

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה והי' עקב תשמעון ה'תשכ"ז מוגה קונטרס כ"ף מנחם אב תשמ"ז

Published for Sedra Ekev
23 Menachem Av 5782, 20 August 2022¹

ON THE HEELS OF THE MESSIAH

THE SEDRA BEGINS “SINCE YOU WILL LISTEN TO THESE LAWS, AND YOU WILL guard them and do them, then G-d will guard for you the Brit (Covenant) and the kindness which He swore to your fathers..”.

Earlier Chassidic teachings ask why this verse *assumes* that the Jewish people will keep the laws, stating ‘since’ *ekev* you will listen to them... By contrast, other similar verses in the Torah say ‘if’ you will keep the laws, such as ‘if you will walk in My statutes’ (Num.26:13), and, later in our Sedra, ‘it will be *if* you listen..’ (Deut.11:13). The Tzemach Tzedek explains² that the word *ekev*, which literally means ‘heel’ hints at the time of ‘the heels of Messiah’, just before the Redemption, when at last the Jewish people *will* listen to and obey G-d’s teachings. As the Rambam writes “the Torah promises that in the end, the Jewish people will repent, at the conclusion of their Exile, and then at once they will be redeemed”³.

The Tzemach Tzedek continues that “listen”, “guard” and “do” hint at thought, speech and action. “Listen” means thought, because when we hear something it enters our thoughts; “guard” hints at speech, for the Sages speak of repeated

¹ Maamar Vehaya Ekev Tishma’un 5727 (1967), published 1987 *Kuntres 20th Menachem Av*, edited by the Rebbe. Republished in Dvar Malchus Ekev 5774.

² In a discourse in his Or HaTorah, Devarim, p.491. Rabbi Menachem Mendel, known as the Tzemach Tzedek was the third Lubavitcher Rebbe (d.1866).

³ Hil. Teshuvah 7:5.

recitation (speech) as being the way to guard and preserve one's knowledge of Torah⁴; and "do" literally expresses action.

The effect of these three dimensions of the person's observance of the Torah and its laws, in thought speech and action, is a parallel response from the Divine. G-d will guard for us the Brit, which is action, and the kindness, which takes the form of thoughts in one's mind, which He swore to our fathers, expressing speech.

But is this response enough? The soul was on an exalted level before it came into the world. Surely, the process of life should lead to a far greater level of fulfilment? In the morning prayer 'My G-d, the soul which You have given me is pure', the words 'is pure' refer to the soul before it was born; and the later phrase 'and You guard it within me' refer to the heights it can reach through undergoing the process of life. This too links to the word *ekev*: the soul at the level of *ekev*, the 'heel', means the soul in the physical body, rather than those aspects of the soul which remain in spiritual realms beyond the body.

In the body, with all its challenges, the struggle of the soul in thought, speech and action with yearning of the heart and with self-sacrifice, especially at a time of exile, reaches a level beyond the down-chaining of the worlds. Then the corresponding response from the Divine is also beyond the down-chaining of worlds, and is a revelation of the Divine Essence.

This explanation of the Tzemach Tzedek links with a comment by the Midrash⁵ on the same verse in the Sedra: "G-d told the Jewish people, your reward will be in the heel (*ekev*)", meaning at the end. But this focus on 'reward' is speaking about *after* the coming of the Messiah, while the plain meaning of the verse is that it is speaking of observance of the Mitzvot at the end of Exile but *before* the coming of the Messiah. The point which unifies both interpretations is the revelation of the Divine Essence. Through the ultimate observance of Torah, with self-sacrifice, revealing the Essence, will come the Redemption by the Messiah, which, likewise, will manifest a revelation of the Divine Essence.

Further, in the time of the heels of the Messiah, the challenges will be greater and hence the self-sacrifice will be greater. Thus at that time, particularly, there will be the revelation of the Divine Essence, through the service of the Jewish people and then in the Divine response through the coming of the Messiah.

This will be further understood by considering what it says in Tanya: that the ultimate goal of the coming of Moshiach and the Revival of the Deasd depends on our actions and service in the time of Exile. The Rebbe's father Rabbi Levi

⁴ See Eruvin 54a.

⁵ Devarim Rabbah, beginning of Ekev (3:1).

Yitzhak commented on this, in his comments on the margin of his Tanya⁶, that this can be understood by considering what it says in Section 12 of Part 4 of Tanya, which he interprets as meaning that ‘our actions’ lead to the time of the Messiah, and ‘our service’ leads to the Revival of the Dead.

The chapter which he mentioned explains the difference between ‘action’ and ‘service’, with reference to the giving of charity. ‘Action’ means a level which is to be expected, even if one would consider it virtuous. Thus, the Animal Soul might protest at this level of giving charity, but the Divine Soul would consider this appropriate. ‘Service’ means a higher level: self-sacrifice, a level of transcendence, not only for the Animal Soul, but even for the Divine Soul.

This level of transcendence is paralleled by the concept of Repentance, which reaches a higher level than pure righteousness, as the Talmud states ‘the place where the repentant stand, the purely righteous cannot reach’⁷. The righteous express the power of holiness of the Divine Soul; but the repentant are able to reach into the darkness of the unholiness of their transgressions and transform that into light.

Similarly the process of birth and life in this world is one in which the Divine Soul enters a gloomy and limiting arena in which it has the opportunity to transform the negative into the positive. Before it entered the world, the Soul was on the level of a Tzaddik, the completely righteous. But entering the world, the Divine Soul is concealed by the Animal Soul and the body. It is then able to a) conquer this concealment and express its innate spirituality and b) achieve something completely new, by transforming the darkness of the Animal Soul and the body, and even all aspects of the person’s life.

The ultimate in this process is seen in those who died with self-sacrifice. Faced with hideous forces of evil, their self-sacrifice elevated the sacred sparks trapped in that realm of evil.

We thus see that ‘our actions’ are the key to one level of Divine Revelation, that of the time of the Messiah, and ‘our service’, expressing total self-transcendence and even physical self-sacrifice – as in the case of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak, the Rebbe’s father - leads to the even greater revelation of the Revival of the Dead. As the Talmud states⁸, that all the prophecies of the Prophets concern the time of the Messiah. But the time of the Revival of the Dead will be on an infinitely more exalted level.

⁶ While in exile in far eastern Kazakhstan, he had no paper, but wrote on the margins of the few books he had with him, one of which was a Tanya. His wife prepared ink for him by cooking berries, and made pens from reeds. As a result of his suffering during his imprisonment and subsequent exile he died at the relatively young age of 66 in 1944 on 20th Av.

⁷ Berachot 34b.

⁸ Berachot 34b

We thus see that facing the challenges of the time of the ‘heels of the Messiah’, even with self-sacrifice, is an integral part of the corresponding Divine revelation. But, as the Torah says, by referring to ‘your fathers’ in the opening verse of the Sedra, this revelation extends to the children, which includes the disciples. Through the self-sacrifice of the fathers, the children and disciples will be able to enjoy the ultimate revelations, with peace and comfort, and joy and a happy heart. Then the promise will be fulfilled that ‘wake up and sing, you who dwell in the dust’ (Isaiah 26:19), including the Rebbe’s father whose Yahrzeit it is (on 20 Menachem Av), with the coming of the Messiah, verily in our time.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care