

ALSO BY ARTHUR GREEN

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A Jewish Mystical Theology

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Spiritual
Teachings
from
around

the Maggid's Table

Volume
1

Genesis • Exodus • Leviticus

Arthur Green
with Ebn Leader, Ariel Evan Mayse
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For People of All Faiths, All Backgrounds

JEWISH LIGHTS Publishing

Woodstock, Vermont


 ויגש

Va-Yiggash

OR TORAH

And Judah approached him, saying: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord; do not become angry with your servant, for you are the equal of Pharaoh."

(GEN. 44:18)

The sages taught that "approaching" always means prayer (*Tanhuma Va-Yera* 8).

It seems to me that our verse alludes to this. **And Judah approached him** refers to any Jewish person, since we are called *yehudim* ["Jews" = "Judahs"] after him. When you arise to pray before the blessed One, this is how you should act: the entire intention of your prayer should be to bring blessing to God's *shekhinah*.

This is the meaning of the sages' statement (b. Berakhot 30b): pray only with a serious demeanor (*koved rosh*)—be mindful of the Beginning of all beginnings [*keter*, called *reisha de-kol reishin*, lit. "head of all heads"]. Even though you are asking for something that you need, your intention should be that whatever it is not be lacking above. Your soul is a part of God, one of the limbs of the *shekhinah*. The goal of your prayer is that the lack be fulfilled on high. This will certainly make your prayer acceptable, and the adversary will be unable to find blame in you. Do not be like those described in the *Zohar* who act only for themselves, barking out "give, give" (*Tikkuney Zohar* t. 6, 22a)....

This is the explanation of **And Judah approached** in prayer. **Saying**, fulfill my request for Your sake, for I am a portion of God above. **Please, my lord** [can also mean "the Lord is within me"]. Now **do not become angry**. Do not let the adversaries harass me, since my sole intention is to bring blessing above to the aspect of the Creator inside me; this is **the Lord is within me**. **For you are the equal of Pharaoh**—Pharaoh's name also means "to reveal" (*para'*, cf. Num. 5:18). Your inner self is being revealed, for He lies within. The World of Speech [*shekhinah*] speaks through you. This is the meaning of **let your servant speak a word**. She is called [the divine] Word, referring to the World of Speech.



Many, but not all, of those gathered around the Maggid's table struggled with the idea of petitionary prayer. If God is within all, and the essence of prayer means removing the ego and forgetting your own individual existence, how can we ask the One to fulfill our very worldly and often mundane needs?

Here the Maggid gives us an answer: *shekhinah* requires our voice. We give Her the words to pray for the world to be healed. Our own unfulfilled needs (both spiritual and physical!) are a part of the fracture. Through the act of prayer we open ourselves up and allow God to speak through us, and in this mystical moment our voice allows the divine element within us to call out to the infinite One above.

PERI HA-ARETS

And Judah approached him, saying: "Please, my lord"
(GEN. 44:18)

The *Or ha-Hayyim* asks why the term **and Judah approached** is necessary here [since we know Judah was already standing close to Joseph], appropriately explaining that the drawing near to Joseph took place within Judah's heart, as in the verse "As face answers to face in water, so does one man's heart to another" (Prov. 27:19). With these words Judah sought to inspire Joseph's compassion, and therefore he approached him in his heart, drawing near to Joseph and truly loving him, in order to arouse Joseph's love and spark his compassion. The words of the *Or ha-Hayyim* are certainly wise and faithful.

Judah thought that Joseph was an Egyptian, about whom Israel was to be warned “Give them no grace” (Deut. 7:2), meaning that one must not find any beauty in them (b. ‘Avodah Zarah 20a). Nevertheless, Judah did not refrain from bringing his heart closer and loving him, [raising up the fallen sparks] as we do through prayer, sacrifices, and eating....

Our Torah is true and trustworthy. It is therefore forbidden to test yourself, to enter into strange thoughts in order to uplift them, heaven forbid. Who knows if you will overcome them like a lion and rise [to the challenge], or descend lower and lower and be unable to withstand the test? But when a test happens that you had not planned, it has certainly come from God. Gird yourself with all your strength, even risking your life in the act of return to God; that is the raising up. Such was the error of King Solomon, who said: “I shall have many [wives] and will not turn aside” (b. Sanhedrin 21b). He set out to uplift the holy sparks, but he did not meet the challenge.

The Sages taught: “One says [the following] blessing upon encountering beautiful creatures, ‘Blessed is the One with such in His world’” (b. Berakhot 58b)—even over an attractive gentile. This does not contradict the injunction of “give them no grace.” What the verse prohibits is *seeking out* the sight of [the attractive gentile], over whom to say the blessing. This is not the case when the gentile has happened to come before you by chance. Then you must certainly recite the blessing, to uplift the pleasure of seeing. This is what happened with Rabbi Akiva and the Roman matron, when he saw her as he was coming around the corner (b. ‘Avodah Zarah 20a/b). To initiate [the test] is certainly forbidden, but in a situation like this one should risk one’s life, as in the practice of *nefilat apayim*.

The general rule of uplifting is that you must contemplate everything that happens to you. Discover something of yourself in it, whether for good or ill. Once “like has found like” and [attraction] has been aroused, take heed and immediately connect it with God according to the manner of the event. Realize that certainly this too is God and there is nothing else but Him, as it is said: “His sovereignty rules over all” (Ps. 103:19)....

This is the meaning of **Please, my lord** (*Bi, Adoni*; lit. “my Lord is in me”), since Judah represents the *malkhut* [sovereignty] of David, and “His sovereignty [*malkhuto*] rules over all” and all is included in Him. **And Judah approached him**, binding himself to God. Yet in fact he was Joseph, who is *yesod* and connected to *malkhut*. This is **Please, my lord—my Lord is in me** according to both the simple meaning and the esoteric.



