

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים ש"פ מצורע שבת הגדול תשל"ג בלתי מוגה

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THE OTHER ASPECT OF PHARAOH

THE MAIN SECTION OF THE HAGGADA BEGINS ‘WE WERE SLAVES TO PHARAOH IN EGYPT’. This is a quotation from the Torah² where it is presented as the answer to the Wise Child (as explained by the Sages), who asks in the verse before ‘What are the testimonies, statutes and laws which Hashem our G-d has commanded you?’.

The Discourse taught by the Rebbe the day before this one, on 11th Nisan 1973³ explained that the Wise Child is asking how one can have an intense union with the Divine, expressed in the words ‘G-d has commanded you’. The Wise Child understands this phrase with its Chassidic meaning not of command but connection⁴. How can the practical Mitzvot give a deep spiritual connection with the Divine?

Further, as explained in the first discourse and reiterated in the second, the very terms for those Mitzvot indicate how far the person might be from feeling such a spiritual connection.

Thus ‘testimonies’ implies a person who does not sense G-dliness at all. He needs a ‘testimony’ in order to tell him about the presence of the Divine. If he were aware of the Divine in even the slightest way, he would not need a ‘testimony’.

¹ Maamar Avadim Hayinu LePharaoh 5733 (1973), Shabbat Metzora, Shabbat Hagadol. It was printed in Dvar Malchut Metzora 5784. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Deut.6:21, Vaetchanan.

³ On the Rebbe's birthday, 5733 (1973). An English summary was published for Shabbat Tazria, 5784.

⁴ The words *tziva* ‘connect’ and *tzavta* ‘connect’ (in Aramaic) are considered linked.

Similarly the term Statutes, Chukim in Hebrew, relating to the word ‘engrave’. Engraving letters in stone is a very difficult process, compared with ordinary writing with ink on paper. Using this term for the Mitzvot suggests that the person has a struggle to get himself to keep the Mitzvot.

So too the word ‘laws’, Mishpatim. The general explanation of this word is that it means laws which can be comprehended by one’s intellect (contrasting with Statutes which are above understanding, one of the aspects which makes them difficult for this individual). But intellect itself can be problematic in terms of a person’s relationship with the Divine. Sometimes it might be a secularizing force; but even if it is a sacred form of intellect, immersed in Torah teachings, it can be limiting. When a step of self-abandon is required, leading to spiritual union with G-d, sometimes sacred intellect can get in the way. The person feels so full of their self-worth and their own subtle understanding that they cannot step beyond it...

Hence the question of the Wise Child is, how can these practical laws, with their implicit limitations as described, be the way for a person to achieve spiritual union with the Divine? Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to have a more spiritual relationship with G-d, like the Patriarchs?

The answer given in the first discourse, taught on the previous day, was that the fact that the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt enabled them and the physical world to go through a process of refinement. The very problems involved in keeping the Mitzvot, as described in both discourses, help a person achieve self-transcendence through keeping them. In this way through the practical Mitzvot he or she can bond with the Divine in a way which is higher than the purely spiritual bond of the Patriarchs.

This second discourse explains this process of refinement of the physical world in more detail.

The first step to this explanation is a question: one can understand the significance of being slaves in Egypt as a process of refinement. The word ‘slaves’, *avadim*, relates to ‘*orot avudim*, the Hebrew words for refining an animal hide and turning it into useful leather or parchment. In that sense the slavery in Egypt can be understood as a positive process. But what has Pharaoh got to do with this? Why does the Haggadah text state ‘we were slaves *to Pharaoh* in Egypt’?

The discourse presents a further way to understand the meaning of Pharaoh. The letters of this word can be rearranged, from Pharaoh to HaOreph: פֶּרַעַה – הָעֵרֶף. HaOreph means ‘the back of the neck’. The discourse explains that this concept

is to be understood as it relates kabbalistically to the higher realm of the Sefirot, rooted in the World of Chaos (Tohu), higher than the World of Repair (Tikkun).

The Divine radiance in the World of Chaos is higher and more intense than that in the World of Repair. That is why there was the Breaking of the Vessels, due to the intensity of the radiance, and the sparks of radiance fell below to the lowest aspect of this world, the realm of Egypt, the realm of ultimate limitation [and its evil King, Pharaoh].

The word Pharaoh פרעה also relates to a term in the Zohar אַתְּפָרְיֵעוּ כָּל נְהוּרֵינָא ‘all radiance was exposed’⁵, emphasizing the intensity of the spiritual radiance which has now fallen into our physical world, as explained in the Kabbalah. This has become the ‘sparks of holiness’ trapped in material existence.

Our lives, guided by the Torah, engaging with the physical world through the practical commandments, including both positive involvement (eating kosher food, for example) and negative involvement (such as avoiding non-kosher food) enable us to elevate these sacred sparks. Many such sparks were raised, when we left Egypt thousands of years ago. But some remain, which we are working on now, in our long and difficult Exile.

The challenges that we sometimes face in keeping the practical Mitzvot are precisely the way we engage with the hidden sacred sparks and elevate them. Through this process we will achieve our forthcoming Redemption, of which it says ‘like the days of your going out of Egypt, I [G-d] will show you wonders’⁶. May this be speedily in our days!

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁵ Zohar I 210a.

⁶ Micah 7:15.