

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summary of Points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

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BRINGING RAIN

THE ZOHAR TELLS US THAT RABBI YOSI SAID 'IT ONCE HAPPENED THAT THE WORLD NEEDED RAIN... several disciples went to Rabbi Shimon [to ask him to pray for rain].. when he saw them, he said a Torah teaching on the verse 'behold how pleasant it is when brothers sit together'² and through this he caused the rain to begin to fall³.

Now we have to understand, why did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai bring the rain through saying a Torah teaching? We find a number of earlier Sages, like Choni the Circle Drawer, who brought rain by means of their Prayer. Further, the Torah says 'If you walk in My statutes and keep My Mitzvot... I will give your rains in their season...'⁴ This suggests that rain falls because the people are living in the right way, and because of their merit the rain falls. The idea that rain falls because of the merit of the people, links more to the theme of Prayer than to Torah study, as will be explained.

Prayer implies that the person praying has in some way tried to improve or purify himself or herself as preparation for Prayer. This applies even more if the person praying is praying on behalf of the whole community, because then the whole community is included in him, and through the fact that he is praying

¹ Maamar Amar Rabbi Yosi Zimna Chada 5733 Shabbat Behar, printed in Dvar Malchut Behar 5784. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Ps.133:1

³ Zohar III 59b.

⁴ Deut.26:3-4, Sedra Bechukotai.

to G-d, he achieves a purification of the entire community⁵. As a result of that, the rain falls.

So that is why we can ask why Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, unlike the earlier Sages of the Mishnah (including his own teacher, Rabbi Akiva) made the rain fall through teaching Torah? In this respect, Torah is the opposite of Prayer. Torah comes from above to below, without the lower level, the recipients, having made any step of preparation or purification. It simply pours down from above, so to speak.

In fact, Rabbi Shimon managed to make the rain fall even though previously there had been a drought, implying that the people of that place were not worthy that rain should fall. Nonetheless, his Torah teaching was successful in bringing rain.

The discourse explains that when considering a flow from above, there are two modes. One is that there is ‘an arousal from below’, from the would be recipients, reaching upwards, triggering the response from above. The other is that the arousal starts from above, causing the flow downwards. Each of these modes has its own special property.

The first mode, with an arousal from below, entails the prior purification of the recipients, as explained, which is not the case in the second mode. But in the second mode, the flow downwards takes place in a way which is independent of the limitations of the recipients. G-d gives the flow in His own boundless way, and ‘in one moment’⁶.

In the individual, these two modes are manifested in Torah study and Prayer. Torah operates from above to below, while Prayer is from below to above. For each of these, there is a style of service where that is the extreme: the Talmud states ‘if only a person would pray all day long’⁷ and there is also a style of service in which ‘Torah is one’s [only] occupation’⁸. But there is also a style of service of the Divine in which these are combined, at one point one is devoted to prayer, and at another point one is devoted to Torah.

The discourse now presents an answer to its question why Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai got the rain to fall by delivering a Torah teaching, while his predecessors among the Sages would do this by their intense prayer. The answer given is that at different epochs, different styles of service are prominent. In the time of the

⁵ This is a profound Chassidic perspective on prayer, expressed in the early writings of the Chassidic movement (ed.).

⁶ As expressed in Zohar I 129a.

⁷ Berachot 21a, Jerusalem Talmud Shabbat 1:2.

⁸ Shabbat 11a.

earlier Rabbis, before Rabbi Shimon, the most important approach was Prayer. But in Rabbi Shimon's own time, Torah teaching and study became the central theme⁹. Hence Rabbi Shimon chose the mode of Torah teaching in order to bring the rain.

Further, the discourse explains, Torah itself combines different modes. There are the two domains of Torah (from above) and the Mitzvot (from below). Within Torah study itself there is Torah as one vast interactive whole, in which every topic might impinge on every other topic, in which the Torah can be seen as 'above'. But there is also Torah the way it divides into different distinct themes, and particularly as it defines the actual practical Halachah, the laws of daily life, relating to the practicalities 'below'. Further, these two dimensions of Torah combine when one is studying the broad reaches of Torah in order to answer a specific question in Halachah. Then the limitless Torah above focuses onto the specific situation below.

The distinction between Torah above and Torah, ie Halachah, below can be seen as relating to the difference between the Divine Name Elokim, and the far more exalted Tetragrammaton, the ineffable Name of G-d. Concerning the Torah above, in which all opinions are equal, we find the phrase¹⁰ 'all [the different opinions] are *divrei Elokim chaim*, words of the living G-d' with the word Elokim for G-d. But when speaking of Torah study which authentically defines the Halachah, the term 'and G-d [the Tetragrammaton] is with him' is used by the Sages¹¹, expressing the fact that the Torah below manifests a deeper level of holiness.

The discourse now discusses why Rabbi Shimon's Torah teaching focused on the verse 'behold how pleasant it is when brothers sit together'¹². The discourse explains this verse in terms of the different levels of the Sefirot: at the highest level, the inner and outer levels of Keter ('Crown'), lower down, Wisdom and Understanding, then the seven attributes relating to the emotions such as Kindness and Severity, culminating in Malchut, Kingship, Fulfilment. In order to draw the rain down, there has to be unity between the different levels from above to below.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was particularly able to do this because in his own being he combined both dimensions of Prayer and Torah. His famous saying in the Zohar 'I am a just a sign'¹³ can mean that he is in a state of total abnegation

⁹ It is said that at a later stage, in the time of Rabbi Isaac Luria (16th cent.), Prayer again became the central mode of service. It is said that later, in our own time, Action became the main focus in service of G-d.

¹⁰ Erubin 13b.

¹¹ Sanhedrin 93b, quoting I Sam.16:18.

¹² Ps.133:1

¹³ Zohar I 225a.

to G-d, the ultimate achievement of Prayer, and also that he is just an inert channel for Torah teachings to flow into the world.

Indeed, there is a tradition transmitted by Rabbi Hillel of Paritch¹⁴ that Rabbi Shneur Zalman said that for Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai there was no Destruction of the Temple and no Exile (and the fact that he hid from the Romans who sought to execute him, was simply because ‘one should not rely on miracles’¹⁵). Rabbi Shimon transmitted the sense of being above the Destruction of the Temple and the Exile to everyone. And even if there is someone who *does* feel the Destruction and the Exile, when he or she comes to Rabbi Shimon’s grave in Meron on Lag B’Omer, Rabbi Shimon’s Yahrzeit, will be able to transcend the Destruction and the Exile...

From this may we all come to the full Redemption through our righteous Moshiach, and then there will be complete fulfilment of the verse ‘And G-d will be King over all the world, on that day G-d will be one and His Name will be one’¹⁶.

[Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care](#)

¹⁴ Rabbi Hillel (d.1864) was a famous Chabad chassid, a close follower of the first three Rebbeim of Chabad-Lubavitch.

¹⁵ Pesachim 64b. For the account of why they wanted to execute him see Shabbat 33b.

¹⁶ Zacharia 14:9.