written Torah and the oral tradition in extremely sharp terms: "Woe to he who thinks that the Torah has come only to tell worldly stories...Rather, all the words of the Torah are extremely exalted and contain supernal secrets...Come see. The Torah has a body and a soul. The Torah's body is its commandments which are called *gufei Torah* (limbs of the Torah). This body itself is covered with garments, which are none other than the mundane stories of the Torah...Fools do not attempt to see beneath these outer garments. Those who understand more do not look at the garments, but at the body beneath the garments. Those who are truly wise, the servants of the Supernal King...look at the soul of the Torah, its essence." (*Zohar Behaalotkha*, 3:152a).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Tanchuma Naso* 16, "When the Holy One created the world, He especially desired a *dirah ba'tachtonim* (a dwelling place in the lowest worlds) similar to His dwelling *ba'elyonim* (in the supernal worlds)." The simple meaning of this is that Hashem wishes to be as revealed in our lives down here as much as He is revealed in the supernal worlds.

^{iv} *Tikuney Zohar*, first introduction, p. 13a; *Menachot* 29a; *Tanchuma Pekudey* 2; Rabbenu Bachya on Exodus 25:9. See also *Tanchuma Naso* 11; *Pirkey d'Rebbi Eliezer* 3.

^v See *Nefesh HaChayim* 1:4, *hagah s.v. ki ha'mishkan* in *Temple of Prayer*, Chapter 7, note #158. See also Rabbi Elazar Azkari (1533-1600), "The main dwelling-place of the *Shekhinah* is in the Jewish heart, as the verse states, 'They [Israel] shall make Me a *Mikdash* (Temple), *ve'shakhanti betokham* (so that I may dwell among/within them)' (Exodus 25:8)" (*Sefer Charedim* 66:21).

^{vi} Returning from exile in Babylon and Persia, Ezra HaSofer (aka Malakhi the Prophet) gathered one hundred and twenty of the greatest sages of his time. This group, which included the last of the biblical prophets (Zekhariah and Chagai), was known as *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*.

^{vii} See *Maarekhet Elokut* in *Temple of Prayer*, Chapter 8, note #183. After explaining how the *keruvm* in the Holy of Holies are the *hishtalshelut* (physical counterparts below) of the *keruvm ha'elyonim* (angelic *keruvm* in the higher dimension), the author continues, emphasizing the fact that the wings of the *keruvm* in the *Mikdash* below were spread upward in exactly the same manner as the wings of the angelic *keruvm* above. As we will see below, this is a receiving position. With their wings spread upward, they open themselves to receive *shefa mochin* (higher consciousness) from the level above them. As a rule, every lower entity or dimension receives from the level immediately above it, which receives from the level above it, all the way up to the Singular Source that enlivens all. Based on this, we too spread our hands in prayer in order to receive life-force and sustenance from Hashem.

^{viii} In *Zohar Haazinu* (3:288a) this is called, "*Da le'go min da*—one clothed within the other, *ve'da le'ela min da*—one above the other." See *Zohar Bereshit* (1:19b-20a): "*Vekhol alma...ila vetata...kola ihu da levusha leda*—each universe or dimension...above and below...each is a garment for each" [i.e., each lower universe is a garment for the one above it]. See also *Shaarey Kedushah* 3:1; *Tanya* 51, p. 72a; *Nefesh HaChayim* 1:5; *Leshem Shvo VeAchlamah*, *Hakdamot VeShearim* 5:1; Kaplan, *Innerspace*, p. 21.

In the words of the Ari, "Just as *Malkhut* [*d'Malkhut*] *d'Atzilut* (the lowest extremity of *Atzilut*) descends and enters into *Kodesh Kodashim d'Beriah* (the highest chamber of *Beriah*), the same order is followed from *Beriah* to *Yetzirah*, and from *Yetzirah* to *Asiyah*...In this way, the *Malkhut* [*d'Malkhut*] of each higher dimension becomes the *Keter* of the lower dimension" (*Etz Chayim* 46:2; see also *Etz Chayim* 3:1 end). As Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi states, as the lowest extremity of each higher dimension descends to become clothed within the highest chamber of each lower dimension, the lower dimension receives its life force not only from the level immediately above it but from *Ein Sof*: "The higher and lower dimensions differ with regard to the magnitude of the flow of life force with which the blessed *Ein Sof* enlivens and illuminates them, in the category of *giluy mi'helem* (revelation via concealment)...For the higher dimensions receive the light in a somewhat more revealed way than the lower dimensions...The lower dimensions...do not receive the light in quite such a revealed manner, but only via numerous *levushim* (garments), whereby the blessed *Ein Sof* clothes and conceals the life force and the light that He flows down to them...In this way, the light is *melubash* (clothed), *mekhuseh* (covered), and *mustar* (concealed)...This light certainly comes from the blessed *Ein Sof*, but it is clothed in many *levushim*. As written in *Etz Chayim*...the light that inheres within the physical orb of the earth comes from *Malkhut d'Malkhut d'Asiyah*. Within this is the light of *Malkhut d'Yetzirah*; within this is the light of *Malkhut d'Beriah*; within this is the light of the ten *sefirot* of *Atzilut*, all of which are unified with the One who emanated them, the blessed *Ein Sof*" (*Tanya, Likutey Amarim*, Chapter 51, p. 72a; see *Realizing the Unity*, Chapter 10, note #189).

^{ix} Entering the *Kodesh Kodashim* is also described as entering *lifnay ve'lifnim*. Usually rendered in English as "inner sanctum," *lifnay ve'lifnim* means literally "the inner of the inner" and refers not only to a physical place but to the profound, life-changing realization that we are always *lifney Hashem* (in the presence of pure divinity).