

# The Rebbe's Discourses

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

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## ADDING TO THE TORAH

**B**ATI LEGANI, “I G-D HAVE COME INTO MY GARDEN”<sup>2</sup>, WHICH MEANS THAT the essence of the Shechinah has descended and been revealed in the world. As explained in Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak’s famous series of discourses, this took place when the Sanctuary was built and the Divine was revealed there, as G-d said, “make for Me a Sanctuary and then, I will dwell in it”<sup>3</sup> and, the discourse explains, in each of individual.

Although the Divine Presence had been revealed below before this, as it says in our Sedra that “G-d descended on Mount Sinai”<sup>4</sup>, the real indwelling of the Divine is when it is in an inward way, when it has an effect on the lower realm. This takes place only when the indwelling is as a result of the effort made by those who are below.

Hence the indwelling in the Sanctuary, which had to be constructed and needed effort, was a true indwelling, while that on Mount Sinai which needed no effort from those below, was only temporary.

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar Basi Legani Yisro 5738 (1978), Kuntres 22 Shevat 5749 (1989). It was printed in Dvar Malchut Yitro 5778. It was edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Song of Songs 5:1.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus, Terumah, 25:8

<sup>4</sup> Exodus, Yitro 19:20.

Further, the Bati Legani discourse explains that the most effective effort to create this indwelling is not working with aspects of holiness, but facing the challenge of the negative: either quelling, restraining it, or transforming it to good. This service has the greater quality, because it has the effect of changing darkness to light.

It is known that at the Giving of the Torah the Jewish people were empowered for all future service of G-d, including the ability to face the challenge of negativity and change darkness to light. The fact that the Giving of the Torah was preceded by Jethro saying ‘now I know that G-d is greater than all other powers’<sup>5</sup> gave this event the potential quality to transform darkness to light in the future. Because the Sages tell us about Jethro that in his quest for truth, he had served every kind of idol, and also had explored every kind of secular wisdom. Yet now he saw the truth of the Divine and of the Torah, which meant the ‘darkness’ of his idolatry and his secular knowledge had been transformed.

In the case of idolatry, this meant he had rejected the idolatry in favour of G-d and the Torah. But in the case of secular wisdom, a more subtle process was taking place. When secular wisdom is transformed from negative to positive it enhances Torah, and even can itself become part of Torah teaching<sup>6</sup>. Thus, one’s knowledge of mathematics might help one understand more clearly a discussion in the Talmud, or as an example of a higher level of transformation, the Rambam’s knowledge of Greek astronomy became part of his *Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon* and thus they became an actual part of Torah itself<sup>7</sup>.

This potential in Torah, that it could be enhanced or even added to, by transforming secular wisdom, is rooted in the Giving of the Torah and is a result of the fact that Jethro’s recognition of G-d preceded the Giving of the Torah. The discourse explains that this is the effect a link to the Essence of the Divine, going beyond the ‘light’ and ‘dark’ of Torah knowledge contrasting with secular wisdom.

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<sup>5</sup> Exodus Yitro 18:11.

<sup>6</sup> See the Previous Rebbe’s discourse ‘And Moshe said’ in *Book of Discourses 1949*, p.56ff. However, the Rebbe points out that not everyone can attempt to do this. See Tanya ch.8.

<sup>7</sup> Note that Jethro’s name means ‘adding’, and the Sages say this is because he added a section to the Torah (Rashi to Ex.18:1).

In itself, the Giving of the Torah was from above to below. The very words ‘Giving of the Torah’ - *Matan Torah* - express that. Further, from the point of view of the Torah, higher than the world, all is light. In that sense, the ‘darkness’ with which Jethro struggled was far below.

But Jethro’s recognition of the Divine through transforming his secular wisdom, coming from below, had the effect of connecting the Torah to the Essence of the Divine, which is beyond the distinction between light and darkness and beyond ‘above’ and ‘below’. This recognition triggered the power in the future for Torah to be added to, by study and transformation of secular knowledge<sup>8</sup>.

It also enabled the revelation of Torah to be increased, through the generations, by the each individual student of Torah who can produce *chiddushei Torah*, novel comments and insights. These become part of the discussions of the ‘seasoned student’ with his teacher, which, we are told, were included in the Giving of the Torah<sup>9</sup>.

The result is that, as the Alter Rebbe states in his Laws of Torah Study (1:4), every individual has the power and the duty to add to Torah and reveal extra aspects in the Pshat, Remez, Drush, Sod<sup>10</sup> - all four levels of Torah interpretation. Through this, one reveals one’s own ‘portion of the Torah’.

Through doing this we will reveal that, as was stated in the Sedra before the Giving of the Torah (Ex.19:6), we are a Kingdom of Priests and a sacred nation. Rashi says ‘priest’ here means ‘prince’. This should be revealed in its literal sense. For once someone determines in a state of poverty that they will study and keep Torah, their situation is transformed and they become wealthy (see Ethics 4:9), like a prince: wealthy in both spiritual and material terms, which will ultimately be fulfilled with the coming of Moshiach, swiftly in our days.

**Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care**

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<sup>8</sup> One might suggest, that if a new situation arises, on account of secular advance, and consequently a question is asked of a rabbi, the question and his answer become part of the Responsa literature of Torah (ed.).

<sup>9</sup> See Megila 19b, Jerusalem Talmud Peah 2:4.

<sup>10</sup> The simple level, hints, deeper teachings, esoteric thought.