

Talmud Tour – Sunday 25 May 2025 – 27 Iyyar 5785 by Zoom
8.00pm UK time

Special session in honour of Shavuot, when the Torah was given at Sinai (June 1-3), studying Shabbat 88a-89a concerning the Giving of the Torah.

Link to standard Hebrew text of this page of Talmud

[https://hebrewbooks.org/shas.aspx?
mesechta=2&daf=88&format=pdf](https://hebrewbooks.org/shas.aspx?mesechta=2&daf=88&format=pdf)

Text and Translation from Sefaria, elucidated by Rabbi Adin Even Yisrael Steinsaltz.

Colour code: blue – Talmud Tractate Shabbat 88a-89a, sometimes including Rashi and Tosefot; purple – passages from elsewhere in the Talmud and other classical texts; brown – Chassidic comments; black – editorial comments

דַּרְשׁ הָהוּא גְּלִילָאָה עָלֶיהָ דְּרַב חֲסִידָא: בְּרִידָא רַחֲמָנָא דִּיהֵב אוּרְזָאן תְּלִיתַאי, לְעַם תְּלִיתַאי, עַל יְדֵי תְּלִיתַאי, בְּיוֹם תְּלִיתַאי, בְּיַרְחָא תְּלִיתַאי.

The Gemara states: **A Galilean taught**, while standing **above Rav Ḥisda: Blessed is the all-Merciful One, Who gave the threefold Torah: Torah, Prophets, and Writings, to the three-fold nation: Priests, Levites, and Israelites, by means of a third-born: Moses, who followed Aaron and Miriam in birth order, on the third day** of the separation of men and women, **in the third month: Sivan.**

Why is the Torah linked to the number 3? Surely, it comes from Hashem, Who is One, and the goal of Creation is to reveal His Oneness. So, why 3? The answer is that the number three hints the cancelation of the 'decree' that

preceded the Giving of the Torah. The 'decree', described in the Midrash, is that the upper and the lower realms cannot meet. The spiritual must always be remote from the physical. This idea is found in many religions – hence their emphasis on celibacy as the route to holiness. A central theme in Chabad Chassidic thought is the idea that the Giving of the Torah dissolved this decree. The Laws of the Torah enter the simple practicalities of daily life – eg, ceasing to work on Shabbat, eating only kosher food – and make them holy.

How does the number 3 hint at the dissolution of that decree? Because 'One' expresses the One Divine, ultimate holiness. 'Two' expresses Creation, when there is also a world, but it is separate from the One. Three expresses the idea that the Oneness of Hashem is expressed in the physicality of the world.

This also relates to the different months. The first month is Nisan, when Hashem was revealed and brought the Jews out of Egypt. This expresses 'one'. Then comes Iyyar, when we count the Omer in order to elevate and purify our Animal Soul. This Animal Soul expresses the concept of 'Two', the earthly aspect of life, apparently separate from G-d. Then comes the third month Sivan, when the Oneness of Hashem is joined with our own physical being through the laws of the Torah¹.

"וַיִּתְּצֵבּוּ בְּתַחֲתִית הַהָר", אָמַר רַב אֲבָדִימִי בַּר חֲמָא בַּר חֲסָא: מְלִמַּד שְׂפָכָה הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עָלֵיהֶם אֶת הַהָר כְּגִיגִית, וְאָמַר לָהֶם: אִם אַתֶּם מְקַבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוֹטָב, וְאִם לֹא — שֵׁם תִּהְיֶה קְבוּרַתְכֶם. אָמַר רַב אֲחָא בַּר יֶעֱקֹב: מִכָּאן מוֹדְעָא

¹ Nishmata D'Oraita, Shabbat, p.342-3, based on Likkutei Sichot vol. 20 p.180, vol. 2 p.301.

רַבָּה לְאוֹרֵייתָא. אָמַר רַבָּא: אִף עַל פִּי כֵן הַדּוֹר קִבְּלוּהָ בִּימֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ, דְּכָתִיב: "קִיְמוּ וְקִבְּלוּ הֵהוּדִים" — קִיְמוּ מֵה שֶׁקִּיְבְּלוּ כְּבָר.

The Gemara cites additional homiletic interpretations on the topic of the revelation at Sinai. The Torah says, “And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet G-d; **and they stood at the lowermost part of the mount**” (Exodus 19:17). **Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said:** the Jewish people actually stood beneath the mountain, and the verse **teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above the Jews like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial.** **Rav Aha bar Ya’akov said:** From here there is a **substantial caveat to the obligation to fulfill the Torah.** The Jewish people can claim that they were coerced into accepting the Torah, and it is therefore not binding. **Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written:** “The Jews **ordained, and took upon them,** and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them” (Esther 9:27), and he taught: The Jews **ordained what they had already taken upon themselves** through coercion at Sinai.

