

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
ד"ה זכור ה' מה ה' לנו ש"פ דברים שבת חזון תשל"ג בלתי מוגה  
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## REMEMBERING

**I**N LAMENTATIONS, WHICH IS RECITED ON THE FAST OF THE NINTH OF AV, WE READ THE VERSE 'Remember G-d, what has happened to us, look and see our shame'<sup>2</sup>. The simple explanation of this verse is that it expresses the sorrow of the Jewish people at the destruction of the Temple. But in Hasidic teachings we find a remarkable interpretation of this same verse, which presents it as saying something positive.

This positive interpretation is presented by the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph Isaac, in a discourse which he had printed in Yiddish<sup>3</sup>. He describes how the Baal Shem Tov was with a group of simple, unlearned Jews, who were distinguished for their self-sacrifice in their efforts to redeem Jews who had been taken captive [a common occurrence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century]. From pure Ahavat Yisrael, they would work beyond the limit in order to gain freedom for these unfortunate people.

The Baal Shem Tov explained this verse in a positive way, giving a different meaning to the word 'what'. In Hebrew, what is 'mah', מה. This word can also mean the inner dimension of the soul, utter selflessness<sup>4</sup>. The Baal Shem Tov translated the verse as saying 'Remember, G-d, what has been achieved through

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar Zachor Hashem Parshat Devarim Shabbat Chazon 5733. It was not edited by the Rebbe. It was printed in Dvar Malchut Devarim 5784.

<sup>2</sup> Lamentations 5:1.

<sup>3</sup> The discourse was first printed in the 1940s in the USA. At that time a Yiddish text was accessible to a wider readership than a Hebrew text.

<sup>4</sup> As in Exodus 16:7 'what are we that you should complain at us', ie we are nothing.

the *mah*, the inner point of the soul; see how they were willing to risk their lives for the sake of their Ahavat Yisrael’.

Another Hasidic interpretation of this verse links it to a passage in the Zohar<sup>5</sup> which also speaks of ‘remembering’. The Prophet Micah calls to the Jewish people ‘remember what Balak King of Moab planned to do against you’<sup>6</sup> – but he was foiled. He tried to get Balaam to curse the Jews, and instead, repeatedly, Balaam blessed them.

Yet another example of Remembering is in the statement in Ecclesiastes (12:1): ‘Remember your Creator in the days of your youth’. This means, when you are young and strong and filled with passion – remember your Creator and repent! The Midrash<sup>7</sup> gives a different twist: the word for ‘your youth’ is *bechiratecha*, which relates to a term for the Temple: *Beit Habechirah*. This verse is explained to mean: Remember what your Creator did for you, when the Temple stood!

The discourse explains that by the fact that we remember G-d’s kindness to us in the past, we arouse His kindness again. That is why there is a command to remember daily the Exodus from Egypt. Simply by remembering G-d’s miracles for us, we [arouse G-d’s mercy] and thus quell the negative force of ‘Egypt’ in all its forms.

Another interpretation of the verse from Lamentations is found in Rabbi Joseph Isaac’s Yiddish discourse. This also comes from the Baal Shem Tov. But this time, he was with a group of very scholarly people, who were proud of their brilliance and originality in interpreting the Torah.

In this interpretation, the word ‘what’ has a new interpretation. It means ‘selfless’ or ‘spiritual’ as before, but in an inverted way. There are Kelipot, literally shells, concealing forces, at different levels of existence. In a very spiritual realm, there can be the negative aspect ‘see how spiritual I am!’.

This is how the Baal Shem Tov translated the verse, for this group of vain scholars: ‘Remember, G-d, see how we have misused the deepest part of our soul, make us see how shameful this is!’.

The point of saying to G-d ‘Remember’ in this verse, is of course that we are asking G-d to take us out of Exile. If so, one can ask, why should there be these negative interpretations of the verse. Why should we stress our own negativity?

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<sup>5</sup> Zohar III 112a.

<sup>6</sup> Micah 6:5

<sup>7</sup> Kohelet Rabbah 12:8.

The discourse explains that we are saying to G-d: You put us into this world where it is very difficult not to sin. Even Torah study, which should elevate and purify us, can easily be misused and make a person vain and haughty.

Since You, G-d, have put us in this situation, please save us! Send the Redemption!

The Exile came through causeless hatred; the Redemption will come through causeless love, total Ahavat Yisrael. And this will bring out the intense love of G-d to us, as it is written 'I love you, says G-d'<sup>8</sup>. Thus the Redemption which comes after Exile will lead us to a greater closeness to G-d than we would have experienced otherwise.

Hence, dear G-d – Remember, and bring us to the true Redemption when the Temple will be built on its place in Jerusalem, and the scattered Jews will be gathered together, and the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea<sup>9</sup>.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

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<sup>8</sup> Malachi 1:2.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 11:9.