

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

חג השבועות תשכ"ה ד"ה בשעה שעלה משה בלתי מוגה

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THE POWER OF SELF RESTRAINT – REFINING THE ANIMAL SOUL

THE TALMUD² TELLS US THAT WHEN MOSES ASCENDED MOUNT SINAI TO RECEIVE the Torah the angels were shocked to see a human being there. What is man born of woman doing here? they asked. He has come to get the Torah, said G-d. 'Keep Your glorious Torah in Heaven!' responded the angels.

G-d told Moses to give them an answer. Moses said, what is written in the Torah? I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt. Did you angels go down into Egypt? Were you slaves to Pharaoh? Why should you have the Torah?

What else is written in the Torah? Do not serve idols. Do you angels live among idolaters who might influence you to serve idols? What else is written there? Do not swear falsely. Do you do business together so you might come to litigation in court? What else is written there? Keep the Sabbath. Do you work so that you have to rest? What else? Honour your parents... do you angels have parents? Why should you have the Torah?

What else is written there? Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal. Do you suffer from jealousy (which might lead you to murder)? Do you have an evil desire (which might tempt you to adultery or theft)? So why do you need the Torah...?

The Talmud tells that the angels accepted this argument.

¹ Maamar Besh'a She'ala Moshe 5725 (1965). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Naso Shavuot 5779. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Shabbat 88b ff.

The Rebbe discusses this account, and points out that Moses was making two different kinds of claim. One is that the angels have no connection to the laws in the Torah. They were never slaves in Egypt, do not live among idolaters, do not do business, do not work and do not have parents. The laws which relate to such aspects of human life simply do not apply to them.

The second claim which Moses presents is that the angels do not have the power of jealousy, nor an evil desire, so the laws which specifically concern battling with one's negative feelings, such as not to murder, nor commit adultery nor steal, likewise do not apply to the angels.

This raises the question of the relationship of the Ten Commandments and the Giving of the Torah to the general task to refine one's Animal Soul. On the one hand the fact that we were given Commands by G-d leads to a refining of the Animal Soul, just by virtue of the fact that we keep the commandments, despite contrary temptations. A second aspect is that refining the Animal Soul is an important part of our preparation to receive the Torah, during the seven weeks of counting the Omer. Each week we refined one of the aspects of our Animal Soul, as expressed in the seven Divine Attributes, the Sefirot³.

Concerning the counting of the Omer, the Midrash quotes the verse 'you should count for yourselves seven complete weeks'⁴ and comments 'when are the weeks complete? When the Jewish people fulfil the Will of the Divine'⁵. In Chassidic thought⁶ we find that this 'fulfilling the Will of the Divine' means they achieve a love with total dedication to the Divine, beyond any limit of Reason.

Now, the main aspect of the Revelation of the Torah to the Jewish people is expressed in the opening words of the Ten Commandments⁷: I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of the land of Egypt. The first word, *Anochi*, 'I', expresses the Divine Essence. This relates to taking you out of the Land of Egypt, which means going beyond all limitations. For Egypt *mitzrayim*, signifies limitations, *meytzarim*. This would suggest that the great love beyond all limitations is the key to receiving the Torah. But the way that this idea is expressed in the Midrash, great love is a helpful adjunct, but not the main thing.

The main thing, the Rebbe explains, is the elevation of the Animal Soul.

³ Thus we refine the our personal attribute of Kindness in the first week, of Severity in the second, then Mercy, Victory, Submission, Dedication, Fulfilment.

⁴ Leviticus Emor 23:15.

⁵ Vayikra Rabba 28:3.

⁶ Likkutei Torah Shelach, 42c.

⁷ Exodus 20:2.

To understand this, let us consider another concept in Chassidic thought based on a verse in Proverbs: as the water reflects a man's face, so the heart of one person reflects that of another⁸.

This means the emotions of two individuals are reciprocal. In terms of our discussion, this means the person and the Divine.

When the person considers the Divine love for him or her, this arouses love for the Divine in one's heart. Further, the Rebbe explains that there is an even deeper interaction between the Jewish people and G-d. The image of the person's spiritual service of G-d is reflected, so to speak, in the 'water' of the Divine Oneness.

This leads to the idea that the Animal Soul of the Jew links with the spiritual veils+ which the Kabbalists describe as key elements causing concealment of the Divine in the spiritual aspect of the cosmos. Hence if the Jew succeeds in refining his or her Animal Soul, then the veils in the spiritual cosmos are purified and made more transparent.

This leads to the revelation of the Divine Essence. Further, when the Animal Soul is purified the person's Neshama, their Divine Soul, is able to express its great love for the Divine.

Hence we see that the effort to refine one's Animal Soul, which is both the preparation for and the effect of the Giving of the Torah, leads to the revelation of the Divine *Anochi*, and the 'Great Love' of the person's Neshama, beyond all limitations.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁸ Prov. 27:19