

PREFACE

In the year 1950, Kehos Publication Society published a discourse by the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, titled Basi Legani. It was to be studied a few days later, on the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Shvat, the day of his grandmother's passing. The tenth of Shvat was a Shabbat, and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak passed away that day.

One year later, on the same day, his son-in-law, the Rebbe accepted leadership by publicly delivering a chasidic discourse. The discourse expounded the first chapter of Basi Legani. The Rebbe explained that it was no coincidence that his father-in-law released this discourse to be studied on the day he would pass away. In fact—the Rebbe went on to say—the discourse contains the mission statement for our generation; it is the blueprint for our work and a guide to getting it done.

Every year on that day, for the following thirty-seven years, the Rebbe delivered a discourse based on another of the twenty chapters of Basi Legani (completing one full cycle and 18 of the next). In the year 1971, when the twenty chapters had all been explained, the Rebbe started the cycle from the beginning, adding even more, deeper insight. It has since been a custom to review one chapter every year, along with the Rebbe's expository discourses.

This year (2015) we are in the fourth cycle and have reached the fifth chapter. In this booklet, we are presenting a new translation of Basi Legani, chapter five. We have also included an introduction, which summarizes the beginning of the discourse.

INTRODUCTION

This world seems to be anything but a garden. Yet, that is what G-d refers to it as, and not just a garden, but His garden. When the Tabernacle was built in the desert, He said to the Jewish people, “I have come to my garden, my sister, bride.¹”

When He created the world, the place where G-d most desired to be found was here, in our material world. That presence of G-d is what the rabbis refer to as the Shechina. With the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, and the sins that succeeded it, G-d's presence was no longer felt in this world.

A mission was left for us: To invite the Shechina back into her garden. Abraham, our forefather, was the first to bring the Shechina a little closer, and his children after him continued to do so. When Moshe built the Tabernacle in the desert, the Shechina finally returned; G-d's presence was once again revealed in this world.

The Tabernacle shows us what we must do to make G-d's presence shine throughout the world. The acacia wood, which formed the walls of the Tabernacle, encompassed all the work that was done within. In Hebrew, the word for acacia is שטים—which is similar to the word שטות, which refers to any sort of foolish, irrational behavior.

You see, G-d wants the world to be made into a home for Him through us—the world's inhabitants. So He hid Himself in this world, so that it seems to us that there is some other existence besides for Him. It is this idea that allows a foolishness to overcome us. We behave mindlessly, blind to the damage that sin causes. In fact, this foolishness is the only reason it is possible for us to sin.

The Jews in the desert took acacia wood—which represents foolishness—and with it, built a house for the Shechina. We have the ability to do the same, taking our foolishness and turning it around into its opposite counterpart, as a holy supra-rational state; one that lifts us out of our limitations. And so G-d looks and says, “Aha, you saw through the blinds which I have placed on the world! You see that the world is really my garden!”

And when we do, the Shechina returns, and G-d's presence is felt throughout every detail of His world.

¹ Song of Songs 5:1.

HIGHER THAN REASON

Just as you can veer beneath mindfulness, falling into unholy, foolish irrational behavior, so you can rise above mindfulness, acting with non-rational (but not irrational) behavior that has holiness to it, a kind of intelligence that transcends reason.

This is illustrated in the Talmud by a story:

They say about Rabbi Yehuda Bar Ilai, that he used to take a branch of myrtle and dance before the bride.

Rav Shmuel the son of Rav Yitzchak used to dance with three. (Rashi says he took three branches and juggled them.)

Rav Zeira said, “This old man is embarrassing us.” (Since he is disgracing Torah scholars by making a fool out of himself. —Rashi)

When Rav Shmuel’s soul departed, a beam of fire separated him from the world. Rav Zeira said, “The branch helped the old man achieve this.” (The branch of myrtle which he danced with. —Rashi)

Some say that Rav Zeira didn’t say “branch”, but he said *his folly* helped him achieve this. (That he acted like a fool. —Rashi)

Others say he said neither of those. He said *his attitude*. (His style and conduct. —Rashi.)

—Ketubot 17a.

This is a kind of non-rational behavior, one that is beyond self-awareness. It is a most supreme and wondrous level.

What brought these sages to such a wondrous level of holiness? It was the presence of the Shechina that is manifest at a wedding.

The Talmud tells us:

If a man and a woman are worthy, the Shechina resides between them. The Hebrew word for man, אִישׁ, consists of אש—fire—with the letter י (yud) in between. The Hebrew word for woman, אִשָּׁה, consists of אש with the letter ה (hey) tacked on. If they are worthy, the י and the ה combine to spell G-d’s name.

—Sotah 17a.

This presence of the Shechina manifests as a blessing of an everlasting household, since the couple have offspring who give birth to more offspring, which potentially could continue into eternity.

Because of this holiness that is found at weddings, the sages were able to attain an extraordinary level of joy, beyond self-awareness. And through his joyous dancing, Rav Shmuel merited this great revelation of G-dliness—the pillar of fire that stood between him and the world.

THE NEED TO GO BEYOND THE MIND

But what is so remarkable about this kind of non-rational behaviour that brings such great revelations of holiness? The Zohar helps us solve this question:

No thought at all can grasp Him.

—*Tikkunei Zohar 17a.*

The Zohar refers to G-d using a metaphor of Infinite Light. When the Zohar tells us that no thought can grasp this Infinite Light, it doesn't simply mean that G-d is beyond our understanding. The Zohar means that this Infinite Light is entirely outside the realm of comprehension. Any comprehension, even the wisest and deepest, is still comprehension.

