

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

פרשת במדבר תשכ"ז בלתי מוגה

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THE POWER OF RASHBY (RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI)

THE ZOHAR TELLS US THAT ONCE THERE WAS A DROUGHT. PEOPLE CAME TO RASHBY to tell him of their plight. Instead of praying for rain, which is what they might have expected, he said a Torah teaching on the verse 'behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers sit together in unity' (Ps.133:1) and the rain began to fall (Zohar III 59b).

The effect of his Torah teaching was to draw together the 'male' Sefirot, Zeir Anpin, and the feminine, Malchut. This spiritual unity, in which there is a flow from male to female, is the source of the rain pouring onto the earth and enabling it to grow produce.

Usually, the response of the Sages when there was a drought, was to pray. Tractate Taanit of the Talmud tells of praying for rain, and even fasting. Prayer is a movement from below to above. It depends on a certain preparation on the part of the individual praying, or those on whose behalf he is praying. This is particularly relevant in the case of rain, which is described in the Torah as G-d's response to the righteousness of the Jewish people, and conversely, when they are not righteous, rain is withheld.

Torah is different. It comes from above to below. In many ways it is independent of the spiritual state of the recipient. This is what is so remarkable about Rashby's ability to bring rain by saying Torah.

¹ Maamar Ita BaZohar 5727 (1967). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Bamidbar 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

The Rebbe explains that this came from his power to reveal the Inner dimension of Torah, and also to connect the Inner dimension of Torah with the Revealed dimension.

The Talmud speaks of the way the Inner, esoteric aspect of Torah was concealed in the generations before Rashby. His teacher, Rabbi Akiva, was very sensitive to the spiritual dimension. When he studied the secrets of Torah concealed in the Song of Songs, he would weep because of the intensity of the experience. But he was not empowered to teach these secrets in public². By contrast Rashby did teach his select group of disciples, whom we encounter in the Zohar. It is true that for them too, the teaching was in an esoteric way. Rashby told one of his disciples, Rabbi Abba, that he should write down the teachings, and the other disciples absorbed them in their hearts, but did not write them down (or even say them aloud)³. However, his teaching this group was still a major step. Because Rashby was able to teach the Inner dimension of Torah, also connecting it with the Revealed dimension⁴, he was able to cause the rain to flow by teaching Torah teachings from above to below, to a world which was not yet purified.

The aim of Moshe Rabbenu was to grant this power to the Jewish people as a whole: that they should all be able to transmit the teachings of the Inner dimension of Torah, from above to below, even to those who were not yet purified. This was why he pleaded with G-d that he should enter the Land of Israel. The word ‘and I pleaded’, וַאֲתַהֲנַן is explained as ‘matnat chinam’, a free gift, he was asking that all should have the power to give the Inner dimension of Torah as a free gift to others. If he would have been permitted to enter the Land, he would also have been able to grant this power.

But this was not to be. Instead, G-d told him to climb Mount Nebo and look at the Land. His gaze at the Land and at its future was able to grant this power to a few rare individuals, like Rashby. This power links with the quality of ‘sight’, which is described as also being ‘from above to below’⁵. But for the mass of the Jewish people the dominant quality is hearing and understanding through hearing, from below to above⁶.

Rashby for his part also sought to transmit this power to others: for those who dedicatedly study Torah, and do nothing else, like him (*Torato umanuto* ‘his Torah was his profession’) the power is in an inward way. For others, who do not study Torah constantly, it is in a more external way. The day of a person’s

² The Sages imposed rules limiting the teaching of esoteric topics (see Mishnah Chagigah 2:1).

³ Zohar III 287b (Idra Zuta).

⁴ The Zohar often connects spiritual ideas with halachic concepts. Hence it is an important source of Halachah.

⁵ Sight embraces the whole scene at once, as if viewed from above, and can then examine specific details. By contrast hearing initially focuses on details: one hears a few words here, and a few words there. Gradually one builds up the total impression of what is being said. This is described as being ‘from below to above’.

⁶ Note that the Talmud often says ‘come and hear’, while the Zohar says ‘come and see’.

passing from this world sums up their spiritual achievement. Hence Lag b'Omer, the day of the passing of Rashbi, is like the Giving of the Torah for the Inner dimension of Torah.

Now, after the Arizal (Rabbi Isaac Luria, 16th century), and the Baal Shem Tov, this power is even more important. As Moshiach said in reply to the Baal Shem Tov's question 'when will you come?' – when your wellsprings, the fountains of the Inner dimension of Torah, will be spread to the outside, to those who are not yet purified.

We can add, commenting on this: that this is the Rebbe's goal, and he sought to achieve this by empowering each of us to transmit the Inner dimension of Torah, to everyone.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care