The ‘coercion’ was the tremendous love which Hashem showed the Jewish people, which elicited a response from them without them having willed it at all. Hence they are considered ‘coerced’, and they have an excuse not to keep the Torah: ‘we were forced to accept it’. But then at the time of Purim, they accepted the Torah with self-

sacrifice, even though it was a time of concealment of the Divine².

אמר חזקיה, מאי דכתיב: "משמים השמעת דין ארץ יראה ושקטה", אם יראה — למה שקטה? ואם שקטה — למה יראה? אלא בתחילה יראה ולבסוף שקטה. ולמה יראה? כדריש לקיש. דאמר ריש לקיש, מאי דכתיב: "ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי", ה' יתירה למה לי? — מלימד שהתנה הקדוש ברוך הוא עם מעשה בראשית ואמר להם: אם ישראל מקבלים התורה — אתם מתקיימין, ואם לאו — אני מחזיר אתכם לתוהו ובוהו.

Hizkiya said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "You caused sentence to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was silent" (Psalms 76:9)? If it was afraid, why was it silent; and if it was silent, why was it afraid? Rather, the meaning is: At first, it was afraid, and in the end, it was silent. "You caused sentence to be heard from heaven" refers to the revelation at Sinai. And why was the earth afraid? It is in accordance with the statement of Reish Lakish, as Reish Lakish said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31)? Why do I require the superfluous letter *heh*, the definite article, which does not appear on any of the other days? It teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, established a condition with the act of Creation, and said to them: If Israel accepts the Torah on the sixth day of Sivan, you will exist; and if they do not accept it, I will return you to the primordial state of chaos and disorder. Therefore, the earth was afraid until the Torah was given to Israel,

² Nishmata D'Oraita Shabbat 343-4. From Torah Or, Megilat Esther 98d.

lest it be returned to a state of chaos. Once the Jewish people accepted the Torah, the earth was calmed.

Note that we quote Yom Hashishi at the beginning of Kiddush on Friday Night. יום הששי ויכולו השמים – the initial letters spell the Name of Hashem.

This is saying that the world exists because the Jewish people accepted the Torah at Sinai, and that when they study and keep the laws of the Torah they are keeping the world in existence further. The question is asked: the Sages tell us that Avraham, Isaac and Jacob studied Torah and in their own way kept its laws. Why didn't that have the power to keep the world in existence? The same question is asked by Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713-1793), called the Nodah biYehudah, in his book the Tzlach ³(צל"ח).

His answer is that the Patriarchs were not commanded by Hashem to study Torah and keep its laws. But after the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish people were commanded, and מצווה ועושה 'commanded and acting accordingly' reached higher than not being commanded, even though one does the same positive action.

The Rebbe explains that due to the 'decree' mentioned earlier, before the Giving of the Torah the spiritual and the physical could not meet. This meant that even when Abraham kept a Mitzvah, the holiness of the Mitzva did not impregnate the physical object with which he kept the Mitzva. After the Giving of the Torah, when the Jews are 'commanded', the physical object became part of the

³ His book Nodah BiYehudah pays tribute to his father, Yehuda Landau, and his book Tzion Lenefesh Chaya, Tzlach, pays tribute to his mother Chaya.

Mitzva and was elevated spiritually by being used for it. Hence the Jewish people after the Giving of the Torah have the power to keep the world in existence, which the Patriarchs did not have⁴.

דַּרְשׁ רַבִּי סִימַאי: בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהִקְדִּימוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל "נַעֲשֶׂה" לְ"נִשְׁמָע" בָּאוּ שְׁנַיִם רִיבּוֹא שֶׁל מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרָת, לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל קָשְׁרוּ לוֹ שְׁנֵי כְּתָרִים, אֶחָד כְּנָגֵד "נַעֲשֶׂה" וְאֶחָד כְּנָגֵד "נִשְׁמָע". וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁחֲטָאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל, יָרְדוּ מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים רִיבּוֹא מַלְאָכֵי חֲבֵלָה וּפִירְקוּם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיִּתְּנֻצְלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת עֲדִים מֵהָר חוֹרֵב". אָמַר רַבִּי חֲמָא בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא: בְּחוֹרֵב טָעֲנוּ, בְּחוֹרֵב פָּרְקוּ. בְּחוֹרֵב טָעֲנוּ — כְּדֹאֲמַרְנוּ, בְּחוֹרֵב פָּרְקוּ — דְּכַתִּיב: "וַיִּתְּנֻצְלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגו'". אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: וְכוּלָן זָכָה מִשָּׁה וּנְטָלָן. דְּסֻמֵּיָּהּ לִיהִ: "וּמִשָּׁה יָקַח אֶת הָאֵהָל". אָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ: עֲתִיד הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְהַחְזִירָן לָנוּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וּפְדוּיֵי ה' יֵשְׁבוּן וּבָאוּ צִיּוֹן בְּרִנָּה וְשִׂמְחַת עוֹלָם עַל רֵאשִׁים" — שִׂמְחָה שְׂמֵעוֹלָם עַל רֵאשִׁים.

