

Shaar HaYichud The Gate of Unity

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Chapter Thirty Nine

It may now be understood in a general way why the letters are called “Vessels¹ – *Kelim*” and are also called “Garments² – *Levushim*.”³ This is because, at first glance, even though it limits the [spreading forth of] the essence, the aspect of the vessel is [nonetheless] considered to be of the essence. For example, the letters which at all times are embedded in the essence of the soul are unified with the essence. This is analogous to how the letters which are engraved in an image or letters that protrude from a seal [are one with it]. This is likewise so with the spiritual letters of the soul. [Furthermore] this is similar to the revelation of the essence of an animal through its power of movement, or like the revelation of the vitality which spreads forth from the essence of the animal, as this power still [exists] embedded [and] concealed within the [animal’s essential] self.

We likewise observe this with the letters of an intellectual concept; that they are included [in their source] in the essential power to conceptualize. That is, that immediately when [a person] brings [his] reasoning to light from his potential power to conceptualize (*Koach HaMaskel*), its letters come out together with it.⁴ It is by and through these [letters] that its

¹ See *Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah*, end of Ch. 4. Also see *Etz Chaim, Shaar 6 (Shaar HaAkudim), Ch. 1*. Also see *Shaarei Teshuvah* of Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch, Vol. 1, pg. 38b.

² See *Sefer HaMa’amarim 5562*, Vol. 2, pg. 391 and *Sefer HaMa’amarim 5563*, Vol. 1, pg. 249 and 261.

³ This may be understood in light of what was explained above in chapter 38. Also see Chapters 27, 28 and 30 especially note 18 of chapter 28.

⁴ In other words, they already preexist in the Primal Intellect (*Kadmoot HaSechel*), which is the Desire of the Desire to conceive (*Ratzon L’Ratzon L’Chochmah*), in the power to conceptualize of the soul (*Koach HaMaskil*) and in the *Ratzon HaSayach L’Asiyah*, which is the desire to conceptualize a particular concept **before** it comes out as an actual expression of thought, even on the level of thought of thought (See *Sameach T’Samach 5657* of Rabbi Shalom Dovber of Lubavitch). On these levels the letters are considered to be vessels which are part and parcel of the essence, similar to how the forms of the letters of a seal are part and parcel of the seal itself and similar to how the power of movement of an animal is part and parcel with the animal itself, even before he actually moves. This is the case, even though he may have already decided to make a specific move. Nonetheless, since no actual movement has come out yet, it is still in the potential state. In the same way, on the levels of the Primal Intellect (*Kadmoot HaSechel*), the power to conceptualize (*Koach HaMaskil*), and the desire to conceptualize a particular concept (*Ratzon HaShayach L’Asiyah*), since they are in the potential state and are still totally bound up with the soul, the letters are considered to be vessels. On the other hand, once they come out as **actual** thought, even on the highest level of thought, which is thought of thought, they are considered to be garments, which are separate and apart from the essence, rather than vessels which are part and parcel with the essence. This is because thought, speech and action are considered to be the garments of the soul, through which the soul expresses itself outwardly (See Part One of Tanya, Chapter 4), and even though the level of thought is directed

existence is [limited to] a certain manner of being a [tangible] “thing”.⁵ These are the letters of any concept to whosoever discovers it.⁶

The proof for this [that the letters which are called vessels are of the essence] is from two individuals who conceive the same concept or reasoning. One will bring it out with certain letters and combinations, while the other will bring it out into revelation with a different manner of letters and combinations. [However, the concept remains the same.]⁷ (This is like

toward himself, rather than directed toward anyone else, nevertheless, it still is only a garment of the power to conceptualize of the soul (*Koach HaMaskil*), albeit the innermost garment. This being the case it is only a vehicle for the expression of the soul rather than part and parcel of the soul itself. (See *Ma'amarei Admor HaEmtza'ee, Vayikra* Vol. 2, pg. 924.)

⁵ This is to say that it is specifically the letters which give definition to everything and thereby give it tangible existence.

⁶ If not for the letters which define it would be impossible to conceive any concepts or to differentiate one concept from another. This is because the letters which define make the concept palpable and tangible.

⁷ This may be understood as follows: The relationship between the lights and vessels is that the lights are intangible, while relative to the lights, the vessels are tangible. However, though in essence they are incompatible, nonetheless, because the lights were emanated so that they may be invested into vessels and the vessels were emanated so that they could withstand, receive and unify with the lights, these two factors make the unification of the lights and vessels possible.

