

An Incredible Idea from the Holy Baal Shem Tov and His Students zy”a We Are Obligated to Follow in the Footsteps of the Ovos Who Dug Wells to Reveal the Divine Spark Concealed within the Earthly Realm

In this week’s parsha, parshas Toldos, we read about the Ovos’s intense efforts to dig wells in the ground. The Plishtim opposed the digging of the wells and filled them up with dirt. Elimelech’s subjects attempted to steal the water wells from Yitzchok. Eventually, Yitzchok succeeded in digging a well of flowing water devoid of controversy. Here is the passage from the Torah (Bereishis 26, 18):

”וישב יצחק ויחפור את בארות המים אשר חפרו בימי אברהם אביו ויסתמום פלשתים אחרי מות אברהם, ויקרא להן שמות כשמות אשר קרא להן אביו. ויחפרו עבדי יצחק בנחל וימצאו שם באר מים חיים, ויריבו רועי גרר עם רועי יצחק לאמר לנו המים, ויקרא שם הבאר עשק כי התעשקו עמו, ויחפרו באר אחרת ויריבו גם עליה ויקרא שמה שטנה, ויעתק משם ויחפור באר אחרת ולא רבו עליה ויקרא שמה רחובות, ויאמר כי עתה הרחיב ה' לנו ופרינו בארץ.”

And Yitzchok returned and he dug the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Avraham his father and which the Plishtim had stopped up after Avraham’s death; and he called them by the same names that his father had called them. Yitzchok’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of fresh water. The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Yitzchok’s herdsmen saying, “The water is ours,” so he called the name of the well Esek because they vied with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over it also; so he called its name Sitnoh. He relocated from there and dug another well; and they did not quarrel over it, so he called its name Rechovos, and said, “For now Hashem has granted us ample space, and we will be fruitful in the land.”

Three Wells Corresponding to the Three Beis HaMikdoshes

The Ramban expresses his amazement over the fact that the Torah goes into such great detail describing the wells that Yitzchok dug. On the surface, it does not appear as if this matter glorifies

Yitzchok or portrays him in any special light. The Ramban goes on to explain that in fact the three wells dug by Yitzchok’s servants correspond to the three Beis HaMikdoshes. Hence, the first two wells—Esek and Sitnoh—were mired in controversy between the herdsmen of Gerar and Yitzchok’s herdsmen. For, those two wells corresponded to the two Beis HaMikdoshes that were destroyed as a consequence of our countless sins. The third well, however, Rechovos, which was free of controversy, corresponded to the third Beis HaMikdash which will endure for all eternity.

To reinforce this notion, let us recall that the three Beis HaMikdoshes correspond to the three holy Ovos. The Gemara states (Pesochim 88a): **”לא כאברהם שכתוב בו הר... ולא כיצחק—”**Avraham visited the site of the Beis HaMikdash and referred to it as a mountain, “har”; Yitzchok visited the site and referred to it as a field, “sodeh”; Yaakov called it a house, “Bayis.” The holy Alshich, in Toras Moshe parshas Bechukosai (Vayikro 26, 13), provides us with a fascinating insight. Our enemies gained control of the first Beis HaMikdash corresponding to Avraham, because he begat Yishmael. They also gained control of the second Beis HaMikdash corresponding to Yitzchok, because he begat Eisov. The third Beis HaMikdash, however, which will be built in the merit of Yaakov, will endure forevermore, because his progeny were unblemished.

Thus, we can propose that the three wells dug by Yitzchok also correspond to the three holy Ovos. Concerning Yishmael, fathered by Avraham, the possuk states (Bereishis 21, 20): **”וישב במדבר ויהי—”**he dwelt in the desert and became an archer. Rashi comments: **”היה יושב במדבר ומלסטם את העוברים הוא שנאמר—”**living in the desert, he would rob all the passersby. Therefore, the first well, corresponding to Avraham was called Esek, a name deriving from the Hebrew word for exploitation; the

controversy over this well reflected the fact that Yishmael robbed and exploited other human beings.

