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BaChodesh HaShelishi: Shavuos - Section IV

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

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ובזה On the basis [of the explanations in the previous sections],

In the previous section, it was explained that bittul is necessary to tap into the infinite G-dliness invested in the Torah. In this section, the Alter Rebbe illustrates that concept by using the relationship between the sun and the moon as an analogy.

we can resolve [the questions raised at the outset concerning Rosh Chodesh Sivan].

In the first section of the maamar, the question was raised: Why in the verse: “In the third month after the exodus of the Jewish people from the land of Egypt, on this day...,” is Rosh Chodesh referred to by allusion instead of being mentioned explicitly? (The resolution of this question is found in the following section. This section merely lays the conceptual groundwork for that explanation.)

The Jewish people structure their calendar according to the moon. *Sukkah* 29a; *Bereishis Rabbah* 6:3.

The moon has no [light] of its own.¹

Just as the moon has no light of its own and receives its light from the sun, the spiritual power of the Jewish people does not depend on their own individual potential, but on their bittul to G-d which, through the medium of the Torah, enables them to tap into His infinite light.

It receives its light from the sun [and] reflects [it] towards the earth. Therefore, every month, its light wanes until it is reduced to a mere point before it is renewed, because it becomes aligned with the sun to receive its light [at this time]. Therefore, it does not shine to the earth [on that night].

The Alter Rebbe is explaining the inner, spiritual motif reflected in the phases of the moon. Since the moon's light is derived from the sun, it must align itself with the sun to make itself a medium for its light. Afterwards, as it proceeds on its orbit, it shines that light towards the earth.

The light then proceeds to grow until the moon becomes full. All of the light is the sun's because the moon has no [light] of its own. After the full moon, it wanes until it becomes a point again at the end of the month and it is then renewed.

וככל In keeping with this analogy, a parallel to all these phases can be found regarding the Jewish people who are in a state of *bittul* to G-d's infinite light that transcends all the worlds.

I.e., the fact that the Jews structure their calendar according to the movement of the moon indicates that their relationship with G-d parallels that between the sun and the moon.

Their Torah study and their Divine service are not their [achievement] at all. There is no sense of an "I" who studies or an "I" who loves [G-d]. Instead, [the relationship] is entirely one of *bittul* to G-d's infinite light, and G-d's infinite light actually rests amidst their Torah study and Divine service.

Nevertheless, just as the light reflected by the moon is not really its own, but is actually the light of the sun, so too, when the Jews study the Torah...

"The word of G-d': this refers to *halachah*," is spoken from their mouths.

The Alter Rebbe is referring to Shabbos 138b as cited in sec. 2, and the statements of Maggid Meisharim, Parshas Vayikra, as cited in sec. 3 of the maamar entitled U'Sfartem, translated in this series.

וזהו [G-d's word] is comparable to the sun, as it is written:² "[Like] the sun and its shield are *Havayah* and *Elokim*," i.e., the dimension [of G-dliness associated with the name] *Havayah* is analogous to the sun, while the dimension [associated with the name] *Elokim* is called its shield, as explained in another source.³ The Torah is drawn down from G-d's name *Havayah*.

*I.e., in contrast to nature whose vitality is drawn down through the medium of the name *Elokim* and thus is characterized by limitation and concealment, the Torah has its source in the name *Havayah*. The Torah is thus the vehicle which conveys G-d's transcendence to this world.*

וזהו [On this basis, we can understand the need for] Torah study, Divine service,

In this context, "Divine service" refers to the service of prayer.

and deeds of kindness.⁴

The intent is that to evoke G-d's infinite light and have it enfolded in the Torah, Torah study must be complemented by prayer and charity.

All three are necessary. [To explain:] "deeds of kindness" refers to charity. Charity comprises the totality of the Torah. [Indeed, the Torah] is called charity.

As Devarim 6:25 states: “It will be considered as charity for us if we carefully observe this entire commandment,” and Bereishis 18:19 speaks of “keeping the path of Havayah to perform charity and justice” (Maamarei Admur HaZakein, 5569, p. 66).

In particular, this refers to actual deeds of charity. For charity involves “reviv[ing] the spirit of the lowly.”⁵ In this, it is comparable to the sun, as it is written:⁶ “And the ‘sun of charity’ will shine forth for you, those who fear My name.” For just as charity involves “reviv[ing] the spirit of the lowly,” the light of the sun shines in a place of darkness where there is no light, drawing influence from Above downward.

Every action on man’s part evokes a corresponding process in the spiritual realms. Our giving charity, i.e., sharing vitality with a needy person, motivates G-d to invest His essential vitality in the Torah and have it illuminate our material plane.

והשפעה This influence is evoked through Divine service, [prayer,] which reflects *bittul*,

i.e., by bringing a person to a state of bittul, Divine service makes man a medium to draw down these spiritual influences. Thus the person’s relationship with G-d encompasses all of the three pillars of Jewish practice: Torah study, Divine service, deeds of kindness.

enabling [man’s] ascent upward [and his nullification to] G-d’s infinite light that transcends all the worlds. This calls forth influence from G-d’s infinite light, enabling it to be revealed on this material plane as it is revealed above. [In the above analogy, this parallels] the *bittul* of the moon to the light of the sun. [Thus, prayer and charity make it possible for Torah study to be a medium to draw down G-dliness.]

Summary

Building on the explanations in the previous sections, the conceptual groundwork is laid for the resolution of the question raised at the outset concerning Rosh Chodesh Sivan: Why is [Rosh Chodesh] not mentioned explicitly but instead alluded to by the phrase “this day?”

The Jewish people structure their calendar according to the moon. The moon has no light of its own and goes through phases, reflecting the light of the sun. Just as the moon is *batef* to the sun and reflects its light, the Jewish people are in a state of *bittul* to G-d’s infinite light.

Their study of Torah and observance of its *mitzvos* call forth this G-dly light. And prayer and charity make it possible for this light to be drawn down into our world.

FOOTNOTES

1. See *Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 135b.
2. *Tehillim* 84:12.
3. See *Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah*, chs. 4-5.
4. See *Avos* 1:2.
5. *Yeshayahu* 47:15.
6. *Malachi* 3:20.

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

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