This may be understood by the analogy of a human being below, in this world. The terms lights and vessels as they relate to the spiritual realms could be termed substance and form as they relate to man below. Similar to the relationship between lights and vessels, substance and form, likewise, are distant and seemingly incompatible with each other, but nonetheless, unify with each other. In this regard the revelation of the form specifically manifests according to the conditions of the substance. On the other hand, when form is invested in substance, this brings about a refinement of the substance.

This principle may be observed through the organs of the human body, which are the vessels for the faculties of the soul. For example, the substance of the eye is the vessel for the form of the power of sight which vests within it, the substance of the ear is the vessel for the form of the power of hearing which vests within it etc. Now, even though the substance of the eye is physical, (since even the spiritual of the physical is still physical) nonetheless, the form of the spiritual power of sight specifically follows the conditions of the physicality of the eye. In other words, whether a person has good eyesight or bad eyesight is a direct result of the physical condition of his eyes. From this we see that the manifestation of the form directly correlates to the condition of the substance.

Likewise, the form of the intellect which vests within the brain matter directly correlates to the condition of the brain. *Chochmah*, which is the seminal point of intellectual concepts, vests in that part of the brain matter which is cold and wet (which corresponds to the kindnesses-*Chassadim*), whereas *Binah*, which is intellect as it relates to detailed analysis, vest in that part of the brain matter which is hot and dry (which corresponds to the severities-*Gevurot*). Likewise, the ability to concentrate, which is *Da'at*, also depends on the condition of the physical substance of the brain. Furthermore, even a person's intellectual leanings, whether he will be lenient or strict, depends on the physical condition of his brain.

This is so, even though the *Zohar* and *Chassidut* explain that a person's leanings towards either kindness or sternness stems from the essence of his soul, as in the case of the academy of Shammai, who tended to be strict, as opposed to the academy of Hillel, who tended to be lenient. This was because the souls of the academy of Shammai were rooted in the severities-*Gevurot*, whereas the souls of the academy of Hillel were rooted in the kindnesses-*Chassadim*. However, this division of tendencies is only in general, since the structural design of the substance is dictated by the form. However, the particular divisions of how the form will manifest is dictated by the condition of the substance.

For example, the eye is designed to receive the form of the general power of sight, however, the particulars of how well a person will see, i.e. how the power of sight will manifest, such as whether he will be near sighted or far sighted etc., is determined by the physical condition of his eye. From all this we see that with the unification of form and substance, on the one hand, the substance limits the form, and on the other hand, the form refines the substance.

From this analogy we may now understand the relationship between lights and vessels as they exist in the spiritual realm. Even though the two are not at all comparable to each other, nonetheless, the manifestation of the light is specifically in accordance to the vessel and the vessel is so unified to the light that its *raison d'être* is to reveal the light according to the conditions of the vessel.

The function of the garments, however, is quite different than that of the vessels. Whereas the vessels reveal the lights, the function of the garments is to conceal them. Now, in truth, the vessels also conceal light. However, they, nonetheless, are unified and animated by that part of the light which they do reveal, which is the externality of the light. As explained above, the lights are intangible and the vessels, relative to the lights, are tangible. The vessels conceal the light as an intangible and reveal it as a tangible. Nonetheless, they are unified to and animated by the external aspect of the light which they reveal. It may, therefore, be said of them that they reveal the light.

The contrary is true of the garments. They are separate and apart from the light, and conceal it. This too may be understood through the analogy of man below. On the one hand, a person's garments certainly relate to him. Because of this his head gear will be different than his body gear and his body gear will be different than his foot gear. Furthermore, this is so not only in the fact that the garments must have the correct measurements to fit his body. In addition, they must have varying degrees of lightness and heaviness, fineness and coarseness. Depending on the needs and specifications of each limb, that is how fine or how coarse the garment specific to it will be. However, although the garments are designed for and fit the body, it is, nonetheless, self evident that they are totally separate and apart from the body.

Now, just as this is so in regard to physical garments, so is it in regard to the spiritual garments of the soul, which are thought, speech and action. It is self understood that not only speech and action are separate from the soul, but even thought. This is the case even on the higher levels of thought.

As known, there are several general levels of thought. These are thought of thought, speech of thought and action of thought. Thought of thought constitutes the letters of thought as they come with the flash of intellectual insight. Although the letters on this level are not consciously felt, however, we must say that there must be some degree of sense of letters there, albeit in a very refined and spiritual manner. Nevertheless, even though a person is not consciously aware of them at all, these letters too are not of the essence of the intellect, but are rather separate and apart from it.

