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BaChodesh HaShelishi: Shavuos - Section III

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

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והנה Behold, studying the Torah with such *bittul*

I.e., the dread and awe that result from the awareness of the essential G-dliness of the Torah one is studying.

grants strength and power to the G-dly soul and weakens the *sitra achra*. This is the implication of the verse:¹

That begins the Ten Commandments.

“I am G-d your L-rd Who took you out of the land of Egypt.” With the acceptance of the Torah, *Anochi* —G-d’s actual Essence and Being which transcends all worlds — is drawn down. This is also the implication of the verse:² “And these words which I (*Anochi*) command you today....”

The word metzavecha, “I command you,” relates to the term tzavsa, meaning “connection.” The level of Anochi, G-d’s Essence, is drawn down and connected to “you,” the Jewish people.

[The verse states: *Anochi, Havayah Elokecha* (“I am G-d your L-rd,”), i.e.,] the level of *Anochi*, [G-d’s Essence,] is drawn down to the Jewish people through the medium of [His name] *Havayah*, which refers to an [ongoing] motif of contraction and expansion,

Although the name Havayah sometimes refers to G-dly light that transcends all limitations, in other contexts it is described as the source for the sequence in which G-d’s infinite light descends and creates structure within the Spiritual Cosmos. The Yud of G-d’s name Havayah (ה-ו-ה-י) is associated with contraction, for the yud is a small letter, a mere point. The Hei is associated with expansion, as indicated by its form which has both width and height. The Vav is associated with drawing the influence down to a lower level, and the final Hei, with expansion on that lower plane (Tanya, Iggeres HaTeshuvah, ch. 4).

until it actually becomes *Elokecha*,

Translated as “your L-rd” in the above verse. G-d’s name Elokim is associated with the G-dly

power and life-force that enclothes itself in every entity and endows it with vitality.

[your strength and your vitality, i.e., the power and energy that maintain the Jewish people on this physical plane].

יָדַי This “take[s] you out of the land of Egypt,” i.e., the boundaries and limitations stemming from the body and the animal soul that constrict and enclothe the G-dly soul and prevent it from leaving its encasement, as the verse states:³ “I will cause you to ascend from the oppression of Egypt to a good and abundant land.”

כִּי Receiving [the Torah as it is identified with the level of] *Anochi*, the level that transcends all worlds, the level at which “I, G-d, have not changed,” i.e., studying the Torah with an approach of *bittul*, empowers the G-dly soul and weakens the desires of the body.

This concludes the theme mentioned in the previous section, that the Torah connects a person to the essence of G-d and this connection empowers him to overcome the challenges presented by the body and the animal soul.

וְזָדוּ On this basis, we can understand [the *Talmudic* statement]:⁴ “The inhabitants of Jericho would bind together the *Shema*,” i.e., they would not interrupt between “[G-d is] one” and “You shall love.”

I.e., they would read the Shema as it is written in the Torah without interjecting the expression “Baruch shem kevod....” Our practice is to include that expression, but to do so in a whisper, as stated in Pesachim, loc. cit.

[Their intent was that through] accepting [the concept that G-d is] “one,” by identifying with the sublime unity which represents absolute *bittul* to G-d’s infinite light that transcends all the worlds, their love [for G-d] would increase until it would truly be “with all your heart,” [interpreted by our Sages⁵ as meaning,] “with both your inclinations.” [Even the *yetzer hara*

Evil inclination.

that stems from] the *sitra achra*

Lit., “the other side,” the forces not identified with G-dliness; the unholy side of existence.

would be subdued and transformed from darkness into light.

The sparks of G-dliness enclothed within the evil inclination will be elevated and expressed in a positive manner.

This *bittul* draws down strength [for the G-dly soul] and [brings about] weakness [for the animal soul], as explained above.

משא"כ In contrast, [such utter *bittul* is not evoked by the expression]: “Blessed be the name of Your glorious kingdom forever and ever,” [recited during the *Shema*]. [Indeed, that phrase refers to a level of G-dliness that leaves room for worldly existence, as implied by the verse:]⁶ “G-d reigns over nations.”

I.e., G-d's kingship allows for the existence of other nations. In contrast to the higher realms of G-dliness which are too exalted to allow for the existence of nations that are not batel, nullified to Him, Malchus, G-d's kingship, makes possible such existence.

[The verse uses] the name [*Elokim*] which represents the vitality for all worlds, [conveying life] even to the gentiles. [To refer to a related concept,] our Sages state:⁷ “Unlike Avraham, from whom Yishmael emerged.”

