

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

Published for Sedra Vayakhel 25 Adar I 5782, 26 February 2022¹

THE MIRRORS OF THE SANCTUARY

THE SANCTUARY WHICH MOSES BUILT RELATES TO EACH INDIVIDUAL JEW. For this reason the Sedra begins by telling us that Moses gathered the whole Jewish people to instruct them about the Sanctuary². The Sanctuary is divided in three general areas: the outer courtyard, the Sanctum and the Inner Sanctum (Holy of Holies). This corresponds to the lower worlds (Creation, Formation and Action), the higher world of Atzilut (Emanation), and the realms beyond the down-chaining of existence. Further, the various forms of curtain, and the diverse sacred objects, are all significant in terms of the relationship of the individual with G-d.

Here we will discuss one item, which prepared a person to serve anywhere in the Sanctuary: the Laver (Kiyor). This was a basin on a stand, made of copper. It was made of copper mirrors donated by the women.³

The Laver was to be used by the Cohanim, but it also had a special connection with Moses. The Torah states that "Moses, Aaron and his [two] sons" should wash their hands and feet at the Laver. Ostensibly this refers just to the week of the initiation of the Sanctuary, as Rashi explains (Pekudei 40:31). But the Talmud (Zevachim 19b) carries this link on into future generations, by citing this verse as support for the idea that if, throughout the generations, the Laver does not contain enough water to wash four Cohanim, it cannot be used. The 'four' include Moses. We will see later the significance of the connection with Moses.

¹ *Vayakhel Moshe* 5719, published in *Dvormalchut Vayakhel* 5774.

² And also to tell them that when it came to Shabbat, they must stop building it in order to observe the Shabbat.

³ See Rashi to *Vayakhel* 38:8.

First let us consider the copper “mirrors, brought by the hosts [of women]” (Vayakhel 38:8) which were used to construct the Laver. Torah Or tells us these mirrors, in the plural, hint at two kinds of mirror, or prism: the clear prism, through which one can glimpse what lies beyond, and the unclear prism, which (as explained in this discourse) functions more like a mirror, in which one sees only a reflection⁴.

The problem addressed by the discourse is the fact that the goal of existence is that the individual should connect with the Divine, and make an indwelling of the Divine in his or her own being, but the gap between the individual and the Divine is infinite. Even the Divine Soul, the Neshamah, which is so sacred, and emerges from an infinitely sacred source, in its passage through different stages⁵ towards nesting in the physical body of the person, becomes a ‘created’ being and thus very far from the Divine, the Creator. How can they join? By means of the clear or unclear prism, which are both hinted at in the copper Laver in the Sanctuary.

The clear prism represents the service of Torah and Miztvot. In such activities the person is connecting with actual holiness, through the partial veil of the ‘clear prism’. The discourse compares this to Moses entering ‘the cloud’ as he ascended Mount Sinai⁶. The cloud functioned as a partial veil, but Moses could still see through it.

For this reason, when Moses said he wanted to see G-d’s glory, he was told this could not be granted, for ‘man cannot see Me and live’. Such an experience would be too intense for a mortal person. By contrast Isaiah (6:1) said “I saw G-d” because his vision was only through the unclear prism, functioning as a mirror, in which he saw a reflection but not the reality.

In the case of every Jew, the unclear prism represents another aspect of Divine service: our struggle with our Animal Soul, our attempts to control it and refine it. In this we face challenging aspects of our inner self, and we sometimes have to call on our deepest resources, the infinite within us, in order to face that challenge: to serve G-d ‘with all your might’. In doing this – measure for measure - we draw the ultimate infinity of the Divine.

Hence, the service of the unclear prism sometimes reaches higher than that of the clear prism. It reaches beyond the downchaining of the worlds, beyond the

⁴ Chassidic teachings, based on the Talmud (Yevamot 49b), use the image of these two kinds of prism to explain the difference between the prophecy of ordinary prophets and that of Moses. Only the latter saw through the ‘clear prism’.

⁵ These are described, from above to below, as ‘radiance’, ‘water’, ‘firmament’.

⁶ Exodus (Mishpatim) 24:18.

source of the Soul as ‘creation’. It is ‘only’ a reflection, but the reflection can reveal the highest Essence.

The copper mirrors were brought by the ‘hosts’ of women, and this is a hint as to how we ourselves should approach Divine service: that we should strive to be part of ‘the host of G-d’, meaning abnegated to G-d, in a state of selflessness. We achieve this through contemplating the way all existence is as nothing in relation to Infinite G-d, “a mere letter in His Host”⁷.

The Laver is used to wash one’s hands and feet. The hands represent our emotions, and the feet represent our thoughts, speech and actions. The ‘washing’ takes place through immersion in the pure water of Wisdom, the quality of Moses.

For whichever kind of service we are carrying out, whether of Torah study, Mitzvot, or struggles to control or transform our inner selves, or contemplation leading possibly to selflessness – we need the purifying connection with Moses, which helps us to transcend our ego, and to truly make the inner Sanctuary of our heart into a dwelling for the Divine.

This will bring us to the state that Adam and Eve were in, at the beginning of Creation, when the Essence of the Divine dwelled with them in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, this is the ultimate purpose of existence: that within each one of us there should be a dwelling for the Divine, and the world as a whole will be like the Garden of Eden, a realm of peace and goodness.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁷ See Hagigah 16a.