

Discourse 8

*“Katontee Mikol HaChassadim -
I have become small from all the kindnesses”*

Delivered on Shabbat Parshat VaYeishev,

20th of Kislev, 5717

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

1.

The verse states,⁵⁸⁴ “I have become small from all the kindnesses and all the truth that You have done to Your servant; for with my staff, I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps.” About this verse, His honorable holiness, the Tzemach Tzedek,⁵⁸⁵ cites the teaching of our sages, of blessed memory,⁵⁸⁶ “A person should never place himself in a place of danger saying that they will perform a miracle for him from on high. Even if they do perform a miracle for him, it will be deducted from his merits. Which verse alludes to this? The verse, ‘I have become small from all the kindnesses etc.’” Rashi explains this further stating, “My merits became smaller and diminished because of all the kindnesses You did for me.”

⁵⁸⁴ Genesis 32:11

⁵⁸⁵ Ohr HaTorah, Vayishlach (Vol. 5) p. 874; Also see the first discourse entitled “*Katonti*” 5678 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5678 p. 84 and on); Discourse entitled “*Katonti*” 5698 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5698 p. 155 and on).

⁵⁸⁶ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 32a

Now, there is another explanation of this. In Iggeret HaKodesh,⁵⁸⁷ in the section entitled “*Katontee* – I have become small,” the Alter Rebbe explains as follows, “This means, that with every act of kindness that the Holy One, blessed is He, does for a person, he should become very humbled. For, kindness-*Chessed* is the right arm,⁵⁸⁸ as it states, ‘His right arm embraces me,’⁵⁸⁹ and is the aspect of coming close to God far more intensely than before, literally. Whosoever is more intensely closer to *HaShem*-יהו"ה, being raised to the highest heights, must be even more humbled and lowly of spirit, to the lowest depths. For, whoever is before *HaShem*-יהו"ה to a greater degree, is as nothing and zero to a greater degree.”

We must therefore understand how these two explanations could possibly be merged as one, when at first glance, they seem to be opposites and at odds with each other. (Namely, my merits have become small, in the simple meaning of the word, “I have become small-*Katontee*-קטנתי,” and the matter of self-nullification and humility stemming from service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He).

2.

This may be understood by prefacing with the words of the Tzemach Tzedek⁵⁹⁰ in explanation of the statement in Talmud that when a miracle is performed for a person, it is deducted from his merits. He explains this based on the

⁵⁸⁷ Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 2

⁵⁸⁸ Introduction to Tikkunei Zohar 17a-b (Patach Eliyahu)

⁵⁸⁹ Song of Songs 2:6

⁵⁹⁰ Ohr HaTorah ibid.

foundation of the Alter Rebbe's explanation in Iggeret HaKodesh,⁵⁹¹ about the teaching,⁵⁹² "There is no reward for the performance of a *mitzvah* in this world." He explains that in this physical world, it only is possible for there to be a drawing forth of the aspect of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*), which is the vitality that relates to the world. Thus, since the *mitzvot* affect a drawing forth of the aspect of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*), therefore, "there is no reward for the performance of a *mitzvah* in this world," since the world is incapable of receiving the drawing forth of the aspect of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*).

However, the matter of a miracle is a drawing forth of the aspect of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*). For, as known,⁵⁹³ the conduct of the natural order stems from the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*), whereas miraculous conduct specifically stems from the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*). Thus, since when a miracle is performed, there is a drawing forth of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*), we therefore find that the drawing forth affected by the miracle is of the same substance as that which is drawn forth through the *mitzvot*. It therefore applies to state that when a miracle is performed for a

⁵⁹¹ Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 3

⁵⁹² Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 39b

⁵⁹³ See the beginning and end of the discourse entitled "*HaChodesh*" in *Hemshech* 5666, and elsewhere.

person, it is deducted from his merits. For, through the miracle that happened for him, there was a drawing forth of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*), which is the very same matter as his merits, which are the reward for the *mitzvahs*.

3.

The explanation is that the matter of a miracle is not that there is a complete abrogation of the natural order. For, if that were so, it would have no relation whatsoever to the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*). Rather, as known, when the natural order is overridden by a miracle, it only pertains to one particular detail,⁵⁹⁴ whereas the general essence of the existence of the physical thing (in which the miracle occurred) remains in existence, with the qualities and laws etc., as they stem from the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*) remaining intact. This being so, the matter of a miracle is specifically the drawing forth of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*) into the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*).

