

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

ל"ג בעומר תש"ל בלתי מוגה

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THE 'WEDDING' OF RASHBI

LAG B'OMER, THE 33RD DAY OF THE OMER, IS THE YAHRZEIT OF RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI, THE 2ND CENTURY SAGE known as Rashbi. A Yahrzeit, the anniversary of that person passing away, may have solemn connotations, but in the case of Rashbi it is a joyful day, celebrated with music, bonfires, outings for children, and frequently weddings – which, according to general custom, do not take place in the Omer period between Pesach and Shavuot, except for on Lag B'Omer². The general term for Rashbi's Yahrzeit is 'Hilula', Aramaic for 'wedding'. What does this mean? Why is his Yahrzeit joyful, and even termed a 'wedding'?

The Talmud presents striking depictions of the greatness of Rashbi. His teacher Rabbi Akiva said 'it is enough that I and your Creator know your strength'³. The Midrash tells us that Rashbi claimed he could gain Divine forgiveness for the world for the period of his own lifetime, and if he were joined by certain great figures of the past, such as Abraham or Ahijah the Shilonite (a Prophet in the Temple period) they could gain forgiveness for all humanity till the Messiah⁴.

In order to understand his significance further, we have to consider the nature of Angels; how the Jew differs from (and is superior to) an Angel; and then, what is special about Rashbi.

¹ Maamar Lehaven Inyan Hilula deRashbi 5730 (1970). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Emor 5781. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Some communities celebrate weddings after that day. Others retain the restriction till shortly before Shavuot.

³ Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin, 1:5.

⁴ Bereishit Rabba 35:2. See also Zohar I, 255a.

Angels are spiritual beings which are aware of the Divine and act as messengers for Him (and hence are sometimes termed Divine). Their awareness of the Divine leads them to feel intense love and awe. But the Jew is on a higher level. G-d tells the Prophet Zacharia ‘I will enable you to move among these stationary beings’⁵. The stationary beings are angels, and compared with them, Zacharia is able to move. Chassidic teachings depict this as a movement from one extreme to another, as in the process of Repentance, from the lowest level to the highest, which is within the power of any Jew.

Further, the Angels, compared with the Jew, are from a lower level of Kabbalistic world. There are four such worlds: the highest is Atzilut, Emanation; then Creation, Formation, and finally Action. The Angels are from the three lower levels. Some Jews, like Rashbi, and Moses, and – as explained by the Previous Rebbe – also Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi – have souls from a higher level, from Atzilut⁶. The souls of more ordinary Jews, which emerge at a lower level, from Creation, Formation or Action, are actually also rooted in the higher level of Atzilut.

This is why in the morning prayers one recites the prayer ‘My G-d, the soul which You gave me is Pure; You created it, You formed it, and You blew it into me..’. The term ‘Pure’ represents Atzilut, the true root and source of every Jewish soul, then come the lower worlds of Creation and Formation, and ‘You blew it into me’ refers to the soul entering the world of Action.

Now, although the soul has an exalted source, it does not have the full power of ‘movement’ when it is at that heavenly level⁷. In order to have the power of movement the soul has to enter the world and reside in a physical body. The joining of soul to body is like the joining of Mashpia, the one who gives flow, and Mekabel, the one who receives the flow. This also like man and a woman in marriage.

When G-d created man and woman, the Torah states ‘male and female He created them, and G-d blessed them’ (Gen.5:2). The union of male and female elicits a flow of exalted Divine blessing. So too in the case of the body and the soul: through their union, an exalted Divine level is tapped, which enables the person to ‘move’.

At this stage however, the movement is only a potential. It’s a possibility of movement. Through study of Torah and observance of Mitzvot this becomes actualized, as true movement, as the verse states in next week’s double Sedra ‘if you *walk* – ie: move - in My statutes’ which the Sages explain as making effort in Torah study⁸, and Torah study leads to the action of the Mitzvot. Through

⁵ Zacharia 3:7.

⁶ Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s successors also have souls from Atzilut.

⁷ Elijah mentions ‘standing’ before G-d (I Kings 17:1) which is explained as meaning before his soul came into the world.

⁸ See Rashi to the beginning of Sedra Bechukotai.

this the soul is able to ascend to higher and higher levels, to the ‘vessels’ of the Sefirot of Atzilut, and yet higher to the radiance within the vessels of the Sefirot, and even higher, to the radiance which is beyond the Sefirot. At the same time through this process exalted spiritual unions are brought about, in which differing levels of the Divine Name, the Tetragrammaton are unified⁹.

This power in Torah and Mitzvot to reach down to this world and connect it above to the highest levels is because Torah is both the most precious, hidden treasure and yet it is also channeled down into this world¹⁰.

We thus understand the ‘movement’ of the soul, within the body, studying Torah and observing Mitzvot, which brings about exalted spiritual connections and enables the soul to *move* to the highest levels.

Now we come to Rashbi’s unique qualities. He is the author of the Zohar, the centre of the Jewish mystical tradition, which reveals the inwardness of the Torah and its Mitzvot.

The discourse explains that the fullest level of ‘movement’ described above comes about through the inner dimension of Torah. The Zohar¹¹ states that there are three levels which interlink: G-d, Torah and the Jewish people. Each level has a revealed and hidden dimension.

Chassidic teachings explain that the revealed aspect of Torah – the Talmud and the Code of Law – connects the revealed aspect of the Jew, the Nefesh, with the revealed, immanent aspect of the Divine. The inner, hidden aspect of Torah connects the inner aspect of the Jew, the deeper levels of the soul¹², with the hidden, transcendent aspect of the Divine. At this deeper level, the ‘movement’ of the individual is much more profound.

Now we can try to understand the ‘wedding’ of Rashbi. The goal of a human wedding is the birth of children, which is explained in Chassidic teachings as meaning the illumination of the Ein Sof (the Infinite) below in this physical world. This is achieved through the physical union of bride and groom, which has a greater effect than a spiritual form of union (called the union of a kiss).

Lag B’Omer is regarded as the time of the Giving of the Torah for the inner dimension of Torah (although all Torah was really included at the Giving of the Torah at Sinai). For with Rashbi, whose Yahrzeit is on Lag B’Omer, began the revelation of the inwardness of Torah, the mystical dimension.

Other Tzaddikim are also great, and have a great spiritual effect. But for the most part their realm of study and teaching is the revealed aspect of Torah, while the hidden dimension remained hidden. This means that their supernal effect in joining spiritual dimensions, different levels of the Divine Name, adds

⁹⁹ The differing levels relate to different

¹⁰ See Talmud Shabbat 88b, Bava Metzia 59b.

¹¹ Zohar III, 73a.

¹² Ruach, Neshamah, Chaya, Yechidah.

great radiance above, in celestial realms; but it is not revealed below. The anniversary of the day of their passing might be a sad day.

By contrast, Rashbi who began the revelation of the inwardness of Torah, draws that radiance below, revealed openly in our world. And this is seen particularly on his Yahrzeit, Lag B'Omer, for on the day a Tzaddik passes away his greatness becomes more apparent. Hence the joy on Lag B'Omer.

Due to this power to reveal the radiance below, as takes place in physical marriage, with numerous offspring – the chain of students of his spiritual teachings, through the generations - Rashbi's Yahrzeit is termed a 'Wedding', a day of inspiring revelation of the Divine.

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