The second well corresponded to Yitzchok, who fathered Eisov. It is known that Eisov's ministering angel, known as the "samech-mem," is none other than the Soton—who slanders and denounces Yisroel. The controversy over this second well stemmed from Eisov; therefore, Yitzchok called it Sitnoh, a name related to the Soton. In fact, Rabeinu Bachayei comments on the association between the name of this well and Eisov's ministering angel, the Soton: **“ויש לך להתעורר בשם הבאר הזה, כי שם נמצא השטן שהוא שרו של עשו המשטין עלינו תמיד”**.

The third well dug by Yitzchok corresponded to Yaakov—the third of the Ovos, referred to as the elite of the Ovos; his offspring were unblemished. As a result, the well corresponding to Yaakov was free of controversy. Hence, he called it Rechovos and proclaimed: “For now Hashem has granted us ample space, and we will be fruitful in the land”—reflecting the fact that Yaakov was fruitful and merited to father only righteous sons—G-d's twelve tribes.

Digging Wells to Reveal the Divine Spark Concealed in the Earth

Let us now present a vital principle from the incomparable teachings of the holy Baal Shem Tov, zy”a. He addresses the reason that our holy Ovos occupied themselves with the digging of wells and the practical significance it portends for us. He explains that they intended to penetrate through the material veil of life on earth in order to uncover the divine spark concealed within. The Maor Einayim (Vayeitzei) expresses this idea as follows:

“כי זה סוד כל הבארות שחפרו האבות, למצוא מים שהיא התורה בבחינת עפר במדרגות הפחיתות, וכמו שאמר הבעש”ט זלה”ה נשמתו בגנזי מרומים על פסוק (בראשית כו-טו) וכל הבארות אשר חפרו עבדי אביו בימי אברהם אביו סתמום פלשתים וימלאום עפר, שהוא כמו שאמרנו שכל אחד מן האבות עשה התגלות התורה מיסוד עפר ומדרגות תחתונים, על ידי תיקון מדתו של כל אחד ואחד, למצוא שם מים, בחינת באר מים חיים, שלא יכסה יסוד העפר על המים.

ואחר הסתלקות אברהם נסתמו התגלות ההם, על ידי יסוד העפר ששב לכסות על בחינת המים, והסתימה היתה על ידי פלשתים שהם הקליפות שחזרו וגברו, ויצחק שב וחפרן כמו שכתוב (שם שם-יח) וישב יצחק ויחפור את בארות המים אשר חפרו וגו'... וכל זה היה לדורות הבאים לתקנם, שאילולי האבות לא היה אפשר להשיג שום השגה ולהתקרב להשם יתברך... וזהו ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה', פירוש בהווה תמיד

הוא כך, שהוא עומד לימין צדיקים לעזרינו על ידי התיקונים שתיקן וגילה לנו, לחפור בבחינת עפר בארות מים חיים.”

The Ovos wished to reveal Torah, represented by “water” (“mayim”), even in the lowliest, most material places, represented by “dust” (“a'far”). Each of the Ovos approached this task from his own unique perspective, based on his own characteristic attribute. After Avraham departed from this world, his revelations were covered up by the Plishtim; they covered up the “water” he had uncovered with “dust.” The Plishtim represent the “klipos”—the negative forces that returned to power after Avraham passed away. Nevertheless, due to his persistence, Yitzchok restored the wells for the benefit of future generations. It is only due to the efforts of the Ovos that their future generations are afforded the opportunity to perceive the Almighty and get close to Him on even the minutest level.

We should note that the Sefas Emes (Toldos 5633) presents this same fundamental idea in the name of his elder, the great author of the Chidushei HaRim, zy”a: **“אדוני אבי זקני מורי ורבי ז”ל הגיד בענין הבארות שחפרו אבותינו, להסיר החיצוניות למצוא הארה הגנוזה, שבכל מקום יש נקודה פנימיות”**—the Ovos dug wells to remove the external earthly layers so as to find the hidden illumination; all things and places possess an internal aspect.