This is why the word “miracle-*Neis*-נִסִּים,” also means “to uplift,” as it states,⁵⁹⁵ “I will uplift My banner (*Areem Nissee*-אָרִים נִסִּי).” This is because a miracle is not the nullification of the natural order, but rather is in a manner that the natural order

⁵⁹⁴ Also see *Torat Menachem*, *Sefer HaMaamarim Tammuz* p. 68.

⁵⁹⁵ Isaiah 49:22

itself, as it stems from the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*), is uplifted to a state of miraculous conduct stemming from the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*).

The same is so of the matter of merits, which are the reward of the *mitzvot*. That is, since the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* is with physical objects in the physical world of action, we therefore find that the drawing forth of the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*), which is drawn through the *mitzvot*, is specifically within the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*).⁵⁹⁶

Additionally, we may state that based on the above, it is understood that there is an element of superiority to a miracle which manifests in the natural order, such as the miracle of Purim, over and above an openly revealed miracle which transcends the natural order, such as the splitting of the Red sea. For, since every miracle is the matter of elevating the natural order itself, it is therefore understood that wherever the natural order exists to a greater degree, and yet there is miraculous conduct in the natural order itself, the miracle is all the greater and of greater superiority.

Moreover, the primary superiority of a miracle is when it is completely hidden, to the extent that according to Torah law it would even be improper to make the blessing, "Blessed are You, *HaShem*-יהו"ה our God, King of the world, that You

⁵⁹⁶ It is noted in the original transcript that the transcribers were not fully clear regarding this matter.

performed a miracle for me in this place.”⁵⁹⁷ For, since the natural order is dominant to such a great degree, the miracle and elevation is therefore to a much greater degree, so much so, that the natural order itself, as it is in its full strength, is elevated to the level of the miraculous.

With the above in mind, we can understand the great elevation of the holiday and revelation of the 19th of Kislev.⁵⁹⁸ That is, although the miracle of the 19th of Kislev manifested within the natural order, nevertheless, it is for this very reason that the miracle is far superior. That is, on the 19th of Kislev the natural order itself was elevated higher than the natural order.

4.

Now, based on what we explained above, that miracles are connected to the matter of merit, it is understood that just as the primary superiority and elevation of a miracle is when it is completely hidden and concealed, so likewise, this is so of the general matter of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. That is, to the degree that a person's service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, hidden, to that degree the revelation is loftier.

This is as explained before,⁵⁹⁹ that it is specifically through the withholding and obstruction, meaning that the light (*Ohr*) is withheld and restrained and not revealed except through great toil and labor, that there thereby is caused to be a much greater revelation of much loftier light and illumination

⁵⁹⁷ Mishnah Brachot 9:1

⁵⁹⁸ The miraculous redemption of the Alter Rebbe from prison.

⁵⁹⁹ In the preceding discourse entitled “*Katonti* – I have been diminished,” of this year 5717, Discourse 7, Ch. 4 and on.

(*Ohr*), so much so, that even the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is revealed. As we observe, that a person whose brain is coarse and must exert himself in toiling to understand a matter of intellect, through toiling in refining the concealment, he comes to grasp the essential intellect. Moreover, not only does he grasp the intellect as it is in the power of conceptualization (*Ko'ach HaMaskeel*), but he also grasps it as it is in the essence of the soul, and his grasp extends to the point that he grasps and takes hold of the essence of the soul itself, literally, in which it is impossible to differentiate between one matter and another etc.

