

Discourse 16

“Hodu LaHaShem Ki Tov - Give thanks to HaShem for He is good”

Shabbat Parshat Va'era, Rosh Chodesh Shvat, 5722

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

1.

The verse states,⁹⁵¹ “Give thanks to *HaShem*-יהו"ה for He is good, for His kindness endures forever.” (The next three verses repeat),⁹⁵² “Let Israel now say, ‘For His kindness endures forever! Let the House of Aharon now say, ‘For His kindness endures forever! Let those who fear *HaShem*-יהו"ה now say, ‘For His kindness endures forever!’”

About this, the Alter Rebbe explains in a discourse (in the booklet of discourses from the years 5563-5564, some of which have neither been published nor publicized),⁹⁵³ that the words “Give thanks to *HaShem*-יהו"ה for He is good,” refer to Torah. For, “there is no goodness (*Tov*-טוב) except for light (*Ohr*-אור),”⁹⁵⁴ as it states,⁹⁵⁵ “God saw the light (*Ohr*-אור) that it was good (*Tov*-טוב),” and “there is no goodness (*Tov*-טוב)

⁹⁵¹ Psalms 118:1

⁹⁵² Psalms 118:2-4

⁹⁵³ The discourse referred to has subsequently been printed in Maamarei Admor HaZaken 5664 p. 35 and on; Also see Ohr HaTorah, Na"Ch Vol. 2, p. 1 (the beginning of the discourse).

⁹⁵⁴ Also see Likkutei Moharan 19

⁹⁵⁵ Genesis 1:4

except for Torah,”⁹⁵⁶ as it states,⁹⁵⁷ “Torah is light (*Ohr*-אור).” It can be added that besides Torah being the Torah of light (*Ohr*-אור) and “there is no goodness (*Tov*-טוב) except for light (*Ohr*-אור),” we also find that Torah itself is called “good-*Tov*-טוב,” as in the verse,⁹⁵⁸ “For I have given you a good (*Tov*-טוב) teaching, do not forsake My Torah.”

Now, since Torah has 613 תרי"ג commandments, (as our sages, of blessed memory, taught,⁹⁵⁹ “613-תרי"ג commandments were said to Moshe, as the verse states,⁹⁶⁰ ‘Moshe commanded the Torah to us, the inheritance [of the congregation of Yaakov].’ The numerical value of Torah-תורה is 611 (these being the 611-תרי"א commandments that Moshe commanded us, plus the additional two commandment, ‘I am *HaShem*-יהו"ה your God,’ and, ‘you shall have no other gods,’ that we heard directly from the mouth of the Almighty), beyond this, there also are the seven Rabbinic commandments instituted by the sages of Israel.

Thus, when the verse states, “Give thanks **to *HaShem*-יהו"ה** for He is good (*Tov*-טוב),” (in which only *HaShem*-יהו"ה is mentioned, and not Israel), it refers to the 613-תרי"ג commandments that *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, said to Moshe. When it then continues and states, “Let **Israel** now say,” it refers to the seven commandments instituted by the rabbis. In other words, the ingathering of the Souls of Israel

⁹⁵⁶ Mishnah Avot 6:3

⁹⁵⁷ Proverbs 6:23

⁹⁵⁸ Proverbs 4:2; Mishnah Avot 6:3 *ibid.*

⁹⁵⁹ Talmud Bavli, Makkot 23b and on

⁹⁶⁰ Deuteronomy 33:4

(*Knesset Yisroel*) should also say, thus drawing down the limitless light of the Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* instituted by the sages of Israel.

Now, the reason it states, "Let Israel now say... Let the House of Aharon now say... Let those who fear *HaShem*-יהו"ה now say," is because the Jewish people's service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, is divided into the three categories of the Jewish people; the Priests (*Kohanim*), the Levites (*Leviyim*), and the Israelites (*Yisroelim*). Thus, when it states, "Let Israel now say," this refers to the Israelites (*Yisroelim*), when it says, "Let the House of Aharon now say," this refers to the Priests (*Kohanim*), when it says, "Let those who fear *HaShem*-יהו"ה now say," this refers the Levites (*Leviyim*), since the service of the Levites is in the line and mode of Judgments-*Gevurot*,⁹⁶¹ meaning, fear (*Yirah*) of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

