

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
ד"ה ואתחנן תשכ"ה בלתי מוגה

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## FREE GIFT FROM G-D

**A**ND I PLEADED WITH G-D...<sup>2</sup> IN MIDRASH SIFRI IT SAYS THAT THERE WERE TWO GREAT LEADERS for the Jewish people Moses and King David. Each of them could have claimed that they had many merits, but each asked only that G-d should grant their plea 'for nothing', not because of their merit. And if this is what these two great people did, how much more we should ask only as a free gift...

By contrast, Midrash Rabbah<sup>3</sup> says that there are ten expressions of prayer, and Moses chose to pray with 'tachanunim', asking for mercy. Because in relation to G-d, any person is as nothing. So Moses, despite his greatness, prayed in a way of asking for mercy. He did this because G-d had said 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy' (Ex.33:19), meaning that even if someone has no merits, I will have mercy on him.

The Rebbe explains that according to Midrash Rabbah, the fact that the plea is one of the ten forms of prayer means that, as is the nature of prayer, it relates to the possible merits of the person<sup>4</sup>. However, a person knows that one cannot claim anything from G-d on account of one's merits, since even the idea that G-d rewards goodness is purely from the Kindness of G-d. Indeed there is a verse to this effect: 'You, G-d, are kind, because You recompense a person

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar *Va'etchanan* 5725 (1965), published in *Dvar Malchus Va'etchanan* 5779, 5782. The Hebrew text was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 3:23, beginning of Sedra *Va'etchanan*.

<sup>3</sup> *Devarim Rabbah* 2:1.

<sup>4</sup> In a related talk given at the same hasidic gathering the Rebbe cited the second paragraph of the Shema which links blessings from G-d with the merits of the Jewish people.

according to his/her actions' (Ps.62:13). This includes the kabbalistic idea that 'the arousal from above' comes as a response to 'the arousal from below': the fact that there is a response from 'above' is purely the effect of the Kindness of G-d. Hence Moses prayed simply for mercy. By contrast the Sifri speaks of appealing to G-d at a level which is entirely beyond any merit that a person might have. At that level any merit is like nothing. Hence, according to Sifri, Moses asked G-d for a free gift, as if he had no merit at all.

Chassidic teachings explain that the 'ten expressions of prayer' correspond to the ten Sefirot of Kingship of Atzilut<sup>5</sup>. Moses' plea for a 'free gift' is Keter, Crown of Kingship, which is on a higher level, beyond all the ten Sefirot. The Rebbe suggests that the two ways of understanding his plea relate to the two aspects of Keter. As regards the external aspect, which relates to the worlds and to existence, the merits of a person have worth, as explained by Midrash Rabbah. Only Moses knew that G-d's recompense of merits is only through G-d's Kindness and Mercy. But the way his plea is explained by Sifri, as coming from a sense that he has no worth at all, relates to the inwardness of Keter, before which all is as nothing, and the only way to plead is for a completely free gift from G-d.

This higher way of pleading relates to prayer on Shabbat. For Shabbat itself is a gift, as the Sages tell us that G-d says 'I have a precious gift in my treasure house, and it is called Shabbat'<sup>6</sup>.

Now, in fact the prayers during the week also relate to Shabbat: during the weekday prayer there is an illumination from Shabbat. The lower way of pleading (as explained by Midrash Rabbah) relates to the prayer of the weekdays, the higher way (as expressed by Sifri) to the prayer of Shabbat. In fact the prayer of the weekdays, even though it embodies an illumination from Shabbat, requires effort to make it a meaningful and spiritual experience of prayer. It also includes the Tachanun supplicatory prayer. But prayer on Shabbat does not need this effort, and one does not say the prayer in the Amidah 'Forgive us..' because on Shabbat, beginning with Friday afternoon, 'all negative aspects are cleared away'<sup>7</sup>. Hence the Shabbat prayers are like a gift, beginning with the Friday night prayer, and then even more on Shabbat

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<sup>5</sup> Within each Sefirah are included all the Sefirot. Hence, within Malchut, Kingship, are all ten Sefirot.

<sup>6</sup> Shabbat 10b.

<sup>7</sup> Zohar II 135b

morning, and yet more on Shabbat afternoon, which is termed the time of ‘delight of delights’.

All this links with Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s explanation in Likkutei Torah<sup>8</sup> that Moses wanted to enter the Land so as to endow the Jewish people with a spiritual level which cannot be reached by the person’s own service. That is the arousal from above which is completely beyond any arousal from below. That is the meaning of the ‘free gift’, like the words ‘free, without Mitzvot’<sup>9</sup>, a level which transcends the Mitzvot.

This explains the approach of Sifri: in order to attain this exalted revelation for the Jewish people, Moses’ plea had to reach for the highest level, beyond any merit or Mitzvah.

To understand the contrasting approach of Midrash Rabbah we have to consider a further aspect of Moses’ goal, as explained in Likkutei Torah. The idea of the arousal from above which transcends any arousal from below is actually the Torah itself. Through Torah study one draws down the most exalted aspect of the Divine, relating to the words ‘I am’ at the beginning of the Ten Commandments. This comes as a gift.

But if this was Moses’ plea to G-d, why do we imagine that it was not fulfilled? After all, we have the Torah and are able to study it and through this we draw down the ‘arousal from above’. The Tzemach Tzedek<sup>10</sup> explains that Moses wanted that the Torah which is revealed from above should also have an effect below, in this world. An example of this is given in the Zohar: there was a drought, and when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai delivered a Torah teaching, the rain began to fall<sup>11</sup>.

The power to affect the lower world is what generally distinguishes prayer from Torah. Prayer starts below in the world, reaches up to G-d, and achieves a change in the world: the ill person is healed. Torah, in general, remains in the upper spiritual realms. Moses’ plea to G-d was that he should enter the Land and thus establish for the entire Jewish people (not just rare individuals like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) the power of Torah to affect the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Beginning of Sedra Va’etchanan.

<sup>9</sup> See Rashi to Num.11:5

<sup>10</sup> Tzemach Tzedek, Or HaTorah, Va’etchanan, p. 54ff.

<sup>11</sup> Zohar III 59b

This is why Midrash Rabbah explains Moses' plea as a form of prayer: it starts below, like prayer, and, even though it ascends to a very exalted level, like Torah coming from G-d, its ultimate goal is – like prayer - to affect the lower world.

But, as we know, Moses' plea was not granted. He could not enter the Land, and therefore this kind of power of Torah was not granted automatically to every Jew. This is because the real goal of the Divine is that each individual and the Jewish people as a whole should achieve the highest goals *through their own effort*.

Moses, whose face is described as being like the sun, constant, did not lead the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. If he had done, there would not have been any future Exile. Instead they entered the Land with Joshua, whose face is compared to the moon, which waxes and wanes<sup>12</sup>. This lack of constancy gives room to the possibility of Exile.

But this itself also gives room for the service of the individual and of the people, service 'from below'. This ultimately draws down an even more exalted radiance – higher even than the 'free gift' sought by Moses<sup>13</sup> – which will be revealed in this world with the true Redemption through Moshiach.

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

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<sup>12</sup> Bava Batra 75a.

<sup>13</sup> See the Tzemach Tzedek's Or HaTorah, Va-etchanan, p.87.