

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
פרשת פנחס תשכ"ז ד"ה שאו ידיכם קודש בלתי מוגה
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LIFTING ONE'S HANDS TO G-D

PSALM 134:2 TELLS US TO LIFT UP OUR HANDS TO G-D AND TO BLESS HIM... The Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn (1880-1950) said a discourse beginning with this verse, on the Shabbat after his miraculous release from Soviet captivity in 1927. Then he asks: But how can one bless G-d? G-d is Infinite and, surely, utterly beyond our blessings.

Chassidic teachings explain that there are two levels of the Divine Name. The Upper Name and the Lower. The verse means that we reach up, so to speak, to the Upper Name and draw down a spiritual flow to the Lower.

As the Psalm continues, the effect of this is that "G-d - the Upper Name - will bless us from Zion, Maker of heaven and earth". The verse means that when this exalted blessing flows to us, the Essence of our soul, termed here Zion, but also called Yechida, is revealed. That we human beings should exist in this lower world, and yet be able to experience the revelation of the essence of our soul, is the true purpose of Creation of Heaven and Earth.

This links with the Sedra of the Week which speaks of the single bull which is brought as an offering on Shemini Atzeret². This contrasts with the many bulls brought each day of Succot³. The numbers of bulls offered on Succot total 70, corresponding to the seventy nations. The single bull of Shemini Atzeret

¹ Maamar S'u Yadeichem Kodesh 5727 (1967). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Pinchas 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Numbers (Sedra Pinchas) 29:35. Shemini Atzeret is the concluding festival of Succot and includes Simchat Torah, the Rejoicing of the Law.

³ See Numbers 29:12-34.

corresponds to the Jewish people who are called One, Yechidah, in the feminine, because they bond with G-d, Yachid - One, in the masculine.

How does a person achieve this flow from one level of Divine Name to another, bringing about this revelation of the essence of the soul? The first step in service of G-d is Prayer, which is the equivalent of the Offerings in the Temple. When bringing an Offering, one lays one's hands on its head, an action which is called Semicha. The ten fingers of our hands represent the ten Sefirot, the spiritual emanations of the Divine.

The effect of this action, in a sense drawing from the human being down into the animal offering, via the ten Sefirot, is to set up a similar movement on the Divine plane. This means it causes a radiance to flow from the exalted level of Chochma, Wisdom, represented by the person bringing the offering, down to the Sefirah Malchut, Kingship, which is represented by the animal offering. This is like drawing from the higher level of the Divine Name to the lower.

Chassidic teachings explain that there are different ways of spelling the Divine Name 'in full'. Thus instead of just writing Yud, one writes Yud, Vav, Daled: ךי. Similarly with the other letters. One way of writing in full leads to a Name with the numerical value 45, which is also the numerical value of Adam, Man. Another way of writing the Divine Name in full leads to a Name with the numerical value 52, which is also the numerical value of Behemah, animal.

These are the two levels of the Divine Name, one corresponding to the person bringing the offering, and the other to the animal which is being offered. The action of Semicha, putting one's ten fingers on the animal's head, like the ten Sefirot, is an important element in this process. The flow from the higher level to the lower is in order to connect with the spiritual energy in the animal and in this world as a whole, so as to elevate it and connect it with the Infinite beyond.

The term Semicha was also used when Moses transmitted spiritual authority to Joshua, and similarly other forms of transmission of authority⁴. One such line of transmission is the line of Chabad Rebbeim, from the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) to the Previous Rebbe⁵.

As regards the individual and prayer, the concept of Semicha is drawing an Upper radiance down into our world. The process of Prayer begins with the Shema before going to bed. The person assesses what he or she achieved during the day. With deep feeling the person decides tomorrow will be better than today, and he or she gives himself to G-d with dedication. Then the next

⁴ The same term Semicha, is also used for the ordination of a Rabbi today.

⁵ We understand this as reaching also our Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson.

morning comes and the person contemplates G-dliness while saying the Psalms of Praise, and the blessings before the Shema.

In the Shema the person says “and you should love G-d... with all your heart”, in a totally sincere way, indeed loving G-d with both aspects of the heart, not only the Divine Soul but also the Animal Soul. And then in the Amidah, the climax of prayer, the person is utterly selfless, like a servant before his Master.

Following the morning service, Jewish tradition recommends that a person should study Torah. After the meaningful prayer described here, through the Torah study which follows, a radiance shines down into the person’s soul.

In his discourse of 1927, the Previous Rebbe made the point that in order to experience Torah study in this way, it is also important to study Chassidic teachings regularly. This helps the person appreciate the Divine quality in the Torah, beyond its rational dimension. The Talmud⁶ tells us that people wonder why the Second Temple was destroyed, when so many people were great Torah scholars. The answer given is ‘because they did not make a blessing before studying Torah’. Commentators on the Talmud explain that the blessing adds awareness of G-d.

In the same way, Chassidic teachings are like the ‘prayer dimension’ within the Torah one studies. They help the person feel the Divine radiance through studying G-d’s sacred Torah.

Through this one comes to the revelation of the inner point of one’s soul, Zion, the Essence of the soul, revealed here in this lower world, which is the goal of Creation.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁶ Nedarim 81a.