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BaChodesh HaShelishi: Shavuos - Section II

From the teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi; adapted by Eli Touger

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ולזה It is for this purpose that the Torah was given to the Jewish people.

I.e., Torah study assists a person as he grapples with the material tendencies of his body and animal soul described in the previous section. The Torah empowers even people who are not on the level of spiritual giants like the Patriarchs to prevail in this struggle.

The Torah is referred to as “strength”¹ because it endows the G-dly soul with the power and strength to overcome the physical tendencies of the body and the animal soul and their crass material nature, enabling “the prisoner to depart from confinement.”²

I.e., it enables the G-dly soul to overcome the restricting influences of the body and the animal soul.

וזרו The above [helps us understand the connection between the two clauses of] the verse:³ “G-d will grant strength to His people; G-d will bless His people with peace.” The Torah which is referred to as “strength” brings about “peace.”

יפי To explain: בשלום, translated as “with peace,” can be read as ב ש ל ו מ, “two [expressions of] peace.” As our Sages say:⁴ “[Whoever occupies himself with Torah study] brings about peace in the heavenly company and peace in the earthly company.”

The simple meaning of the Talmudic passage focuses on the effects of Torah study in a larger, more general sphere. The Alter Rebbe, however, places the emphasis on the individual world of each person.

“Peace” refers to establishing a [harmonious] connection [between two entities with diverse and even opposite tendencies. In our individual Divine service, this means that studying Torah brings about “peace] in the heavenly company,” i.e., [it brings about] an actual revelation of G-d’s infinite light within the G-dly soul, [causing it] to be bound and united with actual G-dliness.

I.e., even the G-dly soul has its individual, subjective nature and thus is, as it were, distant from G-d. The “peace” which Torah study generates enables it to bond that individual nature with G-d in complete unity, as explained in Tanya, ch. 5.

ובפמליא And [Torah study establishes “peace] in the earthly company,” i.e., [it empowers] the radiance of the powers of the G-dly soul

The Alter Rebbe speaks of “the radiance of the powers of the G-dly soul,” because only a certain dimension of the soul and its powers are enclothed in the body. The essence of the soul remains in the spiritual realms.

not to be bound by the constraints of the body and the animal soul within which it is enclothed. Instead, [even the body and the animal soul will] agree and acquiesce to the union [with G-d established through Torah study].

I.e., establishing peace between the G-dly soul and the animal soul.

[This involves] the subjugation [of the body] and the transformation of darkness into light.⁵ For the Torah which is called “strength” is also called “wisdom” (תושיה). [Our Sages note⁶ that תש, the root of that term, can also mean “weakness” and state that Torah study “weakens a person’s power,”] i.e., it weakens the power of the *sitra achra* that stems from the body. For “Might will pass from one power to the other”;⁷ [and] “when one rises, the other falls.”⁸

The verse relates a prophecy concerning the conflict between Yaakov and Esav and their descendants. The Alter Rebbe is applying it to the inner conflict between the G-dly soul and the animal soul. Thus when the G-dly soul strengthens itself through Torah study, it will weaken the animal soul.

אך [This concept,] nevertheless, requires explanation: How is it possible for the strength of the Torah to empower the G-dly soul and weaken the physical nature of the body and its materialistic orientation, since the Torah is also enclothed in material entities [and speaks about] *terumos*, tithes, etc.?

Portions of the crop which must be separated and given to the kohanim and the Levites.

The Alter Rebbe is asking: Since the Torah also speaks in material terms, appearing as a code of law that deals with worldly matters, how can its G-dly power have such an effect on our souls? Seemingly, the Torah is also under the influence of material reality.

אמנם [The resolution is that] the source of the Torah and its foundation are found in “the peaks of holiness,”⁹ [i.e., in] G-d’s infinite light, in its very essence and glory, which transcends all worlds,

In the original, sovev kol almin.

[the level at which] “I, G-d, have not changed.”

See sec. 1.

[For] “the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are all one.”¹⁰

Since the Torah is connected with the very essence of G-dliness, it has the power to influence the G-dly soul and the animal soul, as described above. It is, however, necessary — as the Alter Rebbe proceeds to explain — to study the Torah in a manner that encourages this inner G-dly nature to surface.

[Even as the Torah descends and enclothes itself in this world, it still retains a connection to its G-dly source.]