Rabbi Simai taught: When Israel accorded precedence to the declaration “We will do” over the declaration “We will hear,” 600,00 ministering angels came and tied two crowns to each and every member of the Jewish people, one corresponding to “We will do” and one corresponding to “We will hear.” And when the people sinned with the Golden Calf, 1,200,000 angels of destruction descended and removed them from the people, as it is stated in the wake of the sin of the Golden Calf: “And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward” (Exodus 33:6). Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said: At Horeb they put on their ornaments, and at Horeb they removed them. The source for this is: At Horeb they put them on, as we have said; at Horeb they removed them, as it is written: “And the children of Israel

⁴ Nishmata d’Oraita Shabbat p.344, from Likkutei Sichot vol.16 p.213.

stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb.” **Rabbi Yohanan said: And Moses merited all** of these crowns **and took** them. What is the source for this? **Because juxtaposed to this** verse, it is stated: “**And Moses would take the tent [*ohel*]**” (Exodus 33:7). The word *ohel* is interpreted homiletically as an allusion to an aura or illumination [*hila*]. **Reish Lakish said: In the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will return them to us, as it is stated: “And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads”** (Isaiah 35:10). **The joy that they once had will once again be upon their heads.**

The idea of Naaseh, we will do, coming before Nishmah, we will understand, is fundamental to the traditional Jewish perspective on life. But why should the angels give two crowns, one for Naaseh and one for nishma? Isn't the main point putting Naaseh before nishmah, which deserves only one crown? The Rebbe explains that the second crown concerns the way we understand. This has to be in an elevated, spiritual way. For example, we have to be able to realise that what seems like a very simple rational law - such as not to steal - has an exalted Divine source, beyond human understanding⁵.

אמר רבי אלעזר: בשעה שהקדימו ישראל "נעשה" ל"נשמע" יצתה בת קול ואמרה להן: מי גלה לבני רז זה שמלאכי השרת משתמשין בו? דכתיב: "כרכו ה' מלאכיו גברי כח עשי דברו לשמע בקול דברו" — ברישא "עשי", ונהדר "לשמע". אמר רבי תמא ברבי חנינא: מאי דכתיב "כתפות בעצי היער וגו'" —

⁵ Nishmata D'Oraita Shabbat 345-6, from Torat Menachem vol.5 p.226.

לָמָּה נִמְשָׁלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְתַפּוּסָה, לוֹמַר לָךְ: מָה תַּפּוּסָה זֶה פְּרִי קוֹדֶם לְעָלְיוֹ, אֲףִי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִקְדִּימוּ "נַעֲשֶׂה" לְ"נִשְׁמָע".

See Tosafot re 'apple' or 'etrog'.

Rabbi Elazar said: When the Jewish people accorded precedence to the declaration “We will do” over “We will hear,” a Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Who revealed to my children this secret that the ministering angels use? As it is written: “Bless the Lord, you angels of His, you mighty in strength, that fulfill His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word” (Psalms 103:20). At first, the angels fulfill His word, and then afterward they hearken. Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. Under its shadow I delighted to sit and its fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song of Songs 2:3)? Why were the Jewish people likened to an apple tree? It is to tell you that just as this apple tree, its fruit grows before its leaves, so too, the Jewish people accorded precedence to “We will do” over “We will hear.”

הָהוּא מֵינָא דְחִזְיָה לְרַבָּא דְקָא מַעֲיִין בְּשִׁמְעָתָא, וְיִתְבָּה אֲצַבְעָתָא דִּידֵיהּ תוּמֵי כַרְעָא וְקָא מַיִיץ בְּהוּ, וְקָא מִבְּעֵן אֲצַבְעָתֶיהּ דְּמָא. אָמַר לֵיהּ: עָמָא פְּזִיזָא, דְּקִדְמִיתוּ פּוּמִיכוּ לְאוּדְגִיכוּ, אִפְתִּי בְּפִחְזוּתִיכוּ קִימִיתוּ. בְּרִישָׁא אִיבְעָא לָכוּ לְמִשְׁמַע, אִי מַצִּיתוּ — קִבְּלִיתוּ, וְאִי לֹא — לֹא קִבְּלִיתוּ. אָמַר לֵיהּ: אֲנִן

