

# The Rebbe's Discourses

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

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## FROM BEYOND THE DARKNESS

**T**HE SEDRA BEGINS “AND YITRO (JETHRO) PRIEST OF MIDIAN, FATHER IN LAW OF MOSHE, HEARD WHAT G-D had done for Israel..”<sup>2</sup>, and consequently he came to where Moshe was encamped with the Israelites. Rashi comments: ‘what did Yitro hear, which made him come to Moshe? The Splitting of the Sea..’. One can ask, what has the Splitting of the Sea got to do with the content of this Sedra, which goes on to tell us about the Giving of the Torah at Sinai? Also, if the verse is speaking in praise of Yitro, why does it mention that he was a Priest of Midian, meaning a priest of idolatry?

Another point is that the Zohar says that Yitro’s declaration ‘now I know that G-d is greater than all other powers’<sup>3</sup> was a necessary step leading to the Giving of the Torah. Why should this be so? To understand this we have to understand the deeper significance of the Giving of the Torah.

As regards the laws and teachings of the Torah, there are many sayings of the Sages which indicate that these were known before the Divine Revelation at Sinai. Thus the Midrash<sup>4</sup> states that Adam knew the deep teachings about the Jewish calendar (which combines the lunar calendar with some aspects of the solar calendar), and he passed these to the following generations. The Talmud<sup>5</sup> speaks of all the Patriarchs as scholars of Torah. Even in Egypt there was Torah

<sup>1</sup> Maamar Vayishma Yitro 5745 (1985), not edited by the Rebbe. It was printed in Dvar Malchus Yitro 5785.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 18:1.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 18:11. Zohar I, 67b.

<sup>4</sup> Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer ch.8. See Likkutei Sichot vol.20 p.14.

<sup>5</sup> Yoma 28b.

study, and the Rambam speaks of Amram, the father of Moshe, in Egypt, being commanded certain Mitzvot<sup>6</sup>. So, what was unique about the Giving of the Torah at Sinai?

It is known that before the Giving of the Torah there was a decree that the upper, spiritual realms should be separate from the lower, physical realm. At the Giving of the Torah this decree was cancelled and the two realms could connect together<sup>7</sup>. The reason is, that before the Giving of the Torah what was revealed of the Torah was its 'radiance', as a verse says 'Torah is light'<sup>8</sup>. At the Giving of the Torah the Essence of the Torah was disclosed. This Essence is far higher than the radiance of the Torah, coming from the realm described as 'He makes darkness His secret abode'<sup>9</sup>, indeed from the very Essence of the Divine.

The 'Tree of Life'<sup>10</sup> presents a central theme of the Kabbalah, that there was the infinite radiance of the Divine, which was then veiled in the Tzimtzum, and this enabled the creation of the spiritual worlds (and ultimately our physical universe) to take place. But in fact there are levels higher than that initial radiance, each with a Tzimtzum before it.

The darkness of the highest level, of which it says 'He makes darkness His secret abode', is the source of the Torah.

We are now able to understand why Yitro's declaration that G-d is greater than all other powers was necessary for the Giving of the Torah to take place. In Kohelet it states 'I saw that wisdom is greater than foolishness as light is greater than darkness'<sup>11</sup>. Chassidic teachings explain that 'light is greater than darkness' means the light which proceeds from darkness, the light which is a transformation of darkness<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, the wisdom which emerges from and is a transformation of 'foolishness' is a very deep wisdom.

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<sup>6</sup> Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings, 9:1.

<sup>7</sup> Tanchuma Vaera 15, Shemot Rabbah 12:3. Thus the Mitzvot, connecting us with G-d, generally concern physical activities.

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 6:23.

<sup>9</sup> Ps.18:12, see Zohar III 225a. 'Radiance' is very definitely spiritual, contrasting with 'physical/material'. The Essence is beyond this division and can include both.

<sup>10</sup> By Rabbi Chaim Vital, student of Rabbi Isaac Luria (d.1572).

<sup>11</sup> Kohelet 2:13.

<sup>12</sup> See Sefer Ha'archim Chabad vol.2 p.575 ff.

‘Foolishness’ here does not mean stupidity or lack of intelligence. It means the vast realm of ‘secular’ knowledge with Yitro had studied, in his exploration of every kind of idol and every kind of wisdom. This wisdom is called ‘foolishness’ because it generally leads to hubris and vanity, contrasting with Torah wisdom which leads to humility.

The fact that Yitro now recognized that G-d is greater than all other powers meant that the ‘darkness’ of his earlier knowledge was being transformed to light. This was a parallel process to that which led to the Giving of the Torah: the darkness of ‘He makes darkness His secret abode’ became the source of Torah, as it was revealed in the world. Thus one can say that Yitro’s personal transformation of darkness to light triggered the cosmic transformation expressed in the Giving of the Torah.

For this reason the opening verse of the Sedra stresses that Yitro was (formerly) the Priest of Midian: his knowledge gained as an idolatrous Priest was an important step towards the Giving of the Torah. And this also explains why Rashi links Yitro’s coming to Moses with the Splitting of the Sea.

The Sea functions as a veil concealing a spiritual reality. When the Sea was split, all levels of veiling, higher and higher, were split as well. Through this the Essence could be disclosed on the level of our physical and practical world.

Now, the Torah is eternal, and its teachings are eternal. Thus there is actually a ‘Giving of the Torah’ every day. Chassidic teachings explain that whenever a person studies Torah, it is as if the voice of G-d from Heaven is declaring those words of Torah together with the person, just as G-d declared the Ten Commandments at Sinai.

Now, this personal Divine revelation is hidden. But in the future it will be revealed, as the verse states: ‘The glory of G-d will be revealed, and all flesh will see together that G-d has spoken’<sup>13</sup>, with the true and complete Redemption through Moshiach, with joy and a happy heart.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

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<sup>13</sup> Is.40:5.