This is evidenced by the fact that the same concept may be expressed through different combinations of letters. This phenomenon, that they may be readily exchanged, is what defines them as garments. Vessels, on the other hand, such as the organs of the body, like the heart or the kidney, are not readily exchangeable at all. (This point is particularly evidenced by the fact that heart or kidney transplants etc. are extremely difficult procedures in which very serious, life threatening complications may arise, such as the ineffectuality of the drugs used to offset the natural tendency of the body to reject foreign organs.)

All this shows that even the letters of thought of thought are separate from the intellect. This may be especially understood through understanding the reason why immediately upon the flash of insight the letters are already present. This is because the root of the letters is higher than revealed intellect. Their root is in the primal intellect-*Kadmoot HaSechel* (which is the concept before it comes out as an actual expression of thought, even in a way of thought of thought) and even higher in the very essence of the soul itself. Because the letters are rooted in these higher levels, therefore they are already present with the revelation of thought. The letters, as they exist on these higher levels are considered to be vessels, which are of the essence, whereas the letters as they exist on the levels of thought speech and action, which are

the various commentaries of the Talmud; such as the commentaries of *Rashi* and of *Tosefot*, the *R"ashb*, or the *Ra"N*, and the like. [Sometimes] they may all be explaining the very same concept or reasoning, each one in his own unique language, nonetheless, all [their explanations] amount to the same matter and intent, except that each one explains it according to the letters of his intellect etc, as explained elsewhere.⁸)

This is because when the concept itself is born, its letters are born along with it, through which it takes on [tangible] appearance as an aspect of a “something”, and even though [the letters] depict and define it, they, nonetheless, are considered to be essential to it.

This is likewise the case with the letters of desire and the letters of the emotions, such as the love of the heart etc. It becomes revealed by the aspect of its letters, which are what [define the light of Kindness] giving it the aspect of a type of revelation, as a [tangible] existence in various different manners, such as a single concept which becomes revealed through different combinations [of letters] etc.

This, then, is what is called the aspect of vessels (*Kelim*). This is the aspect of the “something” which depicts and defines, but is [nevertheless] considered to be essential. For example, the aspect of all the vessels of the ten *sefirot*, [such as] the vessel for the light of *Chochmah*, the vessel for the light of *Chessed* and of *Netzach* etc., which is the aspect of that “something” which depicts them, as known. (This is in accordance with what was explained in chapter twenty-eight; that from the “thickening” of the lights the vessels are made. [Furthermore, it was] also [explained] that the root of the vessels preceded that of the lights, and is called “the simple substance” (*Chomer Pashut*) etc. This is understood from what was said above regarding the letters which are in the essence of the soul, that they [even] preceded the root for the existence of the light of the essential desire and pleasure etc.)

However, notwithstanding all of the above, it is also true that the letters are sometimes called by the term “Garments – *Levushim*”. This is because the aspect of a Garment (*Levush*) is something that is completely separate from the essence. It is only that the essence becomes vested in it. This is similar to how the body becomes vested within garments that are foreign and separate from it, which cover and conceal it.

This is similarly the case with the letters of the intellect. Once they come into being as existing [in a tangible way], the essence of the intellect becomes vested and concealed within them, so that all that is revealed is only the aspect of the letters of the concept, which is the manner in which it becomes a [tangible] “something”, as if there were nothing besides this

separate from the essence, are considered to be garments. (See *Sefer HaMa'amarim*, of the year 5715, page 244-247.)

⁸ See *Shaarei Teshuvah* 108d. In other words, although in the external garment of thought the concept manifests itself in many different ways, nonetheless, the “letters” or “vessels” that define that concept as that particular concept are the same. We therefore observe that in this concept there are two types of “letters.” There are the letters that are called “vessels” which are one with the essential core of the concept and inseparable from it. Then there are the letters that are called “garments” which are only the manifestation of this concept in the garment of thought, i.e. the terms in which he thinks about the core idea. These letters which are called “garments” are not essential to the concept, as evidenced by the fact that they are interchangeable with other “letters,” i.e. different people will conceptualize this same concept in completely different terms.

manner. In truth, however, the essential light of the concept is not confined to this specific manner [of combinations of letters]. Rather, [this combination of letters] may be exchanged like a garment, and [the concept] may be invested into a completely different manner of [letter] combinations. [However] none of these [letter formations] actually reach the essence of what [the concept] is, altogether. Rather, it only vests and is revealed in them.⁹

(This is similar to what was mentioned above, regarding the revelation of the same concept and reasoning [through the various unique manners of expression] in the language of the [Talmudic] commentators etc.)