The Gemara relates that **a heretic saw that Rava was immersed in studying *halakha*, and his fingers were beneath his leg and he was squeezing them, and his fingers were spurting blood.** Rava did not notice that he was bleeding because he was engrossed in study. The

heretic **said to Rava: You impulsive nation, who accorded precedence to your mouths over your ears. You still bear your impulsiveness**, as you act without thinking. **You should listen first.** Then, **if you are capable** of fulfilling the commands, **accept** them. **And if not, do not accept** them. He **said to him: About us,**

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דְּסָגִינוּ בְּשִׁלְמוֹתָא כְּתִיב בֵּן: "תִּמְתּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּנְחָם", הֵנָּה אֵינֶנְשִׁי דְּסָגֵן בְּעִלְלוֹתָא כְּתִיב בְּהוּ: "וְסָלַף בּוֹגְדִים יִשְׂדֵּם".

who proceed wholeheartedly and with integrity, **it is written: "The integrity of the upright will guide them"** (Proverbs 11:3), whereas **about those people who walk in deceit, it is written** at the end of the same verse: **"And the perverseness of the faithless will destroy them."**

The Rebbe cites this passage in a Sichra (talk) presenting the virtue of simple kabbalat 'ol, 'acceptance of the yoke of Heaven', as opposed to the egotism of intellectualism.

The heretic in the story thinks that one should live according to one's own understanding, and there is no reason to be 'dedicated' to Judaism in a way which surpasses intellect. Rava responded that with the basis of 'acceptance of the yoke of Heaven' one can then soar with one's intellect. But first one needs that secure basis: the integrity, or simplicity, of the upright will guide them in the right direction – including the deepest understanding⁶.

...אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: מַאי דְּכְתִיב "ה' יִתֵּן אֱמֶר הַמְּבֹשְׁרוֹת צָבָא רַב" — כָּל דִּיבּוֹר וְדִיבּוֹר שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה נִחְלָק לְשִׁבְעִים לְשׁוֹנוֹת. תְּנִי דְּבֵי רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעֲלֵאל: "וּכְפָטִישׁ יִפְצֹץ סָלַע", מָה פָּטִישׁ זֶה נִחְלָק לְכַמָּה נִיצוּצוֹת — אַף כָּל דִּיבּוֹר

⁶ Likkutei Sichot vol.2 p.428.

וְדִיבּוּר שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִפִּי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא נִחְלַק לְשִׁבְעִים לְשׁוֹנוֹת. אָמַר רַב חֲנִנְאֵל בֶּר פָּפָא: מַאי דְכָתִיב "שְׁמַעוּ כִּי נְגִידִים אֲדַבֵּר" — לָמָּה נִמְשְׁלוּ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה כְּנְגִיד, לֹאמַר לָךְ: מָה נְגִיד זֶה יֵשׁ בּוֹ לְהִמִּית וּלְהַחְיֹת, אִף דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה יֵשׁ בָּם לְהִמִּית וּלְהַחְיֹת.

With regard to the revelation at Sinai, **Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “The Lord gives the word; the women that proclaim the tidings are a great host” (Psalms 68:12)?** It means that each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Almighty divided into seventy languages, a great host. And, similarly, **the school of Rabbi Yishmael taught** with regard to the verse: “Behold, is My word not like fire, declares the Lord, **and like a hammer that shatters a rock?**” (Jeremiah 23:29). **Just as this hammer breaks a stone into several fragments, so too, each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, divided into seventy languages.** The Gemara continues in praise of the Torah. **Rav Ḥananel bar Pappa said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “Listen, for I will speak royal things, and my lips will open with upright statements” (Proverbs 8:6)? Why are matters of Torah likened to a king? To teach you that just as this king has the power to kill and to grant life, so too, matters of Torah have the power to kill and to grant life.**

Seventy languages – Chabad Chassidic teachings emphasise the importance of translating the Torah a) so that non-Jews will be able to learn the Seven Noachide Laws which apply to them, which were also given at the Giving of the Torah b) so that the wellsprings of the spiritual dimension of Torah should spread to the ‘outside’.

The fact that Hashem said the Ten Commandments in all 70 languages is a step towards this; but also the beginning of Devarim states that Moshe 'began explaining the Torah' and Rashi says this was in all 70 languages⁷. Then not only the Ten Commandments were translated but all Torah⁸.

