

# The Rebbe's Discourses

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

פרשת בהעלותך תשכ"ד בלתי מוגה

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## TWO KINDS OF RADIANCE

**T**HE SEDRA SPEAKS OF KINDLING THE LAMPS. THE WORD 'LAMPS' IN THE PLURAL signifies, in simple terms, the seven lights of the Menorah. But another way of interpreting the plural form of the word 'lamps' is in terms of two kinds of radiance: one expressed in the verse 'the lamp of G-d is the soul of a person' (Prov.20:27), suggesting that the person shines radiance towards G-d, and the second 'for you G-d are my lamp' (II Sam.22:29), meaning that G-d shines radiance to the person. As the Sages put it, G-d says 'My lamp is in your hand, and your lamp is in My hand'. Thus the Sedra is referring to this double flow of radiance.

The beginning of the Haftorah for this Sedra is the verse 'Sing and rejoice daughter of Zion' (Zacharia 2:15). Rabbi Shneur Zalman comments on this<sup>2</sup> discussing the idea that the Jewish people are called 'daughter', citing a Midrash which gives the image of a King who had a daughter whom he loved very much; he loved her so much that eventually he called her not 'my daughter', but 'my mother'.

This relates to the two kinds of radiance discussed above. When the radiance shines from G-d to the person, this is like the sustenance which comes from the King to his daughter, he is giving and she is receiving. But when the radiance shines from the person to G-d, it is like the image of the mother who gives sustenance to the King.

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar Behaalotecha 5724 (1964). It was printed in Dvar Malchut Behaalotecha 5776. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> In a discourse in *Torah Or* Miketz 36a about Shabbat Chanuka, which has the same Haftorah.

In which way can a tiny human being be spoken of as giving sustenance to G-d? Rabbi Shneur Zalman cites the last verse in Psalms: “every soul ‘praises’ G-d.”. There is an explanation that the soul is called Binah, Understanding (termed ‘mother’, while Chochmah, Wisdom, is termed ‘father’) and therefore it is able to ‘praise’ G-d, from Binah to the lower Sefirot of the Divine<sup>3</sup>. Further, the word ‘praise’ relates to a word meaning ‘shine’<sup>4</sup>. The verse therefore means that every soul can shine to G-d from the exalted level of Binah.

This shining from the soul to the lower manifestation of the Divine, meaning shining from Binah to the lower Sefirot, is parallel to the flow of radiance from that aspect of the Divine which creates the worlds. With the letter Yud the higher realm of the World to Come is created, and with the letter Heh the lower realm, This World.

This is a challenging process, because due to the necessary ‘contraction’ and veiling of the Divine radiance, in order to create the finite universe, there can be ‘leakage’ of spiritual energy to the negative, impure realms<sup>5</sup>.

In Chassidic teachings this process is also described in terms of ‘hair’ which is similarly ambiguous. Hair channels the intense holiness of the Mind, but in such a way that there is a complete veiling, so much so that when the hair is cut, one does not feel any pain. In the case of the Nazirite, the emphasis is on the holy dimension of hair. But by contrast, the Sedra describes how the Levites, who represent the Sefira Severity, had to shave their hair<sup>6</sup>. Similarly a married woman should conceal her hair, because it is considered too private to be revealed to all and sundry.

Despite this aspect, each individual has a role in the process of drawing Divine life-force into the universe, and this is expressed in the words ‘every soul, Neshamah, praises G-d’<sup>7</sup>. The word Neshamah, soul, relates to Neshimah, breath. With every breath a person should praise G-d, and it is through this dedication to the Divine with every breath that the flow of life-force and radiance is drawn from the upper realms of the Sefirot, Binah, into the lower realms, and the universe is given existence and life.

This immense spiritual process needs every Jewish soul. Rabbi Shneur Zalman describes the combined prayer of the entire Jewish people in terms of a meal: there is the basic staple like bread, savoury food such as fish or meat, ingredients which make the food more tasty, and also condiments with a sharp

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<sup>3</sup> The lower Sefirot are Kindness, Severity, Mercy, Victory, Submission, Dedication, Kingship (the Feminine).

<sup>4</sup> מְהַלֵּל means ‘praise’ and the verse בְּהִלּוֹ נֹרָא (Job 29:3) means ‘His light shines’.

<sup>5</sup> One might suggest that as a result of the necessary ‘hiding’ of G-d, there is a possibility of evil.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers 8:7, Sedra Beha’alotecha.

<sup>7</sup> Psalms 150:6.

taste like pepper and similar spices. Just as with physical food, if salt and pepper are missing the food is tasteless, so too with the combined prayer of the entire Jewish people: as the Sages said, when there is a fast, like Yom Kippur, the prayers of the ‘sinners’ are also necessary. The sinners add ingredients like the sharp spices which give more taste to the whole.

Thus we see the way the soul of the individual Jew, and the souls of the entire Jewish people, function as a ‘lamp’ which gives radiance to the Divine, drawing spiritual illumination from the exalted level of Binah, Understanding (the ‘mother’) to the stream of Divine energy which gives life to the universe, bringing it into being and maintaining it constantly. But in order for the Jewish people to fulfil this role, they need the empowerment which comes from above, from G-d: That is the illumination which comes from G-d to the Jewish people. In this mode, they are described as His ‘daughter’, expressed in the verse ‘for You, G-d, are my lamp’.

We might think that the power to, as it were, illuminate G-d, is only for the supremely righteous, the Tzaddikim. But in fact it is also, and especially, in the power of the Baalei Teshuvah, those who repent. Hence the verse ‘for you, G-d are my lamp’ continues with words – ‘and G-d will illuminate my darkness’. The one who seeks to return at first might find himself or herself in darkness. G-d grants them the radiance which then enables them too to act as a source of light, to be ‘the lamp of G-d’.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care