The same [principle] applies to the letters of the desire (*Ratzon*), for we find that one simple desire may be invested in many different forms of revelation. Nonetheless, it is all one single

⁹ As known, the world of *Atzilut* is considered to be like the soul relative to the three separate worlds of *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*, which are considered to be like thought, speech and action. This being the case, one would think that the matter of vessels, which are part and parcel of the essence, should apply only to the world of *Atzilut*, and that the matter of garments, which are separate from the essence, should apply only to the three separate worlds of *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*. This being the case, how could it be that there are both vessels and garments on all levels, even as far down as our lowly world? Now, to understand this we must consider the fact that actually each of the four worlds of *Atzilut*, *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*, have all four levels within them. In other words, in the world of *Atzilut* there is *Atzilut* of *Atzilut*, *Briyah* of *Atzilut*, *Yetzirah* of *Atzilut* and *Asiyah* of *Atzilut*, and in *Briyah* there is *Atzilut* of *Briyah*, *Briyah* of *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* of *Briyah* and *Asiyah* of *Briyah*. The same holds true of the worlds of *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*; in the world of *Yetzirah* there is *Atzilut* of *Yetzirah*, *Briyah* of *Yetzirah* etc. and in the world of *Asiyah* there is *Atzilut* of *Asiyah*, *Briyah* of *Asiyah* etc. Furthermore, in each world, the *Atzilut* of that world is like its soul and the *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah* of that world are like its thought, speech and action. Nonetheless, the main definition of each world is its primary characteristic and all the various levels within it still fall within that general characteristic. For example the main characteristic of the world of *Atzilut* is that there is an open revelation of G-dliness in it. Therefore, it cannot be regarded as a separate world, separate and apart from G-dliness. This being the case, all its various levels, including even its lowest level, which is *Asiyah* of *Atzilut*, also are an open revelation of G-dliness and cannot at all be regarded as separate and apart from G-dliness. However, within the world of *Atzilut* itself, *Asiyah* of *Atzilut*, which is the revelation of G-dliness as it applies to the “action” of bringing the world of *Briyah* about, is similar to a garment, rather than a vessel, relative to *Atzilut* of *Atzilut*. This is because *Asiyah* of *Atzilut* is like the “action” of *Atzilut* whereas *Atzilut* of *Atzilut* is like the “soul” of *Atzilut*. In the same way, though generally speaking, the world of *Briyah* is already considered to be the separate garment of thought relative to the world of *Atzilut*, which is like the soul, however, within *Briyah* itself, *Atzilut* of *Briyah* is considered to be the essential soul of that world, whereas, relative to it, *Briyah* of *Briyah* is considered to be the separate garment of thought. Thus, even though, generally, the world of *Briyah* is regarded to be a separate garment, nonetheless, in relation to itself, the letters of *Atzilut* of *Briyah* are considered to be vessels which are part of the essence, whereas the letters of *Briyah* of *Briyah* are considered to be garments, which are separate and apart from the essence. This is because, in general, the worlds of *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah* correspond to the three levels of thought, speech and action, which are the garments of *Atzilut*, which is like the soul, and are therefore separate from it. However, when examining each world specifically, this principle also applies to all the various levels of each specific world. In other words, *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah* of the specific world of *Atzilut* correspond to the garments of thought, speech and action of that particular world, whereas *Atzilut* of *Atzilut* corresponds to the soul of that particular world. Likewise, in the world of *Briyah*, the levels of *Briyah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah* of *Briyah* correspond to the garments of thought, speech and action of the world of *Briyah*, whereas *Atzilut* of *Briyah* corresponds to the soul of the world of *Briyah*. The same pattern similarly applies to the worlds of *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*. With the above explanation in mind, we may now understand how it is that the letters may be seen as both vessels and garments on all levels, even down to our lowly world. (See *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, *Hakdamah* 18, also see *Sha'arei Teshuvah* of Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch, *Chinuch* pg. 108b-108c)

desire. Just as the body vests in its garments, so likewise, the desire becomes revealed in a manner of constantly undergoing change.

Similarly, we observe this with the letters of thought (*Machshavah*) which enrobe the emotions. For, the love [felt] in the heart which has already come in its [distinct] manner of letters of [description and] revelation in the heart; when it [subsequently] enters thought, it then vests within the thought, literally like a body which becomes enrobed in a separate garment.¹⁰ Regarding this it states,¹¹ “Like a garment they are changed and exchanged,” literally. This is because the garment of thought does not stand still for even a moment. Rather, it is [in a] constant [state of] “disrobing” and “enrobing”, “disrobing” and “enrobing” etc., from thought to thought etc. This is likewise the case when the light of the intellect comes into the garment of the letters of thought. It literally “disrobes” and “enrobes” from thought to thought, [constantly].

