

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

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THE POWER OF BLESSINGS

THE SEDRA STATES ‘YOU SHALL EAT AND BE SATISFIED, AND YOU SHALL BLESS G-D YOUR G-D, FOR THE good Land which He has given you’². The Zohar comments that this means ‘one should bless the Holy One blessed be He, for everything that a person eats or drinks, or enjoys in this world’³. Rabbi Moshe Zacuto, a famous commentator on the Zohar, adds that this includes the pleasures of all the senses. One should bless G-d for what one sees, hears, smells and tastes, and these correspond to the four letters of the Divine Name⁴.

Although the Talmud states that this verse commands one to make a blessing only after eating, namely Grace after Meals, and other blessings are of Rabbinic authority, the view of the Zohar is that the Torah requires one to make a blessing for every form of enjoyment of the world⁵. This leaves us with the question why the verse seems to focus specifically on being *satisfied*.

The Zohar continues with an explanation of the opening text of most blessings: ‘Blessed are You o G-d, our G-d...’ It states: “ ‘Blessed’- that is the secret of

¹ Maamar VeAchalta VeSavata, Shabbat Ekev, 20 Menachem Av 5733 (1973), Yahrzeit of the Rebbe's father Rabbi Levi Yitzhak Schneerson z"l. It was printed in Dvar Malchut Ekev 5784. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Deut 8:10, Sedra Ekev.

³ Zohar III 270b.

⁴ This is quoted in the commentary ‘Sparks of Light’, on that page of the Zohar.

⁵ Rabbi Moshe Zaccuto explains that the Zohar interprets the words ‘for the good Land’ as meaning every kind of pleasure. These blessings are termed Blessings on Pleasure. Generally, they are considered to have Rabbinic authority, while only Grace after Meals is ‘from the Torah’ (see Rambam, Laws of Blessings, 1:1-2). The contrasting view of the Zohar is that the Blessings on Pleasure are also ‘from the Torah’. A third kind of blessing is one said on performing a Mitzva, such as the blessing said when putting on Tefilin or separating Challah. This kind of blessing is considered of Rabbinic authority.

the supernal Source, beyond everything, which pours and flows and illuminates the Lamps”.

It is known that every word of the Zohar is very precise. This is made clear in the Introduction to the book *Explanations of Zohar* by the Mittlerer Rebbe⁶. He writes that on each occasion⁷ his father Rabbi Shneur Zalman would study with his sons and students just a page or two of the Zohar, but with great depth, focusing on the exact meaning of each word. These explanations were later published in the *Explanations of Zohar* by the Mittlerer Rebbe and the Tzemach Tzedek⁸.

The Rebbe’s father, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak Schneerson⁹, also wrote comments on the Zohar. On the above quoted passage, he explains that the term “ ‘Blessed’, ...the Supernal source” means a flow from the attribute Wisdom.

He adds that Wisdom represents the letter Yud in the Divine Name¹⁰. The letter Yud can be spelled out as a word: ‘Yud’, which itself has three letters: Yud, Vav, Daled, like this: **ד״י** . These represents three aspects of Wisdom: Wisdom itself, Understanding and Knowledge. Yud is like a point, Vav is a line, and then Daled is extension, an area.

The Rebbe explains that there are several ways in which the three letters Yud, Vav, and Daled can be seen to correspond to Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge. For example, Yud is the ‘point’, the initial spark of Wisdom. Vav is the line of extension of that point through Understanding, which takes the initial point and explores its ramifications and possibilities. The Daled expresses the tangible area described as ‘Knowledge’, which in Habad thought represents commitment¹¹.

But these three aspects – Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge – are all as they are expressed in Wisdom itself, in the word ‘Blessed’. In fact, in order for this flow to come from Wisdom, there must be an input from a yet higher level,

⁶ Literally ‘the Middle Rebbe, meaning the second Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Dov Ber (1773-1827).

⁷ The Introduction states that Rabbi Shneur Zalman would generally teach Zohar on Friday nights.

⁸ The Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1789-1866) was the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, grandson of Rabbi Shneur Zalman and son-in-law of Rabbi Dov Ber. Both Rabbi Dov Ber and Rabbi Menachem Mendel wrote tracts entitled *Explanations of Zohar*.

⁹ His Yahrzeit is 20 Menachem Av. He was arrested in 1939 and exiled to Kazakhstan in far-eastern USSR for his work in strengthening Judaism in Ekaterinoslav (now named Dnipropetrovsk) where he was Chief Rabbi. While in exile he wrote a commentary on the Zohar. He passed away in Almaty in 1944. This commentary and other writings were subsequently published.

¹⁰ The four letters of the Divine Name are depicted as relating to the Sefirot, the Divine Attributes. Yud expresses Wisdom, the first Heh manifests Understanding, the Vav (Gematria 6) represents the following six Sefirot, and the second Heh represents Kingship.

¹¹ As in the phrase ‘and Adam knew Eve’ (Gen.4:1).

the hiddenness of Keter, Crown, a dimension beyond the ‘downchaining’ of worlds.

Then come the next words in the blessing – ‘are You’, ‘G-d’, ‘our G-d’. These words express the lower levels in the spiritual realms.

This means that when a person makes a blessing on a pleasurable activity – eating, drinking, smelling a beautiful fragrance, and so on – there is a flow of Divine radiance from an upper supernal level, Wisdom, and even Keter (Crown) beyond, down through lower and lower levels.

This is the nature of the Blessing made on a pleasurable activity, and in fact also the Blessing made when carrying out a Mitzva.

By contrast, the blessings made in Prayer, such as the eighteen (actually nineteen¹²) blessings of the weekday Amidah, and its seven blessings on Shabbat and Festivals, and nine on Rosh Hashanah - move from below upwards, as expressed in Jacob’s dream of the ladder, on which angels are ascending¹³. The Rebbe explains that in Prayer, before this ascent, there is a connection of the ‘male’ Sefirot with the ‘female’ Sefirah Kingship (Malchut). This is indeed a flow downwards. But then, when that connection has been made, the prayer flows upwards to the Divine.

The reason for this difference is that the essence of Prayer is to achieve a spiritual unification with the Divine. It ascends beyond the physicality of the world. By contrast, the blessings on enjoyment, and also those on Mitzvot (which generally involve practical, physical things), directly concern the physical world.

The physical world is very exalted, despite the fact that this exaltation is hidden. The Kabbalah explains that the source of the physical world is from a very exalted level called the ‘World of Chaos’ (Tohu), much higher than the spiritual realms which are termed the ‘World of Repair’ (Tikkun).

When we enjoy something physical in the world, such as food or drink, or a fragrance, or carry out a Mitzva with a physical thing, we are really interacting with this exalted domain of the hidden ‘sparks’ of the World of Chaos. Hence the blessing we recite comes from a very exalted source, beyond the downchaining of the worlds.

¹² Originally the daily Amidah had eighteen blessings, then a nineteenth blessing was added by Rabban Gamliel.

¹³ The Zohar declares that this ladder represents Prayer (Zohar I 266b).

Through this we are accomplishing the goal for which G-d created the world. That there should be a physical world, even though that means by definition a concealment of the Divine, and in that physical world G-dliness should be revealed.

The verse in the Sedra emphasizes that not only do we interact with the world, we are *satisfied* from that interaction, and that satisfaction (and also, as the Zohar puts it, not only from food, but from everything we might enjoy) is the occasion for our blessing to G-d, drawing the highest levels of G-dliness into the world, which is the purpose of Creation.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care