הֵינּוּ דֹאָמַר רַבָּא: לַמִּימִינִין בֵּה סֵמָא דְחַיִּי, לַמִּשְׁמָאִילִים בֵּה סֵמָא דְמוֹתָא.

And **that is** what **Rava said: To those who are right-handed in** their approach to Torah, and engage in its study with strength, good will, and sanctity, Torah is **a drug of life**, and **to those who are left-handed in** their approach to Torah, it is **a drug of death**.

An important aspect of Chassidic thought is the perception that Torah study can be used in negative ways. This is one of the arguments for the necessity for study of Chassidic teachings: hopefully, they ensure that the person uses Torah in a positive way. Chassidic teachings are compared to the *kav chumtin*, the handful of preservative, which is thrown into the wheat granary. The handful of Chassidic teachings – the awe of the Divine - keeps the general Talmudic Torah study fresh and true (Shabbat 31a).

דָּבָר אַחֵר: "נִגִּידִים" — כָּל דִּיבּוּר וְדִיבּוּר שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִפִּי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא קוֹשְׁרִים לוֹ שְׁנֵי כְתָרִים. אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֹוִי: מֵאִי דְכָתִיב: "צָרוּר הַמּוֹר דּוֹדִי לִי בֵּין שְׂדֵי יֵלִין" — אָמְרָה כְּנֶסֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם אָף עַל פִּי שְׁמִיּוֹר וּמִימֵר לִי דּוֹדִי — "בֵּין שְׂדֵי יֵלִין". "אֲשַׁכֵּל הַכֶּפֶר דּוֹדִי לִי בְּכַרְמִי עֵין גִּדִּי" — מִי שֶׁהִכֵּל שְׁלוֹ מְכַפֵּר לִי עַל עֲוֹן גִּדִּי שֶׁכָּרַמְתִּי לִי. מֵאִי מִשְׁמַע דְּהָאִי

⁷ See Likkutei Sichos vol.36 p.38.

⁸ See ibid. p.39 n.24.

"כַּרְמִי" לִישָׁנָא דְמִכְנֵשׁ הוּא? אָמַר מָר זוּטְרָא בְרִיה דְרַב נַחֲמָן, כְּדִתְנֹן: כִּסָּא שֶׁל כּוֹבֵס שְׂכוּרִים עָלָיו אֶת הַכֵּלִים.

Alternatively, why are matters of Torah referred to as **royal**? Because **to each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, two crowns are tied. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "My beloved is to me like a bundle of myrrh that lies between my breasts" (Song of Songs 1:13)? The Congregation of Israel said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, even though my beloved, G-d, causes me suffering and bitterness, He still lies between my breasts.** And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi interpreted the verse: **"My beloved is to me like a cluster [eshkol] of henna [hakofer] in the vineyards of [karme] Ein Gedi" (Song of Songs 1:14). He, Whom everything [shehakol] is His, forgives [mekhapper] me for the sin of the kid [gedi], i.e., the calf, that I collected [shekaramti] for myself. The Gemara explains: From where is it inferred that the word in this verse, *karme*, is a term of gathering? Mar Zutra, son of Rav Nahman, said that it is as we learned in a mishna: A launderer's chair upon which one gathers [koremim] the garments.**

וְאָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי, מֵאִי דְכָתִיב: "לְחִטּוֹ כְּעֶרְוַת הַבֶּשֶׂם" — כָּל דִּיבּוּר וְדִיבּוּר שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִפִּי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נִתְמַלֵּא כָּל הָעוֹלָם כּוּלּוֹ בְּשָׂמִים. וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁמִּדִּיבּוּר רֵאשׁוֹן נִתְמַלֵּא, דִּיבּוּר שֵׁנִי לֵהִיכֵן הֵלֵךְ? הוֹצִיא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הָרוּחַ מְאוּצְרוֹתָיו וְהֵיךְ מַעְבִּיר רֵאשׁוֹן רֵאשׁוֹן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "שְׂפָתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשְׁנִים נוֹטְפוֹת מֹר עֵבֶר". (אַל תִּקְרִי "שׁוֹשְׁנִים", אֶלָּא "שְׂשׁוֹנִים").

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as banks of sweet herbs, his lips are lilies dripping with flowing myrrh” (Song of Songs 5:13)? It is interpreted homiletically: From each and every utterance that emerged from His cheeks, i.e., the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the entire world was filled with fragrant spices. And since the world was already filled by the first utterance, where was there room for the spices of the second utterance to go? The Holy One, Blessed be He, brought forth wind from His treasuries and made the spices pass one at a time, leaving room for the consequences of the next utterance. As it is stated: “His lips are lilies [*shoshanim*] dripping with flowing myrrh.” Each and every utterance resulted in flowing myrrh. Do not read the word in the verse as *shoshanim*; rather, read it as *sheshonim*, meaning repeat. Each repeat utterance produced its own fragrance.