In other words, the seven *mitzvot* instituted by the sages of Israel divide into three lines and modes; Kindness-*Chessed*, Might-*Gevurah*, and Splendor-*Tiferet*, (which in the Jewish people are the three categories; Priests (*Kohanim*), Levites (*Leviyim*), and Israelites (*Yisroelim*)). This is just like Torah, which in general, is divided into three lines and

⁹⁶¹ See Shaarei Orah of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as Gates of Light, Gate Five (*Tiferet*), section on the title "Splendor-*Tiferet*-תפארת"; Also see Tanya, Ch. 50 (70b); Likkutei Torah, Korach 44b and on, and elsewhere.

modes;⁹⁶² Torah study, the sacrificial service of the Holy Temple, and acts of lovingkindness (*Gemilut Chassadim*).⁹⁶³

Now, the general matter of the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* instituted by the sages of Israel, is to affect that “His kindness endures forever.” (This is as in the continuation and conclusion of the three above-mentioned verses, “For His kindness endures forever.”) In other words, this is to affect that the Supernal kindness-*Chessed* of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, will also illuminate all the way down within the darkness of night etc.

The explanation is that the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* were established by the sages of Israel in the time of the second Holy Temple, when as a result of the fall they had undergone, they saw that from the Biblical *mitzvot* [alone] there was not enough revelation of *HaShem*'s-יהו"ה Godliness in the ingathering of the souls of Israel (*Knesset Yisroel*). That is, they had fallen from their level, and thus the Godly light (*Ohr*) could not illuminate in the receptacle (*Kli*) of their Torah and *mitzvot*.

Therefore, according to the times, they added Rabbinic *mitzvot*, such as the *mitzvah* of lighting the Chanukah lights [added] in the times of the Hasmoneans, because of the darkness during the time of battle against the Greeks. Thus, upon the victory of the Hasmoneans, they established the *mitzvah* of lighting the Chanukah lights. This was likewise so in [establishing the *mitzvah*] of reading the Megillah in the

⁹⁶² See Tanya, Ch. 46 (65b) and elsewhere.

⁹⁶³ Mishnah Avot 1:2

days of Mordechai, because of the darkness caused by the decree of Achashverosh and Haman etc. Shlomo instituted washing one's hands [before eating bread], which also was because of the hiddenness and concealment of the time.⁹⁶⁴ (This concludes the summary of the [above-mentioned] discourse.)

2.

Now, we can connect this matter with Rosh Chodesh [the new moon], at which time we recite the above-mentioned verses, (“Give thanks to *HaShem*-יהוה... Let Israel now say etc.”) during the recitation of Hallel, which likewise a Rabbinic *mitzvah*.⁹⁶⁵

The explanation is that, as known,⁹⁶⁶ the matter of Rosh Chodesh is the matter of drawing down the light of holiness even into the mundane days of the week. For, when Rosh Chodesh falls on a mundane day of the week, (unlike this Rosh Chodesh, which falls out on Shabbat), acts of labor are permitted.⁹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, even so, we recite Hallel, which is of the same root as in the verse,⁹⁶⁸ “When His flame shone (*b'Heelo*-בהלו) [above my head],”⁹⁶⁹ referring to a

⁹⁶⁴ See Ohr HaTorah, Shir HaShirim Vol. 2, p. 452 and elsewhere.

⁹⁶⁵ See the note of the Rebbe to Sefer HaMaamarim 5708 p. 165.

⁹⁶⁶ See Likkutei Torah, Zot HaBrachah 96d and on; Ohr HaTorah, Bereishit 22a and on.

⁹⁶⁷ Tur and Shulchan Aaruch, Orach Chayim 417

⁹⁶⁸ Job 29:3

⁹⁶⁹ Also see the discourse entitled “*Inyan Hallel*” (at the end of Derech Mitzvotcha of the Tzemach Tzedek).

drawing down and revelation of light (*Ohr*). That is, it affects a drawing down of light (*Ohr*) even in the mundane days and activities of the week.⁹⁷⁰

This likewise is the general matter of the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* instituted by the sages of Israel. That is, their purpose is to affect that even mundane matters that, in and of themselves, are not *mitzvot* and are not sanctified, come to have the matter of a *mitzvah*, sanctity, and holiness.

3.

Now, the general light (*Ohr*) drawn down through the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot*, the matter of which is to draw holiness even into mundane matters, is a much higher light (*Ohr*) than the light drawn down through the 613 תרי"ג Torah *mitzvot*.⁹⁷¹ Because of the great elevation of [this] light (*Ohr*) it can be drawn to illuminate much further down, even in mundane matters. That is, to have an effect and illuminate further down, even in mundane matters, the drawing down of the light (*Ohr*) drawn through the 613 תרי"ג Torah *mitzvot* is not enough. Rather, a higher light (*Ohr*) must be drawn down through the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot*.

This is like the explanation of the *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah lights. That is, even though our sages established it as a remembrance of the miracle of the lights of the

⁹⁷⁰ Also see Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 2, p. 491 and on; Torat Menachem, Vol. 2, p. 83 and on.

⁹⁷¹ See Ohr HaTorah, Shir HaShirim ibid. p. 474 and on; Sefer HaMaamarim 5680 p. 207 and on, and elsewhere.

candelabrum in the Holy Temple, there nevertheless is a difference between the Rabbinic *mitzvah* of lighting the Chanukah lights and the Biblical *mitzvah* of lighting the candelabrum of the Holy Temple. For, the *mitzvah* of lighting the candelabrum of the Holy Temple did (not take place in the women's section, nor in the section of the Israelites, but specifically took place) in the inner sanctuary. (Only through the windows [of the sanctuary, which were] "broad and narrow"⁹⁷² did the light go out and illuminate the outside.)

In contrast, the *mitzvah* of the Chanukah lights is to specifically place them "at the entrance to his house on the outside."⁹⁷³ This is because the matter of the Chanukah lights is to illuminate the outside.⁹⁷⁴ This is to such an extent that the Chanukah lights affect "the cessation of the foot traffic of the people of Tarmod (*Tarmuda* 'i-תרמודאי)."⁹⁷⁵

The "people of Tarmod" (*Tarmuda* 'i-תרמודאי) refers to the external husk (*Kelipah*) of those who rebel against the *HaShem*'s יהו"ה Kingdom, blessed is He. This is as stated in books of Kabbalah,⁹⁷⁶ that the name "Tarmod-תרמוד" shares the same letters as the word "rebellious-*Moredet*-מורדת,"

⁹⁷² Kings I 6:4; Talmud Bavli, Menachot 86b; Midrash Vayikra Rabba 31:7. According to the Aramaic translation on this verse this means that the windows were broad on the inside and narrow on the outside. However, according to the Talmud it means that the windows were broad on the outside and narrow on the inside, unlike other windows, to indicate that in the Holy Temple the outside light was not needed.

⁹⁷³ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 21b

⁹⁷⁴ See Ohr HaTorah, Bereishit Vol. 5, p. 940b and on; Torat Menachem, Sefer HaMaamarim Kislev p. 169 and on.

⁹⁷⁵ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 21b *ibid*.

⁹⁷⁶ Emek HaMelech, Shaar Kiryat Arba, Ch. 111 (108a); Kehilat Yaakov, section on "Tarmod-תרמוד."

which also hinted in the revealed parts of Torah, as understood from Talmud⁹⁷⁷ that these were the servants of Shlomo who rebelled against him and intermingled with the Tarmodites. Since about Shlomo it is written,⁹⁷⁸ “Shlomo sat upon the throne of *HaShem*-יהו"ה,” it therefore is understood that a rebellion against Shlomo is a rebellion against the Kingdom of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

From the above we can understand the great elevation of the Chanukah lights in comparison to the lights of the Candelabrum of the Holy Temple. This is because the lights of the Holy Temple, which existed in the days of Shlomo, (about whom the verse states,⁹⁷⁹ “He will build a Temple for My Name”) did not negate the existence of the rebelliousness of Tarmod-תרמוד. Rather, for “the cessation of the foot traffic of the people of Tarmod-תרמוד” to be, an even higher light (*Ohr*) must be drawn down and through the Chanukah lights.

