

Discourse 17

*“B’Sha’ah SheHeekdeemoo Yisroel Na’aseh L’Nishma -
At the time when Israel gave precedence to ‘We will
do’ over ‘We will listen’”*

Delivered on the first day¹¹⁹⁷ of Shavuot, 5713

By the grace of *HaShem*, blessed is He,

1.

It states in Talmud,¹¹⁹⁸ “At the time when Israel gave precedence to the declaration, ‘We will do,’ over the declaration, ‘We will listen,’¹¹⁹⁹ six-hundred-thousand ministering angels came and tied two crowns each for every member of the Jewish people, one corresponding to, ‘We will do,’ and one corresponding to, ‘We will listen.’”

Now, as known, all matters that come in a way of an awakening from Above (*Itaruta d’Le’eila*) are similar to the manner of an awakening from below (*Itaruta d’Le’tata*). It therefore is understood that the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, by the Jewish people giving precedence to “We will do” over “We will listen,” is related to the matter of the crown-*Keter*.

¹¹⁹⁷ This discourse was delivered on the first night of Shavuot, 5713, toward the morning.

¹¹⁹⁸ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88a

¹¹⁹⁹ Exodus 24:7

Now, concerning¹²⁰⁰ the matter of the crown-*Keter*-כתר, there are two primary explanations. The first explanation of the word “*Keter*-כתר” is that it is a term meaning to “surround” or “encompass.” For example, the verse states,¹²⁰¹ “They surrounded-*Kitroo*-כתרו Binyamin,” and similarly,¹²⁰² “The wicked surrounds-*Makhteer*-מכתיר the righteous.” That is, the root meaning of the term “*Keter*-כתר” in these verses is to “surround” or “encompass.” It is for this reason that the crown that sits upon the head of the king is called, “*Keter*-כתר,” since it surrounds and encompasses the head.

The second explanation of the word “*Keter*-כתר” is that it is a term that means “silence,” as in the verse,¹²⁰³ “be silent-*Katar*-כתר for me for a moment and I shall tell you.” The meaning of “*Katar*-כתר” in this verse is to “be silent and wait for a moment for me.”

Now, both these explanations converge to the same point. For, our sages, of blessed memory, stated,¹²⁰⁴ “A protective fence for wisdom-*Chochmah* is silence.” That is, just as a fence is a boundary that surrounds and encompasses a place or space, so likewise, silence is a fence that surrounds and encompasses wisdom-*Chochmah*, which is the beginning of the revelation. This refers to the aspect of crown-*Keter* that transcends and surrounds wisdom-*Chochmah*. Thus, this teaching informs us that we should not say about wisdom-

¹²⁰⁰ See Ohr HaTorah, Chag HaShavuot, Hosafot p. 29 and on.

¹²⁰¹ Judges 20:43

¹²⁰² Habakkuk 1:4

¹²⁰³ Job 36:2

¹²⁰⁴ Mishnah Avot 3:13

Chochmah that it is drawn forth and the matter is revealed in its entirety, but rather, that there yet is some matter that has not come into revelation, but remains in a state of silence. For, speech is revelation to one's fellow, whereas silence transcends the revelation of speech. It therefore is a transcendent aspect that surrounds and encompasses wisdom-*Chochmah*.

We thus find that, in this matter of "A protective fence for wisdom-*Chochmah* is silence," both explanations of the word "*Keter*-כתר" are present, both as a term of "silence," as well as a term meaning "to surround."

The explanation is that all novel creation and existence of the worlds occurs through the restraint of the *Tzimtzum* and the resultant empty space (*Makom Panuy*). However, above this is the great circle (*Igul HaGadol*) that precedes the line (*Kav*). This refers to the general crown-*Keter*-כתר, which is the general encompassing light that surrounds all worlds in their entirety and does not come to be revealed in the worlds. This is the matter of "A protective fence for wisdom-*Chochmah* is silence." That is, wisdom-*Chochmah* is the beginning of the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*). In contrast, the "fence for wisdom-*Chochmah*" refers to that which encompasses and surrounds the entirety of the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*) and is "silence." This refers to the aspect of the great circle (*Igul HaGadol*) that precedes the line (*Kav*) and is the aspect of the crown-*Keter*. The general matter of the giving of the Torah, as well as the preparation for the giving of the Torah by giving precedence

to “We will do” over “We will listen,” is the matter of the crown-*Keter*, as will soon be explained.

2.

