

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
פרשת ראה תשמ"ה ד"ה ראה אנכי בלתי מוגה
Published for Shabbat Sedra Re'eh
25 Av 5783, 12 August 2023¹

THE BLESSING OF SIGHT

THE SEDRA BEGINS 'SEE I AM GIVING BEFORE YOU TODAY A BLESSING AND A CURSE'². Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains that this means that the highest essence of the Divine, hinted at in the word 'I', *Anochi* in Hebrew, is giving us, the entire Jewish people, a special blessing, the blessing of *sight*, meaning spiritually to perceive G-dliness in a direct way.

[‘Sight’ in this context expresses a clear relationship with the Divine, contrasting with ‘hearing’ which is more vague and ambiguous. Sight implies certainty, as in the English phrase ‘seeing is believing’.]

The Rebbe asks a question about this, because in Sedra Va-etchanan, two weeks earlier, Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains Moses’ plea to enter the Land of Israel and see it (Deut.3:25) as meaning that he was asking G-d to allow him to impart the quality of spiritual ‘sight’ to the Jewish people, but this was denied. Instead, he could only transmit to them the quality of ‘hearing’. Hence in that Sedra he says to the Jewish people ‘And now, Israel, listen...’ (Deut 4:1). The Rebbe points out that the following Torah portion, Sedra Ekev read last week, similarly begins ‘And it will be when you *listen*..’ (Deut.7:12).

This means that Moses was able to transmit the lesser quality of ‘hearing’ the Divine, but the higher level of ‘sight’ could not be transmitted. How then are we to understand Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s explanation of the beginning of this

¹ Maamar Re'eh Anochi 5748 (1988). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Re'eh 5778. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Sedra Re'eh, Deut.11:26.

week's Sedra, which says that the Jewish people were indeed blessed with the spiritual power of sight?

The Rebbe answers that the clue is the word *Anochi*, 'I'. This is an exalted aspect of the Divine, beyond the down-chaining of the worlds.

When the flow of G-dliness and of blessing is from a lower level, within the downchaining of the worlds, only the power of 'hearing' can be transmitted to the Jewish people. But when it comes from the higher level of *Anochi*, beyond the downchaining of worlds, then the higher level of the power of spiritual sight *can* be transmitted. For within the realm of downchaining, there are limitations; beyond that realm, there are no limitations.

But if the beginning of the Sedra is telling us about such a wonderful blessing from G-d to the Jewish people, as is explained by Rabbi Shneur Zalman, why does it go on to mention the idea of 'a curse'? The Rebbe explains that this blessing is so powerful that it gives the Jewish people the power to change a curse into a blessing, comparable to the way that deep repentance can change a deliberate sin into a merit.

[The Talmud in Tractate Yoma 86b dealing with Yom Kippur discusses the power of repentance. Reish Lakish states 'great is repentance, because it can transform a deliberate transgression into an accidental transgression.' But he also states: 'great is repentance, because it can transform a deliberate transgression into a positive merit.' The Talmud explains that this higher level of transformation of the transgression into a merit comes from a higher level of repentance. Thus the Rebbe goes on to explain:]

When the repentance comes from the level of *Anochi*, beyond the limited realm of the downchaining of worlds, it has an unlimited power, and can change the spiritual quality of a deliberate transgression into that of a positive meritorious deed. So too the blessing in our Sedra, emerging from the exalted level of *Anochi*, grants the power not only to 'see' G-dliness but also to transform a curse, the harsh punitive effect of negative behaviour, into a blessing³.

This idea helps us understand more clearly the spiritual service of the month of Elul.

The Hebrew word Elul - אלול - is an acronym for the verse from the Song of Songs (6:3) 'I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me' אני לדודי ודודי לי.

³ The Talmud in Moed Katan 9b tells of an incident in which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai sent his son to receive a blessing from certain great Sages. The son was upset because what they said to him sounded like curses rather than blessings. His father explained that in fact these were great blessings, but the only way they could be expressed was in a manner which sounded like curses. However, in our case, the Rebbe points out, the effect of the blessing from *Anochi* is to be able to transform real curses into their opposite, beautiful blessings.

This verse suggests that we, the Jewish people (or the Jewish individual) makes the first step towards the Divine, expressed in the words ‘I am to my Beloved’, and then the Divine responds, as in the second part of the verse: ‘and my Beloved is to me’.

This sounds very simple. But a question is asked about this process. Chassidic teaching explains that when we make a step towards G-d (as we do in the opening words of this verse - I am to my Beloved) we first need to have a spiritual input from above to get us into the mood. The verse does not mention this. It seems as if we start off from ‘cold’ and are able to launch ourselves towards G-d.

But the teaching from our Sedra solves the problem. The blessing which it describes, coming from the exalted level of *Anochi*, starts the process. And then we are able to make our step toward G-d - ‘I am to my Beloved’, and G-d responds: ‘my Beloved is to me.’.

In fact, as a result of this exalted input from the very beginning, we are able to reach an especially exalted level of response. Some kinds of input from the Divine come about as a direct effect of our spiritual service: our ‘arousal from below’ triggers the complementary ‘arousal from above’. But a higher level of Divine input is from a level which cannot be reached by our human efforts. All we can do is prepare ourselves, so as to be able to receive the exalted Divine input. This takes place through the blessing from *Anochi* described in the Sedra, followed by our efforts of ‘I am to my Beloved’ and the initial Divine response, ‘my Beloved is to me’.

This is then followed by a much more exalted Divine revelation and blessing, granting us and the entire Jewish people every aspect of goodness for the new year ahead.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care