YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Prayer**

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**Shiur #40: The Reason for Prayer According to Chabad *Chassidut* (3)**

In this *shiur*,we will continue our study of the teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi in the *Tanya*, by going back to see how he interprets the fundamental concepts of the Ari regarding prayer. We saw the basic concept of the four worlds in the Ari’s teachings: *Atzilut* (Emanation), *Beri'a* (Creation), *Yetzira* (Formation), and *Asiya* (Action). These are the worlds in which God reveals Himself, and each is comprised of ten *sefirot.* God made, formed, and created the three lower worlds, whereas the world of Emanationis "by Him" (*etzlo*); it is the Divine revelation in which the revealer and the revealed are not separate from each other.

These concepts are among the foundations of the world of Kabbala, and we will see in this *shiur* how they are interpreted in the *Tanya.* For the sake of understanding the chapter under discussion, it should be noted that according to the *Tanya*, angels belong to the world of Formation, while souls belong to a higher world – the world of Creation. This assertion relates to a fundamental and long-standing dispute among the sages of Israel: Who is greater, man or angel? The *Baal HaTanya* continues the approach of the kabbalists, according to whom the human soul is higher in rank than the angels.

**The Divine Service of All of Israel – Love and Fear**

Chapter 39 of the *Tanya* opens with an image of the angels as beasts. Unlike man, who was given free choice, beasts act according to their nature. One of the verses that express this idea is "I will give you walkers among these who are standing" (*Zekharya* 3:7) – an angel is "one who is standing," whereas man is called a "walker." Man depends on his free choice and therefore exists in motion, whereas an angel is on a fixed level and is therefore seen as "standing."

Therefore, the world of Formation – to which the angels belong – is a natural world. This does not mean there is no spirit in it, only that it is fixed and standing in place; it operates in a natural manner, according to the essence of its identity. The world of Creation, to which the souls belong, is connected to intellectual contemplation. For the *Baal HaTanya*, a person's ability to walk is connected to his ability to contemplate, to his intellectual strength.

It is also for this reason that the angels are called *chayot* (beasts) and *behemot* (cattle), as it is written: "And the face of a lion on the right side… and the face of an ox on the left side…," for they have no freedom of choice, and their fear and love are natural to them, as it is stated in *Ra'aya Mehimna* on *Parashat Pinchas*. Therefore, the quality of the *tzaddikim* is superior to theirs, for the abode of the souls of the righteous is in the world of Creation, whereas the abode of the angels is in the world of Formation. The difference between them is that in the world of Formation, only the attributes of the blessed *Ein Sof* shine forth, namely, the love of Him, and the dread and fear of Him, etc., as is stated [in the *Tikunim* and in *Etz Chaim*] that the six *sefirot* nest in [the world of] Formation*.* Therefore it is the constant service of the angels, resting neither by day nor by night, to stand in fear and dread, etc.; that is, the whole camp of Gabriel which is on the left, while the service of the camp of Michael is with love.

But in the world of Creation shine forth the wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (*chokhma*, *bina*, and *da’at*)of the blessed *Ein Sof*, which are the source of the attributes and their "mother" and root, as stated in the *Tikunim* that *ima ila'a* (Supernal Mother) nests in the three *sefirot*, in the [Divine] Throne, which is the world of Creation*.* Therefore, this is the abode of the souls of the righteous who serve God with fear and love, which are derived from the understanding and knowledge of the greatness of the blessed *Ein Sof.* For this love is called *re'uta deliba* (heart's desire), as has already been mentioned. And from this "heart's desire" is produced a garment for the soul in the world of Creation which constitutes the Higher Garden of Eden, as will be explained later, and as is written in the *Zohar* on [*Parashat*] *Vayakhel.* But this applies specifically to *neshamot* (souls) which [possess] a great cognition, as it were, of the blessed *Ein Sof.* As for the category of *ru'ach* of the righteous, as also all other souls of Israelites who have served God with the fear and love that are latent in the heart of all Jews, these do not ascend there, except on Shabbat and the New Moon by means of the pillar that rises from the Lower to the Higher Garden of Eden, i.e., the world of Creation which is called the Higher Garden of Eden, wherein to take pleasure in God and derive enjoyment from the splendor of the *Shekhina*. For the intellect of a created being can have no enjoyment or pleasure except in what it conceives, understands, knows, and apprehends, with its intellect and apprehension, what is possible for it to understand and grasp of the light of the blessed *Ein Sof,* by virtue of His blessed wisdom and understanding which shine forth in the world of Creation*.* As for the reason that these souls merit to ascend higher than the angels, even though their service has been with no more than natural fear and love, it is that through their fear and love the *sitra achra* which was clothed in their body was subdued, both in the realm of "depart from evil" – by subjugating and breaking the passions – and in the realm of "do good," as discussed earlier. For they had the freedom to choose evil, God forbid, yet they chose the good in order to subdue the *sitra achra,* thereby elevating the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, as the excellence of light, discussed above. (*Likutei Amarim* 39)

