

# The Rebbe's Discourses

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

Published for Sedra Mishpatim 5782, 29 January 2022<sup>1</sup>

## THE SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN

**A**T THE END OF THE SEDRA MOSES ENTERS THE CLOUD ON MOUNT SINAI, in order to begin his forty days and nights on the Mountain, after the Theophany and the Divine declaration of the Ten Commandments. Rashi comments that the cloud was a kind of smoke, and that G-d made a channel for him through the smoke.

Now the smoke was a product of the fire (as it says in the preceding verse: the image of the glory of G-d was like a consuming fire [Ex.24:17]) but not just of fire alone. Smoke depends on what is being burnt by the fire. In the previous Sedra, Yitro, there is the description of the Giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments. It says 'and Mount Sinai was smoking all over, because G-d had descended on it in fire.' [Ex.19:18]

There is discussion of this. Some commentators ask: what was burning to produce smoke? Mount Sinai was not covered with thick vegetation or trees, it was predominantly rocks<sup>2</sup>. Further, generally fire burns *upwards*. What made the fire *descend*, opposite to its normal nature?

The Previous Rebbe explains<sup>3</sup> that at the Giving of the Torah there was revealed the inner meaning of the Creation of the World. The world is based on the Laws of Nature defining the four elements (fire, earth, air, water) and the four domains: human, animal, vegetable, mineral. The goal of creation, revealed at the Giving of the Torah, is that man should change his own nature and the nature of existence in order to make a dwelling for the Divine. G-d began this process by changing nature in that the fire *descended* and the smoke poured from the fire on the mountain without it having anything to burn.

The Rebbe now asks two questions. Comparing the end of Sedra Mishpatim with that section of Sedra Yitro: why is the smoke clearly mentioned in Yitro, while at the end of Mishpatim it is only hinted at: the verse says 'cloud', and Rashi explains that this is smoke. Further, why in Mishpatim does it mention that the fire is a 'consuming fire', meaning a fire which burns something, while in the case of the fire at the Giving of the Torah in Sedra Yitro it just says 'fire' without the adjective 'consuming'.

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<sup>1</sup> *Vayavo Moshe Betoach HeAnan-Mishpatim 5725*, published in Dvormalchus Mishpatim 5776, 5782.

<sup>2</sup> See Alsheich to Exodus 19:18, and the Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 16, p.224 n.9. Note that the burning bush was on Mount Sinai. The Rebbe suggests that the Midrash takes different approaches as to how much vegetation was on the mountain.

<sup>3</sup> In his discourse 'And Mount Sinai was smoking..'1948. See also his discourse with the same beginning 1941.

To understand this we have to consider the nature of 'smoke'. Generally, the smoke depends on what is being burnt. If it is something light and delicate, it burns quickly and produces only a slight amount of smoke. If it is something heavy and coarse, the smoke is much thicker, and it leaves a residue of soot.

This also applies in spiritual terms. Note that the Hebrew word for 'smoke', עש"ן is an acronym for עולם, שנה נפש 'world', 'year' ie time and 'the soul'. The idea of 'smoke' therefore expresses the way the entire realm of existence is being connected with G-d. However, it is much easier for something spiritually refined to connect with the Divine. If it is coarse, full of its own ego, it might produce a lot of smoke, and even soot, and it might not burn at all.

Now we can consider the difference between the smoke before the Giving of the Torah in Sedra Yitro and the cloud on the mountain at the end of Mishpatim. Before the Giving of the Torah the world was gross and coarse; it was so coarse, that the fire would not even burn it directly. Hence it does not say 'a consuming fire'. Nonetheless the fire did descend on the mountain, and the thick, coarse, smoke did pour from it, expressing the way G-d was transforming the world, beyond Nature.

The final passage in Sedra Mishpatim describes events *after* the Giving of the Torah, an event which purified the world. Now the fire can 'consume' the mountain. Further, the process is more delicate. The Torah speaks merely of 'cloud', and only by looking in Rashi do we discover that it is a kind of smoke.

How does this apply in the service of the individual? Some people claim that they do not have to be involved with anything 'low', like the inanimate rocks of the mountain. They prefer to concern themselves only with higher things, the levels of 'vegetable' or 'animal'. They do not want to get their hands dirty, from the soot, as it were, of the smoke from the lower levels.

The answer to this stance is, that G-d made a 'channel' for Moses through the smoke. This means that the inner Moses of each person does not become defiled, it is always pure. And this applies to every Jew, even in the case of one who is transgressing, his inner Moses is still pure. And more than this. Not only the inner Moses, but also the revealed soul-powers of the person, their mind and heart, are not defiled.

This is because it is not really smoke at all, but simply cloud. It only has the semblance of smoke in order that there can be free will. As is known the saying of the Zaddik Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, asking what does G-d expect: He puts the promise of the reward of the Garden of Eden hidden away in books, while the forbidden pleasures of the world are in the open. But the reason for this is, so as to arouse their inner resilience, to resist temptation.

This shows us that the negative 'smoke' in fact has a sacred purpose. For this reason it is actually not smoke but cloud, something holy.

Thus we understand that Moses and every Jew, on account of their own inner Moses, receives the Torah after first passing through the cloud, which looks like concealment, but is really the pathway to spend forty days and nights on the mountain. Chassidic teachings explain that the days signify study of the Written Law, and the nights mean the study of the Oral Law - Mishnah and Talmud, and all later teachings.

Each person then draws the Torah into their own person and into their portion in the world, as it says in the next Sedra Trumah: ‘make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them’<sup>4</sup>, not ‘within it’, but ‘within *them*’, meaning within each individual.

With this inner Sanctuary, and also, through the literal Sanctuary of silver and gold, one makes a Temple for G-d, through which we fulfil G-d’s desire to have a dwelling in the lower world.

**TORAH TEACHINGS ARE HOLY - PLEASE TREAT THESE PAGES WITH CARE**

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<sup>4</sup> Exodus 25:8.