Now, at first glance this is not understood. Why is it that a person who has a good brain, a refined body and a rarified soul, has a lesser portion than a person who does not? The explanation is that the matter of concealment (*He'elem*) is superior, in that it is specifically in the concealment that the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is found. In other words, even though this is a matter of concealment (*He'elem*), nevertheless, it is specifically in the concealment that the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is found, literally. Therefore, through refining and clarifying the concealment (*He'elem*) we literally take hold of the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

This matter is the general superiority of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, by affecting refinements (*Birurim*). That is, through refining and clarifying the concealment (*He'elem*) a much greater elevation is caused, so that not only do we take hold of the light (*Ohr*) of the line-Kav, and not only do we even take hold of the light (*Ohr*) of *HaShem*-

יהו"ה as it is included in His Essential Self, but we even take hold of the Essential Self of the Singular Preexistent Intrinsic and Unlimited Being, *HaShem*-יהו"ה Himself, blessed is He.⁶⁰⁰

The same is likewise true of the matter of miracles which are completely hidden and concealed. That is, it is specifically in such miracles that the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is drawn forth, literally. For, it is by His power, blessed is He, that there becomes a bond between the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה that fills all worlds (*Memaleh Kol Almin*) and the light of *HaShem*-יהו"ה that transcends all worlds (*Sovev Kol Almin*), so that the natural order, as it is in its full strength, is itself elevated to the miraculous.

5.

With the above in mind, the two explanations of the verse, "I have become small" can be resolved. That is, the literal meaning of the word "I have become small-*Katontee*-קטנתי" is that "my merits have become small and diminished," and the second meaning is the matter of self-nullification, lowliness and humility, which is the matter of smallness stemming from toiling in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

The explanation is that through self-nullification (*Bittul*) and a sense of lowliness (*Shiflut*), a person comes to sense that his entire service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is considered to be sinful⁶⁰¹ (similar to "my merits have become small and

⁶⁰⁰ As explained at greater length in the preceding discourse "*Katonti* – I have been diminished," Discourse 7 of this year, 5717.

⁶⁰¹ See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5651 p. 75 and on; 5659 p. 64; 5689 p. 5, and elsewhere.

diminished”). That is, he is compared to “a person who dares to make gestures in the presence of the King etc.”⁶⁰² This realization itself brings him to repentance (*Teshuvah*), and through this, he reaches the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. For, as known, repentance (*Teshuvah*) reaches higher than all the *mitzvot*.⁶⁰³ This is because the *mitzvot* are the desire of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, whereas repentance (*Teshuvah*) reaches the One who desires Himself, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

Thus, the general summation of the matter is that through self-nullification and a sense of lowliness stemming from the matter of, “I have become small-*Katontee*-קטנתי,” a person literally comes to relate to the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה Himself, blessed is He.

Now this matter (of literally relating to the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He) is not only brought about through self-nullification and a sense of lowliness stemming from the toil of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, but also stems from the matter of “I have become small-*Katontee*-קטנתי” according to its simple meaning, that, in and of himself, he finds himself in a state of lowliness and humility (not through toil in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He). In this too he relates to the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, being that the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is specifically found in concealment (*He'elem*) (as discussed before).

⁶⁰² Talmud Bavli, Chagigah 5b

⁶⁰³ See Sefer HaMitzvot of the Tzemach Tzedek 39b; Torat Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Tishrei p. 93; Cheshvan p. 265; Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 22, and Derech Chayim, translated as The Way of Life.

However, the difference is that his relation to the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, also is in a state of concealment, and it must be revealed through toil and exertion in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

6.

From all the above, the application of the matter as it relates to serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is understood. Namely, a person need not seek out specifically lofty matters. Rather, even in lowly matters, and matters where there is hiddenness and concealment (which on the contrary, are much loftier, as explained before) is where we must affect refinement and clarification (*Birurim*). Right now, the primary mode of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is by affecting refinements (*Birurim*) and specifically in a manner that whatever is in one's ability to do, he must immediately do, without any calculations. For, "there are none amongst us who know for how long"⁶⁰⁴ and we therefore must be engaged in the mystery of refinements (*Birurim*).⁶⁰⁵ We therefore must⁶⁰⁶ "grab and eat and grab and drink," since, as explained before, through serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, by affecting refinements (*Birurim*) we take the loftiest lights and revelations, as they are included in the Essential Self of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, up to and including the Essential Self of the

⁶⁰⁴ Psalms 74:9

⁶⁰⁵ See Igrot Kodesh of the Rebbe Rashab, Vol. 1 p. 266.

⁶⁰⁶ Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 54a

Singular Preexistent Intrinsic Unlimited Being, *HaShem*-יהו"ה
Himself, blessed is He, literally!