והנה [The awareness of the Torah’s G-dly nature should affect our] fundamental [approach to] receiving the Torah, as indicated by [the verse that introduces] the Ten Commandments:¹¹ “And G-d spoke all these words *leimor*: ‘I am [G-d...].’” Seemingly, the term *leimor*, [which means “to say,”] is difficult to understand in this context. It does not have the same meaning as it does wherever else it is used in Scripture. In those instances, the intent is that one should communicate [the subject matter] to someone else.

I.e., the Torah frequently states: “And G-d spoke to Moshe leimor.” The intent is that G-d related a commandment to Moshe with the intent that he communicate it to the Jewish people. That meaning is not applicable in this instance, as the Alter Rebbe proceeds to explain.

This meaning does not apply with regard to the Ten Commandments because they were heard by the entire Jewish people, as it is written:¹² “Face to face, G-d spoke [to you].” [Moreover, we cannot say that the intent was to communicate the matter to the future generations, because the revelation at Sinai encompassed]¹³ “those who are present and those who are not present.”

As explained in Shmos Rabbah 28:6, the souls of all the Jewish people of all time were present at the Giving of the Torah.

אך Instead, the meaning of the term *leimor* is “to speak,” [i.e., the Jews are charged with] saying the entire Torah that was given to Moshe at Sinai. [This includes] “all of Scripture, *Mishnah*, the *halachos*,

Torah Law.

and *aggados*,

The homiletic and ethical dimension of Torah study.

[for they] were given to Moshe at Sinai in their entirety.”¹⁴

הגם [One might protest that a person’s Torah study is a product of his own thinking, as evident from the fact that] the *halachos* are associated with the names of the Sages of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud* who authored them, as it says: “The School of Shammai says....” [This, however, is not a correct conclusion. On the contrary,] “the word of G-d,¹⁵ [which is] *halachah*,¹⁶ was communicated to Moshe and was uttered by the Sages of the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*.

As implied by the Talmud Yerushalmi (Peah 2:4): All the new insights to be developed by the sages over the course of Jewish history were given to Moshe at Sinai.

[For the Torah is] “My words that I placed in your mouth.”¹⁷

I.e., even the insights taught by the Sages are G-d’s thoughts, not their personal insights.

וכן For this reason, the Torah was given to the Jewish people so that the *halachos* that they articulate will actually be “the word of G-d” that was given to Moshe at Sinai. [This is the meaning of the term *leimor* used at the time of the giving of] the Ten Commandments: That by receiving the Torah, [the Jews were given the potential] “to say what was said,” [i.e., to reveal G-d’s word].

I.e., the Giving of the Torah involved more than the transfer of information. [Indeed, it is possible to say that the transfer of information was not necessary, for the Torah was given to Adam, Noach, and the Patriarchs. And it was studied by our ancestors in Egypt (see Yoma 28b, et al.)] Instead, what was unique about the Giving of the Torah was the fact that from that time onward, “the Torah was no [longer] in the heavens” (Bava Metziah 59b, et al.), but given to mankind on this physical plane.

דהיינו [Revealing G-d’s word requires an approach of] *bittul*, a total commitment to G-d. The person’s speech should not be separate [from G-d’s], as if it is his own. Instead, “My tongue shall repeat *Your* sayings.” *Tehillim* 119:172. [He should realize that] the Torah is “*Your* sayings,” but “my tongue” will recite them, like one repeating the words that another person says.

Thus when a person speaks words of Torah, he is not speaking ordinary words. They are “the words of G-d.”

ויו"ד [The term *leimor* introduces the Ten Commandments. Now,] the Ten Commandments include the entire Torah.¹⁸ Thus receiving the Ten Commandments from the Almighty is equivalent to receiving the entire Torah,¹⁹ [and the approach of *leimor* applies whenever the Torah is studied].

I.e., the explanation given above with regard to the Ten Commandments thus applies not only

to those fundamental truths, but to the entire Torah.

[As such, everyone should study the Torah with an approach] of *bittul* to the word of G-d emerging from his mouth, so that he is merely repeating His words. Because [the person] is in a state of utter *bittul*, [his Torah study] reveals G-d's infinite light on this physical plane as it is above.

When a person comprehends that the Torah he is reciting is G-d's word, he will lose all consciousness of self.

