

Discourse 25

“u’Moshe Nigash el HaArafel - Moshe approached the thick cloud”

Shabbat Parshat Yitro,

20th of Shvat, 5725

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

1.

The verse states,¹¹⁸² “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל) where God (*Elohi*”מ-אלהי) was.” Rashi comments on this, “Within three partitions – darkness (*Choshech*-חושך), cloud (*Anan*-ענן), and thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל), as the verse states,¹¹⁸³ ‘The mountain was burning with fire up to the heart of heaven, darkness (*Choshech*-חושך), cloud (*Anan*-ענן), and thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל). The ‘*Arafel*-ערפל’ is the ‘thickness of the cloud-*Av HaAnan*-עב הענן etc.’”

In his glosses¹¹⁸⁴ to the discourse of the Alter Rebbe by the same title (which has not yet been printed, but hopefully will be printed in the near future)¹¹⁸⁵ the Tzemach Tzedek cites that in *Sefer Emek HaMelech*¹¹⁸⁶ it is written that the “thick cloud-

¹¹⁸² Exodus 20:18

¹¹⁸³ Deuteronomy 4:11

¹¹⁸⁴ This was printed as an independent pamphlet (including notes of the Rebbe Shlita) by Kehot 5725, and subsequently in *Ohr HaTorah*, Yitro, p. 1,008 and on. Also see *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5658 p. 186 and on; See the beginning of the discourse entitled “*uMoshe Nigash El HaArafel*” 5682 (*Sefer HaMaamarim* 5682 p. 303).

¹¹⁸⁵ Subsequently printed in *Maamarei Admor HaZaken Al Parshiyot HaTorah*, Yitro p. 337 and on.

¹¹⁸⁶ *Emek HaMelech*, Shaar 17 (*Olam HaBriyah*) Ch. 13

Arafel-ערפל” (which is a greater darkness than what is indicated by the word “darkness-*Choshech*-חושך,” and as mentioned before, the “thickness of the cloud-*Av HaAnan*-עב הענן”) corresponds to the world of Action (*Asiyah*).

[Based on this, it can be said¹¹⁸⁷ that “darkness” (*Choshech*-חושך), “cloud” (*Anan*-ענן), and “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל) correspond to the three worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action (*Briyah*, *Yetzirah*, *Asiyah*).¹¹⁸⁸ That is, the world of Creation (*Briyah*) is called “darkness” (*Choshech*-חושך), as the verse states,¹¹⁸⁹ “He creates darkness” (*Boreh Choshech*-בורא חושך), the world of Formation (*Yetzirah*) is called a “cloud” (*Anan*-ענן),¹¹⁹⁰ and the world of Action (*Asiyah*) is called a “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל).]

[Emek HaMelech continues, stating that] this is the meaning of [the verse] “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל) where God (*Elohi*”m-אלהי”ם) was,” in that the world of Action (*Asiyah*) is made with the mystery of ‘God-*Elohi*”m-אלהי”ם.” (This concludes the quote.)

About this the Tzemech Tzeddek writes that when it states that the “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל) is the world of Action (*Asiyah*), this being so, its thick darkness is [to indicate] its detriment. However, this does not seem to be indicated by the verse,¹¹⁹¹ “*HaShem*”הו”ה said that He would dwell in the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל).” He also cites the words of the Talmud in

¹¹⁸⁷ See Emek HaMelech *ibid*.

¹¹⁸⁸ Also see Sefer HaMaamarim 5670 p. 238

¹¹⁸⁹ Isaiah 45:7; See Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim 4c and elsewhere.

¹¹⁹⁰ Also see Sefer HaSichot 5704 p. 79

¹¹⁹¹ Kings I 8:12

Tractate Chagigah,¹¹⁹² “[The sphere of] Aravot that contains righteousness, justice, and charity... and the Throne of Glory... The King, the Living God, the Exalted One, dwells above them in Aravot... and darkness (*Choshech*-חושך), cloud (*Anan*-ענן), and thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל) surround Him, as it states,¹¹⁹³ ‘He made darkness His concealment etc.’”

The Talmud then asks, “And is there darkness before [He who dwells in] Heaven? Does the verse not states,¹¹⁹⁴ ‘He reveals the deep mysteries... and light dwells with Him’?” The Talmud answers, “This is not a difficulty, being that this verse refers to the inner houses, and that verse refers to the outer houses,” to which Rashi explains, “The inner houses is where ‘light dwells with Him.’”

