

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
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## THE IMPORTANCE OF 'THE PEOPLE'

**T**HE SEDRA PRESENTS THE DECLARATION WHICH A JEWISH FARMER MAKES ANNUALLY in the Temple. It includes the words 'Look down from Your sacred abode and bless Your people, Israel.'<sup>2</sup> A discussion by the Previous Rebbe of the details of the Hebrew text suggests that 'people' and 'Israel' are treated as two separate categories<sup>3</sup>. Now, in Hebrew the term 'people' (*am*) often appears in a pejorative sense, expressing a lower spiritual level (as in English, 'the crowd' and similar). Why does this term precede the word Israel, the name which the angel gave Jacob<sup>4</sup>, which has a more exalted connotation?

To explain this, the Previous Rebbe quotes from the Jerusalem Talmud<sup>5</sup> commenting on this verse in our Sedra. "Come and see the greatness of those who fulfil the Mitzvot! Whenever Scripture says 'look down' it expresses a curse; except in this case, which expresses a blessing. For observance of the Mitzvot transforms the curse into a blessing". The Previous Rebbe then explains that 'people' means simple people, who with purity and simplicity keep the Mitzvot, while 'Israel' – a term coming from the verse 'for you have conquered spiritual forces'<sup>6</sup> - suggests the scholars. However 'people' comes before 'Israel', because action is of paramount significance, so much so, that the Talmud declares that when

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar Hashkifa Mima'on Kodshecha – Ki Tavo 5727 (1967), published 1990 as *Kuntres Chai Elul*, edited by the Rebbe. Republished in Dvar Malchus Ki Tavo 5774.

<sup>2</sup> Deut.26:15.

<sup>3</sup> The word *et*, sign for the direct object, is written before 'people' and before 'Israel', emphasising that they are not just identical concepts in apposition. The Previous Rebbe's discourse was said in 1940 on 18 Elul and begins with the same words from the verse Deut.26.15.

<sup>4</sup> Gen.32:29

<sup>5</sup> Ma'aser Sheni 5:5.

<sup>6</sup> Gen.32:29

weighing up the relative merits of Torah study and action, the reason for saying that Torah study comes first is ‘because it leads to action’<sup>7</sup>.

This explains why ‘people’ comes before ‘Israel’, as a separate concept: the people, keeping Mitzvot with simplicity, rather than the scholars, have the power to change the curse into a blessing.

After explaining that through keeping Mitzvot the curse is changed into a blessing, the Previous Rebbe quotes from Ki Tetze (23:6) “Hashem your G-d did not want to listen to Bilam, and Hashem your G-d changed the curse into a blessing, for Hashem your G-d loves you”. This verse includes three times the combination of the Tetragrammaton (Hashem) and Elokim, and these represent three different levels of relationship with G-d.

The first is that G-d does not want to listen to accusations against the Jewish people (such as from Bilam), even if they might be considered to some extent valid: this is the transformation of Elokim, Judgement, into Hashem, Mercy, at the level of the Lower Tetragrammaton<sup>8</sup>.

The second level is the point at which deliberate sins are transformed into merits: this is at the level of the Higher Tetragrammaton. The third level manifests the very Essence of the Divine. At this exalted level ‘Esau is a brother to Jacob’ (Malachi 1:2) which suggests that bad (Esau) and good are equal, and there is no difference between them, because they are viewed from an exalted level beyond the downchaining of the worlds<sup>9</sup>. This can also mean that sometimes Jacob acts like Esau. Nonetheless, G-d says ‘yet I love Jacob’ (ibid), G-d loves the Jewish people, Jacob, although they sometimes may seem similar to Esau.

How does the explanation of this verse relate to the initial teaching in the Previous Rebbe’s discourse, discussing the fact that ‘Your people’ is written before and is more significant than ‘Israel’?

To understand this let us consider another discourse, by the Rebbe Maharash<sup>10</sup>. This is on the verse ‘Jerusalem, praise Hashem (the Tetragrammaton); Zion, acclaim your G-d (Elokim)’ (Psalms 147:12). Chassidic texts state that Zion is higher than Jerusalem, it is the inwardness of Jerusalem. So why can Jerusalem, the lower level, praise Hashem, the higher level? Further, Zion expresses the Upper Awe, while Jerusalem represents Lower Awe.

The selflessness on account of the Lower Awe relates to contemplating the greatness of G-d expressed in Nature and the worlds, and is on a lower level than that from the Upper Awe, which expresses utter selflessness before the Infinite utterly transcending and beyond the worlds.

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<sup>7</sup> Kiddushin 40b, Bava Kama 17a.

<sup>8</sup> Chassidic teachings speak of different levels of the Tetragrammaton, Lower and Higher.

<sup>9</sup> This can be explained as the level of totally free choice. Nonetheless, the innermost Divine Will is that one should choose ‘good’.

<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn (1834-1882), 4<sup>th</sup> Lubavitcher Rebbe. See his discourse *Shabhi* for Sedra Tavo, 1867.

The way to the Lower Awe is through spiritual contemplation of the way G-d is revealed in the worlds, but Upper Awe is reached through study of Torah and observance of Mitzvot which carry one beyond the worlds. This emphasises the question: why is the higher Name, the Tetragrammaton, employed with Jerusalem, the Lower Awe, while Elokim is expressed with Zion, the Upper Awe?

The reason is explained in the continuation of the verse: ‘for He has strengthened the bars of your gates’. This relates to the walls and gates and bars which strengthen the city, so that the enemy cannot enter. This signifies the power of Gevurah, Severity, Elokim at the highest level, to channel the force which flows from beyond the worlds – where good and evil seem equal, Esau is the brother of Jacob - so that it should flow only in the direction of goodness rather than evil, Jacob rather than Esau.

The discourse of the Maharash continues, that this is achieved through ‘Judges and Guards you shall place at all your gates’ (from the beginning of Sedra Shofetim). The Gates are the 50 Gates of Understanding, which flow into the emotions in the heart, the seven emotions of which each includes all seven, multiplying up to 49. This means that all aspects of one’s emotions should be dedicated only to G-d. Through this process, the walls and gates and bars are constructed to channel the ultimate flow in the direction of goodness, exclusively.

We can now understand that Elokim, Severity, is manifest at the level of Zion, the Upper Awe. This flows into Jerusalem, the Lower Awe, helping to transform the Animal Soul and the body. This is the real task of the soul here in this world, and is achieved by Teshuvah, and therefore this is expressed by the more exalted Divine Name, the Tetragrammaton. It is another example of the lower reaching higher. Through the Lower Awe achieving the ultimate purpose, the Upper Awe is also exalted more.

This explains why the Previous Rebbe needs to explain the three levels of the Tetragrammaton and Elokim in his discourse explaining the significance of ‘the people’ and their Mitzvot. Because in the process of the lower being revealed as higher, ‘the people’ rather than ‘Israel’, one also has to take into account the way at the level of the Essence, good and evil seem equal. By guarding one’s personal city of Jerusalem in the right way, as the Mishnah<sup>11</sup> says, every member of the city must join in the upkeep of the walls and gates and bars, a demand which each person can interpret in terms of his or her own life, we are able to ensure the flow comes in the channel which leads to revealed goodness and everything negative is transformed into positive.

Then G-d blesses His people Israel, literally, both in spiritual and physical terms, with abundant children, life and sustenance.

**Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care**

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<sup>11</sup> Bava Batra 7:2.