Now, this may be understood by prefacing with an explanation of the general matter of the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah, which are the beginning of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, and the culmination of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. The two are related to each other, as the verse states,¹²⁰⁵ “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain.” In other words, the exodus from Egypt, which is the beginning of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, was preparatory to the giving of the Torah, which is the end and ultimate culmination of the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

The explanation is that in regard to the exodus from Egypt, there are three types of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה that occur during the months of Nissan, Iyyar and Sivan, within which Torah mentions the exodus from Egypt. With respect to the month of Nissan, the verse states,¹²⁰⁶ “You shall observe the Festival of Matzot; seven days shall you eat Matzot, as I have commanded you, at the appointed time of the month of springtime, for in it you left Egypt.” With respect to the month of Iyyar the verse states,¹²⁰⁷ “On the first of the second

¹²⁰⁵ Exodus 3:12

¹²⁰⁶ Exodus 23:15; Exodus 34:18

¹²⁰⁷ Numbers 1:1

month, the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt.” Although the simple meaning of this verse is that the words, “their exodus from the land of Egypt” is in reference to “the second year after they left,” nevertheless, it states in Zohar,¹²⁰⁸ “The second month and the second year are all one matter.” We thus find that “their exodus from the land of Egypt” also refers to the second month, which is the month of Iyyar. With respect to the month of Sivan the verse states,¹²⁰⁹ “In the third month of the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt.”

To clarify, even though Nissan is the first of the months of the year, and all months are drawn from it, so that they are counted as “the fourth month” or “the seventh month,” meaning that they are fourth or seventh from Nissan, nonetheless, when it comes to all months other than these three, we do not find them mentioned in conjunction to the exodus from Egypt. Rather, it is only about these three months that Torah mentions the exodus from Egypt in conjunction to them. This is because these three months correspond to the three kinds of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in leaving Egypt (*Mitzrayim*), concluding and culminating and with the giving of the Torah.

To explain this in greater detail, the first manner of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in leaving Egypt (*Mitzrayim*), is as stated,¹²¹⁰ “The people fled.” For, since at

¹²⁰⁸ Zohar III 117b

¹²⁰⁹ Exodus 19:1

¹²¹⁰ Exodus 14:5; Also see Tanya, Ch. 31.

that time, the children of Israel were sunken in the forty-nine gates of impurity, in the total evil of the three impure husks of *Kelipah*, may the Merciful One save us, the order of the toil and service (*Avodah*) in such a state was not in a manner of transformation (*Ithapcha*) through drawing the intellect to the emotions. For, when one is sunken in evil, contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) and transformation is not applicable to him. Rather, the toil and service (*Avodah*) that one must undergo is in a manner of restraint (*Itkafia*), as indicated by the verse, “The people fled.” In other words, even though he does not transform his character traits and remains in the same spiritual state that he was when he was sunken in evil, nevertheless, he forces himself to overcome it in his thought, speech, and action, in a way of fleeing from evil. This is the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the month of Nissan.

The second type of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in leaving Egypt (*Mitzrayim*), is the service of the month of Iyyar, which is the service of counting the Omer (*Sefirat HaOmer*). This service is the matter of clarifying and refining one's emotive attributes, as it states,¹²¹¹ “And you shall count for yourselves-*U'Sfartem Lachem*-לכם וספרתם,” which is of the same root as “brilliance-*Sappirut*-ספירות” and illumination.¹²¹² This refers to serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through transformation (*Ithapcha*). In other words, by drawing the intellect into the emotions, the intellect refines and elevates the emotions. For, the emotions of love and fear of *HaShem*-

¹²¹¹ Leviticus 23:15

¹²¹² See Likkutei Torah, Emor 35b and on, and elsewhere.

יהו"ה are born when the contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) is as it should be,¹²¹³ thus transforming one's emotions.

This transformative service of יהו"ה-*HaShem*, blessed is He, follows after the service of the exodus from Egypt in a way of, "The people fled." That is, at the beginning of one's service of יהו"ה-*HaShem*, blessed is He, he has no relation to Godly contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) at all, being that he is completely sunken in evil. However, subsequent to serving יהו"ה-*HaShem*, blessed is He, in a way of restraint (*Itkafia*) and fleeing from evil, in which case he already has left evil, this is not so. In other words, he no longer has any relationship to forbidden lusts, but now only involves himself in permissible matters. It is specifically then that it becomes possible for him to be engaged in serving יהו"ה-*HaShem*, blessed is He, in a manner of self-transformation (*It'hapcha*).

The third service of יהו"ה-*HaShem*, blessed is He, is the service of the month of Sivan, which is the matter of the giving of the Torah. For, as explained in Torah Ohr¹²¹⁴ about the verse,¹²¹⁵ "In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai," the words, "this day" refer to the new moon (*Rosh Chodesh*) of Sivan.¹²¹⁶ For, at that time the days of counting the Omer (*Sefirat HaOmer*) come to their conclusion, since the week of the new moon (*Rosh Chodesh*) of Sivan is the seventh and final week of counting the Omer

¹²¹³ Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 2:2

¹²¹⁴ Torah Ohr, 67c

¹²¹⁵ Exodus 19:1

¹²¹⁶ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 86b and elsewhere.

