

Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

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

Removing darkness to find the light

ד"ה ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה

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Learning Gemara is difficult. Even for the seasoned student, it can take a life-time to master. One of the reasons it is so challenging is because of its complex structure.

The process of Talmud Bavli (Gemara) involves questions, challenges, postulations and refutations, contradictions and resolutions. We call this the *וטרריא שקלא*, the give-and-take or back-and-forth of the Talmudic debate.

The ultimate objective is to come to the conclusion, which is clarity on the issue under discussion or the Halachic ruling. But in order to get to the resolution we need to wade through pages of arguments and analysis.

Our sages describe the Talmud Bavli using the verse *במחשכים הושיבני*, "*He has caused me to dwell in darkness*". This was meant as a criticism of the style of study in Bavel. The darkness represents the confusion and lack of clarity reflected in the arguments and questioning.

(This is in contrast to the Talmud Yerushalmi. In the Yerushalmi the Halacha is clearly enunciated and there is no questioning and little argument. If the Bavli is "darkness", the Yerushalmi is "light".)

This would suggest that the Talmud Yerushalmi is superior to the Bavli. Yet, the bulk of Torah study and Halachic deduction is from the Bavli. And when there is a discrepancy between the two Talmuds, Halacha is like the Bavli.

One of the reasons for this is because having to answer and resolve the questions and challenges, brings us to the truth and clarity of the Halacha, which is the will of Hashem.

The process of coming to the Halachic conclusion is referred to as *הלכתא ליבון*, clarifying the Halacha. The word *ליבון* comes from the word *לבן* (white). Through the process of wading through the "darkness", we remove the darkness to reveal the white light of truth.

The darkness itself is not the objective. But it is only through the darkness that the true objective of greater light can be achieved. And in doing so, the darkness itself is pushed away.

At the end of the Parsha, as Eliezer is bringing Rivka back to marry Yitzchak, the Torah tells us *ויצא ערב לפנות בשדה לשוח* "*and Yitzchak went out to converse in the field towards evening.*"

The Alter Rebbe explains this verse as alluding to the study of

the Halachos of Torah.

In addition to meaning "converse", the word *לשוח* is also related to *שחייה*, which means to bend-down. The word *לפנות* - "towards" (evening), can also mean to remove.

The "field" refers to the teachings known as Braisa - literally meaning "outside" (because they were not included in the formal text of the Mishna compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi). Relative to the Mishna which is likened to the city, the Braisa is like the fields outside the city walls.

Unlike the teachings of the Mishna which are more general, the Braisos teach the details of the Mitzvos. Braisos form an integral part of the Talmudic debate in clarifying the Halacha.

Putting these ideas together, on a deeper level, the verse can be read "and Yitzchak descended down into the Braisa in order to remove the darkness (evening)."

In the same way, the G-dliness of Torah descends to be en-clothed within the "darkness" of worldly, physical things. But this is in order for us to transform the darkness.

This brings about the fulfilment of the prophesy of Zechariah *לעת ערב יהיה אור*, "*towards evening there will be light*", which refers to the light that comes from the darkness itself.

This Avodah is associated with Yitzchak. Yitzchak embodies the service of Hashem through Yirah; awe and Bittul; surrender to Hashem. Only when we learn with Bittul, can we navigate the darkness to find the light. Otherwise we risk getting stuck in the darkness itself.

We can apply these ideas in our personal lives as well. We all experience moments of darkness and being on "the outside". We suffer times of confusion and lack of clarity, facing challenges and hardship.

Hidden in these experiences of darkness is a greater light - the opportunity to find greater strength, resilience and growth. If we never had to face darkness, we would never have been able to discover these deeper strengths.

If you want to remove something, you have to go down and get involved with it, but the objective is not to remain there. We have to face the darkness of the field, not because we want to be there, but because only by working to overcome it, will we be able to remove the darkness and discover and unleash the greater light.