

Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

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

Planting Mitzvos in Fertile Soil

ד"ה הבאים ישרש יעקב

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הבאים ישרש יעקב ופרח ישראל ומלאו פני-תבל
תנובה

“Those who came, whom Yaakov caused to take root, Yisroel flourished and blossomed and they filled the face of the world with produce” ~ Haftorah of Parshas Shemos.

Many of the commentators explain that this is a Messianic prophesy of Yishaya, foretelling of a time that is coming in the future when the Jewish people will fill the world.

However, Rashi explains that the verse refers to the past, when the Jewish people came down to Egypt. Like a seed, the Jewish people took root in Egypt, flourished and multiplied until they filled the land.

The Exile and subsequent Exodus from Egypt was a necessary preparation for the Jewish people to be able to receive the Torah and its Mitzvos on Har Sinai.

To understand the meaning of the metaphor of planting we need to look at the dynamics of vegetative growth.

The seed of a tree is inedible. It has neither taste nor smell, unlike the fruits that will eventually grow from it. It is like a dry piece of wood. But this single seed has the power to produce a tree that will bear large volumes of edible and tasty fruits year on end.

In order to grow, the seed must be planted in the ground. If the seed is left on a table it will not germinate. When the seed is placed into the ground and takes root, the power within the earth enables the seed to flourish.

Not every land is conducive for planting. The land must be fertile and suitable. If the seed is planted in unfertile land, like a desert, it too will fail to germinate.

The planting of a seed is a metaphor for Mitzvos, which our sages liken to fruit. The Mitzvos come from a lofty source Above. They are revelations of the Divine Will, the infinite light of Hashem that transcends the worlds.

But the Mitzvos descend into our world to be expressed in physical form, observed through simple physical actions. In this physical form, they have no resemblance to their original lofty state - like the seed which is incomparable to the fruit. Like the seed, simple action lacks 'taste' and 'fragrance', representing deeper feeling and understanding.

The 'seed' of the Mitzvah needs to be 'planted' in fertile soil.

This is the Jewish people, whom Hashem describes as His “Land of desire”.

Hashem created the world because He desires a Dirah Betachtonim, for His essential light to be revealed in the created worlds, which appear independent and separate. This is fulfilled through the Mitzvos when kept in a way of surrender to Hashem (Bittul).

Hashem did not give the Mitzvos to the angels because they are not completely separate from Hashem. It is specifically the Neshamos of the Jewish people down here in this world, in physical bodies, that are the fertile soil in which the seeds of the Mitzvos can grow.

This is because unlike the angels, the Neshamos down here are separate entities from Hashem. When the Neshama, with its free will, surrenders its independence to Hashem, this Bittul makes us the fertile soil where Hashem's Will and Desire can be revealed.

So when a Jew performs a Mitzvah, the seed takes root. Like the seedling emerging from the ground, the G-dly energy hidden within the Mitzvah emerges to a state of revelation within the world.

The full revelation of the G-dly light of the Mitzvah will be experienced in the times of Moshiach. Then we will taste the sweet fruits and experience the pleasure and delight of the revelation of the essence of the Mitzvos and their deep hidden meaning.

This idea is also expressed in the metaphor of the conception of a child. Hashem is likened to a Chosson (groom) and the Jewish people are His bride.

The seed provided by the male has all of the essential elements to create a child. However, it is hidden within the seed. The male seed needs to take root in the womb of the female where it can develop from a hidden state to one of revelation, as a fully developed child. It is the fertile womb of the female that has this ability.

The Exile in Egypt was the Bittul that enabled the Jewish people to receive the Torah and Mitzvos in a way that they would take root and flourish. In the same way, our current Exile is preparing us for the even greater revelation that will come with the future redemption. Then we will taste the fruits of our Avodah and fill the world with Hashem's infinite light.