

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה בראשית ברא תשמ"ב בלתי מוגה
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COVENANT OF FIRE

THE FIRST WORD IN THE TORAH, BEREISHIT, MEANING 'IN THE BEGINNING', FORMS A NUMBER OF ANAGRAMS. One of them is Brit Eish, a Covenant of Fire. Chassidic teachings explain this concept in terms of a passage from Tanach: "Jerusalem will be open suburbs, because of its great population. And I (G-d) will be for it a wall of fire, and My glory will be within it"².

This implies that there are three aspects, in the imagery about Jerusalem: Jerusalem as a walled city; doing away with the walls, in order to enlarge the city, in the time of the Messiah; the presence of the Divine, in the form of a wall of fire round greater Jerusalem, and the Divine Glory in the heart of the city.

Let's start with the first image: Jerusalem as a walled city. The purpose of the walls is, obviously, to keep enemies out. In spiritual terms these enemies are negative forces, kelipot, forces of evil.

Why do such negative forces exist? One explanation is, simply to give us the opportunity to serve G-d with our free will. When there are challenges, obstacles in our path, including spiritual obstacles, such as our own temptations and we face up to those challenges, our relationship with G-d is on a deeper level.

This is why there is a wall surrounding the city of Jerusalem, representing each individual in his or her relationship with G-d. The wall is to protect one against challenging forces.

¹ Maamar Bereishit Bara 5742 (1981). Not edited by the Rebbe (and not published in Dvartalchus).

² Zacharia 2:8-9.

At the same time, the wall has another role: it defines the extent of the city. In personal terms, this means defining who we are and what we are trying to do, helping us to focus our energy in the most appropriate ways.

This explains the image of the wall around Jerusalem in normal times.

Then comes the Messianic redemption described by the Prophet Zacharia. The walls of Jerusalem will no longer be needed to protect the city from enemies. Instead, broad suburbs will reach into the surrounding areas (as indeed they do today!). The Midrash tells us that in the future Jerusalem will spread over the whole of Israel, and Israel will spread over the whole world.³ For in the redemptive future, the holiness of Jerusalem will spread everywhere.

But, one may ask, how can holiness spread everywhere? How can the world continue to exist, if the holiness of the infinite Divine is revealed?

This is a good question. Kabbalistic teachings explain that Divine holiness has to be veiled in some way, in order to permit our finite world to exist. This is the function of the wall of fire. When Jerusalem has no borders, when all is holiness, the wall of fire represents the Divine force which protects our individuality and our singular physical presence in the world. True that all will be holy. But at the same time we will be real people, in a real world. The wall of fire indicates the Divine power to maintain and protect that sense of reality.

Chassidic teaching emphasises that there are aspects of our lives today which prepare for future spiritual revelations. How can we prepare for the wall of fire? Through Torah study, for the Torah itself is described as ‘letters of black fire, on a background of white fire’⁴.

The white fire represents the Divine Soul, which is itself a part of G-d. The black fire represents the Animal Soul, seemingly a concealment of holiness. But the letters of Torah blend with both aspects of our being. This is the Covenant of Fire of Bereishit, of the beginning of the Torah: the promise that Torah itself brings unity to our inner being, and unity to the entire world.

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

³ See Yalkut Shimoni, Isaiah sec. 503.

⁴ See Ramban’s introduction to his commentary on the Torah.