

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
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ALONE WITH G-D

WHEN THE HIGH PRIEST ENTERS THE HOLY OF HOLIES, THE TORAH TELLS that he should be completely alone. "No man should be in the Sanctuary when he comes to atone"². The Jerusalem Talmud³ tells us that not even angels were permitted to be there. This is because the revelation there at that moment, was beyond the downchaining of the worlds, as is explained in a discourse of the Tzemach Tzedek⁴.

A hint to this is expressed in the Midrash⁵, which asks by what merit did the High Priest enter the Holy of Holies? It answers, by the merit of Brit Milah, circumcision, which, taking place on the eighth day of the baby's life, denotes the number 'eight' which is beyond the downchaining of worlds, which is signified by the number seven.

This shows that there are two distinct levels of holiness: the sacred realm of the Holy of Holies, and then the further fact that the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, which lifts it to a higher level of sanctity when even angels cannot be there.

The Tzemach Tzedek's discourse continues by explaining that Repentance and Atonement are above the downchaining of worlds. He quotes the Talmudic teaching that 'great is Repentance for it brings Healing to the world'⁶, and points out that Healing is expressed in the eighth blessing of the Amidah, 'Refa'enu, heal us', and that this corresponds to Brit Milah being on the eighth day.

¹ Maamar VeChol Adam Lo Yihyeh beOhel Moed, Shabbat Teshuvah 5723 (1962), published in 1990 as *Kuntres Vav Tishrei*, edited by the Rebbe. Republished in Sefer HaMaamarim Melukat vol.1, p.74.

² Ex.16:17, Acharei Mot. This is in the Torah reading on Yom Kippur.

³ Yoma 1:5.

⁴ The third Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, 1789-1866.

⁵ Shemot Rabbah 38:8.

⁶ Yoma 86a.

The idea that Yom Kippur relates to the number eight is also seen in the statement in the Mishnah⁷ that for seven days previous to Yom Kippur, the High Priest is separated from his wife, to ensure he will be in a state of purity. At that time he is also trained in the special Temple procedures of Yom Kippur. Thus Yom Kippur itself takes place on the day after those seven days: on the eighth day. Another example of the number eight on Yom Kippur is seen in the eight times the High Priest sprinkles the blood of the offering in the Holy of Holies, described as ‘once above, and seven below’⁸. This is referred to in the Liturgy in the repetition of the Musaf Prayer⁹.

Why does Yom Kippur have to draw from a spiritual level beyond the downchaining of worlds? Let us try to understand its spiritual effect. The universe was created by G-d through the Name Elokim. This is a lower level of G-dliness, relating to Nature¹⁰. Then the Torah was given to the Jewish people, with the goal that they would draw the radiance of the higher Name the Tetragrammaton¹¹ into the realm of Nature, thus drawing the Tetragrammaton into Elokim. This can be achieved through keeping the Mitzvot, for they achieve a flow from the Tetragrammaton, first into the person (or the Jewish people) keeping the Mitzvot, and then into the world as a whole.

However, since the Jewish people, or any particular individual, do not always act in a perfect way, and indeed might make serious errors, this process may not take place in the intended way. Consequently there has to be some kind of repair of the system. This takes place by means of a spiritual revelation from a higher dimension. This is seen in the concept of Teshuvah, Repentance, expressed in the verse ‘this Mitzva [of Teshuvah] which *Anochi*, I am giving you’¹². This term *Anochi* also relates to the Giving of the Torah which begins with the words ‘*Anochi*, I am the L-rd your G-d...’¹³. *Anochi* is beyond the Tetragrammaton, beyond the downchaining of worlds. This is the level of Repentance. Because of sin, whether of the individual or the nation, Repentance is required, and Repentance comes from a more exalted realm.

We learn more about Repentance from the following passage from the Sages. They tell us of a series of different responses to the question ‘what should the sinner do?’. Wisdom says: let him die; Prophecy says – let him achieve atonement through suffering; the Torah says – let him bring an offering to the Temple. But the Holy One says – let him Repent and he will be forgiven¹⁴.

⁷ Mishnah Yoma 1:1.

⁸ Mishnah in Yoma 53b.

⁹ In the section called ‘The Avodah’ (Service).

¹⁰ The Hebrew for Nature הטבע (5+9+2+70) has the same Gematria as the Divine Name Elokim, אלהים (1+30+5+10+40).

¹¹ The sacred Name of G-d with four letters which today may not be pronounced.

¹² Deut. 30:11, Nitzavim.

¹³ Ex.20:2, Yitro.

¹⁴ Jerusalem Talmud Makot 2:6.

This helps us understand the power of Repentance. When the Torah says let him bring an offering, this means first he repents, transforming his deliberate sin into an accidental sin. Then his offering in the Temple atones for that accidental sin. But the Holy One speaks of a more exalted level of Repentance, in which deliberate sins are transformed into merits.

The idea of this exalted level of Repentance is included in the Torah – which itself teaches us about Repentance and about Yom Kippur. But at the same time, this level of Repentance is beyond the Torah. Indeed, Yom Kippur itself is higher than Torah, and in a sense it is even higher than Repentance.

This is because of the concept that ‘the essence of the day (of Yom Kippur) effects atonement’¹⁵. This means an exalted level of revelation from the very Essence of the Divine, which, after the person’s own personal Repentance, achieves an even higher level of atonement and bond with the Divine.

Thus one aspect of the number eight is Brit Milah, which is a Mitzva. A second aspect is the concept of Repentance, which is higher than the Mitzvot (and therefore is effective when a person does not keep the Mitzvot). The third level is Yom Kippur which reaches even higher, to the Essence of the Divine.

The central aspect of the Yom Kippur service in the Temple was at the moments when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. There he was alone with G-d, as we read earlier: even angels could not be there.

This wonderful power of Yom Kippur is particularly expressed at its climax, the concluding service of Neilah, when the highest aspect of the Soul is revealed, and bonds with G-d. Neilah literally means ‘locking’, referring to the locking of the gates of Heaven, because at this time of Neilah the Jewish people and each individual, like the High Priest alone in the Holy of Holies, are ‘locked in’ alone with the Essence of the Divine.

This solitary quality of the High Priest in the Holy of Holies parallels the time when Joseph was alone¹⁶ when he revealed himself to his brothers. This too was a moment of revelation of the Essence. This revelation of the Essence is expressed in an incident with Joseph, for his name was given with the words ‘let G-d add for me another son’(Gen.30:24). Joseph represents ‘the other’ becoming ‘a son’, or being recognised as a son. The one who thinks he or she is far away is actually near.

This move from ‘other’ to ‘son’ is central to the Torah and the purpose of Creation, and is the key to the way in which Yom Kippur reveals the Essence, bringing transformation to the individual, to the Jewish people, and ultimately to the world.

After Yom Kippur comes Succot, and then come the climactic Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. The revelation of the Essence is revealed than as well, in an

¹⁵ See Shavuot 13a, Rambam Laws of Repentance 1:3.

¹⁶ ie no Egyptians were present, only Joseph and his brothers. See Gen. 45:1.

openly joyful mode, instead of the previous serious mode of Yom Kippur. In their joy with the Torah, the entire Jewish people, whether seemingly 'far' or 'near', are all united, alone together with the Divine.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care