

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

ד"ה ואשה אחת פרשת וירא י"ח מרחשון, תשכ"ה מוגה

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THE CRY OF THE SOUL

THE HAFTORAH FOR SEDRA VAYERA HAS TWO STORIES ABOUT THE PROPHET ELISHA². The first is about a woman - 'one woman' - who came to him with a bitter cry about her situation. She was a widow of one of his close followers, who were called 'the sons of the Prophets'. Her husband died leaving heavy debts, and the creditor wants to take her two sons as slaves in recompense for the money owed. Elisha asked her if she has anything at all at home. She replied, just a flask of oil.

Elisha told her to borrow many empty vessels from her neighbours. Then she should pour the oil from her flask into the borrowed vessels. She did this, and miraculously the oil continued to flow till all the vessels were full. Elisha told her to sell the oil, pay off her debts, and use the rest to help her live.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman said a discourse³ explaining this story in terms of the cry of the soul to G-d. But before presenting this discourse, the Rebbe quoted an introduction to it, written by the great hasid Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, who was a follower of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, and then of his son and successor Rabbi Dov Ber.

The introduction⁴ stresses the significance of a story in Tanach (the Bible). On the one hand, the story is literally true. But on the other, it also carries with it

¹ Maamar Velsha Ahat 5725 (1964). Printed in Dvar Malchut for Sedra Vayera 5776 and 5783. It was edited by the Rebbe.

² II Kings 4:1 ff.

³ *Maamarei Admur Hazaken Haketzarim* p.137 (see also p.136).

⁴ R. Hillel of Paritch, *Phelach HaRimon*, 568a.

profound teachings about one's service of G-d, which is why the Prophets who wrote the various books of Tanach chose to include that story.

The Rebbe amplifies this: just as every halachic statement in Tanach is significant, so too every story. The Rambam criticises a person who thinks just one word or phrase of the Torah was written by Moses independently of G-d, whatever that phrase might be⁵. Similarly, every word of Tanach is holy and so too, adds the Rambam, are the contents of the Oral Torah.

Now we come to Rabbi Shneur Zalman's explanation of the story of the woman who cried to Elisha.

He starts by mentioning that people cry out to him in Yechidut, private audience, that they cannot serve G-d with enthusiasm. In fact, he says, every night when the soul ascends on high, it cries out to G-d with the same complaint. The soul is called 'a woman', and it is 'one', because it is joined to G-d. Like the woman's husband, who was a member of the sons of the Prophets, who sought intimations of the Divine, the soul experiences spiritual revelations. The woman's cry is to Elisha, and this name can be read as meaning 'G-d turned', or 'turn to G-d'. Hence this hints at the soul crying out to G-d.

When she says 'my husband is dead', *ishi met*, the words can be translated as 'my fire is dead' - the fire of inspiration and enthusiasm in service of G-d. The creditor is called *nosheh* which is a word which also relates to the word 'forget'. The creditor is the Animal Soul which makes the Divine Soul forget its connection with G-d. Further, the creditor demands her two children, symbolizing love and fear of G-d. The creditor wants to force them into servitude to feel false loves and passions, and materialist fears and worries, such as about making a living.

Fortunately she still has a flask of oil: the inner spark of the Divine Soul. How does one get the hidden fire of the Divine Soul to infuse the person's consciousness? The Zohar speak of 'beating' a smouldering log, so that it bursts into flames. The beating in this case is the sense of contrition with which one realises one is just an empty vessel, empty of true knowledge of G-d in one's mind, lacking love and of fear in one's heart, far from G-d.

As a result of this contrition, realising one is just an empty vessel, the flame of the Divine Soul fills one's being, with added strength in that it is coming from the darkness of one's sense of distance from the Divine.

This is Rabbi Shneur Zalman's discourse, and the Rebbe explains that this interpretation helps one understand why the Haftorah to Vayera should begin

⁵ Rambam, Laws of Teshuvah, 3:8.

with this story about Elisha, rather than with the second story. The second is about the Shunamite woman, who was blessed by Elisha that she would bear a child. This obviously parallels the Sedra in which Sarah is told by the visiting angels that she would bear a child. But why is the first story also part of the Haftorah?

Because the Sedra begins with the theme of Divine revelation. “G-d was revealed to Abraham’. The Sages say this was ‘to visit the sick’, because Abraham had recently been circumcised. But at the end of the last Sedra, many people were circumcised together with Abraham. Why does G-d visit only him?

Because his sickness was of a deeper kind. *Holeh*, sick, has the numerical value 49. He was ill with having reached only 49 of the 50 Gates of Understanding. G-d’s revelation to him at the beginning of the Sedra healed this illness, granting him the 50th Gate.

Thus we see the connection of the first story of the Haftorah with the beginning of the Sedra. Our Souls too should be granted Divine inspiration, with the extra light which comes from the darkness, as in the saying⁶ ‘when the Sitra Ahra (the negative realm) is quelled, the glory of the Divine spreads through all worlds’, with G-d’s help...!

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁶ See Tanya, ch.27, and Rabbi Yosef Yizhak Schneersohn, *Bati LeGani*, ch.1.