(*Sefirat HaOmer*). Moreover, in this week itself, the new moon only occurs after the count of the first three days of the week, which correspond to the first three emotive attributes¹²¹⁷ that include all the other emotive attributes generally. This being so, it already is the conclusion and culmination of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, by counting the days of the Omer (*Sefirat HaOmer*). Thus, from that point forward the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the month of Sivan begins, which is the matter of the giving of the Torah.

This service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, transcends the service of restraint (*Itkafia*) and even the service of transformation (*It'hapcha*) and constitutes serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, with total nullification of sense of separate existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*). This accords with the teaching of our sages, of blessed memory, that at the giving of the Torah,¹²¹⁸ “with each utterance of the Holy One, blessed is He, the souls of the Jewish people left their bodies.” That is, they underwent a total and complete transformation of their existence. This is so even according to the revealed parts of Torah, that when the Torah was given they became utterly new beings.¹²¹⁹ The reason is because in the inner aspect of the matter this is how it was, that with the giving of the Torah, they became completely nullified of their existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*) due to the revelation of the Supernal light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that was revealed and

¹²¹⁷ *Chesed, Din, Rachamim*-Kindness, Judgment, Mercy (*Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet*).

¹²¹⁸ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88b

¹²¹⁹ See Talmud Bavli, Yavamat 22a, 46a-b; Keritot 9a

illuminated. The effect of this revelation is that their state of existence became completely nullified (*Bittul b'Metziyut*).

This matter of nullification of existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*), even transcends service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through transformation (*It'hapcha*). For, the service of transformation (*It'hapcha*) is not actual nullification of one's sense of separate existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*). On the contrary, since the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of transformation (*It'hapcha*) involves the drawing forth of intellect to the emotions (as explained above), it therefore is not actual nullification of one's existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*). On the contrary, the emotions are limited to the comprehension and understanding of his intellect. However, in regard to the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the giving of the Torah, which is the matter of the complete nullification of one's sense of separate existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*), this is not so, since they were brought to a state of total nullification because of the revelation of a light that utterly transcended their comprehension.

However, this service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through nullification of one's existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*), which is the service of the giving of the Torah, is nevertheless connected to the beginning of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, which is the matter of "The people fled," and the matter of restraint (*Itkafia*). For, serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through restraint (*Itkafia*), is that he does not at all take his own comprehension into consideration, but rather forces himself to fulfill the will of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is

He, which is a matter of self-nullification (*Bittul*). Thus, the self-nullification (*Bittul*) of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through restraint (*Itkafia*), is preparatory to the total nullification of self-existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*), that occurs with the giving of the Torah.

3.

Now, the same is true in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer. That is, the first prayer upon awakening in the morning is, "I acknowledge before You, living and eternal King, that You have mercifully returned my soul into me, great is Your faithfulness – *Modeh Ani l'faneicha etc.*" and then, the beginning of the morning prayers after reciting the service of the Holy Temple is, "Acknowledge *HaShem*-יהו"ה, call out in His Name – *Hodu laHaShem, Kiroo BiShmo*," both of which are connected to serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, with complete nullification of sense of separate existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*) in the *Amidah* prayer.

To further explain, the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in the *Amidah* prayer, is similar to what it states in the book of Ezekiel about the Act of the Chariot (*Ma'aseh Merkavah*). About the *Chayot Angels*, the verse states,¹²²⁰ "When they stood, they relaxed their wings." However, earlier in the verse it states, "The sound of their wings was like the sound of great waters." That is, the contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) and comprehension of Godliness, caused the

¹²²⁰ Ezekiel 1:24-25

aspect of “running (*Ratzo*)” in them, with great commotion and noise, as it states,¹²²¹ “A wind then uplifted me and I heard the sound of a great noise behind me.” However, when a revelation that was beyond their grasp was drawn to them, to the point that there was a revelation of the light of the Supernal crown-*Keter*, which is the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*), they then were in a state of “standing,” about which it states,¹²²² “‘Standing-*Amidah*’ refers to silence only,” which (as explained in chapter one) is the *Sefirah* of the crown-*Keter*. Thus, “When they stood, they relaxed their wings,” that is, they no longer had the strength for the commotion of love that accompanies the “running (*Ratzo*),” but instead, they were in a state nullification (*Bittul*).

This is the meaning of the teaching,¹²²³ “The *Chayot Angels* uplift the throne and are uplifted with the throne.” That is, at first they uplift the throne through the aspect of the “great noise and commotion of the *Chayot Angels*,” but afterwards, “when they stood, they relaxed their wings,” at which point they are uplifted and carried by the throne.¹²²⁴

The same applies to serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer. That is, the “wings” refer to love and fear of

¹²²¹ Ezekiel 3:12

¹²²² Talmud Bavli, Sota 39a; Likkutei Torah Naso 22c

¹²²³ Liturgy of the Piyut “*V'Chayot*” in the *Kedushah* of *Keter* in the Musaf prayer of Rosh HaShanah (Ashkenaz); Also see Rabbeinu Bachaye to Terumah 25:10, citing Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer (Ch. 4, and see the Rada"l there); Midrash Bamidbar Rabba 14; Shemot Rabba 23.

¹²²⁴ See Ohr HaTorah, Yitro p. 864.

HaShem-יהו"ה, blessed is He, as it states,¹²²⁵ "Two wings covered their bodies." The two wings refer to love and fear of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, which are called "wings," since through them one ascends above.¹²²⁶ Now, the matter of love and fear of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is brought out in the middle of the prayers, during the songs of praise (*Pesukei d'Zimrah*), the blessings of the *Shema* recital and the recital of *Shema* itself. For, the contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) that takes place during prayer, causes love and fear of *HaShem*-יהו"ה to be born, in a way of great noise and "running" (*Ratzo*).

This is followed by the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the *Amidah* prayer, which is not in a way of "running" (*Ratzo*), but rather, is in a way of nullification of one's self-existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*). This is to such an extent that even the speech of the *Amidah* prayer is in a way of nullification of one's self-existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*). This is why before we begin the *Amidah* prayer, we say,¹²²⁷ "My Lord-*Adona*"ע-י-אדנ, open my lips and my mouth will speak Your praise." That is, "My Lord-*Adona*"ע-י-אדנ, open my lips," is what one is given from Above. The verse then continues, "and my mouth will speak Your praise," wherein the word "speak-*Yagid*"גיד-י means the drawing forth of influence. That is, "Your praise" which is transcendent, is drawn forth through "my mouth," meaning that one is in a

¹²²⁵ Ezekiel 1:11

¹²²⁶ Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 10 (25b); Tanya Ch. 39-40

¹²²⁷ Psalms 51:17

state of total nullification of self-existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*).¹²²⁸

This nullification comes about through the revelation of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה that transcends comprehension, for two reasons. The first reason is that as a result of the revelation of the higher, transcendent light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, he comes to realize that all his service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is totally insignificant, and as a result, he no longer is in a state of “running” (*Ratzo*). The second reason is that the revelation of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*), is equal below as it is Above, only that it is concealed and must be revealed from its hiddenness and drawn into revelation. Since *HaShem*'s-יהו"ה transcendence, blessed is He, exists below as it does above, the matter of “running” (*Ratzo*) is inapplicable.

This then, is the service of the *Amidah* prayer, which is in a way of complete nullification of one's sense of separate existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*) due to the revelation of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה that transcends comprehension. For, although the revelation of this light is entirely beyond the comprehension of the intellect, so that not only does he not grasp the revelation of this light, but beyond that, it is not even applicable to say that he “feels it” but does not grasp its true being. Rather, it is utterly beyond his comprehension and grasp, since comprehension is not at all a vessel for the revelation of such light. Even so, the revelation of this light affects his inner being.

¹²²⁸ See Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 2c, 41a

This is like the verse in the book of Daniel,¹²²⁹ “I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, but a great fear fell upon them and they fled into hiding.” Regarding this, our sages, of blessed memory, stated,¹²³⁰ “Even though they did not see, the upper aspect of their soul (*Mazal*) saw.” In other words, this is a matter that entirely transcends comprehension, being that the *Mazal* is the aspect of the essential self of the soul that transcends manifestation in the body. It thus is understood that comprehension is not a vessel for this at all. Nevertheless, the revelation of this light caused a great fear to fall upon them.

The same applies to the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the *Amidah* prayer. That is, although it is a revelation of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה that entirely transcends one's comprehension, nonetheless, this light even affects one's external limbs and the garments of thought, speech, and action. This self-nullification (*Bittul*) during the *Amidah* prayer is connected to the matter of acknowledgment and submission (*Hoda'ah*) at the beginning of the prayers. That is, the beginning of the prayers must be approached in a way of acknowledgment (*Hoda'ah*) and self-nullification (*Bittul*). For, through the acknowledgment (*Hoda'ah*) and self-nullification (*Bittul*) at the beginning of the prayers, one comes to the self-nullification (*Bittul*) of the *Amidah* prayer with complete nullification of his sense of separate existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*).

¹²²⁹ Daniel 10:7

¹²³⁰ Talmud Bavli, Megillah 3a

The explanation is as follows: Each and every day the order of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה in prayer, is that in the beginning of one's service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, he does not need to start off with lofty levels of attainment. Rather, only the matter of restraint (*Itkafia*) and acknowledgement (*Hoda'ah*) is required. This is the matter of reciting, "Acknowledge *HaShem*-יהו"ה, call out in His Name – *Hodu laHaShem Kiroo BiShmo*," at the beginning of the prayers. Only afterwards do we come to other matters of prayer, such as the verses of praise (*Pesukei d'Zimrah*), the blessings of the *Shema* and the recital of *Shema* itself, all of which involve the matter of contemplative meditation (*Hitbonenut*), until one arrives at the sublimation and self-nullification (*Bittul*) of the *Amidah* prayer. However, it is specifically arrived at through the acknowledgment and submission (*Hoda'ah*) at the beginning of the prayers. For, the beginning of one's service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, must specifically be in a manner of acknowledgment (*Hoda'ah*) and self-nullification (*Bittul*).