The author of the *Tanya* explains to us what of the light of God illuminates each of the worlds. In the world of Formation, the emotional attributes of God shine; in the world of Creation shine His wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (*ChaBaD*). The attributes are the six *sefirot* (to the exclusion of the bottom-most attribute, Kingdom), but emphasis is given to two attributes: love and fear, which correspond to *Chesed* and *Gevura.* This emphasis on love and fear as the two main attributes appears already in the teachings of the Maggid of Mezeritch. As soon as the *Baal HaTanya* assigns love and fear a central place in the picture, the whole issue becomes extremely relevant to the service of God.

It is wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (*ChaBaD*) that give rise to the emotional attributes. As we saw in the previous *shiurim*, this is one of the foundations of Chabad Chasidism, which even gave it its name: the goal of worshipping God is to love and fear Him, and that goal is achieved by way of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

Until now, it had seemed that the description of the attributes and of the *ChaBaD sefirot* pertains to all souls – that is to say, to all people. At this point, however, it becomes clear that there is a difference between the *tzaddikim* and the rest of Israel. We already know, in light of the chapters that we saw in previous *shiurim*, that the rest of Israel are the *beinonim*, the average or intermediate ones. To be precise: Every person by his very essence belongs to the world of Creation, since he enjoys mental capacity and free choice; the question is, what is the Divine service of each individual? The service of the *tzaddikim* belongs to the world of Creation, to the profound consciousness of the greatness of the blessed *Ein Sof*, whereas the service of the rest of Israel is to arouse the love and fear that is hidden within them. According to the *Baal HaTanya*, every person has love and fear of God in his inner being, but it is only at special moments (the most prominent example of which are those situations in which one is required to sacrifice his life for the sanctification of God's name) that they are aroused and erupt.

Although in general, the Divine service of the rest of Israel is to arouse the love and fear of God, there are times when their service as well belongs to the level of the *tzaddikim*, to the world of Creation. On Shabbat, for example, there is a general spiritual uplifting around Israel, an "encompassing light." The people themselves do not change in their very essence, but a higher world opens before them. A person can experience that which is usually blocked off from him; he can touch what is beyond his normal level.

**The *Amida* Prayer – The World of Emanation**

From here, the *Baal HaTanya* moves on to talk about the world of Emanation:

The world ofEmanation (*Atzilut*)*,*however, is beyond the intelligence, comprehension, and understanding of a created intellect, because the wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge of the blessed *Ein Sof* are united with it therein in perfect unity, a profound and wonderful unity which infinitely excels, in degree and form, that which is found in the world of Creation; for in the latter, they descended to give light by means of *tzimtzum* (constriction), so that created intellects should be able to receive from them *ChaBaD*, to know God and to understand and apprehend something of the light of the blessed *Ein Sof,*to the extent possible for created intellects which are limited and finite, without their being dissolved in their existence and ceasing completely to exist as created beings, only to revert to their source and root, namely, Godliness itself. It is this *tzimtzum* that is the cause of the glow of *ChaBaD* of the blessed *Ein Sof* illuminating the souls in the world of Creation. It is different in [the world of] Emanation, where they [*ChaBaD*]are not subject to the same extent *of tzimtzum;*consequently, it is impossible for created intellects to apprehend them. That is why no thought of the [created intellects] can apprehend anything there. Hence it is the abode of the great *tzaddikim*, whose service supremely transcends even the quality of fear and love which are derived from the understanding and knowledge of His blessed greatness, just as the world of Emanationis far beyond the understanding and knowledge of a created intellect. Indeed, their service has been truly in the nature of a "vehicle" to the blessed *Ein Sof,*being nullified to Him in existence and absorbed in His blessed light, they and everything they possess, through the fulfillment of the Torah and commandments, in the way that has been said of the Patriarchs that they personally constituted the very Chariot [of God], because throughout their lives this was their service. But as for him whose soul's root is too small to contain such perfect service, so as to be nullified and absorbed in His blessed light by constant service, but only at such intervals and times which are propitious on high, viz., during the *Amida* prayer, which is in Emanation*,*especially when making the genuflexions, for genuflexion characterises Emanation(as explained in *Peri Etz Chaim*on the prayer of *Kabbalat Shabbat*), since it symbolises self-nullification in His blessed light to be accounted as nothing at all before Him – in such a case, therefore, the principal abode of his soul is in the world of Creation. (*Likutei Amarim*, ibid.)