Anything that is not in the realm of comprehension is impossible to grasp with any form of intellect. Here is what the first Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, writes:

When it comes to the Holy One, Blessed Be He, since He is beyond understanding or knowing, and no thought at all can grasp Him, everyone is like a fool in relation to Him, may He be blessed. As written, "I am a fool and know nothing, I was an animal with You, and I am always with You..."

Meaning, that it is due to my being a fool and an animal that I am constantly with You.

—*Tanya, end of chapter 18.*

Why is this? Because the way to reach His core-essence, may He be blessed, is by abandoning your personal desires, and that requires rising beyond your own reasoning and senses to a level that is like a fool, because it is supra-rational.

PROPHETS BEYOND THE MIND

This is also why we find that the prophet is referred to as a madman, as we find written:

And Jehu went out to his master's servants, and one said to him, "Is all well? Why did this madman come to you?"

—Kings II 9:11.

This is because at the time of prophecy, the prophet had to divest himself of his corporeal limitations. This means divestment of reason and feeling, rising beyond his senses and self-awareness, to become transparent before the Infinite Light.

This is also why prophets would throw off their garments when receiving prophecy, as is written about Saul:

And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel, and he fell naked all that day and all the night. Therefore, they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

—Samuel I 19:24.

The need for clothing is only a result of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge. Before the sin, the Torah says about Adam and Eve,

The two of them were naked...and they were not ashamed.

—Genesis 2:25

But because of the sin, a concept called clothing was introduced to the world.

What does sin have to do with clothing?

The root of sin, that which brings people to act against G-d, is a sensation, a state of mind in which the good and bad of things are interwoven. Before the sin, such a state of mind did not exist. But after the first sin, as the story continues, "And they knew that they were naked"²—they first experienced this sensation of feeling something to be good or bad. At its root, this clothing is our awareness of our own reasoning and emotions. That is why we find that Adam and Eve first wore clothing once they brought this kind of awareness upon themselves, through the sin.

This explains why the prophets would throw off their clothing at the time of prophecy. They were stripping themselves of their awareness of their mind and emotions, entering into a state in which their own faculties and senses became transparent, as the Rambam explains:

² Genesis 3:7.

One of the foundations of the religion is to know that G-d, may He be blessed, gives prophecy to mankind. The prophecy descends upon the wise and strong, who controls his impulse, and his impulse does not control him in any matter...

—*Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah*,
chapter 7:1.

That is why this kind of behavior can also be called non-rational, for it transcends the limits of self-awareness and comprehension.

OUR OWN SANCTUARIES

Now, the divine service in the Tabernacle and in the Holy Temple is to turn darkness into light, so that the darkness itself shines—meaning that from unholy foolishness will emerge holy foolishness. That is why we find that the Tabernacle was made specifically from acacia wood. The Hebrew word for acacia is שטים, which is similar to the word שטות—foolishness. If the Shechina was chased out from this world through sin—unholy foolishness—the way to bring it back must be through a kind of suprarationalism that is holy, an intelligence that transcends the limits of the mind.

Each of us is like a sanctuary, and we all have this task of bringing

the Shechina back through this kind of behavior.

This is the meaning of the verse, “Make a sanctuary for me, and I will reside in them,”³ meaning, in every person. Each of us achieves this through our own efforts in purifying the world. We manage to transform darkness into light, meaning, the attitude of this world that is below mindfulness into an attitude which transcends mindfulness.

What do we mean by “below mindfulness?” There are many conventions we keep only because that’s what everybody does, yet we take them very seriously, as if these principles are carved in stone. For example, certain rules of etiquette and protocol.

We have to take this attitude and turn it around to serve G-d in a way that transcends mindfulness.

An example would be mealtimes and sleeping hours. The world has an attitude that these things cannot budge. Even when there’s important business to take care of, these things stay fixed in place. The times people set aside for Torah study and prayer, on the other hand, are easily brushed aside and rarely stay fixed. Sometimes they are, G-d forbid, discarded altogether.

³ Exodus 25:8.

Think for a minute: Is there any wisdom to this? Who can know when his time will come? Or, as the Midrash puts it:

No one is able to tell the Angel of Death, ‘Wait for me to settle my accounts and instruct my household...

—Deuteronomy Rabbah 9:3.

So how could you devote yourself completely to something utterly meaningless, while forgetting all about the main thing—the mission for which you came to this world in the first place?

It’s only because of this surge of irrational foolishness that washes over the truth.

If you take a little time to think about this, you will make your task in life to transform this foolishness of the world, and you will take hold of yourself and set up fixed times for Torah learning. Then you will find the fulfillment of the verse, “...and I will dwell in them,” for a G-dly light will shine in your soul.

This is your mission in this world: to take that stubborn madness of this world that doesn’t budge over meal times and sleeping times, and to apply it to fixed times for Torah study that you keep no matter what.

What happens then? As the verse says, “I will dwell within you.” Divine light will shine openly within your soul.

That is what is meant by the words of the Zohar:

When the Other Side is suppressed, the glory of the Holy One, may He be blessed, shines in all the worlds.

—Zohar II 128b.

Meaning: when you take that irrational madness of the beast within you, along with all the excitement it has for earthly pleasures, and you turn that around into a madness and excitement for Torah and mitzvahs, then the light of the Holy One, may He be blessed, shines in all the worlds. It shines openly, this light that encompasses all worlds.

SUMMARY:

In this chapter of Basi Legani, the Previous Rebbe explained supra-rational behavior, rising above our senses and self-awareness, in a holy way. This was demonstrated by the prophets, who divested themselves of their awareness of their own reason and emotions when prophesying.

The Tabernacle represents this idea. It is constructed of acacia wood, which, in Hebrew, is similar to the word for foolishness. The divine service in the Tabernacle was to channel unholy foolishness into a holy foolishness. This is also the mission of each of us, today.

*Adapted by Chaya Dubinsky and Tzvi Freeman
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