To further explain,¹²³¹ the verse states,¹²³² "Do not ascend by stairs onto My Altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed upon it." That is to say,¹²³³ when a Jew desires to ascend upon the altar to the root of his soul – like the angel Michael, the minister of Israel, who offers the souls of the

¹²³¹ See Ohr HaTorah *ibid.* p. 860 and on.

¹²³² Exodus 20:22

¹²³³ See Maamarei Admor HaZaken, HaKtzarim p. 62, cited in Ohr HaTorah *ibid.* p. 862.

righteous *Tzaddikim*¹²³⁴ – the order of this service of *HaShem*-יהוה, blessed is He, is not to begin ascending “by stairs,” but rather, by way of a ramp. The difference between stairs and a ramp is that stairs are levels upon levels, wherein each particular level is unique unto itself. Ascension by way of stairs is that when a person ascends to one level, he must stop until he becomes essentially one with it. Only then, can he ascend to the next level above it. This is analogous to stairs, in which each stair possesses a height followed by a level plane, as in the Mishnah,¹²³⁵ “All the stairs of the Holy Temple were half a cubit high, with a level plane of half a cubit.” In other words, the height refers to ascent to the higher level and the level plane refers to the level he is on until he can ascend to the level above it.

In contrast, a ramp is a single level. This is to say that the ascent from below to above on the ramp of the altar was not as recognizable, since it was inclined in such a manner that it was easy to walk on it. This is because its length was thirty-two cubits and its height was close to ten cubits, meaning that its height was less than one third of its length. We likewise find this in regard to laws of Shabbat. That is,¹²³⁶ “if a mound gradually gains the height of ten handbreadths over a space of five cubits – which is thirty handbreadths – it is considered to fully be part of the public domain, since it is easy to walk on it.”

¹²³⁴ See Tosefot to Talmud Bavli, Menachot 110a; Zohar I 80a, and elsewhere.

¹²³⁵ Mishnah Middot 2:3; 3:6; Talmud Bavli, Yoma 16a

¹²³⁶ See Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 100a and Rashi there.

Now, the difference between the stairs of the Holy Temple and the ramp of the altar, in terms of revelations from Above, is like the difference between the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*) and the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*). That is, the matter of stairs is related to the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh*), in that it comes in a way of divisions in the chaining down of the worlds (*Seder Hishtalshelut*). That is, how it illuminates in one world is not like how it illuminates in the next world, similar to the difference between how the lifeforce manifests in the head, the body and the feet.

On the other hand, the matter of the ramp of the altar, is related to the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev*), which exists below as it does Above, only that it is concealed. Here, the ascent is merely the revelation of that which is concealed, in which many levels do not apply, since it exists below as it does Above.

As this relates to serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה in prayer, the difference between the two may be understood as follows: The aspect of stairs indicates ascent in a way of order and gradation from level to level. That is, one begins with the submission of "Acknowledge *HaShem*-יהו"ה – *Hodu laHaShem*," up to the verses of praise (*Pesukei d'Zimrah*). This is followed by the verses of praise (*Pesukei d'Zimrah*), then the blessings of the *Shema*, then the recital of *Shema* and then the *Amidah* prayer. When one is at the beginning of his prayers, he is in the aspect of "silent matter" (*Domem*), like a

rock. He then ascends to the aspect of “growth” (*Tzome’ach*), like a plant, then to the aspect of a living animate creature (*Chay*), and then to a speaking (*Medaber*) human being.

However, such is not the case regarding the matter of the ramp, in that the ascent is not in a way of order and gradation from level to level. That is, in this type of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, he serves *HaShem*-יהו"ה, with the acceptance of the yoke of His Kingship, without taking any consideration of levels whatsoever, and without any consideration of his own state and standing. This is the meaning of the verse, “You shall not ascend My Altar on stairs.” That is, the beginning of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in a manner of bringing the animalistic soul as an offering – meaning, to bring it to a state of ascent to its root, which is the aspect of the altar, that is, the aspect of kingship-*Malchut*, which is the ingathering of the souls of Israel (*Knesset Yisrael*) – and must be in a manner that “You shall not ascend My Altar on stairs.” For, if one begins to contemplate and consider his own level, then, “your nakedness will not be exposed upon it.” In other words, he will come to see his own lowliness and that he has utterly no relation to love and fear of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, whatsoever etc. This will cause him to abstain from fulfilling his service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

However, because of the fact that regardless of one’s state and standing it is necessary for him to fulfill the Torah and commandments of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, at the very least in

thought, speech and action, as it states,¹²³⁷ “Fear God and keep His commandments, for that is the whole purpose of man,” he therefore should “not ascend My Altar on stairs.” Rather, the order of ascent must specifically be by way of the ramp.

