

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

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LETTERS WRITTEN AND ENGRAVED, AND THE ESSENCE BEYOND

SEDRA BECHUKOTAI BEGINS “IF YOU WALK IN MY STATUTES...”. RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN’S *Likkutei Torah*² explains that the word statute, Chok, relates to the word chakikah, engraving. One level of revelation of Torah is when the letters of Torah are written ink on parchment. The letters are separate from the material, the parchment, and can even be erased. A higher level is when the letters are engraved, like the letters of the Ten Commandments engraved on the sapphire Tablets of the Law. Then the letters are part of the actual material.

A further level is when the sapphire, the precious stone signifying the Divine ‘beyond’, is in its original pure state, when as yet no letters have been engraved on it. We will return to this concept.

Let us consider the written and engraved letters in the case of a person’s speech and thought. The written letters are like the letters of speech: they are expressed beyond the person, and are something separate from him or her. As regards thought, the discourse explains that there are two levels of thought. The lower level, although it is unspoken, is also focused on the ‘letters’, the words expressing the concept, like speech. This is on the level of ‘written’ letters. But a higher level of thought focuses not on the letters but on the idea itself. Here too, in fact, there are ‘letters’ - the instruments of communication of the idea -

¹ Maamar Im Bechukotai 5725 (1965). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Bechukosai 5776. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² *Likkutei Torah*, Bechukotai, 45a and 45d.

but at this level they are part of the idea rather than something separate. This is a level of 'engraving'. There are also higher levels of this, including the Chassidic concept that 'the soul is full of letters', which are totally integral to the soul. Yet there is also a yet higher level of soul, completely beyond letters. Now the Zohar³ tells us that there are three interconnected knots: G-d, the Torah and the Jewish people. Hence the idea of the different levels of written and engraved letters applies not only to the Torah - the letters written on a Torah Scroll, and those engraved in the Tablets of the Law - but also to the Divine Soul and to the revelation of the Divine above.

The Zohar (I 15a) speaks of the initial step towards Creation as a kind of 'engraving' in the Upper Radiance. This expresses the revelation of the aspect called Keter, which is not separate from the radiance of the Ein Sof. This is like the level of 'engraving'. Then the emergence of the Ten Sefirot is like the 'written letters'. Similarly with the Divine Soul. There is an exalted level of the soul above, 'engraved', and then the way the Soul enters this world, as if it were 'written'.

The statement 'walk in My statutes' therefore means a limitless spiritual movement of the soul, a product of its exalted source above, and of the revelation of the Divine, both expressed as 'engraving'. This enables the Soul to 'walk', to move, contrasting with angels which are described as standing still⁴.

But in order for this infinite movement to be contained and consolidated there needs to be the continuation of the verse: 'and guard My Mitzvot', for the Mitzvot are vessels for the spiritual radiance beyond, enabling it to be carried into this world of the body and physical reality.

This concept links with the idea that when there is an arousal from above, a spiritual illumination, it has to be matched and contained by an arousal from below, the direct response and effort of the person. Through this the power of the spiritual illumination from above will continue, rather than just evaporate⁵.

But a further level of understanding this process, is that the arousal from below, the effort which the individual makes, is not only a means of preserving the spiritual revelation from above, but actually reaches higher. It goes beyond the engraved letters and becomes an expression of the pure sapphire, the precious stone before it has been marked (the text says 'darkened') by any letters.

³ See Zohar III, 73a.

⁴ Chassidic teachings explain that angels 'move', spiritually, but only in a simple progression. That is why they are termed 'standing still'. By contrast the Jew can move from one extreme to another: that is real 'movement'.

⁵ See Likkutei Torah, Vayikra, 2b. This discourse was a 'Siyum' on the section Vayikra of Rabbi Shneur Zalman's Likkutei Torah, linking the topics discussed at the end (Sedra Bechukotai) and the beginning (Sedra Vayikra).

The effort that the person makes in this world in his or her physical environment, seeking to express the exalted message of the Torah thus actually links with the ultimate beyond. For it is through this effort that the Divine desire ‘to have a dwelling in the lower world’ is achieved.

Further, the person feels their greatest satisfaction from something they themselves have worked for and achieved, rather than from something they have been given from above. This is because the effort from below taps the Essence both of the person and of the Divine, reaching the level beyond letters, beyond engraving.

Through this process described at the beginning of the Sedra we come to the promise: ‘I will walk among you’ (26:12) which is explained as combining two kinds of movement, from above to below and from below to above. As will be revealed in the imminent Redemption, the person and the Divine, so to speak, walk together.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care