The Tzemach Tzedek explains that the matter of the darkness in “the outer houses” refers to the aspect of the Crown-*Keter*, which is called “He made darkness His concealment.” This is because “the Supernal Crown-*Keter* is dark before the limitless light of the Unlimited One.”¹¹⁹⁵ Based on this, he explains that the three aspects of darkness (*Choshech*-חושך), cloud (*Anan*-ענן), and thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל) correspond to the Crown-*Keter* (“darkness”), Wisdom-*Chochmah* (“cloud”), and Understanding-*Binah* (“thick cloud”).

He continues and explains that the meaning of [the verse], “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל),” refers to the ascent of Splendor-*Tiferet* (which is the level of

¹¹⁹² Talmud Bavli, Chagigah 12b and on

¹¹⁹³ Psalms 18:12

¹¹⁹⁴ Daniel 2:22

¹¹⁹⁵ See Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 70 toward the end (135b); Also see Likkutei Torah, Matot 82a; Balak 69a; Nitzavim 48a

Moshe) to the aspect of Understanding-*Binah* (the “thick cloud-*Arafel*-עֲרַפֵּל”) and that in regard to the continuation, “where God-*Elohi*”מ-אלהי” was,” this is because the revelation of the Ancient One-*Atik* is in Understanding-*Binah*.¹¹⁹⁶

He states in the discourse¹¹⁹⁷ that we must understand why the verse states, “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-עֲרַפֵּל),” singling out this matter specifically to Moshe. For, was it not so that at that time (at the giving of the Torah) there was a great revelation of *HaShem*’s-יהו”ה Godliness (the revelation of the Essential Self of the Singular Preexistent Intrinsic and Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו”ה, blessed is He) to **all** the Jewish people?

Moreover, we also must understand why the verse states, “where God-*Elohi*”מ-אלהי” was,” specifically using His title God-*Elohi*”מ-אלהי” (even though there are loftier titles than “God-*Elohi*”מ-אלהי,” up to His Name *HaShem*-יהו”ה, which is the Name of His Essential Self (*Shem HaEtzem*)¹¹⁹⁸ etc.). For, was it not so that at Mount Sinai He was revealed as an elder full of compassion?¹¹⁹⁹

¹¹⁹⁶ See Zohar III 178b; Torah Ohr, Lech Lecha 11b; Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, end of Ch. 40 and the notes and citations there.

¹¹⁹⁷ Ohr HaTorah *ibid.* p. 1,009

¹¹⁹⁸ Kesef Mishneh to Hilchot Avodah Zarah 2:7; Moreh Nevuchim, Part 1, Ch. 61; Ginat Egoz of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as HaShem Is One, Vol. 1, The Gate of Intrinsic Being (*Shaar HaHavayah*); Pardes Rimmonim, Shaar 19 (*Shaar Shem Ben Dalet*), and elsewhere.

¹¹⁹⁹ Mechilta and Rashi to Exodus 20:2

2.

He continues the discourse¹²⁰⁰ and explains that we first must preface with an explanation of the matter of the giving of the Torah. For, at first glance, is it not so that our forefathers fulfilled the entire Torah before it was given?¹²⁰¹ In the glosses of the Tzemach Tzedek [there]¹²⁰² he notes that Avraham's level was extremely great, in that his service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, was in a way of "running" (*Ratzo*) and "returning" (*Shov*), [as the verse states,¹²⁰³ "Then Avraham journeyed on], going and turning (*Haloch v'Naso* 'אנסע-הלך) etc."

It is for this reason that the Torah was given to him, including the 248-רמ"ח positive *mitzvot* and the 365-שס"ה prohibitive *mitzvot*, these being the aspects of "running" (*Ratzo*) and "returning" (*Shov*).¹²⁰⁴ This is one view, that Avraham merited the aspects of "running" (*Ratzo*) and "returning" (*Shov*) due to the root of his soul, and every person can reach the aspects of "running" (*Ratzo*) and "returning" (*Shov*) through the Torah.

The second view is that the drawings down affected by Avraham were (primarily) in the upper worlds. However, for there to be a drawing forth of the limitless light of the Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, even below, this specifically is through the giving of the Torah.

¹²⁰⁰ Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 1,009

¹²⁰¹ Talmud Bavli, Yoma 28b

¹²⁰² Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 1,099 and on.

¹²⁰³ Genesis 12:9; See Torah Ohr, Yitro 73d

¹²⁰⁴ Torah Ohr, Megillat Esther 96c

Now, it is understood that what is stated by the second view, does not negate but only adds to what is stated by the first view. In other words, this matter itself, that after the giving of the Torah it is in our capacity to draw forth the limitless light of the Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, to below, (as in the second view) is a matter that is stated for and is relevant to every person.

In the Tzemach Tzedek's note he adds that there is a third view, as in the verse,¹²⁰⁵ "I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as the Self-Sufficient God-*E"l Shaddai*-א"ל שדי" but with My Name *HaShem*-יהו"ה I did not make Myself known through them." For, this is only drawn forth through Torah and *mitzvot*.

In other words, our forefathers drew from the aspects of Kindness-*Chessed*, Might-*Gevurah*, and Splendor-*Tiferet*, meaning from the Name *HaShem*-יהו"ה as it is garbed in His title God-*Elohi*"מ-אלהי"ם, "the sun in its sheath etc."¹²⁰⁶ However, "My Name *HaShem*-יהו"ה" refers to the aspect of "the sun of *HaShem*-יהו"ה,"¹²⁰⁷ which is the aspect of the limitless light of the Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, as manifest within Wisdom-*Chochmah*, which is called Truth-*Emet*-אמת, since this is the revelation of how before Him everything is literally considered as nothing, [in which] "He takes the sun out of its sheath,"¹²⁰⁸ this is drawn down through the Torah etc.

¹²⁰⁵ Exodus 6:3-6

¹²⁰⁶ See Psalms 84:12; See Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah translated as The Gate of Unity and Faith, Ch. 4; Ohr HaTorah (Yahal Ohr) to Tehillim p. 300 and on.

¹²⁰⁷ See the previous citation to Psalms 84:12 and Tanya.

¹²⁰⁸ See Talmud Bavli, Nedarim 8b

Elsewhere it is explained that our forefathers only drew from the world of Emanation (*Atzilut*), whereas through the giving of the Torah, there was a drawing down from an aspect that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshehut*), this being the aspect [indicated by],¹²⁰⁹ “He is not a man-*Lo Adam*-אדם-לא etc.” Likewise, it also is explained in this discourse,¹²¹⁰ that the primary matter of the giving of the Torah is to affect a drawing down of the aspect of Torah, which is called “man-*Adam*-אדם,”¹²¹¹ from the Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהוה Himself, blessed is He, literally.

This is also why the Torah is literally the matter of the revelation of the Supernal will of *HaShem*-יהוה, blessed is He, this being the aspect of the simple desire (*Ratzon Pashut*) that transcends intellect (*Sechel*). This is similar to what we find about Rabbi Akiva, that the Holy One, blessed is He said [to Moshe], “Be silent! Thus it arose in thought,”¹²¹² [when he saw] that Rabbi Akiva had to undergo something that is the opposite of intellect (as Moshe questioned, “Is this the Torah, and is this its reward?”). In other words, this matter is not at all grasped by the intellect (*Sechel*) etc.¹²¹³ This then, is the novelty introduced at the giving of the Torah, namely, that even a matter that utterly transcends the intellect is drawn down into human intellect etc.

¹²⁰⁹ Samuel I 15:29

¹²¹⁰ Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 1,012

¹²¹¹ See Numbers 19:14

¹²¹² Talmud Bavli, Menachot 29b; Also see Shaarei Orah of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as Gates of Light, Gate Ten (*Keter*); Also see Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 21.

¹²¹³ See Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 1,011.

Now, it is understood that the novelty of the giving of the Torah according to the third view, also includes the two views that precede it. In other words, upon the giving of the Torah there was a drawing down of the aspect that transcends the chaining down of the worlds (*Hishtalshelut*) (as in the third view) through every person (like the first view) and in a way that it is even drawn down below (like the second view).

3.

The discourse continues [and asks],¹²¹⁴ from where is it that man should merit such a thing as this? For, in truth, he is the lowest of all creatures. This is as stated in Talmud,¹²¹⁵ “Why was man created on the eve of Shabbat? So that if he becomes haughty, he can be told, ‘The mosquito preceded you in the act of creation.’” (In other words, even the mosquito, which only takes in but does not excrete,¹²¹⁶ this being lowest external husk (*Kelipah*) etc.,¹²¹⁷ precedes man etc.)

However, the explanation is that one who is on the lowest of levels is able to ascend all the higher. This is because he has a very high root, which is why it is possible for him to descend to such a low level as this etc. Additionally, this is because of the greatness of the matter of the lower being refining the concealment. This is as explained in the

¹²¹⁴ Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 1,016

¹²¹⁵ Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 38a

¹²¹⁶ Talmud Bavli, Gittin 56b (i.e., this indicates the height of selfishness, in that it only takes but does not give out anything of itself).

¹²¹⁷ See Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 24

discourse¹²¹⁸ in elucidation of the verse,¹²¹⁹ “For My glory I have created etc.,” that the word “for My glory-*L’Khvodi*-לכבוד” is a term that refers to a garment (*Malbush*-מלבוש), (as in the teaching of our sages, of blessed memory, “Rabbi Yochanan called his garments, ‘my glory-*Mechabdota*-מכבדות”) this being something that conceals.

In other words, the Holy One, blessed is He, garbs Himself in the worlds, and the word “world-*Olam*-עולם” is of the same root as “concealment-*He’elem*-העלם,”¹²²⁰ this being *HaShem*’s-יהוה ultimate Supernal intent in creation. This is as our sages, of blessed memory, stated,¹²²¹ “Everything that the Holy One, blessed is He, created in His world, He created only for His glory (*L’Khvodo*-לכבוד),” meaning, for there be the work of refining the concealment and drawing down the revelation of His Godliness to below.

With this in mind, we can resolve the two explanations regarding the matter of “the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל) where God (*Elohi*”m-אלהי”m) was.” That is, there is the explanation that the “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל) refers to the world of Action (*Asiyah*) (which is made with the mystery of His title “God-*Elohi*”m-אלהי”m,” this being the ultimate concealment that stems from His title God-*Elohi*”m-אלהי”m). Then there is the explanation that the “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל) refers to the aspect of “He set darkness as His concealment” (as discussed in chapter one). For, through the refinement of this world we reach the aspect of His Essential Concealment (*He’elem*

¹²¹⁸ Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 1,017 and on

¹²¹⁹ Isaiah 43:7

¹²²⁰ See Likkutei Torah, Shlach 37d

¹²²¹ Mishnah Avot 6:11

HaAtzmi).¹²²² (This is the meaning of the words, “where God was-*Sham HaElohi*”מ-אלהי”שם, in which His title *God-Elohi*”מ-אלהי refers to the aspect of His Essential Concealment (*He’elem HaAtzmi*).)¹²²³

4.

Now, based on what was said before, we can state that even the matter of “approaching the thick cloud where *God-Elohi*”מ-אלהי is” (that is, that from the loftiest level of concealment, the aspect of “He made darkness His concealment,” which is drawn all the way to the lowest concealment in this world) is applicable to every person. Even though the verse differentiates between all the people and Moshe, as the verse states,¹²²⁴ “The people stood from afar and Moshe (alone) approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל etc.,” nevertheless, the whole of the people have relation to the aspect of the “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל).

To preface, the state and standing indicated by the words, “The people stood from afar,” itself indicates that they have a relation to the aspect they are spatially distant from. For, if they had no relation to this aspect at all, even the words “standing from afar” would not apply to them. Moreover, what is indicated by the language of the words, “The people stood from afar and Moshe approached the thick cloud,” is that at first, even Moshe stood from afar together with all the Jewish

¹²²² See *Hemshech* 5666 p. 93; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5678 p. 125

¹²²³ See *Hemshech* 5666 p. 91.

¹²²⁴ Exodus 20:18

people, and only afterwards did Moshe approach the thick cloud, whereas the people remained where they stood.

From this it is understood that “from afar (*MeiRachok*-מרחק)” is such a place from which “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל).” Moreover, and more importantly, through the fact that “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל)” he drew this aspect to all the Jewish people, even those who are in the aspect indicated by the word “people-*Am-nem*” (which is a word that indicates “dimness-*Omemut*-עוממות”).¹²²⁵

This is also understood from what is explained in Tanya¹²²⁶ about the matter of fear (*Yirah*) of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. That is, since relative to Moshe [fear (*Yirah*)] is a small thing,¹²²⁷ this thereby caused the matter to relate to and be applicable to all the Jewish people. This is because, “each and every soul of the House of Israel possesses within it something of the aspect of our teacher Moshe, peace be upon him etc.

Additionally, in each and every generation, there descend sparks from the soul of our teacher Moshe, peace be upon him, and they become clothed in the body and soul of the sages of that generation, the ‘eyes of the congregation,’¹²²⁸ to teach and impart knowledge to the people etc.”

¹²²⁵ Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VeHaEmunah, translated as The Gate of Unity and Faith, Ch. 7 (81b); Also see Sefer HaMaaamarim 5660 p. 5.

¹²²⁶ Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 42

¹²²⁷ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 33b

¹²²⁸ Numbers 15:24; Taanit 24a and Rashi to Numbers ibid.

5.

The explanation is that Moshe is the matter of Torah, in that, “Moshe received the Torah... and transmitted it etc.,”¹²²⁹ to all the Jewish people. This is so much so, that the Torah is called by his name, as the verse states,¹²³⁰ “Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant.”¹²³¹ The same is so with the Moshe within each and every Jew, this being the matter of the study of the Torah.

It is through the aspect of the Moshe in one’s soul that there is a drawing forth of the light of the Torah even to the aspect of the “people-*Am*-עַם” of his soul, (just as from our teacher Moshe it was drawn to all the Jewish people, from “the heads of your tribes to the hewer of your wood and the drawer of your water”).¹²³²

In other words, the study of the Torah gives strength and vitality to all matters of serving *HaShem*-יהוה, blessed is He, whether it is serving Him in prayer, [for even though prayer precedes Torah study, as in the teaching of Abba Binyamin,¹²³³ “Let my prayer be adjacent to my bed,” nevertheless, this very matter itself, that prayer precedes the Torah, is itself taken from the Torah, since it is Torah that informs us that, in general, there must be a matter of prayer, as well as the particular matters relating to the manner of prayer], or whether it is the fulfillment

¹²²⁹ Mishnah Avot 1:1

¹²³⁰ Malachi 3:22

¹²³¹ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 89a

¹²³² Deuteronomy 29:9-10

¹²³³ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 5b

of the *mitzvot*, up to and including serving Him in a way of “know Him in all your ways.”¹²³⁴

Now, in this there must be the matter of “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל).” That is, even in the aspect of the “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל), that “He made darkness His concealment,” this being the matter of the simple desire (*Ratzon Pashut*) that transcends grasp, there must be a drawing forth of the study of Torah with understanding and comprehension.

This is the general matter of the study of the inner teachings of the Torah, the teachings of Chassidus, that even the matters of the secrets and the secrets of the secrets, which transcend comprehension, must come to be studied in a way of understanding and comprehension. As in the words of his honorable holiness, the Rebbe Rashab, whose soul is in Eden,¹²³⁵ the study of the teachings of Chassidus must be engaged like the study of topics (*Sugyot*) in the revealed parts of Torah.

This is also the general explanation of the matter of Torah study that must be with fear of Heaven,¹²³⁶ which does not only apply to the study of the Written Torah, in which the matter of holiness is more emphasized etc., to a greater degree than the matter of understanding and comprehension. Rather, it also applies to the study of the Oral Torah, the primary matter of which is understanding and comprehension, (as known about

¹²³⁴ Proverbs 3:6; See Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De’ot, Ch. 3

¹²³⁵ See Igrot Kodesh of the Rebbe Rayatz, Vol. 10 p. 368.

¹²³⁶ See Kuntres Etz HaChayim, Ch. 22; See Sefer HaSichot 5689 p. 75 and on; Likkutei Sichot Vol. 14 p. 316 and on.

the difference between Scripture, Kabbalah, Mishnah, and Talmud).¹²³⁷

Now, even though the motion of understanding and comprehension is bound to the motion of spreading forth, whereas fear of Heaven causes a motion of constriction (the opposite of spreading forth), nonetheless, there must be study with understanding and comprehension, as well as fear of Heaven, such that one has both together. Moreover, not only will the constriction stemming from the fear not interfere with the understanding and comprehension, but on the contrary, through the fear of Heaven one will come to have greater understanding and comprehension.

This then, is the meaning of [the verse], “Moshe approached the thick cloud (*Arafel*-ערפל).” That is, even the aspect of the “thick cloud” (*Arafel*-ערפל), which is the simple desire (*Ratzon Pashut*) that transcends intellect (*Sechel*), is drawn to Moshe in the study of Torah, even including the Oral Torah.

This is also why we find the matter of “Be silent! Thus it arose in thought,”¹²³⁸ related to Rabbi Akiva (as mentioned in chapter two). For, our sages, of blessed memory, stated,¹²³⁹ “All are in accordance with [the view of] Rabbi Akiva.” For, Rabbi Akiva is the source of the Oral Torah, the primary aspect of which is understanding and comprehension.

In contrast, the matter of “Be silent! Thus it arose in thought,” expresses the simple desire (*Ratzon Pashut*), which

¹²³⁷ See Likkutei Torah, Vayikra 5c-d; Shir HaShirim 3c and on.

¹²³⁸ Talmud Bavli, Menachot 29b

¹²³⁹ Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 86a

has no room in the intellect, so much so, that the intellect itself argues that this is in opposition to intellect (“Is this the Torah, and is this its reward?”). In other words, even within the understanding and comprehension that accompanies the study of the Oral Torah there must be the drawing forth of the simple desire (*Ratzon Pashut*) that transcends reason and intellect.