It therefore is stated,¹²³⁸ “He ascended the ramp (*Kevesh*-כבש) and turned to the surrounding ledge (*Sovev*-סובב).” The word, “He ascended the ramp-*Kevesh*-כבש” is of the same root as “conquest-*Kvishah*-כבישה,” meaning that he conquers-*Kovesh*-כובש himself, in a way of restraint (*Itkafia*) without giving any consideration to his current state and standing. Rather, he “turns to the surrounding ledge-*Sovev*-סובב,” meaning that he sets himself entirely aside and “turns” to invest himself entirely in matters of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in a way that transcends the measures of “above” and “below,” from the aspect of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that utterly transcends and surrounds (*Sovev*-סובב) all worlds. Through this, he subsequently actually comes to a state and standing of actually attaining this level, (not just in a way of restraint-*Itkafia*. This is the meaning of the continuation of the verse, “He came to the southeast corner etc.,” as all the particulars of this subject are elucidated in *Biurei HaZohar*.¹²³⁹

This is also the meaning of the verse in Psalms,¹²⁴⁰ “For the conductor, regarding the mute dove of the distant

¹²³⁷ Ecclesiastes 12:13

¹²³⁸ Talmud Bavli, Zevachim 53a

¹²³⁹ *Biurei HaZohar* of the Mittler Rebbe, 144b and on; Also see *Ohr HaTorah* *ibid.* p. 855 and on.

¹²⁴⁰ Psalms 56:1

ones.” The dove (*Yonah*-יונה) refers to the ingathering of Israel (*Knesset Yisrael*) as they are above, as well as to the souls of Israel as they are below, which are compared to a dove (*Yonah*-יונה),¹²⁴¹ in which they are in a state of sublimation and nullification (*Bittul*) to *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. They therefore are called “the mute dove” (*Yonat Eilem*-יונת אלם), which is the aspect of the silence of the *Sefirah* of the crown-*Keter*. Now, at first glance, this verse is not understood. That is, what relation is there between “the mute dove (*Yonat Eilem*-יונת אלם),” which is the loftiest level of service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, and those who are in an aspect of “distance-*Rechokim*-רחקים.”

The explanation is that the closer someone is to *HaShem*'s-יהו"ה presence, blessed is He, the more of a nothing he is.¹²⁴² That is, the more he understands and comprehends matters of Godliness, the more he will come to sense his distance from *HaShem*-יהו"ה. Even so, although he senses his distance, it does not obstruct him from serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, and he therefore is in the aspect of “the mute dove” (*Yonat Eilem*-יונת אלם).

That is, as explained before, when a person's approach to serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is in a manner of ascending from level to level, when he senses his distance from *HaShem*-יהו"ה, it obstructs him from serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. However, when his service is in a way sublimation and nullification (*Bittul*) to *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed

¹²⁴¹ See Ohr HaTorah, Shir HaShirim Vol. 1 p. 312 and on; p. 330 and on.

¹²⁴² See Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 2

is He, which is the matter of silence, then even though he senses his distance, this nevertheless does not obstruct his service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, and he is in an aspect of "the mute dove (*Yonat Eilem*-יונת אלים)."

This then, is the general order of the approach in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. The beginning of one's service must be in a way of submission and nullification (*Bittul*) in a way of restraint (*Itkafia*). It is specifically through this that he comes to the aspect of nullification of sense of independent existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*) and complete nullification before *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, which is of the aspect of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that utterly transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*).

5.

Based on the above, we may understand the matter of giving precedence to "We will do" over "We will listen." For, "We will listen" does not mean hearing with the physical ear. If that was so, how would it be possible to fulfill "We will do" before hearing, since one does not yet know what to do? Rather, "We will listen" (*Nishma*-נשמע) is a term meaning understanding and comprehension. In contrast, the term "We will do" (*Na'aseh*-נעשה) is a term of restraint (*Itkafia*), similar to the statement,¹²⁴³ "We force-*Ma'asin*-מעשין charity to be given."

¹²⁴³ See Beit Yosef to Tur, Yore De'ah 248; Also see Sefer HaMaamarim 5678 p. 121; Likkutei Sichot Vol. 12, p. 238.

