

THE GLASER EDITION

מפניני

נועים

אלימלך

MIPENINEI

NOAM
ELIMELECH

*A selection of teachings,
stories, and parables of*

**REBBE ELIMELECH
OF LIZHENSK**

TRANSLATED AND COMPILED BY TAL MOSHE ZWECKER

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מכתב ברכה מאת כ"ק, מרן אדמו"ר מבאסטאן שליט"א רמת בית שמש

ברוך אשר נתן לנו תורת אמת, וחיי עולם נטע בתוכינו. גדולי החכמים והצדיקים לדורותיהם השאירו לנו נחלה העוברת מדור לדור, ואורם מאיר ומחמם לבות בני ישראל בכל עת ובכל מקום.

תורתנו הקדושה נמסרה לנו מסיני באר היטב בשבעים לשון, בכדי שאפי' אחינו בני ישראל שאינם זוכים להבין דברי התורה הקדושה כנתינתה בלשון הקודש, יוכלו עדיין להנות ולהתחמם לאורה הק' באותו לשון שהם מבינים.

והנה מכירי הרב טל משה צוקער שליט"א אוהב תורה וירא שמים, עמל כמה שנים להביא דבריו הק' והמאירים כלפיד אש של הרה"ק רבי אלימלך מליזענסק זי"ע להאירים עבור אחינו בני ישראל יהודים יקרים אשר לא זכו להבין לשונו הקדוש ככתיבתו. ויה"ר שיזכות רביה"ק יעמוד לו ולזרעו לראות ישרים מבורכים.

חיים אברהם הלוי הורוויץ
מבאסטאן – רמת בית שמש

English translation of the *haskamah* of the Grand Rebbe of Boston, *shlita*, Ramat Bet Shemesh:

“Blessed is He who gave us the Torah of truth and implanted eternal life within us.” The great sages and righteous Tzaddikim of each generation left us an inheritance passed down from generation to generation, and their light shines and warms the hearts of the Jewish people in all places and at all times.

Our holy Torah was transmitted to us from Sinai clearly in seventy languages, in order that our brothers among *klal Yisrael* who do not merit to understand the holy Torah as it was given in *lashon hakodesh* may also benefit from and warm themselves by its holy light in a language that they understand.

I know Rabbi Tal Moshe Zwecker, *shlita*, to be someone who loves Torah and possesses a fear of Heaven. He has labored several years to bring the holy words that shine like torches of fire from the Holy Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk, *zy”a*, to enlighten them on behalf of our brothers among *bonei Yisrael*, precious Jews who did not merit to understand his holy words as they were written.

May it be His will that the merit of our holy Rebbes stand by him and his progeny, and may they see just and blessed generations.

Chaim Avraham Ha’Levi Horowitz
Boston-Ramat Bet Shemesh



ב"ה

20 Tammuz 5765

The Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk was the recognized third-generation leader of Chassidus after the Ba'al Shem Tov and the Maggid of Mezritch. His *sefer*, *Noam Elimelech*, is considered by the majority of chassidim as one of the greatest chassidic *sefarim*. The translation of this *sefer* into English by Rabbi Tal Zwecker will definitely enable the English-speaking public to have a greater grasp and understanding of what Chassidus is all about. Rabbi Zwecker has done an outstanding task which will benefit the entire Torah world.

May the merit of this work stand him in good stead, and may the *zechus* of the Holy Rebbe Reb Melech continue to act on our behalf before the *Kisei HaKavod*.

*With Torah greetings from Yerushalayim,
Levi I. Horowitz*

מכתב ברכה מאת כ"ק אדמו"ר מביאלא שליט"א ארה"ב

בעז"ת

ער"ח תמוז תשס"ז

לשם יחוד קודב"ה ושכ"י בדחילו ע"י ההוא טמיר ונעלם בשם כל ישראל ולעשות נחת רוח לבוראי
ית' שמו – ויהי נועם וגו'

לכבוד האברך היקר מוה"ר ר' טל משה זוועקער שליט"א

יתברך הבורא וישתבח הבורא יודע המחשבות ובוהן הלבבות. ראיתי את היגיעה והטרחה הרבה שהנך עומד להדפיס ספר הק' נועם אלימלך מתורתו של איש אלקים קדוש ורבן של ישראל הרה"ק רבינו הק' הרבי רבי אלימלך מליזענסק, זיע"א. ומה שייך לאיש כמוני לתת הסכמה על ספרו הק' של רבינו הקדוש מליזענסק זיע"א ואציין כאן מה שהיה מרגלא בפומיה של כ"ק אאמו"ר הרה"ק מביאלא זצללה"ה שהיה מספר מכ"ק אביו הרה"ה האדמו"ר זצ"ל איך שהיה דבוק בספר הק' שהציל הספר הק' בימי הזעם בערבות סיביר תחת יד הצוררים ימ"ש וכמו כן היה אומר שלא לשהות בבית שאין בו נועם אלימלך – וכמו שכתב "גדול היה כוחו של הרבי ר"א לדורו ולדורות אחריו ועוד קודם רדת נשמתו לעולם הזה חמש מאות שנה מקודם ירד השפע בשבילנו בזכותו עבור צרכי בני וקנסת ישראל. מכש"כ מאי דהוי הוי, שגם היום הולך השפע בעבורינו." ובנועם אלימלך פ' וישב "או יאמר וישב יעקב" – בהקדים לפרש הפסוק שאמר דהע"ה אך טוב וחסד ירדפוני כל ימי חיי כו' דלכארה אינו מובן מלת ירדפוני שלשון רדיפה שייך במי שבורח ורודפים אותו. אך הענין הוא דהנה יש בני אדם שמעשיהם מקולקלים רק מחמת שיש בהם איזה מדה טובה מצד הטבע דהיינו שהוא לב טוב גומל חסד ועושה טובות עם בני אדם זה מועיל להם שחוזרים למוטב: וזהו שאמר דוד אך שהוא לשון מיעוט ורוצה לומר המעט הטוב והחסד שבי זה ירדפוני כל ימי חיי ושבת כו' שאשב בבית ה' לאורך ימים." ואסיים מה שכתב אא"ז זצללה"ה ש' רצון מלפני אבינו שבשמים שזכותו (של הרבי ר"א) יגן עלינו ועל כל ישראל – והאלקים אשר התהלכו אבותי לפניו – אשר מסרו חלבם ודמם על קדושת שמו יתברך ועבור תקוני נפשות ונשמות ישראל לקשרם לשורשם הרמתה ולהשפיע עליהם שפע קודש ש' לנו למליצי יושר שהשי"ת ירחם עלינו במהרה להחיש גאולתינו ופדות נפשינו ויתקדש שם שמים על ידינו ונשמע בקול מבשר להשיב לב בנים על אבותם וכמו שפי' רש"י ז"ל וזכה לראות בנחמת ציון וירושלים – וי' רצון שיהי' ה' אלקיו עמו וחפץ ה' בידו הצליח.

