

The  
**CHASSIDUS**  
**PERSPECTIVE**  
*with Reb Yoel Kahn*



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## YOSEF AND YEHUDAH: WHICH BROTHER IS BETTER?

In the *haftorah* of Parshas Vayigash, Hashem instructs Yechezkel to take two pieces of wood—one upon which was inscribed “Yehudah,” and the other, “Ephraim”—and join them together, symbolizing the reunification of the kingdoms of Yehudah and Yosef (father of Ephraim). This connects to the opening verse of the *parshah*, in which Yehudah approaches Yosef.

However, there is a difference between the *parshah* and the *haftorah*: while the *parshah* depicts Yosef as the dominant character, the *haftorah* states that “my servant Dovid [scion of Yehudah] will be their leader forever.”

What is the explanation behind this difference?

### ALIVE VS. INANIMATE

We find a similar concept with regard to *domem* (inanimate matter) and *tzomei'ach* (vegetative matter).

The Mishkan was comprised of earth (*domem*) at the bottom; wood (*tzomei'ach*) for walls; and hides, taken from living matter (*chai*), as a roof. Of course, the *Shechinah* was present in each of these three categories, including the earth. (Indeed, the earth was used in the procedure for the *sotah*.) Nonetheless, the *tzomei'ach* and *chai* were situated above the *domem*, indicating their superiority.

By contrast, the Beis Hamikdash was entirely comprised of stone, *domem*, including the roof. *Tzomei'ach* merely played an inferior role, in the form of cedar beams used to support the ceiling.

What is the meaning of this contrast?

### TO LOVE OR TO SUBMIT?

*Tzomei'ach* and *domem* represent two approaches to serving Hashem: with *kabolas ol* (subordination) or with feeling.

One approach involves cultivating our emotions (whether love, which fuels positive activity, or fear, which motivates the abstinence from negative conduct). When we are aroused

with a feeling of love toward Hashem, we desire to connect to Him; knowing that a *mitzvah* brings about this connection (and

Torah—even more so), we immerse ourselves in studying Torah and fulfilling *mitzvos* with great gusto. The greater the love, the more energy our Torah and *mitzvos* will be infused with.

This idea is reflected in *tzomei'ach*, growing vegetation: as our understanding and love of Hashem grows, so does our energy and *chayus* in Torah and *mitzvos*.

The other approach is *kabolas ol*. This means that we do not understand Hashem's greatness, and therefore we have no feelings of love or awe toward Him. Rather, we have a yoke that forces us to serve our master.

This can be compared to a slave. A slave does not serve his master because he recognizes his superior intellectual capabilities, nor is he driven by feelings of love and awe. Rather, he fulfills his master's instructions simply because he must do so; he doesn't even consider doing otherwise, as that would be tantamount to rebelling against him.

Dryly following commands with *kabolas ol* can aptly be classified as *domem*, as there is no growth or vitality involved.

Which of these two is superior? Is it the passions of *tzomei'ach*, or the simple acquiescence of *domem*?

### HOUSE BUILDING

The Gemara cites a debate between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel regarding what was created first, the heavens or the earth. We know that both opinions are the “words of Hashem” and are true. But how is that possible?

Let's consider an individual who wishes to build a house. He first envisions how the house will appear, either mentally or on paper, and he then proceeds to actually go about constructing it. The house in the planning stage is therefore conceptual, followed by the construction of a physical house. Which then is “first”?

Although the process of conceiving the house technically precedes building it, the driving force behind the plan is the desire for an actual house. *Sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah*. In the realm of thought, the actual house is the goal—it is “first.” However, in order to achieve that goal in actuality, a plan must first be conceived.

In the same vein, essentially earth comes “first”: it is the real object of Hashem’s Will, and is the domain of Torah and *mitzvos* which lead to a *dirah b’tachtonim*, making a dwelling place for Hashem. However, for this to be realized, the earth must be preceded by the “heavens.”

## THE PATH TO KABOLAS OL

The same applies in our service of Hashem. The objective is action and the *bittul* of *kabolas ol*. No matter how great our love or fear of Hashem may be, they are defined and limited by the constraints of our understanding: the extent of our feelings depends on how much we recognize Hashem’s greatness. *Kabolas ol*, by contrast, isn’t about us and what we understand; it’s only about our master, Hashem.

However, if we want our *kabolas ol* to truly permeate us, we must first cultivate a love and fear of Hashem, to recognize and appreciate the King to whom we are submitting ourselves. The selflessness we will then achieve is incomparable to *kabolas ol* that is not preceded by such feelings and understanding.

## TWO STAGES

We can now understand the contrast between the placement of *tzomei’ach* and *domem* in the Mishkan and in the Beis Hamikdash.

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The Midrash states that the *Shechinah* rested in the Mishkan in a preliminary, temporary manner, only reaching a state of permanent dwelling in the Beis Hamikdash. The Mishkan can therefore be explained as reflecting an earlier phase in serving Hashem, while the Beis Hamikdash reflects a more advanced stage.

An analogy can be brought from a businessperson. Initially, the main focus is on the everyday business interactions, and it is only later that he stops to take stock of the underlying

goal—how much he has earned. Similarly, at the onset of our service of Hashem, our focus is on how much understanding and feelings we have. However, this merely prepares us for a later stage, where our focus shifts to total *bittul* and *kabolas ol*.

This is why in the Mishkan *tzomei’ach* (feelings) was greater, while in the Beis Hamikdash it was *domem* (*kabolas ol*) that took precedence.

This also explains the difference between the *parshah* and the *haftorah*.

Yosef, which means “growth,” reflects our ever-increasing awareness of and feelings toward Hashem. The name Yehudah, on the other hand, is from the root *hoda’ah*—to put our understanding to the side and submit to Hashem.

Therefore, in the *parshah* (which took place even before Matan Torah), it is Yosef who is the ruler. This reflects an earlier stage, where love and fear of Hashem are at the forefront. The *haftorah*, by contrast, is set in the messianic future. At that time, “Dovid will be their leader forever,” as *bittul* and *kabolas ol* will then be recognized as superior.

For further learning see תורה אור ר”פ ויגש

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