ומזה When a thinking person contemplates this, great awe and dread will fall upon him when studying the Torah, for he will take to heart that [whenever he studies Torah, he is speaking] the actual word of G-d that was given to Moshe at Sinai. Thus on the verses:²⁰ “And you shall tell your children and your grandchildren... [of] the day you stood at Sinai,” our Sages commented:²¹ “Just as then, they were possessed by dread and awe..., so too, now.”

שלכאורה On the surface, the comparison is not understood: [How can we be expected to experience dread and awe while studying Torah] as they experienced at Sinai when: “The entire nation saw the voices,”²² and “Face to face, G-d spoke to you”? When the Torah is studied now, every person studies alone, [without experiencing such revelations]. Nevertheless, the explanation is, whenever and wherever the Torah is studied, it is the actual word of G-d that was given to Moshe at Sinai. This [realization] should cause a person to be overcome by dread and awe, as if he received the Torah today at Mount Sinai.

Although the thunder, lightning, and other awe-inspiring revelations that accompanied the Giving of the Torah are lacking, the fundamental truth — that the word of G-d is being revealed — is the same as at Sinai. That realization should inspire dread and awe.

Summary

The previous section describes how a person's body and animal soul constrain his spiritual potential. In this section, the *maamar* explains how the Torah empowers the G-dly soul to overcome those constraints.

The Alter Rebbe asks: How is it possible for the strength of the Torah to empower the G-dly soul and weaken the physical nature of the body when the Torah itself is enfolded in material entities? He explains that the source of the Torah is essential G-dliness. That source remains connected to the Torah even as it enfoldes itself in material entities.

The Torah's essential G-dly nature expresses itself through our study of the Torah, as indicated by the verse that introduces the Ten Commandments: “And G-d spoke all these words *leimor*: ‘I am G-d....’”

Generally, the term *leimor* means “to say,” i.e., to communicate the concept to someone else. In this context, that meaning is not applicable, for the entire Jewish people, as well as every Jewish soul of all time, were present at the Giving of the Torah. Moreover, the entire Torah, the Oral Tradition as well as the Written Law, was given at Sinai. Instead, the intent of *leimor* is to teach that when a Jew studies the Torah, he is saying G-d’s word, as it is written: “My tongue shall repeat Your sayings.”

When a person studies the Torah in this spirit, he brings about the revelation of G-d’s infinite light on this physical plane.

When one contemplates this and takes to heart that, when studying the Torah, he is speaking the actual word of G-d that was given to Moshe at Sinai, great awe and dread will fall upon him.

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FOOTNOTES

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| 1. <i>Midrash Tehillim</i> 8:3. | 8. <i>Rashi’s</i> commentary to the above verse. | 15. <i>Amos</i> 8:12. |
| 2. Cf. <i>Yeshayahu</i> 42:7. | 9. Cf. <i>Tehillim</i> 87:1. | 16. <i>Shabbos</i> 125b. |
| 3. <i>Tehillim</i> 29:11. | 10. See <i>Zohar</i> , Vol. I, p. 24a; the notes to <i>Sefer HaMaamarim</i> 5708, p. 66. | 17. <i>Yeshayahu</i> 59:21. |
| 4. <i>Sanhedrin</i> 99b. | 11. <i>Shmos</i> 20:1-2. | 18. See <i>Rashi</i> , <i>Shmos</i> 24:12. |
| 5. See the Introduction to the <i>Zohar</i> , Vol. I, p. 4a. | 12. <i>Devarim</i> 5:4. | 19. See <i>Shmos Rabbah</i> 28:7; 47:1. |
| 6. <i>Sanhedrin</i> 26b, commenting on <i>Yeshayahu</i> 28:29. | 13. Cf. <i>ibid.</i> 29:14. | 20. <i>Devarim</i> 4:9-10. |
| 7. <i>Bereishis</i> 25:23. | 14. <i>Talmud Yerushalmi (Peah</i> 2:4); <i>Vayikra Rabbah</i> 22:1, <i>et al.</i> | 21. <i>Berachos</i> 22a. |
| | | 22. <i>Shmos</i> 20:15. |

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI SCHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI; ADAPTED BY ELI TOUGER

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (18 Elul 1745-24 Tevet 1812), known as "the Alter Rebbe," was one of the main disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, and the founder of the Chabad Chassidism. He is the author of *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and *Tanya* as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

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