



Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

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

Pathways to a Joyous Service

ד"ה תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה"א בשמחה

פרשת כי תבא

Ki Savo

When we wake up in the morning we may still be dreaming. Not a conventional dream, but a spiritual dream.

In a dream, as our logical brain recedes and our imagination runs free, things do not have to make sense. We can experience and envision a state of absolute paradox, without sensing its incongruity. But when we wake up, our logical mind becomes dominant and we recognise the falsity of our dream-state perception.

In our spiritual dream we can live in a state of spiritual-paradox. We may have a vague awareness of Hashem and how His presence fills the worlds, yet at the same time we are capable of going against His will.

Like the Talmudic paradox of the thief praying to Hashem for success in his heist, we also synthesise our faith in Hashem with a lifestyle or behaviours that do not seem to match.

This is because our Neshama's innate and deep yearning for Hashem is asleep. We need to arouse this love and bring it into our conscious minds. We do this through Davening.

The Pasuk teaches וישכם אברהם בבקר "and Avraham arose early in the morning." Avraham represents the Neshama's love for Hashem. In our Shacharis prayer, we wake up the Avraham inside of us, rousing the hidden love of the Neshama from its dream-state, to bring it into a full state of consciousness.

The focal point of Davening is the Shema, which contains the commandment to love Hashem, by which point the passionate love of our Neshama should be shining. We reach this climax through our meditations in the lead up to the Shema and the opening verse of the Shema itself.

The meditation that brings us to this love is encapsulated in the description of Avraham's prayer ויקרא שם בשם ה' א-ל עולם "and he called there in the name of Hashem א-ל עולם." Chassidus points out a grammatical nuance in the Pasuk. It does not say א-ל העולם, which would mean "G-d of the world", but rather א-ל עולם.

Describing Hashem as "G-d of the world" implies that the world is a separate existence albeit created by Hashem. But in truth, the world is completely nullified and like nought before Him, completely subsumed within His oneness. The source of the vitality of the worlds is merely a ray of His light, completely insignificant to His true Being which is unchanged by creation.

In the first verse of the Shema we openly declare this oneness, expressing our belief in this truth of reality. This brings us immediately to the words "and you shall love Hashem", the reve-

lation of the inner desire of the Neshama to cleave to Hashem that has been awakened through our meditation.

But as much as we come to yearn to grasp the Divine, no thought can grasp Him. No meditation or prayer will allow us to actualise the desire of the Neshama to bind ourselves to Hashem. But through Torah and Mitzvos we can.

With the passionate love and thirsting desire from Davening still strong and the knowledge that through Torah we can quench it, we will go from "the house of prayer to the house of study" and immerse ourselves in learning with great feeling of joy and enthusiasm.

But then we leave the Beis Midrash and our feelings of love disappear once again as we immerse ourselves into our work and mundane worldly pursuits.

Even there, we can still reignite a feeling joy in the service of Hashem with this different meditation; Even when we find ourselves distant from Hashem, immersed in worldliness; even if we have fallen in sin, we can still unite with the infinity of Hashem through the study of Torah and fulfillment of Mitzvos. This meditation can lift us up from the mundane and reinvigorate us with joy in serving Hashem.

There is a greater quality in this path to simcha as it comes from a return to Hashem from a state of distance; like the analogy of the great joy of a prince who goes free from imprisonment to return to his father's house.

With both of these meditations, we are always capable of serving Hashem with joy. This is the expectation expressed in the verse in our Parsha that holds us accountable for not serving Hashem with joy; "for you have not served Hashem with simcha and goodness of heart".

But it all starts with Davening, which awakens the Neshama.

Davening on the level described above is not easy. To get into in the zone of focus and deep meditation, we need to overcome many distractions and inner struggles. In this Maamar, the Alter Rebbe shares three things that we can strengthen ourselves and enhance our Davening;

1. Going to Mikvah, which brings us a spirit of purity
2. Giving Tzedaka which elevates us and saves us from the accusatory forces that claim that we are unworthy of approaching the Chamber of Hashem
3. Learning Mussar, particularly from the Zohar (likewise Chassidus). The light of these teachings illuminates our spiritual darkness. With this preparation, we can set out on our quest to attain true joy in serving Hashem.