

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה אם כסף תלוה פרשת משפטים תשכ"ז בלתי מוגה
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TOWARDS HEAVEN OR EARTH...?

IF YOU LEND MONEY TO MY PEOPLE, TO THE POOR PERSON WITH YOU....(Ex.22:24). The Maharash² asked, in a discourse in the first year of his leadership (in 1867), what is the significance of the words 'to My people'?

To understand this we have to consider the direction of our endeavour to serve G-d. A saying of the Sages tells us 'On three things the world stands, on Torah, on the Temple Service (which means the bringing of offerings), and on good deeds' (Ethics 1:2). But a verse in Hosea declares: 'I desire Kindness not sacrifices'³.

How can we understand this? Isn't the purpose of the Temple to bring offerings? This is also stressed in the Bati leGani ('I have Come into My Garden') discourse⁴, explaining the idea of the inner Sanctuary within each person: the goal is to draw near⁵ and focus one's inner forces towards the Divine, as the Zohar says, about the animal offerings in the Temple: the secret of the offering rises to the secret of Ein Sof.'

The discourse understands the animal offerings in the Temple, and the spiritual focus of one's inner forces as described in the Bati LeGani discourse, as

¹ Maamar Im Kesef Talveh 5727 (1967). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Sedra Mishpatim 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson, 4th Lubavitcher Rebbe (1834-1882), called **Moreinu HaRav Shmuel**, Our Teacher Rabbi Shmuel, Maharash.

³ Hos. 6:6

⁴ This is the final series of discourses by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe (1880-1950). It begins *Bati LeGani*, 'I have Come into My Garden' (Song of Songs 5:1), and in the first chapter it explains that there is a Sanctuary within each person in which we offer spiritual 'offerings'.

⁵ The Hebrew word *korban* which is translated Offering really means 'draw near'.

reaching *upwards* to G-d. But, viewed in kabbalistic terms, Kindness means a movement *downwards*. Divine radiance flows from the Attribute Kindness, *Chesed*, down to the lower Attributes and into the worlds. This means that the offerings which rise upwards and Kindness which flows downwards seem to be opposites.

The Maharash resolves the paradox by explaining that the question is simply a matter of understanding the difference between the main concern, and the secondary concern. If a person has to travel to a distant town in order to accomplish an important task, he first has to find a way to get there. The task in the distant town is the main concern; how he travels, whether on horseback or by train, is of secondary concern.

Thus G-d's main concern for Creation is Kindness, flowing from above downwards. But in order to have Kindness, one also needs the offerings, which move from below upwards. The Temple service, whether physical or spiritual, is therefore important: but it is a prelude to Kindness, which is the main goal. Translated into human terms, this means that the person has to focus his or her energy upwards towards the Divine, and through this s/he will be inspired to pour Kindness below.

The Rebbe points out that even the offerings themselves, when considered more closely, are not only a movement away from the world towards G-d, they also relate 'downwards' to the world. We see this from the fact that Ethics of the Fathers terms them something on which the world 'stands': they therefore have a function in relation to the world in itself.

Further, the Sages make an interesting comparison between the specific details of the Temple offerings, namely the animal offering and the wine libation, and the saying of the Shema and the wearing of Tefilin. 'Anyone who says the Shema without Tefilin is as if he had... brought the offering without the wine libation'⁶.

Chassidic teachings understand the saying of the Shema as an example of reaching 'upwards' towards the Divine beyond the world, while Tefilin can be seen as drawing Divine energy downwards into one's mind and heart⁷. Similarly, one can see the animal offering itself as reaching upwards, while the wine libation which accompanies it as flowing downwards⁸.

⁶ Berachot 14b. When a man or boy over thirteen prays the morning service on a weekday, Tefilin should be worn. However, despite this passage in the Talmud, many men and boys say the Shema early, without Tefilin, so as to say it at the correct time. Then later, wearing Tefilin, they say it again as part of the morning service.

⁷ The head Tefilin relates to the mind, and the arm Tefillin on the left arm relates to the heart. The strap wrapped seven times round the arm expresses the seven emotions of the heart: love, severity, mercy, endurance/victory, submission, dedication, fulfilment.

⁸ The offering is burnt on the Altar and one can think of it as rising upwards in the flames. The wine libation is

Nonetheless, the verse ‘I desire Kindness not sacrifices’ emphasises Kindness above the offerings in the Temple.