The Vitebsker is urging us to remember that while we should not seek them out intentionally, every test we undergo in life is an opportunity to connect to God, and there are no experiences that we cannot follow back to a divine Source. According to the Kabbalistic tradition, bowing down one’s head (*nefilat apayim*) during the personal supplications following *shemoneh ‘esreh* is an act of descent in order to uplift the fallen sparks. Should we find ourselves in a difficult situation and be forced to go down from our spiritual rung, we must embrace the moment and know that it holds a hidden divine ember waiting to be kindled. This includes the encounter with an attractive gentile!

The Vitebsker’s lesson extends to the interpersonal realm as well: each encounter with another human being is an opportunity to discover that both of us share a common Root. The courage to connect yourself to “the other,” even when there seems to be no external similarity between the two of you, reveals the immutable bond hidden just beneath the surface and even has the power to bring about the divine unification between the *sefirot* of *yesod* and *malkhut*. This important message is just as relevant in our age as well, when “lines drawn in the sand” still too often obscure our humanity.

OR HA-ME’IR

Judah approached him, saying: “Please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in his master’s ear...”

(GEN. 44:18)

We have taught frequently that the essence of God’s service and the purpose of both study and prayer is that they be for the sake of *shekhinah*.... Our sages have been aroused to teach us that the ancients had their prayers answered because they prayed with [or “for the sake of”] God’s name (*Midrash Tehilim* 91). In last week’s Torah portion we saw that Jacob told his sons to “do this [*zot, shekhinah*]” (Gen. 43:11); do all that you do only to make a name, that is for the sake of *shekhinah*, who is God’s name.... The verse goes on: “Take of the land’s produce [*zimrat ha-arets*] in your vessels.” This refers to those songs (*zemirot*) and praises that *shekhinah* is forever singing, following the secret of “God, never be silent” (Ps. 83:2). Take this along in the “vessels” of your speech-letters, recombining those letters by which you sought to ask for your own needs into names by which to address God. These callings will then rise up as they should....

Or Peney Mosheh (1810, 1904). Mosheh Sofer of Przeworsk (d. 1806).

A professional scribe (*sofer*) whose ritual articles were highly prized by Hasidic masters. This work has the greatest number of appropriations of any early Hasidic book.

Or Torah (1804). Dov Baer Friedman of Miedzyrzec (see *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'akov*).

Collection of the Maggid's teaching arranged according to the order of the Torah readings. It has significant overlap with *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'akov*, but this text includes original material from the Maggid found nowhere else.

Orah le-Hayyim (1816). Avraham Hayyim of Zloczow (1750–1816).

Disciple of Yehiel Mikhel of Zloczow and Shmu'el Shmelke as well as the Maggid. He married the daughter of Yissakhar Dov of Zloczow after the death of his first wife, the daughter of Pinhas Horowitz. He served as a rabbi in Zeburov before assuming the rabbinate of Zloczow after his father-in-law emigrated to the Land of Israel. He himself prepared his manuscript for printing.

Panim Yafot (1825). Pinhas Horowitz (1730–1805).

Brother of Shmu'el Shmelke and one of the earliest students of the Maggid, whose influence on his thought is clear even when not cited by name. He served as rabbi of Vitkov, Lekhovits, and Frankfurt. The important anti-reformist leader Mosheh Sofer, known as the Hatam Sofer, was one of his students. This work is the third and final section of a larger work known as *Ha-Fla'ah*, which includes *Ha-Ketuvah* (on Tractate Ketubot) and *Ha-Makneh* (on Tractate Kiddushin).

Peri ha-Arets (1814). Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk (1730–1787).

Leader of Hasidism in White Russia, he led the Hasidic immigration to Tiberias in 1777 in the wake of persecution by the *mitnaggedim*. His teachings as preserved are quite complicated and emphasize *devekut* as

the ultimate goal of religious life. He was the teacher of Avraham of Kalisk and Shne'ur Zalman of Lyady. This volume includes a substantial number of letters sent to his followers who had remained in Eastern Europe, through which he attempted to remain leader of Belorussian Hasidism even from a distance.

Peri Hayyim (1873). Avraham Hayyim of Zloczow (see *Orah le-Hayyim*).

Commentary on the Passover Haggadah.

Rav Yeevi (1792). Ya'akov Yosef of Ostrog (1738–1790).

Close student of the Maggid and others who had been associated with the BeSHT. He became the preacher and rabbi of Ostrog after his father died in 1766. He was deeply critical of rabbinic leadership and the empty casuistic style of learning. He did not emphasize the role of *tsaddik*. This popular book is filled with quotations of early proto-Hasidic masters, including the BeSHT, Menahem Mendel of Bar, and Nahman of Kossov.

She'erit Yisra'el (1955). Levi Yitshak of Berdyczow (see *Kedushat Levi*).

Published in the twentieth century from an early manuscript passed down within Hasidic families. Excerpts are reprinted in *Yalkut Kedushat Levi* (2004).

Shemen ha-Tov (1925). Shmu'el Shmelke Horowitz of Nikolsburg (1726–1778).

Brother of Pinhas Horowitz. He studied in Lithuanian *yeshivot* and was brought to the Maggid by Avraham of Kalisk. He served as rabbi of Ryczywol, where he established a yeshivah, and later of Sienewa. In 1773 he became the leader of the Jewish community in Nikolsburg, Moravia, a city far to the west of the Hasidic heartland. He was responsible for attracting many students to the Maggid's table, including Levi Yitshak of Berdyczow. This work is a late compendium of stories and teachings passed down both orally and in manuscript.