

The Rebbe's Discourses

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

פרשת וירא תשי"ג ד"ה והוא עומד עליהם בלתי מוגה

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BEING INSPIRED BY ABRAHAM

THE SEDRA TELLS OF THE THREE ANGELS VISITING ABRAHAM AND SARAH. THEY LOOKED like ordinary travellers, and a lavish meal was prepared for them. The Torah tells us that Abraham gave the food to the angels under a tree, and he stood over them, and they ate².

There is something deliberate about that statement: it looks as if the fact that Abraham stood over them, directly contributed to the fact that the angels ate.

But one moment. Did the angels eat? Surely angels don't have to eat, or even are not able to eat? True. The Sages note this and present the equivalent of the idea "when in Rome, do as Rome does"³. When the angels are among human beings, they imitate them. One view is they looked as if they were eating⁴. Another view is they actually did eat⁵.

What is eating? Considering the emphasis on eating in Judaism, it clearly has deep significance. We can understand more about this by considering an ultimate form of eating: the special 'eating' which took place in the Temple.

Generally, when a person would bring an offering, part of the offering would be consumed, 'eaten', on the Altar. Another part would be eaten by the Priests. Each of these forms of eating were setting in motion a spiritual process.

¹ Maamar VeHu Omed Aleyhem 5713 (1953). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Vayera 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Vayera Genesis 18:8.

³ See Bereishit Rabbah 48:14.

⁴ Rashi to Gen. 18:8.

⁵ Zohar I 144a, as explained in the full discourse.

The Temple had three main areas: the outer courtyard with the outer Altar, the enclosed 'Holy' area where the golden Menorah, Table and inner, golden Altar stood, and the inner Sanctum, the Holy of Holies. These correspond to the lower worlds (including our own), the sacred realm of Atzilut (Emanation), and the transcendent realm of the Infinite Divine.

The offering would be consumed on the outer Altar. Although positioned in the outer courtyard signifying the lower worlds, this Altar represented the lowest dimension of Atzilut, Kingship of Atzilut, which is the source of those lower worlds. The consumption of the offering expressed a 'feminine' spiritual flow reaching from below to above, from Kingship of Atzilut upwards. It initiated a 'masculine' response, from above downwards. The response came from the upper Sefirot of Atzilut.

In short this means that the consumption of the offering on the Altar set in motion a process within the Sefirot of Atzilut (the second level depicted above). This is very wonderful.

However, the consumption of the offering by the Priests had an even greater effect. When they ate the appropriate portions of the offering, the spiritual process took place on a much higher level, and a new level of Divine radiance was drawn down from *beyond* the Sefirot, from the third level depicted above. A kind of equivalent in our daily lives can be seen in our own eating: the food we consume during the week manifests the struggle to eat the right thing and not the wrong thing, and in the right way. It also sets in motion an important spiritual process. But when we eat on Shabbat something more exalted is taking place. Hopefully, the tensions are absent. We eat in a relaxed way, enjoying the Shabbat meals, and they help us connect to the Divine in a profound and intimate way. We may not realise it, but this is in some sense comparable to the eating of the Priests in the Temple, drawing down an exalted radiance from above.

Another such pair of levels of eating could be seen by comparing the eating of an ordinary person, and the eating of a Tzaddik. The Tzaddik eats in such a spiritual way that this engenders a process which reaches a higher level, the third level described above, beyond the Sefirot.

Another such pair is the 'eating' by an angel, and eating by a human being with a Soul. An angel, although spiritual, is created by G-d. But the Jewish soul is an actual portion of G-dliness which has been sent into the physical world, clothed in a body. Generally, angels cannot really 'eat' because if they would be exposed to the exalted Divine radiance drawn down by eating on its higher level, the angel would be dissolved out of existence.

Thus the angels cannot reach higher than the second level, the level of spiritual 'worlds'. By contrast the human being with a Jewish soul can reach beyond, to the Infinite.

Here we come back to Abraham and the angels, and the fact that Abraham stood over them, and then the Torah describes them as eating. What this really means is that by the fact that Abraham stood over them, he enabled them to reach a higher level. Due to his presence and inspiration, they were able to eat as if they were humans with souls, reaching the Infinite beyond.

In our own lives, we ourselves often find ourselves in the position of the 'angels', who are being inspired by Abraham. Our great Sages, Tzaddikim and figures like the Lubavitcher Rebbe, function as the Abraham who inspires us to reach beyond our normal levels of attainment. With this inspiration we are able to set in motion incredible spiritual processes which will transform the world.

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