With the above in mind, we can also understand how this is in relation to the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* in general, the matter of which is the drawing of the light of holiness even into mundane matters. As understood, for this to be, there necessarily must be a revelation of light (*Ohr*) that is higher than the revelation of light drawn down through the תרי"ג-613 Torah *mitzvot*.⁹⁸⁰

We can add that the superiority of the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* and the drawing down of holy light into mundane

⁹⁷⁷ Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 16b

⁹⁷⁸ Chronicles I 29:23

⁹⁷⁹ Samuel II 7:13; Chronicles I 22:10

⁹⁸⁰ Also see Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 5 p. 224 and on, and the citations there.

matters through the revelation of a much higher light (*Ohr*), is also present when serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in permissible and optional matters, by [fulfilling the verse],⁹⁸¹ "Know Him in all your ways." Moreover, it even is higher. For, in regard to the seven Rabbinically instituted *mitzvot*, even though they were initially mundane matters, nevertheless, through the sages instituting them, they came to having holiness in a way of *mitzvot*.

In contrast, in regard to matters [expressed by the verse], "Know Him in all your ways," the matters included in "all your ways" do not become *mitzvot*, but remain permissible and optional, such as eating and drinking etc., (and all ten things by which a sage is recognized and separate from the masses).⁹⁸² However, even so, through them and by means of them a person actualizes the matter of "Know Him," similar to the verse,⁹⁸³ "**Know** the God of your father and serve Him wholeheartedly," specifically in a way of knowledge (*Da'at*), which is a word that indicates bonding, attachment, and adhesion.⁹⁸⁴

From this it is understood that through the toil of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in a manner of "Know Him in all your ways," we draw down an even higher light (*Ohr*) than the light drawn down through fulfilling the *mitzvot*, including the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot*.

⁹⁸¹ Proverbs 3:6; Talmud Bavli, Brachot 63a; Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot, Ch. 3; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 231

⁹⁸² Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot, Ch. 5

⁹⁸³ Chronicles I 28:9

⁹⁸⁴ Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 3

It can be said that this the meaning of the words of our sages, of blessed memory,⁹⁸⁵ “What small Torah passage does the entire body of Torah depend on? ‘Know Him in all your ways.’” In other words, even though [the verse], “Know Him in all your ways,” is “a small Torah passage,” and a small matter, since it neither is a Biblical *mitzvah* nor Rabbinic *mitzvah*, but relates to matters that are permissible and optional, nevertheless, “the entire body of Torah depends on it,” specifying “body-*Gufei*-גופי,” meaning, not just the particular limbs [of the body], but the entire body and essence of Torah. This specifically is what causes the matter of “being subsumed in the body of the King.”⁹⁸⁶

Now, there is another matter in this, which is that the superiority of the revelation of light (*Ohr*) drawn down through serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in the way of, “Know Him in all your ways,” which is even higher than the light (*Ohr*) drawn down through fulfilling the *mitzvot*, is appropriately aligned with the fact that the service of “Know Him in all your ways” comes from and relates to the essential self of the soul on a much deeper level than serving Him through fulfilling the *mitzvot*.

Based on this, we can add to the explanation of the words “a small Torah passage (*Parshah Ketanah*-פרשה קטנה),” namely, that this matter even applies to the smallest of the small. For, since this relates to and stems from the essential self of the soul, it therefore applies to every single Jew, even

⁹⁸⁵ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 63a ibid.

⁹⁸⁶ Zohar I 217b

“the smallest of the small,” because from the angle of the essential self of the soul, all are equal.

4.

Based on the explanation above, that through the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* added by the sages of Israel, there is a drawing down of a higher light (*Ohr*) than what is drawn down through fulfilling the 613 תרי"ג Torah *mitzvot*, we may add a possible explanation of the conclusion of the verse, “(Let Israel now say) ‘For His kindness endures forever (*Ki Le’Olam Chasdo*-חסדו-כי לעולם)’” That is, the novelty and addition in this is not just in regard to drawing down the light (*Ohr*) into the world (*Olam*-עולם), to illuminate even further down, (“For His kindness is to **the world**-*Le’Olam*-לעולם”), but is even in regard to the superiority and elevated level of the light (*Ohr*) itself. This matter is indicated by the word “His kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו,” specifying “**His** kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו,” referring the kindness-*Chessed* of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*).

[This is as known⁹⁸⁷ about the 26 כ"ו times that “For His kindness endures forever (*Ki Le’Olam Chasdo*-כי לעולם-חסדו)” is mentioned in the Psalm,⁹⁸⁸ corresponding to the first 26 generations [of mankind] that were sustained [solely] by

⁹⁸⁷ See Torah Ohr, Beshalach 61a; Ohr HaTorah, Bereishit 288a; Kuntres U'Maayan, Maamar 8 and on, and elsewhere.