Thus, the matter of giving precedence to “We will do” (*Na’aseh*-נעשה) over “We will listen” (*Nishma*-נשמע), is that even if one does not comprehend, he nevertheless forces himself to fulfill his service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

It is for this reason that giving precedence to “We will do” (*Na’aseh*-נעשה) over “We will listen” (*Nishma*-נשמע), is preparatory to the giving of the Torah. For, it is through their giving precedence to “We will do” (*Na’aseh*-נעשה) over “We will listen” (*Nishma*-נשמע), that they put the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in action – of “We will do” (*Na’aseh*-נעשה) – on a much loftier level than the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through the service of “We will listen” (*Nishma*-נשמע). For, even though the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, with comprehension (“We will listen-*Nishma*-נשמע”) is pleasurable, whereas the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of “we will do-*Na’aseh*-נעשה” is in a manner of restraint and constriction, they nevertheless gave precedence to “We will do” (*Na’aseh*-נעשה) over “We will listen” (*Nishma*-נשמע). Thus, this is the aspect of the sublimation and nullification (*Bittul*) of the silence of the aspect of the crown-*Keter*. Therefore, it is this aspect which was preparatory to the giving of the Torah, meaning that it was through this that they brought a drawing forth of the aspect of the Supernal Crown-*Keter*, which is the Crown of Torah-*Keter Torah*-כתר תורה, and the Torah is of the aspect of the Crown-*Keter*.

Now, although it states that “The Torah came forth from wisdom-*Chochmah*,”¹²⁴⁴ nevertheless, the teaching of the Alter Rebbe¹²⁴⁵ on the verse,¹²⁴⁶ “And there was a voice from above the firmament,” is well known. He explained that this refers to the voice of Torah, which is from above the firmament that separates. Through this teaching we may understand the verse,¹²⁴⁷ “My tongue shall respond with Your word.” That is, speaking the words of Torah is the aspect of the word of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, who speaks through his mouth (that is, they are an echo and reflection of the Supernal speech), like a person who “repeats after the reader.”¹²⁴⁸

Now, at first glance, this is not understood. For, all lower speech comes in a manner of chaining down (*Hishtalshelut*) from *HaShem*'s-יהו"ה Supernal speech. However, the explanation is that all matters below come forth through a firmament (*Rakia*-רקיע) that separates, which is the matter of the partition (*Parsa*) and screen (*Masach*) which separates, because the matters as they are here below are not the same as they are above. However, this is not the case when it comes to Torah, which is the aspect of “the voice from above the firmament.” This is to say that the firmament (*Rakia*) does not cause any separation in Torah. That is, it is below as it is above. From this, it is understood that even as

¹²⁴⁴ Zohar II 62a, 85a, and elsewhere.

¹²⁴⁵ Maamarei Admor HaZaken, Nevi'im p. 234 & p. 237.

¹²⁴⁶ Ezekiel 1:25

¹²⁴⁷ Psalms 119:172

¹²⁴⁸ See Torah Ohr, Yitro 67b, 109a; Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 44b

the Torah comes into the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*) and into the aspect of wisdom-*Chochmah*, it nevertheless remains in the aspect of the Crown of Torah-*Keter Torah*-כתר תורה.

However, in order to draw forth the aspect of the Crown of Torah-*Keter Torah*-כתר תורה, there must specifically be given precedence to “We will do” (*Na’aseh*-נעשה) over “We will listen” (*Nishma*-נשמע). That is, there must be the aspect of the self-nullification (*Bittul*) of “We will do” (*Na’aseh*-נעשה), even though the matter has not yet come into comprehension etc.

Beyond even this, at the very least, a person must have the aspect indicated by our sages, of blessed memory, in the teaching,¹²⁴⁹ “The Holy One, blessed is He, overturned the mountain above them like a tub, and said: ‘If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, here will be your burial.’ From this we see that Torah bears a substantial caveat etc.” About this, it states in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov,¹²⁵⁰ that *Tosefot* asked a question regarding this. Namely, why was it necessary for the Holy One, blessed is He, to hold a mountain over the Jewish people, when they themselves already stated, “We will do and we will listen”? The Baal Shem Tov explains that the reason “the Holy One, blessed is He, overturned the mountain over the Jewish people like a tub,” is to teach us that even a person who has no desire in Torah and the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is nevertheless

¹²⁴⁹ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88a

¹²⁵⁰ Keter Shem Tov 47

“not at liberty to neglect it.”¹²⁵¹ Rather, he must do so by force, and, if necessary, should even imagine that he is being forced to do so against his will. In other words, he must serve *HaShem*-יהוה nonetheless, at the very least in thought, speech, and action.

6.

This then, explains the teaching,¹²⁵² “When Israel gave precedence to the declaration, ‘We will do,’ over the declaration, ‘We will listen,’¹²⁵³ six-hundred-thousand ministering angels came and tied two crowns each for every member of the Jewish people, one corresponding to, ‘We will do,’ and one corresponding to, ‘We will listen.’” For, the relationship between the two crowns and the precedence given to “We will do” over “We will listen,” is that by giving precedence to “We will do” over “We will listen” they affected the matter of the sublimation and self-nullification (*Bittul*) of the aspect of the Crown-*Keter*.