Man cannot reach the world of Emanation, because if he would reach it, he would no longer exist; this is the level of absolute nullification. The *tzaddikim* can reach only as far as the world of Creation; otherwise, their existence would fade away. Only the great *tzaddikim*, such as the Patriarchs, are considered the "Chariot of the *Shekhina*" and belong to the world of Emanation.

In the world of Creation, beings are still separate: "The *tzaddik* loves God" means that there is a *tzaddik* and there is God. In the world of Emanation, on the other hand, the *tzaddik* no longer loves God; he is instead completely nullified in Him.

Only at certain moments is it possible to reach the Divine service of the world of Emanation – during the *Amida* prayer. One can reach love and fear when reciting the *Shema*, and during the *Amida* prayer, one can reach nullification. The bows and prostrations express a state of nullification with respect to God – and this is true of the *Amida* prayer of an ordinary person, not just that of the great *tzaddikim*.

The *Amida* prayer can be perceived as a collection of our requests, but as soon as we understand that the world was created so that God would have an abode in the lower worlds, the entire set of requests found in the *Amida* prayer is directed towards this end, that the lower reality should be nullified in the kingdom of God. This is the focus of the *Amida* prayer, in which one of the key words is "You." If the *Amida* prayer is about personal requests, its meaning is that only You can help me. According to the *Baal HaTanya*, however, "You" is at the center. This is the peak of nullification: when all our requests are aimed at the Divine purpose.

Now that we have understood this point, we can outline the entire prayer, from the world of Action to the world of Emanation, using the terms of the *Baal HaTanya*.

**The Route of Prayer Through the Four Worlds**

The first world we encounter in prayer is the world of Action. This occurs in *Birkot ha-Shachar*, blessings the Gemara connects to actions performed when rising in the morning. In *Pesukei de-Zimra*,we move to the world of Formation, which in the inner world of man parallels emotion. The world of emotion is expressed in the psalms constituting *Pesukei de-Zimra*.In the recital of *Shema* and its blessings, we come to the world of Creation, which parallels the intellect and contemplation. Finally, the *Amida* prayer occurs in the world of Emanation, which parallels nullification.

Chapter 39 of *Likutei Amarim* clarifies that these four worlds parallel four levels of the Divine service – not only in prayer, but in general, in life. There are those who serve God only through their actions; there are those who engage in natural service, through their emotional attributes – the majority of Israel; there are those who serve God through intellectual contemplation – the *tzaddikim*; and there are those who serve God at the level of nullification – the higher *tzaddikim*, such as the Patriarchs, who are the "Chariot."

The *Baal HaTanya* criticizes the lowest level, those who serve God exclusively through actions and without emotion. If a person serves God without love or fear, and even without a consciousness that love and fear are important, his service cannot ascend to God. The *Baal HaTanya* emphasizes that even if a person fulfills a mitzva without external motivations, he remains in the world of separation, and all the more so if he fulfills the mitzvanot for its own sake. One might have thought that the lowest level of service is the basic level, and that at least one on that level has reached the basics, but the author of the *Tanya* says differently. Love and fear, or at least thoughts about love and fear, are the basis.

We saw four levels in prayer, and four levels in the general worship of God. Throughout the day, every Jew is at a different level in his service, but during prayer, every Jew is supposed to pass through all the levels. Everyone reaches the level of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, to contemplation that fills him in his service of God. Of course, reaching these levels in prayer also requires work.

Man is meant to serve God, and his service takes place along two axes: one is the fixed service over the course of the day, and the other is prayer, during which one passes through this entire course, and which is the heart of Divine service. Through prayer, a person can reach a level beyond his level.

The notion of raising the worlds in prayer appears already in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, as we have seen, but for the author of the *Tanya*, it receives a form that is suited for everybody. The Baal Shem Tov described the ascent through the four worlds as an ascent to higher levels of consciousness, above all that we are familiar with, which liberates the words and sentences of the prayer from their ordinary meaning into infinite expanses of consciousness. Not every person can meet these expanses – but every person has an inner world with emotions and intellect. For the author of the *Tanya*, the sentences of prayer continue to function in their original sense in Hebrew, and the powers of emotion and intellectual contemplation are central to the service of prayer.

The *Baal HaTanya* takes us on a journey that, on the one hand, is open to all of us, because it speaks our language. On the other hand, it leads us by way of these concepts to deep contemplation, all the way to the level of nullification in the *Amida* prayer.

The Maggid of Mezeritch had dozens of disciples, *tzaddikim* and other elite individuals, while the author of the *Tanya* had thousands of followers. He was one generation after the Maggid, but in this generation – within several decades – many people joined the Chabad Chasidism that he had founded. The teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid are aimed at individuals, and the author of the *Tanya* relates to the heights as well, but he also builds a path to get there using building blocks we can recognize.

(Translated by David Strauss)