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## U'Sfartem Lachem: Sefiras HaOmer - Section II

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

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**וזהו** This is [the inner meaning of] our Sages' statement:<sup>1</sup> "The prayer services were instituted by the Patriarchs." The Patriarchs represent [the sublime *Middos*] — *Chessed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferes* —

*The emotional characteristics generally translated as kindness, might, and mercy.*

from which are drawn the attributes of love, fear, and mercy that are identified with [our Patriarchs] Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

*The Patriarchs served as paradigms of the emotional qualities associated with them. Thus the Pardes quotes Sefer HaBahir as stating: "The attribute of Chessed said before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'From the day on which Avraham existed on the earth, I have not had to perform my function because Avraham is functioning in my stead.'"*

*What is significant, however, is not only the individual greatness of the Patriarchs in personifying these qualities, but the fact that they were Patriarchs, literally, fathers. Just as a father's possessions are inherited by his sons, so too, the emotional qualities that are the legacy of the Patriarchs are inherited by the Jewish people, their descendants (Torah Or, Parshas Va'eira).*

*The inner meaning of the statement that the Patriarchs instituted the prayer services is that it is during the prayer services that the emotional legacy granted us by each of the Patriarchs is given expression.*

Therefore each of the prayer services comprises three types of verses, i.e., verses associated with [each of the qualities]: *Chessed*, [*Gevurah*, and *Tiferes*. Those associated with *Chessed*] lead to the love expressed during the recitation of the *Shema* that comes as a result of the meditation described above.

*I.e., in sec. 1, which describes how contemplation of the bittul of the angels should inspire a burning love for G-d.*

This [gives expression to] the attribute of [love, as personified by] "Avraham who loved Me,"<sup>2</sup> which brings about a revelation of the love within the soul and a movement of *ratzo*.

**וְעִי"ר** Afterwards, this [thrust] evokes [a desire for the satisfaction of the soul's yearning]

*The thirst for G-d that the meditation on G-dliness arouses is satisfied through the connection with G-d established...*

[through the observance of the Torah and its *mitzvos*, as implied by the continuation of the *Shema*]:<sup>3</sup> “And these words which I command you... [shall be upon your hearts] and you shall speak of them.”

*I.e., the person will appreciate that since the Torah is G-d's word, identified entirely with Him, he can satisfy his yearning for G-dliness by studying the Torah and fulfilling its mitzvos.*

Although the second passage [of the *Shema*] also states:<sup>4</sup> “And you shall gather your grain,” nevertheless, [as a result of this love, a person] will establish the Torah as his primary occupation and his work as secondary.<sup>5</sup>

*I.e., the Shema also relates how a person will involve himself in material activities. Nevertheless, these material activities are secondary to the person's primary focus: his involvement in the Torah and its mitzvos.*

**וְזֵה** This is [the implication of the verse]:<sup>6</sup> “Is a person a tree of the field?” [When] a tree grows from the earth, the primary [purpose] is the fruits that [grow] upon it. Although there are thorns, leaves, and the trunk of the tree, the primary [purpose] is the fruits alone. Similarly, with regard to a person, what is most important is the “fruit” he produces; i.e., [his observance of] the Torah and its *mitzvos*, as our Sages said:<sup>7</sup> “What are the fruits? The *mitzvos*.”

*The analogy of a tree teaches us — among other concepts — that just as a tree comprises many different elements and yet they all exist for the sake of the fruit, so too, all the elements of a person's existence are for the sake of the fruits: the Torah and its mitzvos.*

**וְזֵה** This reflects the concept of establishing the Torah as one's primary occupation. All the remainder of one's physical needs should be considered like leaves with regard to the fruit.

*I.e., of secondary importance, and existing for the sake of his spiritual activities, as the leaves exist for the sake of the fruit.*

Thus all [of a person's activities]

*A person's spiritual activities, and even his material activities, for they are considered supportive of his spiritual activities, like the relationship between leaves and fruit.*

will be motivated by *Ahavah*, love, which is the attribute of Avraham. Similarly, Yitzchak, who is [identified] with the attribute of *Gevurah*, inner strength, [endows a person] with the attribute of fear within his soul, as it is written:<sup>8</sup> “The fear of Isaac.”

*For this reason, our prayers also include verses associated with fear.*

**יובחי** The attribute of Yaakov is identified with the quality of *Rachamim*, mercy. [This quality is necessary in our Divine service, for there are those] whose hearts are as stone.<sup>9</sup> Even though [such a person] meditates on all the matters described above, he will not be aroused to love during the recitation of the *Shema* because he is very connected to the vanities of material existence.

*Divine mercy is necessary to enable a person to overcome his spiritual insensitivity, as the Alter Rebbe proceeds to explain.*

He is a *yesh*, [concerned with] his self and his individual existence. As a consequence, his heart has become stone-like. The advice to overcome this is to arouse [G-d's] abundant mercies for his soul, as implied by the phrase:<sup>10</sup> “For Yaakov who has redeemed Avraham.”