המתחנן ומצפה לרחמי שמים במהרה דיין

הק' אהרן שלמה חיים אליעזר בן להרה"ק אאמו"ר זצללה"ה מביאלא

English translation of the Biala Rebbe's *haskamah*:

*A letter of blessing from the Biala Rebbe, shlita, of the U.S.
Erev Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5767*

To the honorable *avreich* Rabbi Tal Moshe Zwecker, *shlita*,

May the Creator who knows thoughts and examines the heart be blessed and praised.

I saw your great work and toil that you are about to print the holy *sefer Noam Elimelech*, from the Torah of the man of G-d, the Holy Rebbe of Israel, our holy rabbi and teacher, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, may his merit shield us.

I wish to emphasize here what my holy father used to say. The Biala Rebbe, *zt"l*, was very attached to the holy *sefer* [*Noam Elimelech*], and during those terrible times, during the Holocaust, he rescued his copy of the *sefer* from the hands of our enemies. He also used to say that one should not stay in a house that does not have a copy of the *Noam Elimelech*. He wrote: "Great was the power of the Rebbe Elimelech for his generation and for the coming generations. Five hundred years before his soul came down to this world, a great influx of blessings came down in his merit for the needs of *Knesses Yisrael*. So, too, just as in the past, this blessing continues to come down for us."

The *Noam Elimelech* on *parashas Vayeishev*, on the words "*Vayeishev Yaakov* — And Yaakov dwelled," begins by explaining David HaMelech's words "May goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life" (*Tehillim* 23:6). We can ask, why is the verb *pursue* used here? The verb *pursue* seems to indicate that someone is running away and being chased.

There are some people whose actions are corrupt. However, they may have some inborn natural good trait, such as kindness and a charitable nature, which help them return to the good path.

This is why the word *ach* is used here by David, which indicates limitation. In other words, this limited amount of goodness and kindness which I have in me, may that pursue me all the days of my life (despite my negative actions), "that I may merit to sit in the House of Hashem all the days of my life."

I will end with what my holy forebear [the Biala Rebbe], *zt"l*, wrote: May it be the will of our Father in Heaven that the merit [of the Rebbe Elimelech] should shield us and all of Israel, and may the G-d before whom my forefathers walked, before whom they sacrificed their blood to sanctify His Name and in order to rectify the souls of Israel, tying and binding them to their lofty root, to bless them with an abundance of sanctity, that they may be advocates on our behalf. May Hashem have mercy on us all and speedily bring near our redemption, and may Heaven's Name be sanctified through our hands, and we shall hear the sound of the harbinger returning the hearts of children to their fathers, as Rashi says, and may we see Zion and Jerusalem comforted, and may G-d be with him and aid him and help him be successful.

*He who prays and awaits the mercy of Heaven speedily in our days,
Rav Aharon Shlomo Chaim Eliezer, son of the holy Biala Rebbe, zt"l*

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INTRODUCTION

Rebbe of All Rebbes

Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi once said: “My *sefer*, *Tanya*, is known as ‘*Sefer shel Beinonim*’ — a book for the average Jew. But the *Noam Elimelech* is a *Sefer shel Tzaddikim* — a book for the righteous.”

Indeed, *Noam Elimelech* is a *sefer* for Tzaddikim, written by the Tzaddik called “Rebbe of all the Rebbes.”¹ There is a story told of the Rebbe’s brother, the Rebbe Reb Zisha of Hanipoli. After Rebbe Elimelech passed away, his disciples approached Reb Zisha and asked him to be their new leader. Reb Zisha declined. This is what he told them:

“The Torah is eternal and alludes to everything that has happened and will happen for all generations. The *pasuk* ‘And a river went forth from Eden to water the garden, and from there it split into four paths’ (*Bereishis* 2:10) alludes to the paths of Chassidus and great Tzaddikim of our times. ‘Eden’ alludes to our holy master the Ba’al Shem Tov. The river is his disciple, the holy Mezritcher Maggid, and the garden refers to my brother, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech. The Torah flows as water from the Ba’al Shem Tov by way of the Mezritcher Maggid to the Rebbe Elimelech. From there it separates into four paths, and they are the holy Rebbe the Chozeh of Lublin, the holy Rebbe the Koznitzer Maggid, the holy Rebbe Reb Mendel Rimanofer, and the holy Ohev Yisrael the Apta Rav. You need no Rebbe other than them.”

Rebbe Elimelech and his brother Rebbe Zisha were among the greatest students of the Mezritcher Maggid, the Ba’al Shem Tov’s successor and leader of all the chassidim at that time. It was the older Reb Zisha who first introduced his younger brother to the wellsprings of Chassidus and brought him under the tutelage of the Maggid. Together they became great chassidic leaders in their own right, traveling from town to town in self-imposed exile, inspiring all who saw them to repent and come close to Hashem. Most of the Mezritcher Maggid’s students began to follow Rebbe Elimelech when the Maggid departed this world,² and many of Rebbe Elimelech’s disciples became great chassidic leaders and masters themselves, such as the Rebbes

mentioned above, Rav Kalonymous Kalman Epstein, the author of *Ma'or VaShemesh*, and Rav Naftali of Ropshitz, author of *Zera Kodesh*. It is fitting then that Rebbe Elimelech is called the “Rebbe of Rebbes.”

The Greatness of Rebbe Elimelech — in Life and in Death

There are many stories told of Rebbe Elimelech’s greatness — his *tzidkus*, his holiness, his knowledge, his humility. To appreciate just who the Rebbe was and the great spiritual levels he attained, we will mention a few examples of his holiness.