Torah affects the world. That each word of Torah brought fragrance to the whole world can be understood from the idea in the Maamar of Behar Bechukotai 5734 Vezacharti lahem brit rishonim, that each word of Torah expresses the Essence of the Divine.

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: כל דיבור ודיבור שיצא מפי הקדוש ברוך הוא יצתה נשמתו של ישראל, שנאמר: "נפשי יצאה בדברו". ומאחר שמדיבור ראשון יצתה נשמתו, דיבור שני היאך קיבלו? — הוריד טל שעמיד להחיות בו מתים וקחיה אותם, שנאמר: "גשם נדבות תניף אלהים נחלתך ונלאה אתה כוננתה". ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: כל דיבור ודיבור שיצא מפי הקדוש ברוך הוא תזרו ישראל לאחוריהן שנים עשר מיל והיו מלאכי השרת מדין אותו, שנאמר: "מלאכי צבאות ידון ידון" — אל תיקרי "ידון", אלא "ידון".

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: From each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the souls of the Jewish people left their bodies, as it is stated: **“My soul departed when he spoke”** (Song of Songs 5:6). **And since their souls left their bodies from the first utterance, how did they receive the second utterance?** Rather, G-d rained the dew upon them that, in the future, will revive the dead, and He revived them, as it is stated: **“You, G-d, poured down a bountiful rain; when Your inheritance was weary You sustained it”** (Psalms 68:10). **And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said:** With each and every utterance that emerged from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed be He, the Jewish people retreated in fear twelve *mil*, and the ministering angels walked them back toward the mountain, as it is stated: **“The hosts of angels will scatter [*yidodun*]”** (Psalms 68:13). **Do not read** the word as *yidodun*, meaning scattered; **rather**, read it as *yedadun*, they walked them.

The idea of *kelot hanefesh*, the expiring of the soul, when faced with great spiritual revelation, is a central concept in Chabad thought. An example of it in the Torah is the death of the two sons of Aaron when they entered the Holiest part of the Sanctuary (Lev. 10:1-2), and in the Talmud, the death of Ben Azai when he entered Pardes (Hagigah 14b).

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונו של עולם, מה לילוד אשה בינינו? אמר להן: לקבל תורה בא. אמרו לפניו: חמדה גנוזה שגנוזה לה תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות קודם שנברא העולם, אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם? "מה אנוש כי

תִּזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבֶן אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ? "ה' אֲדִינֵנוּ מֶה אֲדִיר שְׁמֹךְ בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּגָּה הוֹדָה עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם!"

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: When Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah, the ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, what is one born of a woman doing here among us? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them: He came to receive the Torah. The angels said before Him: The Torah is a hidden treasure that was concealed by You 974 generations before the creation of the world, and You seek to give it to flesh and blood? As it is stated: "The word which He commanded to a thousand generations" (Psalms 105:8). Since the Torah, the word of G-d, was given to the twenty-sixth generation after Adam, the first man, the remaining 974 generations must have preceded the creation of the world. **"What is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You think of him?"** (Psalms 8:5). Rather, **"G-d our Lord, how glorious is Your name in all the earth that Your majesty is placed above the heavens"** (Psalms 8:2). The rightful place of G-d's majesty, the Torah, is in the heavens.

Here is the Psalm which is being quoted Psalm 8:2:

ה' אֲדִינֵנוּ מֶה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֹךְ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּגָּה הוֹדָה עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם:

O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name throughout the earth,
You should keep Your splendour in Heaven!

because

מֶה־אֲנֹכִי כִי־תִזְכְּרֵנוּ וּבֶן־אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֵנוּ:....

what is man that You have been mindful of him,
mortal man that You have taken note of him,

אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: החזיר להן תשובה. אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, מתיירא אני שמא ישרפוני בהכל שפיהם. אמר לו: אחוז בכסא כבודי וחזור להן תשובה. שנאמר: "מאחז פני כסא פרשז עליו עננו", ואמר רבי נחום: מלימד שפירש שדי מזיו שכינתו ועננו עליו. אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, תורה שאמה נותן לי מה כתיב בה? "אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים". אמר להן: למצרים ירדו? לפרעה השתעבדו? תורה למה תהא לכם! טוב: מה כתיב בה? "לא יהיה לה אלהים אחרים". בין הגוים אתם שרוין, שעובדין

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Provide them with an answer as to why the Torah should be given to the people.

Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, I am afraid lest they burn me with the breath of their mouths. G-d said to him: Grasp My throne of glory for strength and protection, and provide them with an answer. And from where is this derived? **As it is stated: "He causes him to grasp the front of the throne, and spreads His cloud over it" (Job 26:9), and Rabbi Naḥum said: This verse teaches that G-d spread the radiance of His presence and His cloud over Moses.**

Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, the Torah that You are giving me, what is written in it? G-d said to him: "I am the Lord your G-d Who brought you out of Egypt from the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). Moses said to the angels: Did you descend to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why should the Torah be yours? Again Moses asked: What else is written in it? G-d said to him: "You shall have no other G-ds

before Me” (Exodus 20:3). Moses said to the angels: **Do you dwell among the nations who worship**

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עבודה זרה? שוב: מה כתיב בה? "זכור את יום השבת לקדשו" — כלום אתם עושים מלאכה, שאתם צריכין לעבודת? שוב: מה כתיב בה? "לא תשא ומתן יש ביניכם? שוב: מה כתיב בה? "כבד את אביך ואת אמך" — אב ואם יש לכם? שוב: מה כתיב בה? "לא תרצח", "לא תנאף", "לא תגנב". קנאה יש ביניכם? יצר הרע יש ביניכם? מיד הדוני לו להקדוש ברוך הוא, שנאמר: "ה' אדנינו מה אדיר שמך וגו'", ואילו "תנה הודך על השמים" לא כתיב.

idols that you require this special warning? **Again** Moses asked: **What else is written in it?** The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: **“Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it”** (Exodus 20:8). Moses asked the angels: **Do you perform labour that you require rest** from it? **Again** Moses asked: **What else is written in it?** **“Do not take** the name of the Lord your G-d in vain” (Exodus 20:7), meaning that it is prohibited to swear falsely. Moses asked the angels: **Do you conduct business with one another** that may lead you to swear falsely? **Again** Moses asked: **What else is written in it?** The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: **“Honour your father and your mother”** (Exodus 20:12). Moses asked the angels: **Do you have a father or a mother** that would render the commandment to honour them relevant to you? **Again** Moses asked: **What else is written in it?** G-d said to him: **“You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal”** (Exodus 20:13) Moses asked the angels: **Is there jealousy among you, or is there an evil inclination within you** that would render these commandments relevant? **Immediately they agreed with**

the Holy One, Blessed be He, that He made the right decision to give the Torah to the people...

and as it is stated: **“G-d our Lord, how glorious is Your name in all the earth”** (Psalms 8:10), while **“that Your majesty is placed above the heavens”** is not written because the angels agreed with G-d that it is appropriate to give the Torah to the people on earth.

Here is verse 10 of the same Psalm, now that the angels have accepted Moses' argument:

ה' אֲדֹנָינוּ מִה־אֲדִיר שְׁמֹךְ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!

..and it does NOT say 'keep Your glory in Heaven.'

This passage expresses the theme found throughout Chabad Chassidic teaching: that the purpose of Creation is to make 'a dwelling for Hashem in the lower world'⁹. Hence the Torah and its laws have to be given to the Jewish people below in this physical world, where this goal can be accomplished¹⁰.

מִיד כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד נַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ אוֹהֵב וּמִסֵּר לוֹ דָּבָר, שְׁנֵאֲמַר: "עֲלִיתָ לְמָרוֹם שְׁבִית שְׁבִי לְקַחְתָּ מִתְּנוּת בָּאָדָם" — בְּשֹׁכֵר שְׁקָרָאוֹךְ "אָדָם", לְקַחְתָּ מִתְּנוּת. אַף מִלֵּאֹד הַמְּנוֹת מִסֵּר לוֹ דָּבָר, שְׁנֵאֲמַר: "וַיִּתֵּן אֶת הַקְּטָרֶת וַיִּכְפֹּר עַל הָעָם", וְאֹמֵר: "וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין הַמַּתִּים וּבֵין הַחַיִּים וְגו'" — אִי לָאוּ דֹאֲמַר לִיה מִי הָוָה יָדַע?

Immediately, each and every one of the angels became an admirer of Moses and passed something to him, as it is stated: “You ascended on high, you took a

⁹ See Tanya, beginning of ch.36.