We find this concept of the Baal Shem Tov's presented by the Shem MiShmuel (Toldos 5678), in the name of his father, the great author of the Avnei Nezer, zy”a, presented with a slight twist. Not only must we strive to reveal the wells of water concealed throughout the world, but we must uncover the internal wells within man himself. Just as the earth must be removed to reveal the water hidden beneath the surface, so, too, man's material aspects and interests must be overcome to reveal his innermost heart's desires. He concludes: **“וזה עצמו היה ענין חפירת הבארות, לפועל דמיוני לזרעם אחריהם, שיהיה בכוחם לסלק החומר ותתגלה העצה—שבלבכם ממילא”**—the digging of the wells served as a symbolic gesture, a “poel dimyon,” to their future generations; it conveyed the message that they would have the power to overcome the material influences and thus their inner desires and inclinations would inevitably be revealed.

“Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens . . . and let the dry land appear”

Let us continue onward and upward along this exalted path to examine the words of the Sefas Emes (Toldos 5647) explaining magnificently the Chidushei HaRim's understanding of the subject

of the digging of the wells. To begin with, we must introduce a possuk relating to the creation of the world (Bereishis 1, 9): **“וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקּוּוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבְשָׁה וְיִהְיֶה כֵן—G-d said, “Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area, and let the dry land appear.”** And it was so. Here we are informed that at the beginning of creation, the entire world was filled with water, as it is written (Bereishis 1, 2): **“וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם—**and the spirit of G-d hovered upon the surface of the waters.

Now, the Midrash (B.R. 1, 1) teaches us that HKB”H created the world based on the Torah. The Gemara (B.K. 17a) teaches us: **“אֵין מַיִם אֵלָא תּוֹרָה—**there is no water other than Torah. The Sefas Emes explains therefore that at the beginning of creation, the entire earth was covered by water. In other words, the light of Torah filled the world without obstruction or concealment, just as it fills the heavens.

The purpose of creation, however, is that down on earth, the light of Hashem should be concealed. Only in this manner, will man have the freedom to choose between good and, chas v’shalom, the opposite. Therefore, G-d commanded: **“וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקּוּוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבְשָׁה—**that the water gather into certain areas and allow the dry land to appear. In other words, the water of Torah was to remain concealed and covered up within the earth. Outwardly, only the dust of the earth, which covers the water, is apparent. That is until man comes along and digs through the material, earthly layers in order to reveal the light of the Torah, the divine spark, concealed within.

This then is the significance of the Ovos’s digging up the physical earth. They wished to reveal the **“בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים—**the well of fresh water—the divine light concealed within the depths of the earth. The Plishtim, however, representing the forces of impurity, filled them up with dirt, attempting to prevent the divine light from shining through. Ultimately, the Ovos’s efforts proved successful. They found a **“be’er mayim chaim”—**revealing the light of Hashem—and paved the way for all of Yisroel to continue to do so throughout all future generations. This is the gist of the Sefas Emes’s explanation.

To reinforce this idea, let us explain why Yitzchok succeeded in revealing the **“be’er mayim chaim,”** without any controversy, specifically on his third attempt—the well corresponding to Yaakov Avinu, Rechovos. What, in fact, is the tool necessary to dig up the ground and the earthly elements in this world that conceal the **“be’er mayim chaim”?** Apparently, the holy Torah with which

the entire world was created—including the material elements—is the necessary digging implement. It allows man to penetrate the material layers of this world and uncover the holy sparks concealed within. Hence, the Torah is compared to water; for, engaging in Torah study, reveals the waters concealed beneath the dust of the earth.

Now, the Zohar hakadosh (Vayeitzei 146b) teaches us that Yaakov is the pillar of Torah: **“עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֲסִדִים, הַתּוֹרָה דָּא יַעֲקֹב, הָעֲבוּדָה דָּא יִצְחָק, גְּמִילוּת חֲסִדִים דָּא אַבְרָהָם—**the world is supported by three pillars; Yaakov is the pillar of Torah; Yitzchok is the pillar of religious service; Avraham is the pillar of acts of kindness. This explains why only when the third well—corresponding to Yaakov Avinu, the pillar of Torah—was dug, was the **“be’er mayim chaim”** revealed; it was not filled back up with dirt and remained free of controversy. The message is clear; only by means of Torah study is it possible to uncover the **“בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים—**the well of fresh water.

HKB”H Formed Man’s Body from an Incredible Mixture of Dust and Water

I was struck by a wonderful thought. The King of Kings formed man’s body, with divine wisdom, out of a mixture of dust from the earth and water from the depths of the earth. This act is described in the following possuk (ibid. 2, 7): **“וַיִּיצַר ה’ אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאָדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בָּאָפִיִּי נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה—**and Hashem G-d formed the man of soil from the earth, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living soul. Rashi provides the following clarification: **“עֹפָר מִן הָאָדָמָה, צָבַר עֹפָרוֹ מִכָּל הָאָדָמָה—**G-d collected soil from all four corners of the earth, so that wherever man may die, the earth will accept his body for burial.

Before HKB”H formed man’s body, He first irrigated the entire surface of the earth with water from the depths. HKB”H then kneaded man’s body from soil and water. The possuk states (ibid. 6): **“וַיֹּאדָם יַעֲלֶה מִן הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת כָּל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה—**a mist ascended from the earth and watered the whole surface of the soil. Here Rashi comments: **“לְעֵנִין בְּרִייתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם, הָעֶלָה הַתְּהוֹם וְהִשְׁקָה עֲנַיִים לְשֵׁרוֹת הָעֹפָר, וְנִבְרָא אָדָם כְּגַבֵּל זֶה שְׁנוֹתָן מַיִם וְאַחַר כֵּן וַיִּיצַר—**in order to create man, He raised the waters of the deep, and filled the clouds with water to saturate the soil; then man was created like one who kneads dough; he adds water to the flour and then kneads the dough; in similar fashion, HKB”H irrigated the soil with water and then formed man from the mixture.

Despite our limited capacity to fathom the true significance of this act, it is still worthwhile to investigate why HKB”H chose to form man’s body from a mixture of soil from the earth and water from the depths. In light of the Sefas Emes’s illuminating explanation above, we can begin to understand why man was formed in this manner. His body was meant to combine water from the depths—representing the “be’er mayim chaim,” the divine spark—together with soil from the earth—which obscures and conceals the divine spark that lies within man. This combination insures that man has freedom of choice; he can strive to reveal the divine spark or, chas v’shalom, to leave it concealed.

Just as every Jew must dig through the material existence of this world in order to reveal the “be’er mayim chaim” hiding beneath the surface, so, too, he must penetrate through the physical earthly layers of his body in order to reveal the divine spark concealed within. This understanding coincides perfectly with the words of the Avnei Nezer mentioned above—that the Ovos dug the wells as a symbolic gesture representing the unveiling of the divine spark within man’s body.

If Not Your Burial Place Will Be there

This helps explain very nicely why Hashem held the mountain imposingly over Yisroel’s heads at the time of Matan Torah. The Gemara (Shabbes 88a) elucidates the possuk (Shemos 19, 17) as follows: **“וַיִּתְּצֵבוּ בַתְּחִתֵּי הַהָר, אָמַר רַב אַבְדִּימִי בַר חַמָּא בַר חַסָּא, מִלְּמַד שִׁכְפָּה הַקֶּבֶה עַלֵּיהֶם אֶת הָהָר כְּגִיגִית וְאָמַר לָהֶם, אִם אַתֶּם מִקְבְּלִים “וַיִּתְּצֵבוּ בַתְּחִתֵּי הַהָר, אָמַר רַב אַבְדִּימִי בַר חַמָּא בַר חַסָּא, מִלְּמַד שִׁכְפָּה הַקֶּבֶה עַלֵּיהֶם אֶת הָהָר כְּגִיגִית וְאָמַר לָהֶם, אִם אַתֶּם מִקְבְּלִים “שֵׁם תֵּהָא קְבוּרַתְכֶם” —the possuk states: “they stood at the foot of the mountain.” Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: This teaches that HKB”H held the mountain over them like an upturned barrel. Then He said to them: “If you accept the Torah, fine; but if not, your burial will be there.”**

Tosefos (ibid.) ask the obvious question. Why was it necessary to threaten them in this manner, they had already expressed their willingness to accept the Torah with the proclamation: “na’aseh v’nishma”? Based on our discussion, however, we can suggest that HKB”H was teaching them a crucial lesson—a lesson so that all future generations would appreciate why it is so important to receive the Torah.

As explained the implement needed to dig through the layers of soil and earth in order to reveal the “be’er mayim chaim” is the holy Torah. With the Torah, HKB”H created the earthly elements

of this world that obscure the presence of the water. It is clear, therefore, that the only way to uncover the well of water hidden within a person is by means of studying Torah—which is compared to water. Its holiness has the power to penetrate through the dust and earth which comprise the body—ultimately revealing the divine spark.

This, in fact, is what we have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): **“כִּךְ הַקֶּבֶה אָמַר לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּנֵי בְרָאֲתִי יֵצֵר הָרַע וּבְרָאֲתִי לוֹ —תּוֹרָה תְּבַלֵּן, וְאִם אַתֶּם עוֹסְקִים בַּתּוֹרָה אֵין אַתֶּם נִמְסָרִים בִּידוֹ”**—so said HKB”H to Yisroel, “My son, I have created the yetzer hora and I have created the Torah as its antidote; if you engage in Torah study, you will not fall prey to it.” The yetzer hora intensifies the element of “a’far,” dust, within man’s being, so as to cover up and obscure the element of water—the divine spark within his being. Nevertheless, by engaging in Torah study, we can successfully dig through the bodily, human “a’far” and reveal the source of running water—the “be’er mayim chaim”—located within.

For this reason, HKB”H held the mountain over Yisroel’s heads in a threatening manner. The mountain represents the soil and dust of the earth that obscure the presence of the water. Then He said to Yisroel: **“אִם אַתֶּם מִקְבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוֹטֵב”**—if you accept the Torah, all will be fine and good; for then you will possess the proper tool to penetrate the earthly body and reveal the water within—the divine spark present in every human being. **“וְאִם לֹא —שֵׁם תֵּהָא קְבוּרַתְכֶם”**—however, if you refuse to accept the Torah, you will lack the necessary digging implement; in that case: **“שֵׁם תֵּהָא קְבוּרַתְכֶם”**—the divine spark within each of you will remain buried underneath the physical layers of the earthly, human body obscuring its light.

Thus, we have learned an important lesson. A Jew must always remember that HKB”H formed our bodies from the dust of the earth, which He kneaded with the waters from the depths. Everyone possesses a divine spark unique to his neshamah, which is concealed by the earthly body. It is our obligation not to fall into the category of: **“וְאִם לֹא שֵׁם תֵּהָא קְבוּרַתְכֶם”**—living our lives in such a manner that the divine spark remains buried beneath the physical body derived from the dust of the earth. Rather we must toil and labor in our study of Torah. No matter what a person’s daily occupation is, he must dedicate time to studying Torah. By doing so, we will merit following in the footsteps of the holy Ovos, who dug up the earth with the power of the Torah and uncovered the “be’er mayim chaim.”

The Lower Waters Lament that They Are Covered by Dust

Based on what we have learned above from the Baal Shem Tov, the Chidushei HaRim and the Sefas Emes, I would like to propose a novel explanation for a well-known teaching from our blessed sages. Chazal teach us that the lower waters cry, because they, too, long to be in the presence of the King, HKB”H. [Translator’s note: Recall that on the second day of creation, the waters were separated by a firmament. Those waters that remained below the firmament, the earthly waters, are here referred to as the lower waters.] Their source is the possuk in parshas Vayikro (2, 13): **“וּכְלֹ קָרְבַּן מִנְחַתְךָ בַמֶּלַח תִּמְלַח וְלֹא תִשְׁבֵּית מִלַּח בְּרִית אֶלְקִיךָ מֵעַל מִנְחַתְךָ—** you shall salt your every korban minchah with salt; you may not discontinue the salt of your G-d’s covenant from upon your korban minchah. Rashi explains: **“מִלַּח בְּרִית, שֶׁהַבְּרִית כְּרוּתָהּ לַמֶּלַח מִשְׁשֵׁת יְמֵי בְּרֵאשִׁית, שֶׁהוּבַטְחוּ הַמַּיִם הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים לִיקְרַב בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ בַּמֶּלַח וְנִיסוּךְ הַמַּיִם בַּחֲגֵ”**—for a covenant has been made with salt since the six days of creation; for the lower waters were promised to be offered on the altar in the form of salt and in the form of water libations on Succot.

Regarding this matter, Rabeinu Bachayei writes (ibid.):

“וּכֵן אָמְרוּ בַּמְדַּרְשׁ מַיִם הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים נִקְרְאוּ מַיִם בּוֹכִים, וְלִמָּה נִקְרְאוּ מַיִם בּוֹכִים, כִּי בִשְׁעָה שֶׁחִלַּק הַקֶּבֶ” ה את המים נתן אלו למעלה ואלו למטה, התחילו מים התחתונים בוכים... אמרו אוי לנו שלא זכינו לעלות למעלה להיות קרובים ליצרנו... אמר להם הקב”ה, הואיל ולכבודי עשיתן כל כך, אין להן רשות למים העליונים לומר שירה עד שיטלו רשות מכם... ולא עוד אלא שעתידין אתם ליקרב על גבי המזבח במלח וניסוך המים.”

The Midrash states that the lower waters are referred to as “crying waters.” For, when HKB”H divided the waters, some were placed above and some were placed below. The lower waters began to cry. They lamented the fact that they did not merit to remain above in close proximity to the Creator. In an attempt to appease them, HKB”H told them that: (a) the upper waters are not permitted to utter their song until they first obtain permission from the lower waters and (b) they, the lower waters, were destined to be offered on the altar in the form of salt and in the form of water libations—according them distinction and honor.

In truth, however, the crying of the lower waters deserves further examination. One of the principles of faith is (Yeshayah 6, 3): **“קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה’ צְבָאוֹת מִלֵּא כֹל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ**” —the glory of

Hashem fills the entire universe. So, what is the basis of the lower waters lament: “We want to remain in the presence of the King.”? Even down on earth, they are still in the presence of HKB”H. Furthermore, since it was HKB”H’s decree that they remain down below, how dare they question the King’s decision and request that He alter the order of creation?

Upper Waters—Torah from Heaven

Based on what we have discussed, let us suggest that the “upper waters” are the elements of Torah that are compared to water—that HKB”H brought down to Yisroel from the heavens at the time of Matan Torah. In contrast, the “lower waters” are the elements of Torah and holy sparks that are concealed in the depths of the earth and are covered up by the material, earthly aspects of this world. Concerning these latter waters, HKB”H decreed during the period of creation: **“יִקּוּ הַמַּיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אֶחָד וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבֶּשֶׁה”**—“Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area, and let the dry land appear.” Therefore they cry and beseech HKB”H that they too should merit to be revealed above ground; they want man to utilize them in the service of Hashem just as he utilizes the upper waters.

Seen in this light, let us interpret HKB”H’s response to the lower waters: **“אִמְרוּ לָהֶם הַקֶּבֶ”** ה, הואיל ולכבודי עשיתן כל כך, אין להן רשות למים העליונים לומר שירה עד שיטלו רשות מכם... ולא עוד אלא שעתידין אתם ליקרב על גבי המזבח במלח וניסוך המים” In other words, the whole purpose of giving Yisroel the parts of the Torah represented by the “upper waters,” was so that they could utilize them—in the form of Torah study and the performance of mitzvos—to penetrate through the earthly, material layers of this world and reveal the sparks of kedushah represented by the “lower waters.” For, Torah study and the performance of mitzvos are the digging implements necessary to unearth the treasures concealed beneath the physical surface of this world.

HKB”H points out that: **“אִין לָהֶן רְשׁוּת לַמַּיִם הָעֲלִיּוֹנִים לֹא מֵרֵ”** שירה—the upper waters are not permitted to utter their song until they have received permission from the lower waters. As explained, HKB”H provided us with the parts of the Torah represented by the upper waters so that we can unearth and reveal the elements of Torah and sparks of kedushah represented by the lower waters—which are concealed within the depths of this earthly existence. Therefore, only after Yisroel have successfully used Torah study and mitzvos to dig through

the earthly layers of this world to reveal the lower waters, are the upper waters permitted to sing their song to HKB”H; only then will they have dutifully completed their task.

HKB”H concludes His response and his words of encouragement to the lower waters by saying: **“ולא עוד אלא שעתידין אתם ליקרב על גבי המזבח במלח וניסוך המים”**—and furthermore you are destined to be offered on the altar in the form of salt and water libations. Here HKB”H conveys to them how dear man’s efforts are to Him. Because human beings, physical creatures of flesh and blood, struggle to dig through the material, earthly aspects of this world in order to reveal the sparks of kedushah associated with the lower waters, HKB”H rewards them by choosing them to be offered before Him on the altar.

Purification of the Earthly Body by Immersion in Water

At this point, we can utilize the explanations of the Chidushei HaRim and the Sefas Emes to enlighten us regarding the matter of purification in a “mikveh”—a ritual bath—filled with water. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 175) explains the mechanism of human purification by means of immersion in a mikveh as follows:

“ובטעם המים שיטהרו כל טמא אכשור על צד הפשט, כי הענין הוא כדי שיראה האדם את עצמו אחר הטבילה כאלו נברא באותה שעה, כמו שהיה העולם כולו מים טרם היות בו אדם, וכמו שכתוב (בראשית א-ב) ורוח אלקים מרחפת על פני המים. ויתן אל לבו בדמיון כי כמו שנתחדש בגופו יחדש גם כן פעולותיו לטוב, ויכשיר מעשיו וידקדק בדרכי השם ברוך הוא.”

ועל כן אמרו חכמים שלא תכשר הטהרה במים שבכלי, רק במים חיים או מכונסים שהן על קרקע ולא בכלי מכל מקום, כדי לתת אל לבו במחשבה כאלו העולם כולו מים, והוא נתחדש בעלותו מהן כמו שאמרנו,

ואם יהיו המים בכלי או אפילו עברו על כלי, לא יתכן הענין הזה שאמרנו אל מחשבת הטובל, כי יש גבול אל כל אשר הוא בכלי שהוא מעשה ידי אדם, ועל כן לא יחשוב בטבלו כאלו כל העולם מים כאשר בתחילה ושהוא נתחדש לשעתו.”

He explains that the process of immersion in a mikveh is to imagine that we are returning to the beginning of creation and that we are being created anew at that moment. At that point in time, the entire world was full of water; and the water was not yet covered by earth. As we have learned, tumah stems from the activity of the yetzer hora. The yetzer strengthens and enhances the influence of the earthly elements of the body—the “a’far”—so that they may cover and submerge the divine spark located within man’s being—the element of “mayim.”

Consequently, to purify man of his tumah, he must immerse in water. Thus, he arouses the source of creation—as if revisiting the first moments of creation—when the entire world was still inundated with water. As we know Torah is compared to water. At that point in creation, the world was filled with Torah; it was before the waters were covered up by land as a result of the command: **“יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה”**—“Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area, and let the dry land appear.” When a person immerses himself in water with this intent, he is connecting himself with his internal well of water. He is effectively removing his earthly layers and revealing the divine spark within his physical body without any impediment or element of concealment. This is the essence of man’s purification. He must unveil the divine spark within his being and insure that it is not covered up, chas v’chalilah, by the earthly layers of his human existence; for, otherwise: **“שם תהא קבורתכם”**—he is not truly alive!



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