

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of Points from the Rebbe's
Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

ד"ה להבין ענין שמחת תורה תשל"ג בלתי מוגה

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FROM BINAH, UNDERSTANDING, TO THE ESSENCE

LET US UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF SIMCHAT TORAH, THE REJOICING OF THE TORAH. AS IS KNOWN, there are two meanings to the words 'Rejoicing of the Torah'. One is that the Jewish people, men women and children, rejoice with the Torah. Another is that the Jewish people make the Torah rejoice.

The joy is not just expressed in melody, which itself is higher than speech, but in dancing. We can understand this as regards our joy with the Torah, the first meaning of 'Rejoicing of the Torah' above. Dancing with our feet is a suitable expression of personal human joy. But how does this work with the second meaning, that we are making the Torah rejoice? There is the idea that the person dancing holding the Torah Scroll becomes the 'feet of the Torah'. But surely, Torah is a matter of intellectual study, understanding. How can dancing with our feet enhance this?

It is true that even someone who does not understand Hebrew makes a blessing when called up to the Torah. The Hebrew text of the Written Torah is significant beyond our actual comprehension of the words². But the fullness of

¹ *Lehavin Inyan Simchat Torah 5733*, published in Dvarmalchut Shmini Atzeret 5784. The discourse was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Similarly when a person recites Psalms, or the daily prayers.

Torah study is expressed in the Oral Torah, Mishneh, Talmud, the Codes of Law – which require comprehension. Isn't this in some ways the opposite of dancing with one's feet?

This relates to the idea that all the Tishrei festivals, beginning with Rosh Hashana and culminating in Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, in some sense combine opposites. They are all connected with the Sefirah [Divine Attribute] Binah, Understanding, meaning focused intellectual comprehension, and at the same time they are all beyond any definition or limitation.

Let us consider Shmini Atzeret, of which the Torah states 'on the eighth day you should make another festive day [in Hebrew: Atzeret]³. The Sefirah Binah is the eighth counting from Malchut, Kingship, upwards⁴. Hence Shmini Atzeret functions as the eighth level which completes the seven days of Succot.

This interprets the word Shmini as eighth, its literal meaning. But there is a teaching by the Maggid of Mezeritch⁵ that shmini means *shuman*, oil and essence⁶. Viewed kabbalistically, the Divine Essence is higher than Binah, Understanding (and of course Chochmah, Wisdom); it is even higher than Will, Keter. This is why Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah⁷ are such a profound festival, described as a unique union between the Essence of the Divine and the Jewish people.

We thus see two contrasting aspects: the next step in a rational progression, from the seventh day of Succot to the eighth level which completes the whole festival, relating to Binah, Understanding, the eighth Sefirah, and at the same time a much higher level, that of the Essence, beyond the Sefirot.

There is a similar combination of opposites relating to Succot. Chassidic teachings state that the Succah represents the 'surrounding radiance of Binah', which is drawn inwardly by shaking the Lulav and Etrog [ideally, in the Succah]⁸. But at the same time, in a contrasting way, the Succah draws 'the surrounding of the Essence', meaning the Essence of Ein Sof. It is because of this utterly transcendent aspect of Succot that the Sages say 'it would be fitting

³ Pinchas, Numbers 29:35.

⁴ Malchut, Yesod, Hod, Netzach, Tiferet, Gevurah, Chesed, Binah (Understanding) – then higher still is Chochmah (Wisdom), and Keter which expresses the Divine Will. Beyond that is the Essence, as explained further in the discourse.

⁵ See his Likkutei Amarim, sec. 260.

⁶ The essence of anything is the 'oil' which can be produced by pressing or crushing that thing, eg olive oil, the essence of the olive.

⁷ These are two different days in the diaspora, but both are on the one same day in Israel.

