

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה זאת חנוכת המזבח פ' נשא תשכ"ה בלתי מוגה

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THE GENERAL AND THE PARTICULAR

SEDRA NASO INCLUDES THE LENGTHY LIST OF THE DEDICATORY OFFERINGS BROUGHT TO THE SANCTUARY by the leaders of each of the twelve Tribes. The offering brought by each leader is described in full. Each offering comprised a silver dish and a silver bowl filled with fine flour (to be offered on the Altar), a golden spoon filled with precious incense, and various cattle. After the description of the twelve offerings, there is then a summary of all the offerings together: how many silver dishes of flour, how many golden spoons of incense, how many cattle, and so on². This summary includes two verses which throw more light on the process of dedication of the Altar, and this in turn helps us understand many aspects of our lives in this world and our relationship with the Divine.

One of these two verses is: 'this was the offering brought for the dedication of the Altar *after* it was anointed.'³. This verse implies that first the Altar was anointed, with the special anointing oil described earlier in the Torah⁴, and only after that were the dedicatory offerings brought. The other verse states: 'This was the offering brought for the dedication of the Altar on the day it was anointed'⁵. Chassidic teachings take this verse to mean that once all the offerings had been brought by the twelve Princes, the dedication was complete, and this itself was a cause for celebration.

There were thus three stages: the initial anointing, then the lengthy process of the bringing of the twelve dedicatory offerings by the twelve leaders of the tribes, and then, finally, recognition that this task was complete.

¹ *Zot Hanukat Hamizbe'ach 5728* (1968) published in *Dvormalchut Naso 5780*. The text has not been finally edited by the Rebbe.

² Numbers 7:84-88.

³ Numbers 7:88.

⁴ Exodus 30:22-33.

⁵ Numbers 7:84.

Chassidic teachings explain that the twelve-day event of dedicating and inaugurating the Altar, actually prepared it spiritually for all the future offerings through the ages. Hence there was an unusual aspect to the inauguration: as mentioned above, each leader brought a golden spoon filled with incense. Throughout the generations, during the existence of the Sanctuary and later the two Temples, incense was offered only on the inner golden Altar, not the outer Altar. But, uniquely during the Inauguration, the incense was offered on the *outer* Altar⁶.

Let us try to understand the significance of this. Chassidic teachings explain that the animal and flour offerings are considered ‘inward’, *penimi*. They are called ‘food’ of G-d and of the Altar. In the case of human beings, food enters the body: it is inward. By contrast, the incense is ‘transcending’, *makif*. When a person smells a fragrant odour, it does not nourish the person. But it helps the person reach towards something spiritual beyond.

During the inauguration of the Altar, both ‘inward’ and ‘transcendent’ aspects were combined: animal and flour offerings, which are inward, and the incense, which is transcendent.

This spiritual logic also applies to the anointing oil. It combines an inward quality, the olive oil which is edible, with the spices, like incense, which are transcendent. The anointing prepared the Altar for its future task. Hence the anointing had to take place first, before any of the other offerings relating to the inauguration were brought. Then, after the twelve days of the offerings of the inauguration, there was a sense of completion⁷.

The Rebbe explains that this can be understood in broader terms through the theme of *klal* and *prat*, the general and the particular⁸. When a person decides to build a house, he or she first has a general idea, then a later stage is the discussion and implementing of the details. However, it is only when the house has been built, and all the details are in place, that they feel satisfied that they have accomplished their plan.

The same applies, on an infinitely greater level, to the creation of the universe. The first statement in the Torah ‘In the beginning, G-d created Heaven and Earth’ is the general statement which includes everything. Then come the details during the six days of Creation. Finally the Creation is achieved in all its splendour.

There is a similar structure in the revelation of the Torah. ‘And G-d spoke all these words, saying..’ (Exodus 20:1) is the verse before the Ten Commandments. It is explained by the Sages as meaning that this one statement included all the Ten Commandments and indeed, all future Torah. It was the ‘general’ statement of Torah by G-d⁹.

⁶ See Rashi to Numbers 7:14.

⁷ Note that the verse which emphasizes that the anointing takes place before the offerings of the twelve princes, Num. 7:88, occurs *after* the verse which expresses the completion of the whole process, Num. 7:84. Despite this, there are three clear stages: the initial anointing (7:88), the 12 days of bringing of offerings (which begin at 7:1), and the final sense of completion, expressed in 7:84.

⁸ This concept is included in Rabbi Ishmael’s list of 13 exegetical Principles. Here it is being considered as a wider principle.

⁹ See Rashi to Exodus 20:1.

Then came the details, in different stages: the full text of the Ten Commandments, and then the entire Written Torah. These are the ‘details’ of the initial Divine statement at the beginning. But the Written Torah is itself ‘general’ in relation to the Oral Torah which spells out the actual practical application of the Law, and elucidates many spiritual aspects as well.

It can be seen from these examples that although the ‘general’ is of a higher order, the full significance of the process taking place is only achieved through the details.

In terms of the Torah we see this from the fact that the Talmud states ‘the words of the Scribes’ - ie, the Oral Torah - ‘are more precious than the (Written) Torah’¹⁰. This is because it is through the details, emerging from the Oral Law, that the real goal of the Written Torah is expressed.

This is also the case in teaching Torah. The teacher provides general ideas which are then discussed in detail by his students. These discussions can provide the deepest understanding of the topic. Thus Rabbi Haninah states in the Talmud: ‘I learnt much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, and most of all from my students’¹¹.

These then are the three stages in the case of the offerings brought by the twelve Leaders of the Tribes, inaugurating the sacred Altar in the Sanctuary. First there was the initial anointing of the Altar, connecting it in a general way to the transcendent level above, which flows down below. Then came the details of the offerings. The conclusion of the inauguration was itself a climax. Now the Altar was ready to be a connecting point between the Jewish people (and indeed, humanity as a whole) and the Divine.

Returning to the theme of the Torah, its general statement and then its further details: through the intensive exploration of the oral Torah, making it one’s own,¹² one comes to the Inner dimension of the Torah, the Chassidic dimension. This gives a glimpse of the Torah of Moshiach, the Torah which is utterly beyond, which will be fully revealed with the Redemption.

Then the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and again the offerings will be brought on the sacred Altar, joining heaven and earth. At that point, one might suggest, the ‘conclusion’ of the work of Creation will be achieved¹³.

[Torah teachings are holy – please treat this page with care](#)

¹⁰ Jerusalem Talmud Berachot 1:4.

¹¹ Taanit 7a.

¹² See Talmud Avodah Zara 19a.

¹³ This final suggestion is not in the original discourse.