Reb Yosef Meir of Spinka said in the name of Yitzchak Isaac Zhidichover that the Rebbe achieved levels that had not existed in this world since the time of the prophets.³

The Belzer Rebbe Reb Shalom said: “The *teshuvah* of Jews who repented in the past, and those who are repenting now, and those who will repent in the future is all due to the power of Rebbe Elimelech.”⁴

The holy Rizhiner testified that Rebbe Elimelech’s two hands were like the *luchos* — the two stone tablets that Moshe brought down from Mount Sinai — and that his ten fingers were like the Ten Commandments.⁵

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz is quoted as saying that from the days of Yehoshua there was no one who afflicted himself with suffering as much as Rebbe Elimelech.⁶

Rebbe Elimelech himself is quoted as saying, “It is a wonder that the Rabbis saw through divine inspiration that the final generations would suffer so terribly. Didn’t they know that Elimelech would come and nullify and sweeten the harsh decrees?”⁷

There are two tales told about the Rebbe that illustrate the extent of his humility. Once, the Ba’al HaTanya, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi, was asked by a certain *misnaged* (an opponent of Chassidus) about a *sefer* called *Noam Elimelech* that he kept on the floor under his seat. He wanted to know what the author was like. “I will describe the author to you,” answered the Rebbe. “Even if you would put the author himself on the floor beneath your seat, he would remain silent and not utter a sound.” That is how humble the Rebbe Reb Elimelech was.⁸

Another tale relates how the Rebbe would bemoan his own “misdeeds.” He would say about himself, “For Elimelech there needs to be created a new Gehinnom because the current purgatory does not suffice.”⁹

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk left this world on 21 Adar 5547 (1787) at the age of seventy. It is said that before his passing, Eliyahu HaNavi paid him a visit. Rebbe Elimelech asked the prophet to invite the holy *Avos* to see him. They all came except David HaMelech, who refused to come. He said he felt slighted because “the Rebbe did not honor me and he did honor my meal, the *seudah* of *melaveh malkah*, which escorts out the Shabbos Queen. Therefore I do not wish to come.” Rebbe Elimelech promised David HaMelech that he would command his children and offspring to guard the path of Hashem and to honor the *seudah* of *melaveh malkah* as well. Upon hearing the Rebbe’s promise, David HaMelech consented to come and visit Rebbe Elimelech.¹⁰ There are stories of Rebbe Elimelech that demonstrate how he valued the importance of the *melaveh malkah* meal. In fact, Rebbe Elimelech passed down to us a *segulah* for an easy childbirth — to eat every *motza’ei Shabbos* in honor of the *melaveh malkah* meal.¹¹

It is a tradition passed down from several Torah scholars and *yirei Shamayim* that the holy Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk promised that anyone who visited his grave site would be saved and attain salvation just as when the Rebbe was alive. The holy Rebbe Reb Meir of Premishlan used to say: “Whosoever wishes to really and truly obtain the fear of Heaven should go to the *tzion* (grave site) of the Rebbe Reb Melech of Lizhensk and pray there, and then his words will bear fruit.”¹² Rebbe Mendel of Rimanov said that one who visits the grave site of Rebbe Elimelech will be inspired to repent.¹³ Furthermore, that individual will not die without having repented. This is why so many people travel to his grave every year on the day of his *hillulah*, his *yahrtzeit*, the twenty-first of Adar. Reb Shlomo of Radomsk was one of those who made an annual pilgrimage to Lizhensk on Rebbe Elimelech’s *yahrtzeit*,¹⁴ and Reb Aharon of Cracow, the son of the author of *Ma’or VaShemesh*, related the following story about a visit he made with his father to the Rebbe’s *tzion*:

“Once, my father and I traveled to the *tzion* in Lizhensk. Reb Kalonymous, the Ma’or VaShemesh, asked his family and followers to allow him to enter the building that housed Rebbe Elimelech’s grave alone; no one was allowed to enter while he was in there. Of course they consented, and he entered alone while his followers and family, including Reb Aharon of Cracow, remained outside.

“Once he entered, he closed the door behind him from inside. He stayed inside for a very long time. His family grew worried because they knew that his custom was not to tarry so long. They feared that something had hap-

pened to him. They broke down the door and entered and found Reb Kalonymous lying prostrate on the grave of Rebbe Elimelech. They attempted to revive him and after several strong attempts finally succeeded in doing so. When he regained consciousness, the Rebbe was agitated. ‘What have you done to me!’ he exclaimed. ‘If you had allowed me to lie here just a few minutes longer I would have gone straight into Gan Eden together with the Rebbe [Elimelech]!’” The Rebbe of Radomsk later added a low fence surrounding the grave, which would prevent anyone from doing the same.”¹⁵

After Rebbe Elimelech’s passing, people asked Rebbe Elimelech’s son Reb Elazar what his father had left over as a will and testimony. He answered them: “If you wish to read my father’s last will and testament, then you should study the *sefer Noam Elimelech*. For twenty-two years before his passing he taught and said the things found in this *sefer*, and I know that each day he was testifying before the day of his death.”¹⁶

Noam Elimelech is held to be a very deep and holy *sefer*; some say that the physical *sefer* itself is holy and can be used as a *segulah*. If a woman places the first edition of *sefer Noam Elimelech* in her bed during childbirth, she’ll have an easy delivery.¹⁷

The Sefer Noam Elimelech

Noam Elimelech follows the order of the parashiyos. The Rebbe usually begins a discourse with a *pasuk* from the parashah on which the discourse will focus and be woven around. He often either immediately introduces a new verse or another teaching of Chazal from the Midrash or Talmud. This verse or teaching is a springboard for relating a concept or idea, which is first applied elsewhere and then read back into the original verse.

Noam Elimelech is not a simple *sefer* to learn. The method of reading and learning used by the Rebbe in *Noam Elimelech* is generally the method called *Remez*, one of the four methods employed in learning Torah, collectively called by the acronym *Pardes*. The acronym stands for *Peshat*, *Remez*, *Derash*, and *Sod* — the simple meaning, hints and allusions, exegesis and sermons, and the secrets of the Torah. The method of teaching by hints and allusions employs the transformation of letters and the use of synonyms and words that have similar spellings and different meanings. For example, in *Bereishis* the Noam Elimelech expounds on the idea of *erev*, evening, which also connotes “sweet.”¹⁸ In *Noach*, an explanation is woven around the idea that *tei-*

vah means both “ark” and “word.”¹⁹ To expound on ideas hinted at by the transformation of letters, the Rebbe employs alternate alphabets, such as *At-Bash* and *Ayak-Bachar*. In these methods letters are substituted for each other.

The Rebbe also employs the use of *gematria* numerology. This technique assigns numerical values to the Hebrew letters and compares words that have the same value. For example, in *Vayechi* we learn that the seventeen years that Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim allude to the word *tov*, whose numerical value is 17.²⁰ In *Re'eh*, the Rebbe teaches that *ahavah*, love, has the same numerical value as the word *echad*, one, because love constitutes true unity.²¹ The Rebbe also uses *roshei teivos* (initials), *sofei teivos* (final letters), and *notrikon* (compounds) to make acrostics. So *terumah* can be read as “*tarum hei* — uplift the letter *hei*.” This hints at the idea of uniting the Shechinah, which is in exile with us and is represented by *hei*, with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, thus bringing the redemption — a common theme in *Noam Elimelech*.²²

Another system of learning verses that the Rebbe employs is the use of *kinuyim*, or aspects and expressions. This method is used to connect words and concepts according to the deep secrets behind them. So Hashem’s Name *Adon-ai* is called the “antechamber of the Name *Havayah*” because one must enter the service of Hashem through fear represented by this Name.²³ And words and prayers are called “angels” because mitzvos and prayers create angelic messengers to convey them to Hashem.²⁴

The Translation

Every effort has been made to preserve the meaning of the original text. Since the style is heavily reliant upon the methods of *Remez* and the nuances and structure of the Hebrew language, I have added bracketed explanations and sometimes provided additional definitions of certain terms for readability and clarity.