⁸ By Chabad custom, one shakes the Lulav and Etrog in such a way that one is drawing the surrounding radiance into one's heart and inner being. See on YouTube 'The Lubavitcher Rebbe Shakes Lulav', https://www.google.com/search?q=lubavitcher+rebbe+shaking+lulav&og=lubavitcher+rebbe+shaking+lulav&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCDY3MjZqMGo3qAIAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:015f500c,vid:ogsioFRCVA8,st:0

for the entire Jewish people to dwell in one Succah⁹, because that transcendent radiance includes every Jew, equally.

The same two contrasting aspects are seen in the case of Yom Kippur. On the one hand it expresses supernal Teshuvah¹⁰, relating to the Sefirah Binah. But it also expresses the idea of ‘once in a year’¹¹ interpreted in spiritual terms, the revelation of Yechidah, the most profound aspect of the soul of every individual Jew, his or her Essence, relating to the Essence of the Divine. This is the fifth aspect of the soul, and that is why there are five prayer services on Yom Kippur.

Similarly with Rosh Hashana and the blowing of the Shofar. On the one hand the Shofar is arousing us to improve our behaviour, and at this level Chassidic teachings explain that the Shofar is at the level of Binah. And at the same time they also explain that the Shofar evokes ‘the inward voice which cannot be heard’, which indicates drawing from the Essence, the point where the individual and the Divine meet¹².

We thus see that each Festival includes both the concept of Binah, Understanding, and also an aspect of relating to the Essence far beyond Understanding. This is because within Binah itself there are two aspects: Understanding, in the sense of seeing all the details and analyzing them, and at the same time in Binah there is a revelation of the inwardness of the highest aspect, Keter¹³. This inwardness of Keter expresses the delight of the Essence.

Considering this in very simple terms we can understand why the most inward delight is associated with Binah. Imagine a person who strives to achieve a certain task, let us say building a palace. When the palace is complete, his or her understanding survey the details of the construction, looking closely at them, seeing how the original plan has indeed been fulfilled. Through this process the person feels an intense delight at his or her achievement.

We thus see that the Essence is to be discovered in the details. This is so on the human level, and it is also true on the Divine level: the Essence is revealed in the details of the downchaining of the worlds.

As mentioned, on Yom Kippur the Essence is revealed. The four days between Yom Kippur and Succot represent the four letters of the Tetragrammaton. The Sages see this time as devoted to the Mitzvot of building a Succah and acquiring a Lulav and Etrog. One could say that the Essence is revealed in the details of these Mitzvot.

⁹ Succah 27b.

¹⁰ The discourse explains that one should have achieved the lower level of Teshuvah (repentance from actual transgressions) *before* Yom Kippur, during the month of Elul, or the Ten Days of Penitence. Then Yom Kippur itself gives the higher opportunity of Supernal Repentance, Teshuvah Ila’ah.

¹¹ Acharei Lev.16:34.

¹² And this is why the Jewish people are able to establish G-d’s Kingship of the universe on Rosh Hashanah.

¹³ The inwardness of Keter is called ‘Atik, which literally means ‘ancient’.

This brings us back to Simchat Torah, and our question about dancing with the Torah rather than studying it in depth.

There are two very different dimensions of Torah study. One is the intellectual exploration, the contrasting opinions, the subtlety of the novel ideas. The Sages declare that all the different opinions have spiritual meaning: ‘all are the words of the living G-d’¹⁴. This aspect of the Torah relates to the joys of Binah, Understanding. But there is also another quite different aspect: the Halachah. The Halachah is the opinion which we follow in daily practice, and it relates to the Essence.

Through study of the Torah we relate to it in terms of Understanding. Through dancing with it we connect with the Essence, because we transcend our own selves. Instead we connect with G-d with selflessness and ‘Acceptance of the Yoke of Heaven’, kabbalat ‘ol.

This both elevates the Torah to a yet deeper point of connection with the Essence of the Divine, and also draws that Essence down into the details of practical life for each person, throughout the year ahead, in Torah study and observance of the Mitzvot. This leads to the personal Redemption of each individual, and ultimately to the general Redemption of the Jewish people and all humanity, with the coming of Moshiach.

[Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care](#)

¹⁴ Eruvin 13b.