## [Waves and Ocean – ל LAMED and Parshat K](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/waves-and-ocean-lamed-and-parshat-korakh)orakh

One of the radical teachings of Hassidism, once regarded by some Rabbinic authorities as heretical, is that we all have equal and immediate access to the Divine, regardless of book learning and even regardless of purity in thought and action. That’s because the Hassidic understanding is that the Divine is not something separate from anything, but is rather the basic Reality of Everything – similar to the relationship between the waves and the ocean. The waves have form and duration; they have individual “identity” in a sense, yet they are never separate from the vast and formless ocean.

Similarly, all things are like waves in the great Ocean of Being, and all we need do to connect with the Divine is shift our attention from the “waves” – the world of time and thinking – to the Ocean – the realm of the Timeless Present, the open space of awareness within which all experience comes and goes.

**Cottages of the Prince**

One of the disciples of Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz wasn’t convinced: “I am not really a holy person; I don’t see how I could possibly ever know Hashem with all the wicked things I’ve done.”

Rabbi Pinhas responded with a parable: “Once there was a prince who liked to go on journeys, so he had many little cottages scattered throughout the land. When he would travel, he would stay in those cottages, among the common folk. Those cottages were very different and far more modest than his palace, but they were in no way inferior, because they served a different function; what the palace could not do, the cottages could, and vice versa.

“It is the same with people: when a supposedly ‘wicked’ person turns their heart to the Divine and connects in prayer or in good deed, the Divine rejoices in a way that is not possible with the tzaddikim; that’s why it’s important for everyone to understand that they can connect to Hashem, regardless of how unscholarly or unsaintly they may regard themselves.”

In this parable of Rabbi Pinhas, the “palace” and the “cottages” are different, but they are both dwelling places of the “prince.” The message is, no matter who we are and what we do, we all can potentially become “homes” for the Divine.

“Home” is a wonderful metaphor for connection with the Divine, because the Divine is literally “at home” everywhere – just as the ocean is “at home” within every wave. Home should be a place of restfulness and security; just like the state of inner connectedness that comes from Presence. But also, the home is a place we leave frequently, only to return again. If we were trapped in our home, the home would be like a prison; we would be “under house arrest.” Appreciation for being at home is partially dependent on regularly visiting other places!

Similarly, we can leave our “home” in the present moment to travel through landscapes of thought and feeling. If thought and feeling function as temporary abodes for serving the betterment of life, they are like the “cottages of the prince” so to speak… as long as we don’t get trapped! We don’t want to get “taken hostage” by the mind and lose sight of our true home, the Palace of Presence.

**Parshat Korakh**

וַיִּֽקָּהֲל֞וּ עַל־מֹשֶׁ֣ה וְעַֽל־אַהֲרֹ֗ן וַיֹּאמְר֣וּ אֲלֵהֶם֮ רַב־לָכֶם֒ כִּ֤י כָל־הָֽעֵדָה֙ כֻּלָּ֣ם קְדֹשִׁ֔ים וּבְתוֹכָ֖ם יְי וּמַדּ֥וּעַ תִּֽתְנַשְּׂא֖וּ עַל־קְהַ֥ל יְיְ׃

And they gathered against Moses and Aaron and said to them. “You make much of yourselves! For all the community – all of them are holy, and the Divine is among them all! Why do you exalt yourselves above the community of Hashem?”

-BaMidbar (Numbers) 16:3, Parshat Korakh

Parshat Korakh describes a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. The protestors have a good point – yes, everyone is holy. This is what the mind whispers to us: “These thoughts are important and holy too!” – which is true! But, visit them and dwell in them as if you were royalty, traveling and visiting your country house; don’t get lost in them! Remember the Palace of Presence, remember your true home.

But how do you do that?