⁹⁸⁸ Psalm 118

the kindness (*Chasdo*-חסדו) of the Holy One, blessed is He,⁹⁸⁹ referring to kindness-*Chessed* that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*), in which “darkness and light are the same.”⁹⁹⁰

In other words, the aspect of “His kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו” drawn down through the seven *mitzvot* instituted by the sages of Israel (about which it states, “Let Israel now say, for His kindness endures forever”), is even higher than the aspect of “His kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו” drawn down through fulfilling the 613 Biblical *mitzvot*, (about which it states, “Give thanks to *HaShem*-יהו"ה for He is good, for His kindness endures forever”).

There is yet another novelty in this, that even though the light (*Ohr*) drawn down through the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* is a much higher light (*Ohr*), and is the aspect of “His kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו” that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*), (and is higher than the aspect of “His kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו” drawn down through the 613 Torah *mitzvot*), though it should be that, in this, the matter of “darkness and light [should be] the same,” nevertheless, the light (*Ohr*) is specifically drawn to the Jewish people.

This is as known⁹⁹¹ about Moshe’s plea to *HaShem*-יהו"ה, that the Indwelling Presence of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, should specifically rest upon the Jewish people, rather

⁹⁸⁹ Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 118a

⁹⁹⁰ Psalms 139:12

⁹⁹¹ See Torah Ohr, Hosafot 123c; Siddur Im Divrei Elohi”m Chayim 299c; Sefer HaMaamarim 5630 p. 107 and elsewhere.

than the nations of the world,⁹⁹² as Moshe said,⁹⁹³ “Unless You accompany us, and I and your people will be made wondrously distinct from every people on the face of the earth.” At first glance, why was this request necessary, being that upon the giving of the Torah there already was the matter of,⁹⁹⁴ “You have chosen us from all the nations”?

However, the explanation is that since during exile “the Holy One, blessed is He, withdraws high above,”⁹⁹⁵ and this drawing down is from the transcendent encompassing light (*Makif*) of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*) in which “darkness and light are the same,” therefore a special request was necessary, that although this is the case, [that on this level, light and darkness are the same] there nevertheless should be the matter of , “I and your people will be made wondrously distinct etc.”

This also is why the thirteen attributes of mercy (*Yod Gimel Midot HaRachamim*) are called “measurements-*Midot*-מדות.” Now, at first glance, since the thirteen attributes of mercy are drawn from an aspect that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*), [and this is especially so considering that the thirteen attributes of mercy were revealed after “this people committed a grievous sin etc.”]⁹⁹⁶ and to repair the blemish there specifically must be a drawing down

⁹⁹² Talmud Bavli, Brachot 7a

⁹⁹³ Exodus 33:16

⁹⁹⁴ See the liturgy of the *Amidah* prayer for the Festivals.

⁹⁹⁵ See Zohar I 210a; Zohar III 20a; 75a

⁹⁹⁶ Exodus 32:31

from higher than the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*),⁹⁹⁷ they therefore are limitless (*Bli Gvul*), and this being so, why are they called “*Midot*-מדות,” which is of same the root as “measurement-*Medidah*-מידה”?

However, the explanation is that a revelation of an aspect that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*) is in a way in which “darkness and light are the same.” It therefore is necessary for there to specifically be the matter of measure and limitation (*Midot*-מדות), so that it will specifically be drawn down to the appropriate place.

This is also the novelty of the verse, “Let Israel now say, ‘For His kindness endures forever.’” That is, even the aspect of “His kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו-78”⁹⁹⁸ that is drawn down through the seven Rabbinic *mitzvot* – even though it is an aspect that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*) in which “darkness and light are the same,” nevertheless, it is specifically drawn down to the Jewish people (“Israel-*Yisroel*-ישראל”).

⁹⁹⁷ See Torah Ohr, Tetzaveh 85c

⁹⁹⁸ The term “His Kindness-*Chasdo*-חסדו-78” is equal to “He is and He was and He will be-*Hoveh v’Hayah v’Yihyeh*-והייה והייה ויהייה-78”. See Ginat Egoz of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as HaShem Is One, Vol. 4 (The Vowels of Creation), The Gate of the *Cholem*-חלם-78 vowel.