¹⁰ See Nishmata D'Oraita Shabbat, p.348, citing Likkutei Sichot vol.18 p.28 ff.

captive, you took gifts on account of man, and even among the rebellious also that the Lord G-d might dwell there” (Psalms 68:19). The meaning of the verse is: **In reward for the fact that they called you man**, you are not an angel and the Torah is applicable to you, **you took gifts** from the angels. And **even the Angel of Death gave him something**, as Moses told Aaron how to stop the plague, **as it is stated: “And he placed the incense, and he atoned for the people”** (Numbers 17:12). And the verse **says: “And he stood between the dead and the living**, and the plague was stopped” (Numbers 17:13). **If it were not that the Angel of Death told him this remedy, would he have known it?**

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: בשעה שירד משה מלפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, בא שטן ואמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, תורה היכן היא? אמר לו: נתתיך לארץ. הלך אצל ארץ, אמר לה: תורה היכן היא? אמרה לו: "אלהים הבין דרכה וגו'". הלך אצל ים, ואמר לו: "אין עמדי". הלך אצל תהום, אמר לו: "אין בי". שניאמר: "תהום אמר לא בי היא וים אמר אין עמדי", "אבדון ומות אמרו באזנינו שמענו שמעה". חזר ואמר לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבוננו של עולם, חפשתי בכל הארץ ולא מצאתיה. אמר לו: לך אצל בן עמרם.

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: When Moses descended from standing before the Holy One, Blessed be He, with the Torah, Satan came and said before Him: Master of the Universe, where is the Torah?

He said to him: I have given it to the earth. He went to the earth, and said to it: Where is the Torah? It said to him: I do not know, as only: “G-d understands its way, and He knows its place” (Job 28:23).

He went to the sea and asked: Where is the Torah? And the sea said to him: “It is not with me.”

He went to the depths and asked: Where is the Torah? And the depths **said to him: “It is not within me.”** And from where is it derived that the sea and the depths answered him this way? **As it is stated: “The depth said: It is not within me, and the sea said: It is not with me”** (Job 28:14). **“Destruction and death said: We heard a rumor of it with our ears”** (Job 28:22).

Satan returned and said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, I searched for the Torah throughout all the earth and did not find it. He said to him: Go to Moses, son of Amram.

See Tosafot sv Torah 89a, and Hayom Yom 3 Sivan.

הלך אצל משה אמר לו: תורה שנתן לה הקדוש ברוך הוא היכן היא? אמר לו: וכי מה אני שנתן לי הקדוש ברוך הוא תורה? אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: משה, בדאי אתה? אמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, חמודה גנוזה יש לה שאתה משתעשע בה בכל יום, אני אחזיק טובה לעצמי? אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: הואיל ומיעטת עצמך תקרא על שמך, שנאמר: “זכרו תורת משה עבדי וגו’”.

He went to Moses and said to him: The Torah that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave you, where is it?

Moses evaded the question and **said to him: And what am I that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would have given me the Torah? I am unworthy. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, are you a fabricator? Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, You have a hidden treasure in which You delight every day, as it is stated: “And I was His delight every day, playing before Him at every moment”** (Proverbs 8:30). **Should I take credit for myself and say that You gave it to me? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Since you belittled yourself, the Torah will be**

called by your name, as it is stated: “Remember the Torah of Moses My servant to whom I commanded at Horeb laws and statutes for all of Israel” (Malachi 3:22).

The idea that the Torah is the ‘delight of G-d’ before Creation is often mentioned in Chassidic teaching. Thus the Rebbe explains the tremendous joy on Simchat Torah simply because this aspect of Torah is being revealed, causing unrestrained dancing among the Jewish people¹¹.

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: בשעה שעלה משה למרום מצאו להקדוש ברוך הוא שיהיה קושר כתרים לאותיות. אמר לו: משה, אין שלום בעירך? אמר לפניו: כלום יש עבד שנותן שלום לרבו? אמר לו: הנה לך לעזרני, מיד אמר לו: “ועתה יגדל נא פה ה' פאשר דברת”.

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: When Moses ascended on High, he found the Holy One, Blessed be He, tying crowns to letters. On the tops of certain letters there are ornamental crownlets. Moses said nothing, and G-d **said to him: Moses, is there no greeting in your city?** Do people not greet each other in your city? He **said before Him: Does a servant greet his master?** That would be disrespectful. He **said to him: At least you should have assisted Me** and wished Me success in My work. **Immediately he said to Him: “And now, may the power of the Lord be great as you have spoken”** (Numbers 14:17).

(See also Menachot 29b). The idea that Moses can ‘assist’ the Divine in some way, is typical of the Kabbalistic approach to Judaism. Hashem empowers the Jewish people so that they assist the Divine in achieving the purpose of Creation. For the earlier Kabbalists this

¹¹ Likkutei Sichot vol. 20 p.369.

empowerment was restricted to certain great individuals. Chassidism broadened the concept so that every man, woman and child is seen as having the spiritual power to help the Divine achieve His goal: a dwelling in the lower world, which will be effected with the coming of Moshiach.