In the haftorah, the prophet Samuel rebukes the people for rejecting Hashem as their King and requesting a human king, king Saul. The people feel remorse and beg for mercy. But Samuel reassures them:

וַיֹּ֨אמֶר שְׁמוּאֵ֤ל אֶל־הָעָם֙ אַל־תִּירָ֔אוּ אַתֶּ֣ם עֲשִׂיתֶ֔ם אֵ֥ת כָּל־הָרָעָ֖ה הַזֹּ֑את אַ֗ךְ אַל־תָּס֙וּרוּ֙ מֵאַחֲרֵ֣י יְהוָ֔ה וַעֲבַדְתֶּ֥ם אֶת־יְהוָ֖ה בְּכָל־לְבַבְכֶֽם׃

But Samuel said to the people, “Have no fear. You have, indeed, done all those wicked things. Do not, however, turn away, but serve the Divine with all your heart…

- I Samuel 12:21

The point is, it’s okay to have a human king. It’s okay – it’s necessary and good in fact – to engage in the world, to enjoy the world. It’s okay to travel in the paths of thought and feeling. The key is to remember, in whatever you are doing, that this moment is a kind of training; this moment is for learning how to be in the waves while staying connected to the ocean. Let this moment teach you how to not get lost – al tasuru – don’t turn away! Learn to turn your attention back again and again toward the Divine as the Ever-Present Reality of this moment; this is the Path of ל Lamed.

**Black Fire on White Fire**

Rabbi Yisrael, the Maggid of Koznitz, used to visit the city of Apt every year on his father’s yartzeitto visit his grave. For years, he would teach the community on those visits. One year, on such a visit, they asked him when he would come and preach in the synagogue.

“I don’t think I will preach this year,” he replied. “I don’t see any evidence that my preaching has done any good.” The people were dumbfounded, and didn’t know what to say.

Later, a crowd gathered around the inn where the Maggid was staying. They wanted to convince him to come and speak, but weren’t sure how. Then, a young craftsman went into the inn and knocked on the Maggid’s door. The Maggid answered.

“You say that your preaching hasn’t had any effect,” said the craftsman. “But that’s not true. Last year you spoke about the practice ofSh’viti Hashem L’negdi Tamid – I place the Divine before me constantly. Ever since then, I always see the Divine before me in whatever I am doing, and in whatever is happening; It appears to me like black fire on white fire.”

“Hmm,” replied the Maggid, “Okay then, I’ll come and preach.”

**The Three Strategies of Ego**

And they gathered against Moses and Aaron…

Moses and Aaron represent our capacity to be in alignment with the Divine – meaning, living from the realization that all things are part of One Reality, One unfolding. From this point of view, there is no tension between oneself and the situation within which one finds oneself, because both “self” and “situation” are arising within (and not separate from) the space of consciousness that we are; there is unity with the moment.

Ego, on the other hand, is living from the sense of oneself as separate from one’s situation; ego is the sense of “me” and “other.” This is Korakh – the incarnation of ego. Ego thrives on conflict, because conflict reinforces the sense of oneself as separate; conflict is food and water for the ego. We can see this in the opening words:

וַיִּקַּ֣ח קֹ֔רַח – Vayikakh Korakh – And Korakh took…

This is usually translated as “Korakh separated himself,” but literally it means “Korakh took.” Took what? He “took” his feeling of existence by creating conflict, by rebelling against Moses and Aaron and trying to seize power for himself. The passage then goes on to illustrate the three primary strategies that the ego employs to accomplish its craving for the illusion of existence:

**The first strategy of ego is co-opting the truth** for its own purpose – Korakh makes an argument against Moses and Aaron that is essentially true:

כֻּלָּ֣ם קְדֹשִׁ֔ים – Kulam kedoshim – all of them are holy!

Instead of trying to say that Moses and Aaron are bad leaders and that he would be a better leader, which would be more straightforward but debatable, Korakh instead says something that can’t really be argued: Everyone is holy!

