

The Lubavitcher Rebbe interprets Rabbi Shneur Zalman's parable of the King in the Field

Rabbi Shneur Zalman's discourse "ר"ת אלול", *Liqqute Torah*, Deuteronomy, folio 32 (excerpts; adapted):

"I am my beloved's; and my beloved is mine" (Song of Songs 6:3). ...

The month of Elul is a time of the revelation of the [Divine] "13 Attributes of Mercy". If so, why are its days non-consecrated, not sacred days like Sabbaths and Festivals, which are characterised by revelation of divinity? This is especially so in the case of the revelation of the 13 Attributes of Mercy, which are particularly lofty revelations, and which are revealed on Yom Kippur. Certainly, there is a great difference between Yom Kippur and Elul.

The [difference] will be understood by means of a parable of a king. Before his arrival in the city, the people of the city go out to greet him, and to receive him in the field. Then, anyone who so desires is permitted [and empowered] to go out and receive him; and he receives them all with a beautiful countenance, and displays a smiling face to them all. However, when he proceeds towards the city, they walk behind him; and subsequently, when he arrives at his royal palace, they cannot enter except with permission; and even that [is granted] only to the chosen ones among the nation and special individuals.

By way of parable, this is what happens in the month of Elul: the people go out to receive the light of God's face in the field; for it is written, "May the Lord shine His face towards you" (Numbers). This is the shining of the "13 Attributes", in order [for us] to come "face to face" [with God]: He shines a revelation of His innermost blessed will to the source of the souls of Israel, through the essential core of one's will being towards God [alt.: so that the essential core of one's will will be towards God], to cleave unto Him ...

For within a person there is the level of "an inhabited city"; and there are the levels of "a field" and "a desert". A desert is an uncultivated land, referring to actions, utterances, and thoughts that are not for God's sake. ...

Rebbe's sermon, Sabbath 22 September 1962 (*Liqqute Sihot* vol. 4, pp. 1342-1344), excerpts; adapted:

... In contrast, during Elul, the "13 Attributes of Mercy" are revealed to each and every individual of Israel, even one who has sinned etc., in his or her present state, "the field". The shining of the 13 Attributes of Mercy is a preparation, enabling them to return to God. ... Nevertheless, the shining of the 13 Attributes of Mercy occurs in the field, not in the desert ...

In order to receive the shine of the 13 Attributes of Mercy, at the very least one must arouse “the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven”, leaving the desert at least for the field, and receiving the face of the King.

Q (1). Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s wording, “the people of the city go out ... in[to] the field”, indicates that their place is in the city, which they have just exited. However, the analogue seems to be the opposite: their place is in the field; and the innovation in Elul is that the 13 Attributes of Mercy shine to them even in their place, as they are, in the field.

A (1). The reason that the shine of the 13 Attributes of Mercy is felt in every single individual of Israel is on account of the source of his or her soul. Rabbi Shneur Zalman alludes to this in saying, “the people of the city go out ... in[to] the field”: the reason that Israel feel the 13 Attributes of Mercy is because they are “people of the city”. It is just that temporarily they are found in the field, exiled in the body and that soul which has animalistic drives. Even in exile, they are noble ... “people of the city”; and therefore, even in the field they receive the light of God’s blessed face, the shine of the 13 Attributes of Mercy.

Q (2). The wording of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s parable implies that from the outset the king’s place is in the field (for he does not write that “the king goes out”.) However, in the analogue, the King’s place is in His royal palace. The only reason that He goes out to the field is specifically to give everyone the opportunity to greet Him.

A (2). From the perspective of what is projected outward (Hebrew: *gilluyim* / גילויים), the King’s situation in the field is lower than His situation in the Royal Palace, where He is wearing his Royal Crown and Garments – unlike in the field. In truth, however, the fact that the King is willing to forego the outward projection associated with His Royal Crown and Garments, and that He goes out to the field so that everyone be able to receive Him, proves that the return to Him of those who are found in the field is more precious to Him and touches His essence more than the Royal Crown and Garments do (in the manner that the exertions of the penitent reach higher than do the exertions of the saints). His Royal Crown and Garments are merely attributes (*to’arim* / תוארים); but His blessed essence is specifically in the field. Indeed, it is known that specifically the lowest realms are a dwelling for God.

Rebbe’s discourse “,ר"ת אלול", Sabbath, 13 August 1966 (edited and published 1990), excerpts; adapted.

... Through exerting oneself (in one's relation with God) during the month of Elul, one becomes one of "the chosen among the nation and special individuals", who may enter the royal palace. ...

... The revelation of the "13 Attributes of Mercy" that takes place in Elul extends even to those who are found in the "desert that opposes holiness". This is understood from Rabbi Shneur Zalman's teaching that fundamentally the revelation of the 13 Attributes of Mercy during Elul is to empower return to God, which, in its basic sense, is from undesirable matters (the "desert") and the casting off of the yoke of God. From here it is understood that the revelation during Elul is even to those who are in the utmost state of distance from God. As for Rabbi Shneur Zalman's statement in his discourse that the revelation during Elul is in the "field" (and not the "desert"): the revelation is not to the "desert" in and of itself, for divinity cannot be revealed in that which is in opposition to God's will; but the revelation is within those people of Israel who are found in the "desert". This revelation is the empowerment to forsake the desert for the field, to receive the face of the King. Accordingly, in Rabbi Shneur Zalman's statement that the King "receives them all with a beautiful countenance", his intention in stressing "them all" is to include even those who wish to receive the King's face but are imprisoned in their negative inclination. Even when they are aroused with a desire to return, and to accept upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, none of this comes to fruition. God receives even those people with a beautiful countenance. Now, this awakens within them a strong and mighty will to receive the King's face; and by means of this will, they overcome the obstacles.

What is the difference between "receiving them (all with a beautiful countenance)", and "displaying (a smiling face to them all)"? "Receiving them" is a reciprocal act ... whereas "displaying" is a unilateral act of self-disclosure to the other. His "receiving them ... with a beautiful countenance" is in response to *the people's* will to receive His countenance, their arousal to return to God. Beyond that, His "displaying a smiling face" is His essential pleasure in Israel themselves (beyond His pleasure from Israel's fulfilment of Torah and the Commandments, and beyond His pleasure from their efforts to return to Him). God's display of His essential, unconditional pleasure in Israel in-and-of themselves arouses their reciprocal, essential pleasure in God. And this further empowers the person's perseverance and complete return.

Rebbe's discourse "ר"ת אלול", Wednesday night, 3 September 1986; excerpts; adapted.

The field equalises all those who are there, because there every individual (without distinction) is permitted and empowered to receive the King's face, and he receives them all. (This is not the case when He is in the Capital City, and particularly in his Palace, where only "the chosen among the nation and special individuals" may enter into the King's presence.) Furthermore, when the King is in the field, all separations between the King and the people fall away. ... In general, and particularly in Elul, each of the two parties – "I (Israel) and my Beloved (God)" – is the "heart" of the other. This is contingent on the unity of Israel ("I"), and upon their equality, which is brought about by the King's presence in the field.