

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Summary of Points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
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## BEYOND NATURE IN NATURE

**O**N THE SHABBAT BEFORE (OR ON) ROSH CHODESH NISAN, THERE IS AN ADDITIONAL TORAH READING from a second Torah Scroll which presents the commands from G-d to Moses in the last stage of the preparations for the Exodus. The passage begins 'This month' – meaning the month of Nisan, the month of the Exodus – 'shall be for you.. the first of the months of the year.'<sup>2</sup> Earlier Chabad Chassidic teachings explain that originally Tishrei, the month of the Creation of the world, was the first month. With G-d's command 'This month shall be for you... the first of the months of the year', Nisan, the month of Redemption from Egypt, was being designated the first month, and Tishrei then became the seventh month.

A hint to this is found in the Aramaic Targum to the Book of Kings. A verse which refers to the month of Tishrei as 'the month of the ancient ones'<sup>3</sup> is translated as 'the month which the ancient ones called the first month but now it is the seventh month'.

This change can be understood in terms of a Midrash<sup>4</sup>, which states that 'When G-d chose His universe, He fixed in it heads of the months and of the years. When He chose Jacob and his descendants, he appointed the head of the month of Redemption.' This means that as regards the creation of the universe, Tishrei was established as the first month. But when G-d chose the Jewish people,

<sup>1</sup> Maamar HaChodesh Hazeh Lachem, Parshat Vayikra 5748 (1988). Printed in Hitva'aduyot 5748. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 12:2, Sedra Bo.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 8:2.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus Rabbah 15:11.

bringing them out of Egypt, He designated the month of their Redemption, Nisan, as the first month.

Another way of expressing this, is that as regards the creation of the world, Tishrei is the first month; but as regards the Torah, which is higher than the limitations of the world, Nisan is the first month.

The *Akedat Yitzhak*<sup>5</sup>, quoted in Chassidic teachings, gives further explanation. There are two ways in which a person can be inspired about the exalted greatness of G-d. One is by observing Nature, in which one sees the constancy of the life-forms in the world, and of the heavenly bodies, expressed in the verse that all Nature ‘will not cease’.<sup>6</sup> This constancy reveals the greatness of the Divine because it stems from the constancy and unchangeability of the Divine, ‘I am G-d, Who does not change’<sup>7</sup>. The second way of being inspired about the greatness of G-d, is by thinking of the miraculous, in which G-d suspends the laws of Nature.

We can thus see that Tishrei represents the grandeur of G-d as Creator of Nature, and Nisan represents His grandeur as the worker of miracles beyond Nature, and of Giving the Torah.

The Rebbe points out that both of these express the concept of the Essence of the Divine, or as the Rambam puts it: the Truth of His existence<sup>8</sup>. Creation of something from nothing (*ex nihilo*) derives from G-d’s Essence, as is explained in Tanya<sup>9</sup>, and a miracle too is an expression of the Divine Essence, beyond the ordinary rules of Nature.

The discourse now asks: since, according to the above, the month of Nisan has displaced the month of Tishrei as the first of the months of the year, what is the significance of emphasizing that Tishrei is the seventh month, as we see in the Aramaic Targum to the verse in the Book of Kings? Surely, Tishrei represents Nature and Nisan represents miracles and Torah. These are two distinct and different aspects. But by emphasizing that Tishrei is the seventh month after Nisan, there seems to be an implication that Tishrei is actually linked to Nisan.

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<sup>5</sup> By the 15<sup>th</sup> cent. Spanish Rabbi Yitzhak Arama. See there Parshat Bo, on the verse Ex. 12:2, Gate 38.

<sup>6</sup> Gen.8:22, Sedra Noach. There is a Jewish philosophical idea that the various species of life on Earth are constant, although individual members of the species die, and that by contrast the heavenly bodies are in themselves individually constant: the sun, moon, planets, stars. Note that for Maimonides, the constancy of the laws of Nature and of the movements of the heavenly bodies express the greatness of the Divine (Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, 1:5).

<sup>7</sup> Malachi 3:6.

<sup>8</sup> Laws of Foundations of the Torah, 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> Tanya, part IV, sec. 20 (fol.130b).

The answer is that once the month of Redemption, miracles and Torah is established, the month of Nisan, there is a special input from that perception of the greatness of the Divine into one's perception of Nature. Although previously, one could look at Nature and through that be inspired at the greatness of the Divine, when one looks with eyes which have seen the miraculous, the beyond Nature, and the sacred Torah – one sees Nature in a different way. One sees the beyond Nature in Nature itself.

This process is also expressed in the relation between Torah thought and knowledge (Nisan) and the 'secular' realm (Tishrei).

In halachic terms, there are aspects of general non-Jewish custom and behaviour, which become part of Torah thought. For example, some of the general customs in the non-Jewish world of business (such as a hand-shake defining the clinch of a deal) are viewed as being included in Jewish law. Even more so, the concept *dina demalchuta dina* 'the law of the Kingdom is law' presents the idea that secular law is generally included in Torah law.

This means that in these aspects of secular custom and law – 'Nature', Tishrei – is revealed the miraculous, Torah dimension: Nisan.

This can also be seen in terms of secular wisdom and Torah. The Rambam tells us in his Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon, that he has learnt this astronomical knowledge from the Greek books on astronomy. Previously, he said, the Jewish Prophets and the tribe of Issachar had this knowledge. However, those books were lost. But the Greek books on astronomy<sup>10</sup> which state accurate facts about the observation of the moon can be relied on, says the Rambam<sup>11</sup>.

Similarly, at the beginning of his *Eight Chapters*, a work on psychological attributes, the Rambam cites the thought of the Greek philosophers and he writes 'accept the truth from whoever says it'.

Now that the Rambam has included this secular knowledge in his great work of Halachah, Mishneh Torah, (and in *Eight Chapters* in his Commentary on the Mishnah<sup>12</sup>), it has become part of Torah. Thus the miraculous, Torah dimension, Nisan, has become an integral part of the Natural, 'secular' realm, Tishrei.

And this indeed is the meaning of the opening verse of the added Torah reading: this month, Nisan, is the first of the months, and is the month of Redemption,

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<sup>10</sup> The Rebbe comments that in the Rambam's way of presenting this, it is irrelevant whether the Greek knowledge was dependent on the knowledge of the Prophets, or independent from it.

<sup>11</sup> Laws of Sanctification of the New Moon, end of ch.17.

<sup>12</sup> The *Eight Chapters* are the introduction to his commentary on Ethics of the Fathers.

bringing Redemption to every aspect of life, revealing the G-diness in Nature. This will be seen in full with the coming of Moshiach when 'like the days of your going out of Egypt, I will show you wonders'<sup>13</sup>.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

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<sup>13</sup> Micah 7:15.