I have included only one or two discourses from each parashah from the original *sefer*. Some of the Rebbe’s more esoteric teachings would be incomprehensible and therefore inappropriate for translation into English; the length of some discourses are equally formidable. The teachings I selected fulfill some of the following criteria: they can be translated easily and clearly into English, they express basic, common ideas found throughout the *sefer* and other chassidic works, they illustrate concepts and ideas of value to the

audience, and they can interact well with a story to illustrate them. Once selected, each piece has been annotated, and in some cases I've added commentary in brackets, to aid both beginners and those familiar with chassidic thought to enrich and explain the text. The selections are meant to be enjoyed on their own, but also collectively, as a cohesive unit, to give a picture of some of the central ideas of Chassidus, especially the role of the Tzaddik, as taught by the Rebbe Reb Elimelech.

The Rebbe's teachings are multifaceted and can be understood in more than one way. I therefore do not make any claim that my translation of this work constitutes the sole interpretation of the Rebbe's words. Rather, the translation is based on my humble understanding, and any faults are solely my own. Surely there are other possible interpretations of the holy Rebbe's teachings, and I make no claim to have captured all possible meanings.

I encourage the reader to view this work as an introduction to classical chassidic thought and to study the *sefer* in its entirety in *lashon hakodesh*. By no means are my interpretations here the only possible way of learning the *sefer*, nor are they limited to the understanding conveyed in the notes and commentaries. The reader is free to derive his or her own interpretation of the Rebbe's teachings and is encouraged to do so. For this reason, I have strenuously avoided adding more commentary than absolutely necessary to explain the text so that there is room to learn different teachings from these lessons.

The Stars

In the original printing of *Noam Elimelech* there were stars or asterisks found throughout the passages. Tradition has it that these stars have some meaning. In the *sefer Devarim Areivim*,²⁵ it is written: "In the first edition of the *sefer*, there are in many places small stars which allude to some secret meaning." I also heard in the name of the Klausenberger that in the heavens above (possibly meaning the stars themselves) there are thousands of "commentaries" on the small stars found in the work *Noam Elimelech*. I have therefore included those stars wherever they appear in the original text.

A Rich Treasure-Trove

Many who have learned *Noam Elimelech* have found a rich treasure-trove that is exceedingly deep. Even those who themselves were great Rebbes in their own rights found *Noam Elimelech* an esoteric work that required in-

tense study. The *av beis din* of Tloyst once related that he was visiting his relative, Reb Chaim of Kosov, the author of *Toras Chaim*. Reb Chaim noticed that the *rav* of Tloyst was learning *Noam Elimelech*, and the Kosover asked him if he understood what was written there. The *rav* of Tloyst answered, “How can I comprehend what is written there? Isn’t it said that whoever understands the *sefer Noam Elimelech* can resurrect the dead?” Reb Chaim of Kosov replied: “I don’t agree. I say, whoever knows how to resurrect the dead can understand the *sefer Noam Eliemelech*.”²⁶ The Rebbe Rav Mendel Rimanover used to say that only on the eve of Shabbos, after immersing in the waters of the *mikveh*, could he understand a *shtikel*, a piece, of the *Noam Elimelech*.²⁷

The holy Komarna Rebbe, who was himself a great kabbalist, writes in *Derech Emunah* that “the holy *sefer Noam Elimelech* is completely refined pure light, exceedingly deep if you can merit understanding even one of its teachings.”²⁸ If so, who are we to claim to be able to interpret his words? However, the Komarna Rebbe also writes in *Nesiv Mitzvosecha*:²⁹ “Who can truly grasp the *sefer Noam Elimelech*? It is full of lofty levels in spiritual growth. Nonetheless, each person can taste it according to his own level.”

This translation is an attempt to take just a mere peek at the light of the holy Tzaddik Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk. May we merit to understand it according to our own level.

Notes:

1. Reb Aharon of Belz, *Beiso Na'avah Kodesh*, Adar.
2. See *Ohel Elimelech* 1.
3. *Eser Tzachtzachos* 34.
4. Thirteen Lights, Pshevorsk, part 2, p. 62.
5. *Mevaser Tov* on *Yeshuas Avraham* 5:19, p. 61.
6. Thirteen Lights, Pshevorsk, part 2, p. 29.
7. *Nesiv Mitzvosecha Emunah* 4:8; see also *Eser Tzachtzachos* 35.
8. *Eser Tzachtzachos* 9.
9. *Ibid.* 39.
10. *Ohel Elimelech* 212.
11. *Ibid.* 57.

12. *Eser Ataros* 5:60 in the name of the *sefer Divrei Yitzchak*.
13. *Eser Tzachtzachos* 11.
14. Ibid.
15. *Ohel Elimelech* 190.
16. *Eser Tzachtzachos* 37 quoted from *Tefillah L'Moshe* of the Rebbe of Samovar.
17. *Ohel Elimelech* 289.
18. See "Uplifting the Fallen Sparks" below.
19. See "Making the Words of Our Prayers Shine."
20. See "Clearing the Paths to Higher Consciousness in Serving Hashem" below.
21. See "Seeing Is Believing."
22. See *Toldos*, "Fear, Love, and Awe in the Service of Hashem" below.
23. See *Vayeishev*, "The Entryway to Divine Unity Is Awe and Fear," below, where this idea is presented.
24. See *Vayeitzei*, "The Ladder Reaching the Heavens," below.
25. Part 1, p. 17.
26. *Ohel Elimelech* 191.
27. Ibid. 92.
28. *Ohel Elimelech* 33; *Eser Tzachtzachos* 36.
29. *Torah* 1:32; see also *Ohel Elimelech* 35.

Bereishis

THREE LEVELS OF SERVING HASHEM

Hashem commanded Adam saying, “From every tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you must not eat from it, because on the day you eat it you shall surely die.”

(Bereishis 2:16–17)

Many points require analysis here: (1) The double language used for eating, “*achol tochel*.” (2) The word *mimenu*, “from it,” is totally unnecessary and superfluous. (3) The wording used for “you shall surely die” is also double — “*mos tamus*.” (4) Chavah added to this commandment, as Rashi teaches [on *Bereishis* 3:3].¹ [Rashi says that] because Chavah added to Hashem’s command not to eat [of the tree by saying that they were also forbidden to touch it] it led to her detracting from it. This is puzzling since she obviously knew the truth: that Hashem had never forbade them to touch it at all. Therefore, the fact that they could touch it is no proof that eating of it is allowed, since she was only commanded to abstain from eating it.²

It seems that the root of the matter is this: When Hashem said, “From every tree of the garden you may eat [*achol tochel*],” He was alluding to the Torah, which is the “*etz hachaim*” — the tree of life.³ “*Achol*,” eat, is in the third person [known in Hebrew as *lashon nistar*, literally, “hidden”], which alludes to studying Torah *lishmah*, purely for its own sake with no ulterior motives [since a person’s true motives are hidden from everyone, known only to Hashem]. This is the principal way in which Hashem commanded the Torah to be studied. However, if one has not yet reached the level where he can study *lishmah*, he should still “*tochel*” — he should still partake of it.⁴ This is what is hinted at by the double language “*achol tochel*.” [Ideally you should “*achol*” — you should partake of the Torah *lishmah*, for its own sake, but if you cannot learn *lishmah*, then] “*tochel*” — you should learn even if you will derive pleasure and benefit from this study, that is, not *lishmah*.

This is [the implication of] “*tochel*,” in the second person: partake of My Torah and do not forsake it.

“But from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you must not eat from it” * — “*mimenu*,” from it specifically. This refers to physical things which contain holy sparks of good mixed in them. [We are commanded:] “Do not eat from them” — [when you eat] do not have in mind to partake of the physical and material alone, but rather concentrate as well on the spiritual holy sparks [found within the material] and “*tochel*,” partake of them.⁵

“Because on the day you eat it you shall surely die [*mos tamus*]” * — [the double usage refers to two aspects of death:] “*Mos*” refers to death in the next world — *Olam Haba* — death from everlasting life. “*Mos*” is also in the third person [which is called “*lashon nistar*,” literally, “hidden”], alluding to *Olam Haba* and everlasting life [for *Olam Haba* is also hidden, since we cannot see it in this world]. “*Tamus*” refers to death in *Olam Hazeih* — in this world. *

Chavah understood these two levels [of serving Hashem]: learning Torah on either level [either *lishmah* or not *lishmah*], as we explained above [גניל], and second, uplifting the sparks.

[I heard from my Rebbe, the Clevelander Rebbe, *shlita*, in the name of his brother-in-law, the Sulitzer Rebbe, *shlita*, that the acronym for “as we explained above,” גניל, is found too often in this *sefer* to attribute it to the simple meaning alone. Rather, it can also be the *roshei teivos* of “*Kalsah nafshi laHashem* — My soul expires for G-d” (based on *Tebillim* 84:3).]

Then she realized that there is a third level: complete and total *deveikus*, cleaving to the blessed Creator. This is why she said, “Do not eat from it and do not touch it” (*Bereishis* 3:4), adding to the command not to eat of the tree. A “*negiah b'alma*,” a slight “touch” or blemish, can interrupt *deveikus* and thus it should be avoided * “lest you die” — lest you experience an interruption of *deveikus*. [The word *negiah*, touch, can also connote a slight touch of bias, or a slight imperfection or blemish.] In other words [Chavah] thought that she was commanded regarding this third level of *deveikus* as well. * However, the truth is that *deveikus* is attained only when one has achieved the other two levels, and she had not yet attained them [and so she had only been commanded regarding these first two levels].

[The Midrash, quoted by Rashi, comments:] “The serpent pushed her [Chavah] until she touched the tree and reasoned, ‘Just as there is no death by touching it, so too there is no death by eating from it.’” [The serpent

told her that] “just as there is no death by touching it” — just as a *negiah*, a slight imperfection, does not cause an interruption of *deveikus* — “so too eating [from the tree]” and partaking of it without the proper intention, as we explained above, in order to uplift the spiritual, “won’t cause you to die”; [you can still achieve *deveikus* without the other two levels].

This is the meaning of the verse “*Bereishis bara...* — In the beginning He created...” (*Bereishis* 1:1). [Rashi explains, quoting the Midrash⁶] that the world was created for the Torah, which is called “*reishis*,” as we explained above. [This alludes to the level of learning Torah.] And it was created for Yisrael, who are called “*reishis*,” alluding to *deveikus* in the Creator, since we cleave to Him through songs and praises, which is hinted at in the name **ישראל**, * which can be read as **ישראל** * — the songs of G-d. And the world was created for the *bikkurim* [the offering of the first fruits], which are also called “*reishis*.” *Bikkurim* hints at the [level of] uplifting the holy sparks [found in the physical], as it says, “The first [*reishis*] fruits of your land you shall bring to the House of Hashem” (*Shemos* 23:19 and 34:26) — the sparks that have fallen below should be brought up to the House of Hashem, to be uplifted from the dust, as we said.

May Hashem guide us on the path of truth to serve Him wholeheartedly, with sincerity and perfection. Amen, may it be His will. *

🕯 Adam’s Sin

The Rebbe Reb Zisha once asked his brother, “My beloved brother, in the holy writings it is written that all the souls were once included and contained in Adam, the first man. If so, we must also have been there at the moment he sinned and ate from the tree of knowledge. Why didn’t we prevent him from doing so?” The Rebbe Reb Elimelech answered him thus: “Brother, we were obliged to let him eat the fruit. If he had not, the serpent’s lie would still stand and would never have been proven false. The serpent said to him, ‘Your eyes will open and you will be as G-d, knowing good and evil and able to create worlds.’ This is why Adam had to eat the fruit — once he did so, he saw that even though he had eaten of the fruit, he was still just a human being and no more.”

(*Ohel Elimelech* 272)

UPLIFTING THE FALLEN SPARKS

And G-d said, "Let there be light." And there was light.

(Bereishis 1:3)

What was added by the fact that Hashem said, "Let there be light" — and there was light? What innovation does *vayehi* ("and there was light") introduce?

Also, we should strive to understand our Sages' teaching that "at first Hashem thought to create the world through the attribute of strict justice. However, He saw that the world would not be able to continue existing in this state, so He added the attribute of mercy" (see *Rashi, Bereishis 1:1; Bereishis Rabbah 12:14*).⁷ The earlier commentators explain that one should not, Heaven forbid, think that Hashem alters His deeds. The one true G-d, whose unity is indivisible, does not think one way in the beginning and later change His mind. Perish the thought! *

We will attempt to explain these difficulties with the verse "The spirit of Hashem was hovering above the waters" (*Bereishis 1:2*). The holy writings⁸ explain that the letters that spell the Hebrew word for "hovering," מְרַחֵפֶת, also spell רַפ"ח מֵת, "288 died."⁹ [The *gematria* of רַפ"ח is 288 — *reish* = 200, *peh* = 80, *ches* = 8.] This alludes to the 288 sparks of holiness that fell to a lower spiritual state and were scattered during the shattering of the vessels. It is our divine duty in this world to rectify and elevate these sparks.

[The shattering of the vessels is a kabbalistic teaching. During Creation, the *sefiros* (divine attributes), which are compared to vessels, were unable to contain the great awesome light of the Infinite and therefore shattered. The sparks of holiness from that light were exiled and dispersed among all mundane physical matter. This created a state of imperfection that can only be rectified by *tikun* — effectively refining this material world and elevating the sparks back to their original source. This is accomplished by performing the will of the Almighty in this physical world through His holy Torah and its commandments, the mitzvos.]

Thus it says, "G-d said, 'Let there be light'...and G-d saw the light that it was good." This, too, is puzzling since we cannot say that Hashem saw that

the light was good only after its creation and not before. Heaven forbid that we should think such things about the Creator!

Rather, the root of the matter is that the divine speech is perfect and complete in every way without any imperfections at all. There is nothing that can rectify Hashem's speech since it is perfect. * Therefore, if Hashem would have said with His mouth, so to speak, "Let there be light" [without adding "And He saw the light that it was good"] as soon as the 288 sparks fell, all the light would have returned to its former state, before the shattering of the vessels. However, Hashem desires the service of the righteous Tzaddikim, that they should uplift and elevate the fallen sparks. If at the time when the sparks fell Hashem would have spoken, all would have been rectified and there would be nothing for the Tzaddikim to elevate. But if Hashem did nothing at all, then the Tzaddikim would not be able to perform the divine will, as the Sages teach, "If not for Hashem's help, we could never overcome the evil inclination" (*Sukkah* 52b; *Kiddushin* 30b). Thus, Hashem in His abundant mercy and lofty wisdom saw and gazed at the light — meaning the sparks — thereby helping the Tzaddik so that he would be able to elevate them.

[It is the Tzaddik's divine duty to elevate the fallen sparks, which are obscured and hidden in the physical reality of this world. In order to find these sparks of light in the darkness of this world, the Tzaddik needs Hashem's help and guidance. This comes in the form of the Torah, which is a shining light from Above. The light of the Torah is like a beacon in the darkness to show the Tzaddik what to do. The mitzvos are the actual deeds and actions that will elevate these sparks back up to their source. The *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, tries to impede the Tzaddik on his path and thus the Tzaddik requires Hashem's help.]

This then is the explanation of "G-d said, 'Let there be light'" and "G-d saw the light and it was good": If Hashem would have said, "Let there be light," and immediately there would have been light — meaning that all the light would have returned to its former state before the shattering of the vessels — all would have been rectified and there would be nothing for the Tzaddik to elevate, and Hashem specifically desires the service of the Tzaddik. * Therefore [He added], "He saw that the light was good" — Hashem saw and gazed at the light, in order to aid and assist the Tzaddik so that he would be able to elevate the sparks, as we explained above.

This is what the verse means when it says "it was good" — the Sages teach that this refers to the Tzaddik who is called "good" (see *Chagigah* 12a).

This also explains the teaching of our Sages that “Hashem hid this light for the righteous in the future” (*Chagigah* 12a; *Bereishis Rabbah* 3:6). Hashem hid the light for those Tzaddikim who would come in the future to elevate it.¹⁰

“And Hashem called the light ‘day’” (*Bereishis* 1:5) — we can understand this verse with the simple meaning of the text. “And the darkness” — this refers to all that remains to be rectified by the Tzaddik but has not yet been set right. Anything that remains in disrepair is called “darkness,” which He called “night.” * And, G-d willing, when the Mashiach will arrive, when all shall be repaired and rectified completely, there will be total unity. This is hinted at in the next verse, “And it was evening” — when the righteous Mashiach will sprout and come forth, the night will become *erev*, meaning the darkness shall be sweetened [for *erev* can also mean “pleasing” and “sweet”]. This also alludes to the holy Shechinah, the Divine Presence that is in the *מערב*, west (*Bava Basra* 25a), which has the same linguistic root as *ערב*, as it says, “By evening time, the light will shine” (*Zechariah* 14:7). Everything will be restored and set right and there will be complete unity, as it was before the shattering of the vessels. * “And there was morning one day” — everything will come together in unity and oneness, so that night will be transformed into day.

Now we can understand the Sages’ teaching that “at first Hashem thought to create the world through the attribute of strict justice.” The time before the spiritual fall is called the “realm of thought.” There is no need for mercy in an abstract realm of thought, and therefore the attribute of strict justice was absolute. * “However, He saw that the world would not be able to continue existing in this state” — after the shattering of the vessels, He saw the light that could not be contained and He saw the need to help the Tzaddikim elevate the sparks back to their lofty place, as mentioned above. “So He added the attribute of mercy” — in order to aid the righteous to help overcome evil. Understand this well. *

🕊️ The Ba’al Shem Tov Sees from One End of the World to the Other

The Ba’al Shem Tov once wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, Rav Gershon Kitover, who resided in the Holy Land. The Ba’al Shem Tov asked his brother-in-law how it could be that he saw Reb Gershon outside Eretz Yisrael on a certain Shabbos. Reb Gershon wrote back explaining that on

that particular Shabbos a certain wealthy Jew who lived outside Israel had made a bris and had sent for Reb Gershon to be the *mohel* to perform the ceremony. Reb Gershon did not question how the Ba'al Shem Tov could possibly see Reb Gershon miles away. It was taken for granted: the Ba'al Shem Tov was able to see from one end of the world to the other! This was, of course, all accomplished using the hidden light in the Torah.

(Degel Machaneh Efraim, Bereishis)

🕊️ The Pearl Necklace

This story has been told in the name of the gaon Rav Moshe Katz Elavitch by his grandfather Rav Shaul Landa of Berdiev:

Rebbe Elimelech once embarked on a journey to Eretz Yisrael. At the outset of the journey he stopped at a town near Brod. When word went out in Brod that such a holy figure was staying in the nearby township, the people flocked to see the Rebbe. Among them was a wealthy man traveling with his young unmarried daughter. She was dressed in fine clothes and wore expensive earrings and a pearl necklace. When the father and daughter came before the Tzaddik, Rebbe Elimelech exclaimed, “See this pearl necklace? It was bought for fifty silver rubles!” The wealthy Jew countered that the pearls were bought for forty-nine silver rubles. Immediately his daughter interjected that even though her father offered the merchant the sum of forty-nine silver rubles, the merchant was unwilling to accept it. So she had secretly added one silver ruble from her own pocket to buy the pearls. The holy Rebbe exclaimed: “See! It is impossible to cheat Elimelech!” He added that through the holy Torah everything can be known, as long as one studies it well with open eyes.