Moses’ approach is wise – he doesn’t argue back, but simply points out that the truth will eventually reveal itself:

…בֹּקֶר וְיֹדַע יי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־ל֛וֹ וְאֶת־הַקָּד֖וֹשׁ וְהִקְר֣יב אֵל֑יו

In the morning, The Divine will make known who is in alignment with the Divine, who is holy and close to the Divine…

In other words, Reality ultimately reveals the truth of things. We may not know where a person’s heart is – whether a person is really concerned with the truth of what they are saying, or whether they are really concerned only with the enhancement of their ego; we may have to simply “wait and see.” But, while we can’t necessarily know the motivation of another person, we can know our own motivation:

וַיִּשְׁמַ֣ע מֹשֶׁ֔ה וַיִּפֹּ֖ל עַל־פָּנָֽיו׃ – Vayish’ma Mosheh vayipol al panav – And Moses heard and fell on his face…

The word for “his face,” panav, can also mean presence, or awareness. So, “fell upon his face” can mean letting our awareness “fall” into our bodies, being quiet and alert to notice whatever feelings are present within, so as not to get caught by our own egos.

**The second strategy of ego is projection:**

יי וּמַדּ֥וּעַ תִּֽתְנַשְּׂא֖וּ עַל־קְהַ֥ל – Umadu’a titnas’u al k’hal? Why do you exalt yourselves over the community of Hashem?

Korakh’s accusation against Moses and Aaron is actually a projection of himself; his own ego feels disempowered and craves enhancement, but that can only happen if his true motivation is hidden. So, he throws the spotlight on the ones he is attacking.

**The third strategy of ego is securing validation** **from others** – Korakh does not attack Moses and Aaron by himself, but first gets the backing of men who are respected leaders:

נְשִׂיאֵ֥י עֵדָ֛ה קְרִאֵ֥י מוֹעֵ֖ד אַנְשֵׁי־שֵֽׁם – N’si’ei eidah, kriy’ei mo’ed, anshei shem – leaders of the community who are called to assembly, men of renown…

Validation from others hides the profound insecurity of ego and stuffs it full with self-confidence. But Moses does the opposite. After examining himself by “listening” and “falling on his face,” he stays with the uncertainty, confident that the truth will be revealed in time.

Similarly, we too can give the benefit of the doubt to those who seem to oppose us. We can look within and discover where ego may be secretly operating, and in that awareness, transcend the ego’s clutches and connect with the life that matters most – the deepest dimension of who we are, beyond ego, beyond all argument. Because, ultimately, the ego’s self “propping up” is bound to collapse:

וַתִּפְתַּ֤ח הָאָ֙רֶץ֙ אֶת־פִּ֔יהָ וַתִּבְלַ֥ע אֹתָ֖ם

And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them…

Meaning, all of the illusions of ego are eventually revealed for what they are. The question is, can we debunk the illusory pull of ego within ourselves first? We can – but only if we are genuinely curious about our own motivations, about how we are operating. We need to turn the ל lamed inward and really learn what is going on with ourselves, instead of merely focusing on the “outside” world.

When I was about three years old, I was at a swimming pool. I had just seen a kid running, and I thought that wasn’t allowed, so I called up to the lifeguard, “Are we allowed to run around the pool?”

“No, no running allowed around the pool.”

“Okay!” I said, feeling confident now in my judgment of that other kid. Then, without realizing what I was doing, I immediately proceeded to run off myself. In a split second, the lifeguard’s whistle was in his mouth and he let off a short blast that pierced my soul: “Don’t you run!” he said.

**Who Do We Think We Are?**

An opponent of the Hassidic movement once came to the Alter Rebbi – Reb Sheur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Lubavitch – to attack him with accusations of pride:

“You claim to be a holy man, but look how you sit alone in your study, separate from the people – and with an attendant at your door, shielding you from those who come to see you, and only admitting them one by one according to your command – how fancy of you! Isn’t that arrogance? Who do you think you are?”

The tzaddik put down his head, resting it in his arms, as one does during the penitential Takhanun prayer.

After a few minutes, he lifted his head and spoke:

“The expression the Torah uses for ‘leaders of the people’ is ‘roshei alfei Yisrael – heads of the thousands of Israel,’ from which we learn that our leaders are known as ‘heads’.