Thus, this is why our sages, of blessed memory, stated,¹²⁵⁴ “When the Jewish people gave precedence to the declaration ‘We will do,’ over the declaration ‘We will listen,’ a Heavenly Voice proclaimed and said, ‘Who revealed this secret-*Raz*-רז to my children?’” A “secret-*Raz*-רז” refers to something that is hidden and concealed, which is a mystery-

¹²⁵¹ Mishnah Avot 2:16

¹²⁵² Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88a

¹²⁵³ Exodus 24:7

¹²⁵⁴ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88a *ibid*.

Sod-סוד. In other words, since their giving precedence to ‘We will do’ over ‘We will listen,’ is from the aspect of the crown-*Keter*, which transcends comprehension, it therefore is a “secret-*Raz*-רז.” Nevertheless, the secret-*Raz* that the preparation for the giving of the Torah must necessarily be through giving precedence to “We will do” over “We will listen,” was revealed to them. It is specifically through this that the giving of the Torah, which is the aspect of the revelation of the Crown of Torah-*Keter Torah*-כתר תורה, was brought about.¹²⁵⁵

Now, although the revelation of the giving of the Torah was the aspect of the Crown-*Keter* which transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*), nevertheless, this itself was even drawn forth into the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*). This is similar to what we previously explained in regard to man’s service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, (in chapter three), that although the nullification of one’s sense of independent existence (*Bittul b’Metziyut*) is due to a revelation that entirely transcends comprehension, nevertheless, it also affects one’s thoughts, speech and actions. In other words, the nullification (*Bittul*) of one’s self to the Master of the Supernal Will, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, causes him to come to a state and standing in which, of his own accord, he has no relation to this.

¹²⁵⁵ The crown of Torah – *Keter Torah*-כתר תורה refers to the revelation of the Giver of the Torah, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, within Torah. (See Ginat Egoz of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as *HaShem Is One*, Vol. 1, The Gate of Intrinsic Being (*Shaar HaHavayah*), and Vol. 3 (The Letters of Creation, Part 2), The Gate explaining the truth of Sinai-סיני where the Ten Commandments-*Aseret HaDvarim*-עשרת הדבריים were given.)

The same is the case when it comes to the drawing forth of light and illumination through one's service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. That is, the aspect of the Crown of Torah-*Keter Torah*-כתר תורה, which transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*), but is nevertheless drawn forth into the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*), begins with the drawing forth in wisdom-*Chochmah*, since "Torah came forth from wisdom-*Chochmah*." Through this, it is then drawn in understanding-*Binah* as well, since "wisdom-*Chochmah* and understanding-*Binah* are two lovers that never separate."¹²⁵⁶ From there, it is also drawn to *Zeir Anpin*, in accordance with the teaching, "understanding-*Binah* is the heart."¹²⁵⁷ For, as explained by the Rav, the Maggid of Mezeritch,¹²⁵⁸ even though understanding-*Binah* is one of the brains¹²⁵⁹ (*Mochin*) in the three sections of the skull, nevertheless, the bond of "the two lovers" (wisdom-*Chochmah* and understanding-*Binah*) spreads forth all the way to the chest (which is the aspect of *Zeir Anpin*). Moreover, the general service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in counting the Omer (*Sefirat HaOmer*) is connected to the forty-nine gates of understanding-*Binah*, in order to affect a drawing forth of the intellect to the emotions.¹²⁶⁰

¹²⁵⁶ Zohar III 4a

¹²⁵⁷ Introduction to Tikkunei Zohar 17a

¹²⁵⁸ Likkutei Amarim 109; Ohr Torah 325; cited in Ohr HaTorah Yitro ibid. p. 856.

¹²⁵⁹ The left hemisphere of the brain

¹²⁶⁰ See Maamarei Admor HaZaken, Hanachot HaRav Pinchas, p. 55; Printed with glosses in Ohr HaTorah Vayikra Vol. 2, p. 584; Sefer HaMaamarim 5696 p. 63.

This then, is the general matter of the giving of the Torah. That is, the order is that, at first, there must be the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the month of Nissan, which is in a way of restraint (*Itkafia*). This is followed by the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the month of Iyyar, which is in a way of transformation (*It'hapcha*). It then is followed by the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, of the month of Sivan, which is the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in a way of complete nullification of one's sense of independent existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*), which is the matter of giving precedence to "We will do" over "We will listen." For, it is through this that the angels first "came and tied two crowns," after which the Torah and *mitzvot* were given to them and Torah was received with joy and innerness!¹²⁶¹

¹²⁶¹ As per the language of the blessing that the Rebbes would bestow upon the Chassidim at the occasion of the holiday of Shavuot. This blessing is explained at greater length in Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 4, p. 1307, Vol. 8 p. 272; Torat Menachem Vol. 8 p. 171, 206, 239, and various other places.