(Eser Tzachtzachos 32; Ohel Elimelech 252)

Notes:

1. Rashi comments on the words “*v'lo sigu bo* — and do not touch it” from that verse: “She added to [G-d’s] commandment; therefore she ended up detracting from it, as it says, ‘Do not add to His words’ (*Mishlei* 30:6).”
2. See *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 3:4, quoting the Midrash. Rashi comments there that the serpent pushed Chavah, and after she made contact with the tree and survived, he “proved” to her that just as touching the tree did not kill her, neither would eating the fruit.
3. See *Mishlei* 3:18.

4. See *Pesachim* 50b and *Horayos* 10b.
5. See the second discourse in *Bereishis* below, “Uplifting the Fallen Sparks,” for a detailed explanation of this concept.
6. *Midrash Rabbah* 1:1 and 1:4.
7. See also *Chayei Sarah* below, “The Service of the Tzaddik: Drawing Down Blessing to This World”; *Vayakbel*, “Even Lower Level Tzaddikim Can Overcome the Serpent”; *Bechukosai*, “The Partnership Between G-d and the Tzaddik”; *Ki Seitzei*, “The Architecture of Creation and Renewal”; and *Ha’azinu*, “The World Runs on Strict Justice,” where this midrash is quoted and explained.
8. In general, “holy writings” refers to kabbalistic commentaries, such as the *Zohar* and the *Arizal*. In this case, it refers to *Etz Chaim* (5:2).
9. See also *Avodas Yisrael*, by the Koznitzer Maggid, *Bereishis*.
10. The *Degel Machaneh Efraim* adds that his grandfather the holy Ba’al Shem Tov taught that this light was hidden by Hashem in the letters of the Torah. When Tzaddikim in every generation learn Torah in purity for its own sake, they can gaze with this light and see the future and know many secrets. This is derived from the Ba’al HaTurim’s hint that the words אֶת הָאוֹר, “the light,” have the same *gematria* as the word בְּתוֹרָה, “in the Torah,” alluding that the light was hidden in the Torah (see *Degel Machaneh Efraim*, *parashas Bereishis*, on the verse “And Hashem saw that the light was good”).

See also *Re’eh*, “Seeing Is Believing,” and *Ki Seitzei*, “The Architecture of Creation and Renewal,” below, which also discusses this hidden light. See also *Likutei Shoshanah* on *Avos* 2:13, and *Zera Kodesh* of Rav Naftali Ropshitzer, beginning of *Miketz*, where we find an allusion to this light in the verse “How great is Your good which You have hidden for those who fear You” (*Tehillim* 1:20) — the light G-d created on the first day was hidden away for the Tzaddikim for the future. At the beginning of *parashas Chukas*, Rebbe Elimelech explains that the idea that the light G-d created on the first day was hidden away for the Tzaddikim for the future means that the light will one day be revealed to the righteous, and they will gaze with it from one end of the world to the other.

Noach

MAKING THE WORDS OF OUR PRAYERS SHINE

Make an opening or window [tzohar] for the ark, and to a cubit finish it from above...

(Bereishis 6:16)

The great commentator Rashi explains that the word *tzohar* connotes a precious stone. We can also suggest that the Hebrew word for “ark,” *teivah*, can also mean “word.” Therefore the verse can be read: “Make your words into a precious stone.” This teaches us that all the words we speak should shine with the luster of a precious stone. *

“And to a cubit finish it from above” — this alludes to true unity, since the Tzaddik must walk in unity in the higher worlds.

[An *amah*, a cubit, is a unit of measurement. When we measure something, we unify it. Rebbe Elimelech is implying that the *pasuk* hints that a Tzaddik’s task is to see to it that there is unity in the higher worlds — that our intentions are solely for G-d and that there is no separation from His unity.]

On a slightly different note, the verse teaches us that we should “make a *tzohar*, a light, through the words [*teivah*].” Through the words of Torah that the Tzaddik learns, he can transform צרה into צהר — “calamity” and “disaster” can be changed into “radiance” and “light.”¹

[*Tzarah* and *tzohar* are both spelled with the same three letters: *tzaddi*, *hei*, and *reish*, but each in a different order. The Rebbe is saying that the Torah is indicating: “Make your words (implied by ‘*teivah*’) shine forth.” Transform the words of pain and darkness — i.e., the bad decrees — into good.]

THE TZADDIK WORKS TOGETHER WITH HASHEM TO ABOLISH HARSH DECREES

And to a cubit finish it from above.

(Bereishis 6:16)

The Gemara in *Shabbos* (119b) says: “He who prays reciting the verse ‘*Vayechulu...*’ regarding the completion of the world’s creation with Shabbos becomes a partner with Hashem in the act of creation, as it says, ‘*Vayechulu...* — And Heaven and Earth were completed’ (*Bereishis* 2:1) — do not read ‘*vayechulu,*’ completed, but rather read it as ‘*vayichlu,*’ they finished it together [meaning to say that Hashem and man finished it together].”

This can be explained as referring to the Tzaddik, who nullifies harsh decrees and judgments by elevating them back to their source, thereby sweetening them.

[The source of everything is ultimately Hashem and His divine attributes. Hashem is absolute good and mercy, so all decrees and judgments — even those perceived as evil — are rooted in sources of holiness and good, as it says, “All bitter things have sweet roots” (Ramak, *Tomer Devorah*, ch. 4). So, for example, love of money and lust has an original source in love of good and love of the divine. When a person overcomes his urges and desires and uses them for a higher purpose, such as diverting those desires to love of Torah and Hashem, he is elevating these attributes and returning them to their source. A decree is also “sweetened” in this way.]

Thus, “one who prays reciting the verse ‘*Vayechulu...*’” refers to the Tzaddik who prays to end and nullify the harsh decrees and judgments. [In Hebrew, the word לללו, “to end,” is spelled with the letters of the word ויכלו.] In this way he becomes a partner with Hashem: G-d decrees and the Tzaddik abolishes the decree, as it says: “Do not read ‘*vayechulu,*’ completed, but rather read it as ‘*vayichlu,*’ they ended or were nullified.” The harsh decrees and judgments are nullified by the Tzaddik who elevates them to the heavens, back to their source in holiness.