*We have translated the phrase within the context in the maamar. A literal translation would produce a different meaning.*

*In this context, Avraham can be interpreted as a reference to the attribute of love, and Yaakov, the attribute of mercy. The person's love for G-d is unable to be expressed because of his self-concern and preoccupation with material matters. By imploring Divine mercy, we are able to activate our inner potential for love.*

**ודזהו** This comes about through prayer, through the recitation of the verses [asking for Divine] mercy, [for example,] “Exalted King... in Your abundant mercy, have mercy upon us,”<sup>11</sup> and “Our Father, merciful Father,... have mercy upon us and endow our hearts with understanding to comprehend and to realize... so that we will not be embarrassed for eternity.”<sup>12</sup>

**יפ'** To explain [the latter request]:

*As the Alter Rebbe proceeds to explain, “for eternity” refers to the eternal life of the soul.*

[On] the verse:<sup>13</sup> “No man will see Me and live,” our Sages comment:<sup>14</sup> “In their lifetime, [men] cannot see [G-d], but at the time of their death, they do see.” During their lifetime, when the soul is encloded in a body, [the material nature of existence] covers and conceals [G-dliness] and it appears to [the person] that this world is a significant and independent entity.

*The nature of material existence is that physical reality is apparent and obvious and overshadows everything else to the extent that our awareness of the spiritual is merely abstract and intellectual.*

When, however, the soul departs the body, it then perceives

*With the same power and certainty that we perceive physical entities in this world.*

that, in truth, G-d's Being and Essence is past, present, and future, without any change, and there is nothing that can enclothe Him or conceal Him at all.

**והיה** [The soul will recognize that] the conception of the world as a significant and independent entity was an entirely false premise. Then it will be overcome by a great and awesome shame that all of its thoughts and strivings were involved in the vanities of this world and its occupations, as if [the world] were actually an independent entity.

*When the soul realizes the futility and emptiness of the material activities in which it invested itself during its lifetime, it will be truly and genuinely embarrassed. Moreover, since spiritual existence is constant and everlasting, that shame will continue "for eternity."*

This reflects great brazenness and audacity.

*For instead of devoting himself to the mission with which G-d charged him, he focused his energies on matters of no true significance.*

**ולכן** Therefore we ask, "In Your abundant mercy, have mercy upon us and endow our hearts with understanding." ["Understanding" refers to the potential] to make deductions,<sup>15</sup> so that even while the soul is enclothed in the body, it will comprehend and conceive how in truth everything is utterly *batef*, as it was before the world was created, without any change, as mentioned above.

*I.e., we ask that even during our lifetime in this world, we be granted a trace of the spiritual awareness that the soul will enjoy in the World to Come.*

[Having this understanding will safeguard us] "so that we will not be embarrassed for eternity," i.e., [that we will] not have [to face] this eternal shame. This [motif, in which our prayers for Divine mercy lead to the expression of our inner love for G-d, is intimated in the verse]: "For Yaakov who has redeemed Avraham."<sup>iv</sup>

## Summary

Our Sages state: "The prayer services were instituted by the Patriarchs," implying that the emotional characteristics epitomized by the Patriarchs are given expression in our prayers.

Avraham was the paradigm of love for G-d. This relates to the concept of *ratzo* and *shov* mentioned previously. The recitation of the *Shema* (*ratzo*) expresses the soul's yearning for G-dliness, and the observance of the Torah and *mitzvos* (*shov*) enables a connection with G-d to be forged within the context of a person's day-to-day life.

Similarly, Yitzchak, who is [identified] with the attribute of *Gevurah*, inner strength, endows a person with the attribute of fear, and Yaakov, who is identified with the quality of mercy, enables us to draw down G-d's mercies. Man is in need of G-d's mercies because so much of our energy is spent on worldly matters that are of no true value. Imploring Divine mercy enables us to activate our inner potential for love, to borrow the wording of a verse: Yaakov (mercy) redeems Avraham (love).

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#### FOOTNOTES

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|---------------------------|---|---|
| 1. <i>Berachos</i> 26b.   | 7. <i>Sotah</i> 46a.  | 12. The blessing <i>Ahavas Olam</i> from the Morning Prayers.                 |
| 2. <i>Yeshayahu</i> 41:8. | 8. <i>Bereishis</i> 31:42..   | 13. <i>Shmos</i> 33:20.   |
| 3. <i>Devarim</i> 6:6-7.  | 9. Cf. <i>Yechezkel</i> 11:19.  | 14. <i>Toras Kohanim</i> to <i>Vayikra</i> 1:1; <i>Bamidbar Rabbah</i> 14:22. |
| 4. <i>Ibid.</i> 11:14.    | 10. <i>Yeshayahu</i> 29:22.   | 15. See <i>Eruvin</i> 100b.   |
| 5. <i>Berachos</i> 35b.   | 11. The passage <i>HaKol Yoducha</i> from the <i>Shabbos</i> Morning Prayers. |   |
| 6. <i>Devarim</i> 19:9.   |   |   |

#### 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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