

Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

The teachings of the Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr and Likkutei Torah

The role of a Rebbe

ד"ה ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם

פרשת משפטים
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Chassidim place great emphasis on the need for a Rebbe. The concept of a Rebbe goes all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the first leader and Rebbe of the Jewish people. But what is the role of a Rebbe?

The Alter Rebbe finds allusion to the function of a Rebbe in the opening Pesukim of Parshas Mishpatim.

וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תָּשִׂים לִפְנֵיהֶם: כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד
שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד וּבִשְׁבַעַת יֵצֵא לְחֶפְשִׁי חֲנָם:

*"And these are the laws that you (s) shall place before them (pl);
When you (s) acquire a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years
and in the seventh he shall go free, without payment"*

Hashem tells Moshe to present the laws (Mishpatim) before the Jewish people, hence the word לפניהם is in plural form - "place before them". Since Moshe is addressing the Jewish people, the next verse should have read כי תקנו, "when you (in plural) acquire a Hebrew slave".

Instead, the verse reverts to singular form, "when you (in singular) acquire a Hebrew slave". Why does the form change and who is the singular person that is being addressed?

In one of the prophecies of Yiriyahu, Hashem says "I will sow the House of Israel... with seed of man and seed of animals." Chassidus explains that these two types of seeds in the House of Israel refer to two different levels of Neshamos; one is likened to man and the other is likened to animals. The difference between a man and animal is that man possesses Daas.

Whilst translated as knowledge, for the Neshama, Daas denotes an inner, implicit sense or knowing of G-dliness to the extent that it defines one's reality. This lofty Neshamos of Atzilus who possess this Daas, are described as "the seed of man". In each generation, only a few, unique individuals merit such lofty souls.

Most of our souls are Neshamos of the lower worlds of Beriya, Yetzira and Asiya. Whilst they believe in Hashem, it is not with the implicit knowing and truth of the Neshamos of Atzilus. Lacking this Daas, they are likened to animals.

The difference between the experience of these two types of Neshamos is like the difference between seeing and hearing. When one sees something it becomes their absolute truth and nothing can sway them. Simply hearing of something will bring an awareness, but it will not be the same immutable truth attained through seeing.

In their relationship with Hashem, the lofty Neshamos are likened to children (בנים), who have a deep love and appreciation for their parents that motivates their service. In contrast, the

lower Neshamos serve Hashem like servants (עבדים).

Moshe is associated with the Sefirah of Daas. The role of Moshe is to draw down Daas to the lower Neshamos, so that they too may "know" Hashem in a deep and meaningful way.

This is why Moshe is referred to as the "Raya Meheimna", the faithful shepherd. Chassidus explains that this term also means "the one who feeds faith". Just as the act of eating causes the food to become internalised, Moshe's role is to enable the Jewish people to internalise their Emunah; so that it is not just a superficial belief or awareness, but a deep realisation and truth that becomes part of them.

"And these are the Mishpatim" - this refers to the study of Torah through which we internalise G-dliness with our minds.

"You shall place before them" is a directive to Moshe. The word לפניהם is related to the word Pnimius, meaning inner. The role of Moshe is "You shall place within them", to give the internalised experience of Daas to the Jewish people.

"When you (s) acquire a Hebrew slave". The verse reverts to singular form because it is addressing Moshe as the Rebbe of the Jewish people. Moshe must "acquire a slave"; to bring Daas even to the Neshamos on the level of a servant - the Neshamos that are likened to animals.

The way in which Moshe brings Daas to these Neshamos is described as תקנה - acquiring. Unlike the act of creation, in an acquisition nothing new comes into being, it is merely transferred from one domain to another. Chassidus describes this as גלוי ההעלם, revealing that which was hidden.

In the verse, the slave is described as a Hebrew - עברי. The term עברי refers to the descendants of Avraham, who came עבר הנהר, the other side of the river.

Every Neshama, even those on the level of "the seed of animals" or "servants", is sourced on "the other side of the river"; Hashem's essential light that transcends all worlds. But through their descent into the world, their source becomes hidden from their conscious experience.

To impart the awareness of Daas, even in the lowest of souls, Moshe does not need to create something new within them. All he has to do is to reveal their true source that lies hidden within them, so that it can define their conscious thinking and living. Since no fundamental change is required, Moshe can make attaining Daas accessible and achievable for every Jew.

A Rebbe does not lift us up by changing who we are. A Rebbe lifts us up by revealing to us who we really are.