What kind of Kindness is meant? Let us consider the verse “the world (*olam*) is built through Kindness” (Ps.89:3). There are two explanations of this. A) that G-d creates the world from His own Kindness, beyond man. B) that man’s Kindness is required all the time (‘the world’ *olam* can also mean ‘for ever’ *le-olam*) in order to elicit G-d’s exalted response and blessing – G-d’s Kindness - for the world.

When we consider the Divine Kindness, it is utterly beyond all the worlds, at the level of Yachid (only one) beyond Echad (one). Yet G-d has implanted in existence the quality that a person who is serving G-d can elicit that exalted Kindness.

This is similar to the way on Rosh Hashana, according to Chassidic teachings⁹ the blowing of the Shofar draws new life-force into the world. What gives man that power? Hashem has implanted this in the nature of existence.

What level of Kindness has this effect? Kindness which goes beyond one’s power and possibility, Kindness beyond one’s comfort zone and one’s normal limitations. This elicits the exalted transcendent Kindness of the Divine.

This is similar to the idea of serving G-d ‘with all one’s might’, as expressed in the first paragraph of the Shema¹⁰. The text reads ‘And you should love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might’. Loving G-d with ‘all your might’ is explained as going beyond one’s limitations. By serving G-d in this way, G-d responds in an exalted way, beyond limitations...

Considering again the text in Ethics of Fathers, that the world stands on three things, we now see that the Temple offerings, reaching up beyond the world, are a prologue to man’s expression of Kindness, and also his Torah study. Both the latter express a flow downwards, into the world¹¹. But as a prologue, the Temple offerings have a special significance. For that which causes some effect is in a sense superior to that effect. The sacrificial service in the Temple is therefore supreme. Yet its true function is to trigger Kindness on an extraordinary level.

poured into a funnel at the side of the Altar and descends into a channel in the earth.

⁹ See Tanya IV sec.14.

¹⁰ Va’etchanan, Deut. 6:5.

¹¹ The Torah is seen as flowing from the Divine down into the world. See Tanya Part I, ch.4.

The discourse now links this theme with the Festivals, which are mentioned in our Sedra¹², and also to the Patriarchs. Abraham relates to Pesach, because the Sages tell us that when the three angels visited him and Sarah, it was Pesach¹³. Isaac relates to Shavuot, because, the Sages tell us, the Shofar of the Giving of the Torah was from Isaac's ram¹⁴. And Jacob relates to Sukkot, as is hinted in the verse 'and for his cattle he built sukkah booths'¹⁵.

How can Isaac be connected with the Giving of the Torah? Isaac's nature is Gevurah, Severity, reaching upwards, but the Giving of the Torah is a downward movement, revealing the Torah itself and the Miztvot, the spirituality in daily life. The answer is because, as described earlier concerning the offerings, the 'upward' movement of Isaac brings about the 'downward' movement of the Giving of the Torah.

An example of the quest to combine these two directions is seen in the case of the Baal Shem Tov. He would have mystical ascents of the soul. His soul would rise to higher worlds. But the Mittlerer Rebbe¹⁶ reveals in *Torat Chaim*¹⁷ that the Baal Shem Tov sought to reach that level that while experiencing an ascent of the soul, he would also be able to respond to questions addressed to him on the ordinary earthly plane: he would be simultaneously in a higher realm, and also here in this physical world.

We can now understand the verse with which the discourse of the Maharash began. "If you lend money to My people (*et amiy*), to the poor person...". The words *et amiy* 'My people' should be pointed differently, as suggested by the Midrash¹⁸, as *at imiy* – you are with Me, on the most exalted level.

This is because the highest spiritual goal, being 'with G-d', the Source of Life (as expressed in the verse 'for with You is the source of life'¹⁹), is achieved not by an endeavour *upwards*, away from the world, which one might imagine, leads one towards G-d, but instead *downwards*, into the world, expressing Kindness by lending money to the poor and other positive actions. Through this the Source of Life, the exalted level which is 'with' the Divine, is drawn into the world, which is the goal of Creation.

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

¹² Mishpatim, Ex. 23:14.

¹³ See Rashi to Vayera, Gen.18:10.

¹⁴ The ram offered instead of Isaac at the Akedah (Vayera, Gen. 22:13.)

¹⁵ Vayishlach, Gen. 33:17.

¹⁶ The second Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Dov Ber (1773-1827).

¹⁷ End of Parsha Vayechi.

¹⁸ Exodus Rabbah end of ch.31.

¹⁹ Psalms 36:10.