(This is not the case, however, with the aforementioned aspect of the revelation of the letters of the essence of the intellectual [concept] itself, which are considered to be of the essence. They only appear to be exactly like the garment of the letters of thought after they come into being as a [tangible] existence, separate [and apart] from the essence of the intellect, as explained above.)¹²

¹⁰ In other words, just as we explained above that a single concept can manifest in many different ways, so likewise, a single emotion can also manifest in many different ways. Here too there are these two different levels of “letters.” There are the letters of the emotion which are called “vessels” and there are those that are called “garments.” The “vessels” are the letters that define that emotion, making it tangible in that particular way (i.e. so that it is a particular experience distinguished from other experiences). Then, there are the “garments” of that emotion, like the manifestation of that emotion in thought, speech or action. While the “vessels” that define it as that particular emotion are essential to it, this is not the case at all with the manifestation of that emotion with the “garments” of thought, speech or action.

¹¹ Psalms 102:27. See also *Shaar HaEmunah* pg. 97.

¹² The basic difference between letters which are vessels and letters which are garments is that letters which are vessels are so profoundly bound to the essential depth of the concept that they are literally part and parcel of it, similar to how the letters of a seal are not separate from the seal but are rather part and parcel of it. This is so much so that one cannot differentiate between the form of the letters and the seal itself. Because of this, the letters which are vessels are immutable and cannot be changed or exchanged for other letters. This is because if they would be changed or exchanged the concept would no longer be the same concept that it originally was. On the other hand, even though the letters which are garments may be identical to the letters which are vessels, nonetheless, there is a vast difference between them in that the letters which are garments exist as separate and apart from the concept invested in them and may therefore be changed or exchanged for other letters. We may understand this from the letters of the Torah. The letters of the Torah are both letters which are vessels and letters which are garments. Though it would be a sacrilege to do so, a wicked person could cut up the letters of the Torah scroll, G-d forbid, and rearrange them in a completely different order to make up a totally new book with a totally different meaning. Theoretically, it might even be possible to rearrange the letters and retain the same meaning. Now, these letters which could be changed or exchanged are not the letters of the Torah which are vessels but are rather only the letters of the Torah which are garments. That is why they could be so readily exchanged. However, the Torah is also made up of letters which are vessels. These letters are immutable and unchanging. In other words, the moment that the letters of the Torah are changed, even if only one letter is exchanged with another letter, it is no longer the Torah, but is rather a different book. The letters of the Torah which are vessels are eternal and cannot be destroyed. Perhaps this is the meaning of the account that when the Romans burned the Torah scrolls, the letters of the Torah were not burned but rather flew up and ascended to heaven. The external letters of the Torah scroll, which were garments, did indeed burn and were destroyed along with the parchment. However, the inner essential letters of the Torah, which are vessels,

[From all the above] we find that it is understood that both [matters] are true in the root of the aspect of the letters. Sometimes they are in an aspect of “Vessels – *Kelim*”. This is when they are [still] in the root from which they are hewn, completely unified with the essence, as explained above. However, they also come into an aspect of “Garments – *Levooshim*”, which are totally separate from the essence, as explained above. (This is because the root of the letters is from the aspect of the Encompassing Lights¹³ (*Makifim*), which are the root of the Garments (*Levooshim*), and [furthermore] the root of the Vessels (*Kelim*) which define and depict etc. is also from there, as stated above and as explained elsewhere.)

From all of the above it may be generally understood how it is above [in G-dliness] by a person who contemplates all the aspects of the garments of thought, speech and action, and the three types of letters [that there are] throughout all the particulars of the ten *sefirot*, and throughout the [entire] chaining down [of the worlds] (*Hishtalshehut*), all the way to the highest heights in the Essence of the Infinite Light (*Atzmut Ohr Ein Sof*), in the letters that, “He engraved an engraving in the Upper Purity,” and the like. This will suffice those of understanding.

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are eternal and cannot be destroyed. Rather, since they no longer had a physical scroll to attach to, they ascended heavenward, i.e. they still retained their spiritual existence and, furthermore, they still retained an attachment to physical existence in all the Torah scrolls that were not burned.

¹³ See *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5567, pg. 392.