

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summary of Points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

וכי תבואו אל הארץ קדושים תשכ"ח ש"פ בלתי מוגה

Published for Shabbat Sedra Kedoshim

3 Iyyar 5784, 11 May 2024¹

REACHING FOR THE HIGHEST LEVELS

THE VERSES ABOUT 'ORLAH' WHICH ARE FOUND IN SEDRA KEDOSHIM states that 'When you come to the Land and you plant a fruit tree... for three years its fruit is forbidden to be eaten, and in the fourth year its fruit is sacred...' Its sanctity in the fourth year means that it cannot be eaten without being redeemed; in Temple times it would be eaten in Jerusalem. Then in the fifth year, the fruit of the tree is permitted and there is a promise that it will grow with tremendous abundance².

What is the spiritual meaning of this law? The Tzemach Tzedek wrote a discourse³ on this topic in which he quotes from Rabbeinu Bachya's commentary on the Torah. This commentary gives a number of different interpretations, and then states that according to the Kabbalah, the Torah forbids eating the fruit for the first three years, corresponding to the three highest Sefirot, of which we have no grasp. Corresponding to them are the three terms 'chaos and void and darkness [on the face of the deep]⁴' in the account of Creation.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains that the three highest Sefirot are Keter (Crown), Wisdom and Understanding. We do not have a true grasp of these at all, so during the corresponding first three years of growth, the fruit is forbidden. Rabbeinu Bachya continues with the idea that the fourth year corresponds to the

¹ Maamar Vechi Tavou el Ha'aretz 5728 (1968). It was printed in Dvar Malchut Acharei-Kedoshim 5780. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Leviticus 19:23-25, Sedra Kedoshim.

³ Or HaTorah, Kedoshim, p.144 ff.

⁴ Gen.1:2.

continuation of the verse from Genesis: ‘and the spirit of G-d hovered over the deep’. The Tzemach Tzedek explains this in terms of the next Sefirah, Da’at, Knowledge. Da’at is the ‘spirit’, on the central line of the Sefirot, hovering over the ‘water’ which represents the Sefirah Chesed, Kindness.

The fruit of the first three years, corresponding to the three highest Sefirot, which are beyond our grasp, is completely forbidden. But the fruit of the fourth year corresponds to Da’at, with which we have a partial connection, since Da’at is the intermediary between the cerebral Sefirot Wisdom and Understanding, and the lower Sefirot expressing emotion – Kindness, Severity, Mercy and so on. Hence the fruit of the fourth year is closer to being permitted: it can be eaten after it has been redeemed.

The Tzemach Tzedek now asks a question. In Rabbeinu Bachya, as we have seen, the fruit of the first three years is forbidden because those three years relate to the three highest Sefirot. But Likkutei Torah⁵, quoting the Zohar, declares that the fruit of the first three years is forbidden because it relates to the three impure Kelipot, the ‘shells’, the spiritually lowest aspect of existence⁶.

Is the prohibition because of the link with the highest aspect of the spiritual realms, or because of the link with the lowest?

The discourse explains that both are true. In Kabbalistic thought there is the idea that ‘the highest falls lowest’. Precisely because of their source in the very highest Sefirot, they can also be manifest at the very lowest level, in the three impure Kelipot. In practice what this means is that the fruit is totally forbidden, as is everything relating to the three lower Kelipot⁷. However, by totally avoiding the fruit of the tree in those three years, one connects it with its higher aspect: the three highest Sefirot.

For this reason, when we come to the fifth year, not only is the fruit of the tree permitted, but it grows with tremendous abundance. By firmly avoiding the negative, we can transform it into positive, on the highest level.

We can understand this further by considering the idea that all the Mitzvot derive from the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable Name of G-d. Some are from the letter Yod, expressing Wisdom; some from the first Heh,

⁵ See Likkutei Torah, Kedoshim, 29c, quoting Zohar II 244b. Likkutei Torah comprises teachings by Rabbi Shneur Zalman, edited by his grandson the Tzemach Tzedek, first published in 1848.

⁶ The ‘shells’, Kelipot, express the force of temptation towards evil. The higher Kelipah termed ‘Nogah’, literally ‘light’, can be transformed from negative to positive; but the three lower impure Kelipot are generally described as irredeemable, one simply has to avoid them.

⁷ In general, the 365 prohibitions in the Torah warn us that such and such an item, or mode of behaviour (eg theft, or adultery), relates to the three impure Kelipot. Activities permitted by the Torah relate to the higher Kelipah Nogah, and can be the route to transforming it to good.

Understanding, some from the letter Vav, the six Sefirot Kindness, Severity, Mercy, Endurance, Submission, Dedication, and some from the concluding letter Heh, Kingship or Fulfilment. But the Law of Orlah is on a different level, it relates to the 'tip of the Yod', the slender point on the letter Yod reaching upwards towards the Infinite. This is the aspect which reaches upwards to the first three Sefirot, beyond our grasp. But because we were able to resolutely avoid the fruit in the first three years, this higher dimension now becomes accessible.

This is also the meaning of the soul coming from an exalted supernal realm into the body. It descends through the levels of the four worlds, as expressed in the Elokay Neshamah prayer: Emanation (expressed in the words 'it is pure'), Creation, Formation and Action (expressed in the words 'You blew it into me'). But its descent is in order to rise to a much higher level, which it is able to do on account of the exalted source of the physical body, [and the product of our service of self-restraint and avoidance of transgression.]

This too is the real meaning of our entry into the Land of Israel. It is a physical land, demanding physical work, and Chassidic teachings explain that the Spies did not want to enter the Land precisely because of that quality. But in fact it is through inhabiting the Land in its practical physical reality that the Jewish people as a whole are able to link with the highest dimension, the boundless abundance of the 'fifth year', the intensity of holiness beyond the worlds which becomes part of wholesome daily life.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care