Our Sages' intent is that, unlike Avraham, Yaakov is praised for the fact that all his offspring were holy. Similarly, the higher unity relates to a level of G-dliness that transcends all worldly dimensions. The name Elokim and the attribute of Malchus, by contrast, serve as the life-force for worldly existence, even its unsavory elements. Therefore the inhabitants of Jericho would omit the expression “Blessed be the name...,” for they desired that their Divine service be above any connection to worldliness.

אלא We, however, do recite “Blessed be the name of Your glorious kingdom forever and ever” in a whisper. [In doing so, we restate the concept of G-d's unity,] because the word *Vaed* is the same as *Echad* if the letters are exchanged,

The mystic energies from Above are expressed through the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each letter is a unique spiritual force. Nevertheless, there are several patterns that reflect an interrelationship of the letters. The alef of echad interchanges with the vav of vaed, since both letters belong to the same group of letters, viz., alef, hei, vav, yud (which, the Rebbe notes, are known as osiyos hahemshech, the “connective letters”). The ches of echad interchanges with the ayin of vaed, since they share the same source (motza) in the organs of speech, and thus both belong to the category of “guttural letters,” viz., alef, hei, ches, ayin. Finally, the large daled of echad transposes into the small daled of vaed (Lessons In Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VahaEmunah, ch. 7).

as the *Zohar* explains.⁸

To explain the above concepts in greater depth: In many sources in Chassidus (Tanya, Shaar

HaYichud VebaEmunah, ch. 7, Kuntres Etz HaChayim, ch. 6, et al.), it is explained that there are two conceptions of G-d's unity:

a) the lower unity, the way we conceive of existence, that G-d created the world and grants it life. The world is, however, a separate entity, subservient to G-d, but distinct from Him. This relates to the expression: "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom...", for a king and his kingdom are separate entities.

b) the higher unity, the way He conceives of existence, as it were. From His perspective, "There is nothing aside from Him" (Devarim 4:35). All existence is merely an expression of His light. This is reflected by the verse: "G-d is one," i.e., His oneness encompasses all existence.

Obviously, an awareness of the higher unity inspires a more complete and encompassing love for G-d. The person loses concern for himself and yearns for — and to a certain extent, achieves — oneness with Him. In contrast, when one loves G-d in the context of the lower unity, he retains his own identity. For this reason, the inhabitants of Jericho would bypass the expression "Blessed be the name...", i.e., they desired that their love for G-d flow directly from the higher unity; the awareness of "G-d is one."

Although our Sages appreciated the positive dimension of this practice, they ordained that people recite "Blessed be the name...." Two reasons are given for this practice:

a) Most people are not capable of functioning on the level of the higher unity, and their prayers would not be genuine if they attempted to do so. They recite "Blessed be the name...", because this is a level of Divine service that they can relate to. They must, however, realize that "Vaed is the same as Echad if the letters are exchanged," i.e., that the higher unity must be reflected within the lower unity.

b) G-d desired "a dwelling in the lower realms" (Tanya, ch. 36) and that cannot be achieved from the perspective of the higher unity, for, from that perspective, worldly existence is not significant. Therefore it is necessary to convey the higher unity of Echad into the realm governed by Vaed through "Baruch shem kevod."

Summary

The previous section concluded by highlighting the dread and awe evoked by the awareness of the essential G-dliness of the Torah. Studying the Torah with such dread and awe grants strength and power to the G-dly soul and weakens the animal soul.

This is the implication of the verse: "I am G-d your L-rd Who took you out of the land of Egypt." With the acceptance of the Torah, *Anochi* — G-d's actual Essence and Being which transcends all worlds — is drawn down. This "take[s] you out of the land of Egypt," elevating the G-dly soul above the constrictions imposed upon it by the boundaries and limitations stemming from the body and the animal soul.

The level of awareness engendered by such an approach is reflected in the practice of the inhabitants of Jericho who, during the recitation of the *Shema*, would not interrupt between "G-d is one" and "You shall love." Their intent was that their acceptance of the concept that "G-d is one" and their identification with the sublime unity would spontaneously inspire an elevated and encompassing love for G-d. We, however, do not follow that practice but instead add "Blessed be the name of Your glorious kingdom forever and ever."

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FOOTNOTES

1. *Shmos* 20:2.
2. *Devarim* 6:6.
3. *Shmos* 3:7.
4. *Pesachim* 55b-56a. See *Kuntres Etz HaChayim*, p. 34; *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 139a, for a discussion of the inner meaning of this practice.
5. *Sifri* to the verse; *Berachos* 54a.
6. *Tehillim* 47:9.
7. See *Pesachim*, *loc. cit.*; *Vayikra Rabbah* 36:5.
8. *Zohar*, Vol. II, 134a; *Or Hachama*, *ibid.* See the Rebbe's *Teshuvos U'Biurom*, sec. 13 (p. 62).

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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