Thus it says, “Make a *tzohar* for the *teivah*” — cause the words of your

prayers to sparkle with brilliance like the luster of a precious stone in order to abolish the verdicts and decrees that have been pronounced against the Jewish people.² How can these judgments be eliminated? The Torah says: “To a cubit finish it from above.” The word for “cubit,” אַמָּה, also connotes אִמָּה, “mother.” Divine mercy is symbolized by the merciful mother bird hovering above its young protecting them from all harm. Therefore, through divine mercy, “*techalenah*” — finish it. End the decrees with the mercy of the divine mother by elevating them back to their source above.^{3 *}

[We therefore read the verse “*V’el amah techalenah milema’alah* — To a cubit finish it from above” as “Through the divine mercy of the mother we end and abolish (the decrees) by elevating them to their source in holiness.”]

THE TESHUVAH OF THE TZADDIK

Put the entrance to the ark on its side.

(Bereishis 6:16)

This hints at the teaching that a Tzaddik must constantly be involved in repentance and returning to Hashem, as the Gemara teaches: “Why does the bottom leg of the letter *hei* hang unattached? This teaches that whoever wishes to return to Hashem should enter through there” (*Menachos* 29b). This is what the verse means: “Put the entrance on the side.” Enter through the opening on the side of the letter *hei* that symbolizes the path of the penitent.⁴

🕯️ The Light of the Rebbe’s Gartel

Related by the rav of Madin, a grandson of the Ropshitzer:

Rebbe Elimelech had a custom that after the afternoon *minchah* service he would converse with his close followers. He would then proceed to a special private room to pray the evening *ma’ariv* service in seclusion, purity, and sanctity. Rav Naftali Ropshitzer, a disciple of the Rebbe, yearned to also be in that room. He constantly wished to observe the deeds of his Rebbe and so wanted to see how he prayed there. Once, he stole into the room unnoticed and hid beneath the bed. The holy Rebbe entered and closed the door be-

hind him. He took out his *gartel* and proceeded to fasten it about himself.⁵ The first time the Rebbe wound the *gartel* about his waist, the entire room was filled with an awesome unbelievable light. The second time he tied the *gartel*, the light grew in intensity until the Ropshitzer could no longer endure it. He grew weak and found himself feeling faint. He could not help himself and called out in a loud voice. Rebbe Elimelech heard the cries of distress coming from his disciple and recognized their source. “Naftali, my son, are you here?” the Rebbe asked. “Fortunately you did not remain here for the third and final time I wound the *gartel*. If you had remained, your soul would have surely left your body from the intensity of the great light.”

(Eser Tzachtzachos 27; Ohel Elimelech 248)

THE TZADDIK CAN RECTIFY ALL THREE LEVELS OF HUMANITY

Make the ark with a lower, middle, and upper deck.

(Bereishis 6:16)

These three physical levels in the ark hint at the three levels of mankind: the completely pious righteous ones, the average man, and the wicked evil ones. The lower level hints at the wicked, for, as Rashi explains, it was used to store waste, since the wicked are constantly involved in wasteful and disgusting loathsome actions. Rashi explains that the middle level was to be used for the animal dwellings. The average man lives and dwells in the pleasures of the physical animalistic world — though he is free of sin, he is immersed in the material aspect. The upper level is for “*adam*,” man — the completely righteous Tzaddik who dwells in the upper worlds.

The Tzaddik must rectify all of these levels with his holy deeds. Thus in this verse, the action verb *ta'aseh*, “you shall make,” is right next to *shelishim*, the word for “the third upper level.” The Tzaddik must take action, actively doing all he can to repair and rectify all the levels of humanity.

The three levels can also be seen as a metaphor for man himself. In his youth, man is engaged in lowly and loathsome pursuits. In his middle years, he is active in the matters of this world. By his final days, he must seek to rectify it all rather than sin and defile his soul.

🕊️ The Angel of His Youth

Once, Reb Mendel of Rimanov told his teacher, Rebbe Elimelech, that he actually saw the angel who removes the light before the darkness and the darkness before the light (as described in the first blessing of the *ma'ariv* service). The Rebbe Reb Elimelech responded: “But I have already seen this angel in my youth!”

(*Ohel Elimelech* 156)

Notes:

1. See the *Degel Machaneh Efraim* on *parashas Emor*, in the name of his grandfather the Ba'al Shem Tov. He says there that the Tzaddik has the power to change the letters of bad decrees, transforming one word into another; for example, making מות, “death,” into תם, “perfection,” and נגע, “affliction,” into ענג, “delight.”
This is also taught in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov in the Komarna Rebbe's *Nesiv Mitzvosecha* (*Nesiv Emunah* 3:15): “The principal application of prayer is for others, as it says, ‘From on High no evil comes forth’ (*Eichah* 3:38). Only letter combinations come from on High. He [the Ba'al Shem Tov] explained, based on what Achiyah HaShiloni taught, that...one can change צרה to רחם, צרה to צד, צד to צר, רץ to רעש, עושר to מות, מות to מוה, and מוה to ואמת. [All of these decrees share the same letters and are transformed from the negative to the positive: from a ban or ex-communication to mercy, from tragedy and calamity to light, from pain and suffering to ‘run away from it,’ from noise to wealth, from dead to perfection, from death to truth.] All this can be done by those of great sincere faith who attach and cling to the Tzaddik.” See also *Vayishlach* below, “Altering the Decrees Against Us,” where we learn how this is accomplished through the prayers of the Tzaddik.
2. This is also taught in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov: “Make all the words of your prayers and Torah study shine.” See Ba'al Shem Tov on the Torah, *Noach, Amud HaTefillah* 15 (quoted by *Tzav'as HaRivash*) and 17 (quoted by *Degel Machaneh Efraim*) on this verse.
3. See also *Lech Lecha*, “Going Out of Ourselves: Perfecting Our Character Traits,” below, for a further discussion on how to bring negative character traits back to holiness.
4. See *Tomer Devorah*, ch. 1, attribute 7, “He will show us compassion once more,” where the Ramak teaches that the word for repentance, *teshuvah*, is a composite of the words “*tashuv hei*,” return the letter *hei* to its source, or alternatively, return through the opening in the *hei*.
5. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 91:1–2; see also *Mishnah Berurah* there) prescribes that a special separation be made between the lofty thoughts of the

heart and the base lowly desires of the reproductive organs during prayer. This is usually accomplished through wearing pants or the like, which form a barrier between these two areas of the body. Chassidim, however, follow a more stringent opinion that a special belt or sash be used especially for the prayer service, fulfilling the verse “*Hachon likras Elokecha Yisrael* — Ready yourself before your Maker” (*Amos 4:12*). In Yiddish this belt is called a “*gartel*.”