“Now it is true, the head and the body are joined together, and neither can exist without the other. Nevertheless, they are clothed separately and differently. Why is this? Because the head must be distinct from the body, just as the ‘heads’ of any generation must be distinct from the people.”

The questioner was impressed with the answer and went on his way.

But the Rebbe’s little son (who would eventually be known as Reb Dov Bear of Lubavich), had a different question for his father:

“Abba, in order to give that answer, there was no need to rest your head in your arms. Why didn’t you give him the answer immediately?”

The Alter Rebbe replied, “In Parshat Korakh, when Korakh and his followers incited mutiny against Moses and Aaron and accused them of abusing their power as leaders, we read that Korakh accused Moses with these words- ‘Umadua titnasu – why do you raise yourself up above the people of God?’

“Then we read, ‘Vayishma Moshe, vayipol al panav- Moses heard, and fell on his face.’

“Only afterward did Moses give his answer to Korakh – that in the morning, Hashem would make clear who were the chosen leaders. The same question could be asked there: Why did Moses have to fall on his face first, before giving his answer?

“But Moses suspected that perhaps there was some truth to the accusation – perhaps there was a bit of ego involved in his leadership, so he had to go inside himself and search inwardly to learn if there was some truth there.

“After searching within and finding that the accusation was false, (for as the Torah says, ‘V’ha’ish Moshe anav me’od – Moses was exceedingly humble’) he was able to respond with clarity. A similar thing happened with me here today.”

The Alter Rebbe’s description of the head in relation to the body – intimately connected, yet separate, transcendent – is not just a metaphor for a leader in relation to the people, but also for consciousness in relation to the mind.

Just as the attendant shields the rebbe from his clamoring hassidim, admitting them one by one according to the wishes of the rebbe, so too we need to be the “attendants” of our own minds, admitting our thoughts one by one, as they need to be dealt with. This “attending to our own minds” allows our consciousness to remain free and not be besieged by our thoughts.

When you practice this, it sometimes happens that your mind rebels against you, like Korakh: “What makes you so great that you get to call all the shots? All of us thoughts are holy too!”

Thoughts will come with incredible urgency, accusing you of being negligent, of being disconnected, of being arrogant, whatever. And even though Moses and the Alter Rebbe may find no trace of ego within themselves, most people will find at least a little. For most, cleansing oneself inwardly from ego is a daily task. That’s why it’s so important to spend some time each day turning the ל lamed inward, looking inside ourselves to learn the truth about whatever feelings and motivations are present. In seeing and acknowledging the truth of our own egos, we can free ourselves from it, and enjoy the inner aliveness that comes with that freedom. Because that aliveness is actually who you are – not who you think you are!

**Learning and Teaching – the Mitzvah of ל Lamed**

וְהָי֞וּ הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֗לֶּה אֲשֶׁ֨ר אָנֹכִ֧י מְצַוְּךָ֛ הַיּ֖וֹם עַל־לְבָבֶֽךָ׃

These words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.

וְשִׁנַּנְתָּ֣ם לְבָנֶ֔יךָ וְדִבַּרְתָּ֖ בָּ֑ם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ֤ בְּבֵיתֶ֙ךָ֙ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ֣ בַדֶּ֔רֶךְ וּֽבְשׇׁכְבְּךָ֖ וּבְקוּמֶֽךָ׃

Teach them to your children and speak them when you sit at home and when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up…

-Devarim (Deuteronomy) 6:6-7

These well-known verses from the Ve’ahavtah are understood to be the mitzvah of Torah study, the learning of Jewish texts. But on a deeper level, they hint at an attitude, an approach to the moment –

When you sit at home and when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up…

In other words, whatever we are doing, wherever we find ourselves – there is Torah to be learned, if we make the moment into our teacher. This is the deeper dimension of the mitzvah of Torah learning – to be constantly receptive to what is being taught, to become a student of the Present…