

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה ומקנה רב ש"פ מטות-מסעי תש"כ בלתי מוגה
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BEING WITH G-D IN THE WORLD

IS *DEVEKUT*, CLEAVING TO G-D, POSSIBLE WHEN A PERSON IS DEEPLY INVOLVED IN WORLDLY MATTERS? Or, in order to feel spiritual closeness to G-d, does one have to be apart from the hurly burly of life? This is an ancient question, which is embedded in the teachings of the Torah.

In Sedra Mattot² we learn about a request made to Moses by the Tribes of Reuven and Gad. They had great flocks of cattle, and they saw that the area East of the Jordan was fine pasture land. They asked Moses if they could settle on the Eastern side of the Jordan, rather than on the western side, where the other Tribes would dwell.

Moses was very upset. He compared their request to the terrible incident with the Twelve Spies of forty years previously, when the people had said they did not want to enter the Land. As a result they had been condemned to wander in the desert till that generation died out. Now the Tribes of Reuven and Gad seemed to be making the same error.

The two tribes responded that this was not their intention at all. In fact, their menfolk would cross the Jordan together with everyone else, and would lead them in battle to conquer the Land. Only when this was successfully accomplished would they return to the eastern side of the Jordan which they would make their home. Moses accepted this.

¹ Maamar Umiknah Rav 5720 (1960), said on Shabbat Parshat Mattot-Mas'ey. It was not edited by the Rebbe. It was printed in Dvar Malchut Matot 5774.

² Deut. Ch.32

What are the real issues here? Let us first understand the real problem with the earlier Spies.

Chassidic teachings explain that the Spies were very spiritual people. They loved the ethereal atmosphere of the desert, where they were guided by the sacred Pillar of Cloud by day, and Pillar of Fire by night. Their food was spiritual Manna from Heaven, for water they had the Well of Miriam. Their daily lives were protected and secluded by the Clouds of Glory. In this special mode of life they could feel intimately close to G-d every moment of the day or night.

They feared that if they entered the Land, an all too physical and earthly realm, where they would have to plow and reap, they would lose this sense of closeness with the Divine. This was why they tried to dissuade everyone from attempting to conquer the Land of Israel.

The Maamar explains that Moses was concerned that the Tribes of Reuven and Gad were making the same mistake. When they assured him that they would cross the Jordan to help the rest of the Jewish people conquer the Land and settle there, he was placated. He therefore gave them (and also half the Tribe of Menasheh) portions of land on the eastern side of the Jordan.

The subtext of the story is that Moses knew that the real way to be close to G-d is not by being in the ethereal atmosphere of the camp in the desert, but by entering the Land, by ploughing and reaping and doing everything else necessary for daily life. The Mitzvot of the Torah illuminate the details of ordinary work and life so that they become a means of achieving intimate closeness with Divine. You can be in the world, and close to G-d at the same time.

This issue is found also earlier in the Torah, in the distinction between the Patriarchs, and also most of Jacob's sons, on the one hand, and the figure of Joseph on the other.

The Patriarchs and the sons of Jacob, excluding Joseph, were all shepherds. Rabbi Shneur Zalman explained this was because they wanted a life of contemplation. This was compatible with the solitary life of a shepherd. But they felt that if they would live in a busy city, they would not be able to maintain the same level of spirituality.

Joseph, by contrast, was completely different. In his early youth he had not been a shepherd to the same extent as his brothers, but instead stayed at home with his elderly father, imbibing a deep sense of devotion to the Divine. When his brothers sold him to Egypt, he became the overseer in Potiphar's house.

This was a responsible and active role, but he was still able to be in a state of *devekut*, of cleaving to G-d. When he was unjustly thrown into prison, as a result of the inappropriate behavior of Potiphar's wife, he was made an overseer of the other prisoners, which, again, was a demanding position, in difficult surroundings, but he maintained his conscious devotion to G-d.

Later when Joseph became Viceroy he had the enormous responsibility of overseeing the harvest and storage of grain throughout Egypt during the seven years of plenty, and then controlling its sale to the thousands who flocked to Egypt during the famine. Despite his practical and organizational responsibilities, he was also able to be in a state of utter *devekut*, cleaving to the Divine.

The discourse explains that this attainment was a result of the greater spiritual power of Joseph. For him, worldliness did not 'disturb'. He was able to use it to serve G-d, without being distracted in any way.

For the Jewish people as a whole, after the Giving of the Torah, the path of Joseph is the path we should choose. Seeking to follow the way of the Patriarchs, and therefore keeping remote from busy life was the error of the Spies. Moses suspected the Tribes of Reuven and Gad of the same approach, until they convinced him that they would fully take part in conquering the Land. Their readiness for self-sacrifice in this task showed that their choosing to live on the eastern side of the Jordan was not because of reluctance to be involved with the world, but simply, as they said, because that area was suitable pasture-land for their many cattle.

The message for us is two-fold: an appreciation of the need for the spirituality of *devekut*, cleaving to G-d; and also a readiness to enter the world, knowing that it is in the world that we can reach our fullest spiritual potential.

Through our practical activities we are, in fact, transforming the world, as Chassidic teachings explain, making it a dwelling for the Divine Presence, which will be revealed with the coming of Moshiach.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care