

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

פרשת נשא תשכ"ה ד"ה נשא את ראש בלתי מוגה

Published for Shabbat Sedra Naso

9 Sivan 5784, 15 June 2024¹

LEARNING FROM THE LEVITES

THERE WERE THREE GROUPS OF LEVITES, KEHOT, GERSHON AND MERARI. THEIR JOB WAS TO TRANSPORT AND SET UP THE SANCTUARY. Kehot, described in Sedra Bemidbar, carried the sacred objects which were in the Sanctuary, such as the golden Ark of the Law. They carried this on their shoulders, by means of staves. This expresses the service of Torah study. The Torah uses the term 'lift up their heads'² concerning the Kehot Levites, because Torah study connects one to exalted levels, to Keter.

Our Sedra Naso begins with the next group of Levites, the descendants of Gershon. About them it states 'Lift up the heads of the children of Gershon, in addition'³. The task of Gershon was to carry the curtains of the Sanctuary. Wagons were provided for this; but they would have had to carry the curtains some way themselves to get them to the wagons⁴. The curtains express a surrounding radiance, and the force of the Mitzvot. The Torah states about Gershon 'lift up their heads' for the Mitzvot too connect a person to Keter. But they do not reach quite as high as Torah.

Then comes the third group of Levites, Merari. They carry the wooden beams which formed the main structure of the Sanctuary, and were then covered by the curtains⁵. Merari (relating to the word *mar*, bitter, expressing awe) represents the service of awe of G-d, and its counterpart, love of the Divine. This service is

¹ Maamar Naso et Rosh 5725 (1965). It was printed in Dvar Malchut Naso 5776. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Numbers 4:2, Sedra Bemidbar.

³ Numbers 4:22, Sedra Naso.

⁴ This point is made in a Sicha said before the discourse, published in Likkutei Sichot vol.18 p.49 ff.

⁵ Num.4:29-33.

important, as will be seen; but it does not reach Keter as do Torah study and Mitzvot, and therefore the Torah does not use the words ‘lift up their heads’ concerning the Merari Levites.

The discourse explains that Kehot and Gershon are considered to be ‘moving’, while the Merari Levites are considered to be standing still. This is because Kehot and Gershon actually carry the objects they transport (although Gershon does so for only a short distance, as mentioned above). But Merari’s transport of the heavy wooden beams is only with the waggons; the Merari Levites do not personally carry the beams (they just manoeuvre them onto the waggons). Therefore they are considered ‘stationary’ compared with Kehot and Gershon.

A verse in Zacharia⁶ ‘I will give you the power to move among these who are stationary’ is applied to the three groups of Levites: Kehot and Gershon move, but Merari is stationary. The wooden beams which Merari carry on their wagons are described as ‘cedar wood beams, standing’⁷, and ‘standing’ can mean both standing upright and standing still.

We could understand this in terms of the power of Torah and Mitzvot, contrasting with emotion. Study of Torah (Kehot) and performance of Mitzvot (Gershon) make a real ‘connection’, and can be seen as carrying the person forward. Emotions of love and awe (Merari) are beautiful, but might not carry the person anywhere.

But the Rebbe asks a question. Surely, the whole point of the Sanctuary and the service of the Levites is the journey through the desert? Aren’t they all travelling, Merari as well as Kehot and Gershon?

The answer is that indeed the Merari Levites are travelling, using the wagons which carry the beams of wood. The waggons represent the Animal Soul. Through feeling love and awe, for example in prayer, a person refines and even transforms his or her Animal Soul. This is the achievement of Merari.

The Kabbalah explains that in certain respects the Animal Soul, from the World of Tohu (Chaos), has more power than the Divine Soul, which is from the lower world of Tikkun (Repair)⁸. The power of emotion in the Animal Soul is very intense. The service of Merari activates the power of the Animal Soul and channels its force in a sacred direction.

⁶ Zecharia 3:7.

⁷ Exodus 26:15, Sedra Terumah.

⁸ The Kabbalah explains that in the higher world of Tohu, Chaos, there was ‘the breaking of the vessels’, causing displaced spiritual energy to become the source of the Kelippot, shells, which act as the force of evil. The World of Tikkun, Repair, is the rebuilt spiritual realm which is being completed by our service of the Divine, in the process which leads to the Redemption.

This then inspires the Divine Soul. The Animal Soul and Divine Soul together move forward, expressed by the service of Gershon which combines both the wagons and also personally carrying the curtains. So too, one could say, the Mitzvot incorporate both the activity and enthusiasm of the Animal Soul with the inner spirituality of the Divine Soul.

But a higher, purely spiritual achievement is the ultimate ascent of the Divine Soul, through Torah study, to an inner, intimate union with the Divine. This is the service of Kehot.

We thus see how the service of the three clans of Levites expresses the service of the individual coming close to the Divine, in three stages: Merari, Gershon, Kehot.

The discourse adds that in fact, the ultimate goal is not the highly spiritual intimacy of the Divine Soul with G-d expressed by Kehot, but the channelling and transformation of the Animal Soul and of the physical body, the service of Merari. This expresses the goal of the Divine ‘dwelling in *this* world’, which was the initial purpose of Creation.

This goal will be revealed with the coming of Moshiach, when, according to Chassidic teachings, the body will be seen to be higher than the soul. For now, this is the potential within each of us. Not a distant potential, says the Rebbe, but something very close, like a burning coal in which, for a time, the flame is hidden. But almost without effort, suddenly, the flame can be revealed.

As stated in *Ani Maamin*⁹ ‘I await [Moshiach’s] coming every day’, and when the Jewish people repent, ‘at once they will be redeemed’¹⁰, and Repentance, Teshuvah, can take place in one moment, in one instant...¹¹

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁹ The popular phrasing of no. 12 of the Rambam’s Thirteen Principles of Faith (in full in his commentary on the Mishnah, introduction to chapter 10 of Sanhedrin).

¹⁰ Rambam Laws of Teshuvah 7:5.

¹¹ Zohar I 129a.