

Discourse 16

*“Va’era el Avraham... -
I appeared to Avraham...”*

Delivered on Shabbat Parshat Va’era,
25th of Tevet, Shabbat Mevarchim Shvat, 5727
By the grace of *HaShem*, blessed is He,

1.

The verse states,¹²⁰³ “God spoke to Moshe... I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov (to the patriarchs) etc.” The Torah then continues and relates the difficulty of the enslavement of the children of Israel in Egypt, which was so harsh that “they did not heed Moshe because of shortness of spirit and hard labor.”¹²⁰⁴ The section concludes with Moshe’s words to the Holy One, blessed is He,¹²⁰⁵ “If the children of Israel did not listened to me, how then will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips!”

Now, we must understand why this hard work and crushing labor was necessary,¹²⁰⁶ to the extent that they even were unable to hear the heralding of the redemption. That is, at first glance, even though at the covenant between the pieces it was decreed that,¹²⁰⁷ “they will oppress them,” it nevertheless

¹²⁰³ Exodus 6:2-3 and Rashi there

¹²⁰⁴ Exodus 6:9

¹²⁰⁵ Exodus 6:12

¹²⁰⁶ Exodus 1:13

¹²⁰⁷ Genesis 15:13

is not understood why the hard work and crushing labor had to be to that extent.

2.

However, this is as the [Alter] Rebbe, whose Hilulah (of the 24th of Tevet) we are celebrating, explained in Torah Ohr.¹²⁰⁸ Namely, that through the labor in Egypt with mortar and brick, they merited the giving of the Torah. That is, since the enslavement in Egypt was the matter of refinement and purification, like “an iron crucible,”¹²⁰⁹ therefore the Torah was not given in the days of Avraham.

This is because in Avraham’s time the materiality of the world had not yet been sufficiently refined and purified for the limitless light of the Unlimited One, יהו"ה-*HaShem*, blessed is He, to be drawn down through fulfilling Torah and *mitzvot*.

This was so, until after the exodus from Egypt, which was the “iron crucible” that purified the Jewish people through the difficulty of the enslavement with mortar and bricks, causing the separation of the evil from the good etc. Then, upon the refinement of the Jewish people, the world and its physicality and materiality was also refined.

This is because the novelty of the giving of the Torah is the effect that Torah has in the world.¹²¹⁰ That is, even before the Torah was given there already was the matter of studying Torah, as stated in Tractate Yoma,¹²¹¹ “From the days of our

¹²⁰⁸ Torah Ohr, Shemot 49a; Yitro 74a and on.

¹²⁰⁹ Deuteronomy 4:20; Kings I 8:51

¹²¹⁰ Also see Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 15 p. 75 and on.

¹²¹¹ Talmud Bavli, Yoma 28b

forefathers, Yeshivah¹²¹² has never parted from them. When they were in Egypt, a Yeshivah was with them... Our forefather Avraham was an Elder who sat in Yeshivah... likewise Yitzchak... and likewise Yaakov etc.,” except that before the Torah was given, it had no effect on the world. This was introduced at the giving of the Torah. Therefore, before the Torah was given, the world had to be refined through “the iron crucible” of Egypt, so that the revelation of the giving of the Torah would have an effect on the world.

3.

Now, the refinement of the Jewish people brought about through difficult servitude with mortar and bricks, relates to the body. This is because the Godly soul itself requires no repair at all¹²¹³ being that it is hewn¹²¹⁴ from under the throne of glory etc. We thus find that the entire servitude in Egypt was for the sake of the body.

The same is so of the giving of the Torah. That is, the giving of the Torah below, is specifically for the soul to have an effect on the body. This is as stated in Tanya,¹²¹⁵ that “the Torah journeyed and descended etc., until it manifested in physical things etc., and in physical letter combinations, written with ink in a book etc., so that every *Neshamah* or *Ru’ach* and *Nefesh*, as they are in a person’s body, will be capable of grasping them with its intellect and fulfill them etc.”

¹²¹² A center of Torah study.

¹²¹³ Etz Chayim, Shaar 26, cited in Tanya Ch. 37 (48b)

¹²¹⁴ Pardes Rimonim, Shaar 1 (Shaar Eser v’Lo Teisha) Ch. 7

¹²¹⁵ Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 4

Thus, since the Torah was given for the sake of refining the body, therefore the difficulty of the servitude in Egypt, as it relates to the body, was necessary, to make it fitting to receive the revelation of the giving of the Torah.

However, we must understand this. What is the greatness is of the body, such that after the preparation through the servitude in Egypt, for its sake, the Torah was given.

4.

Now, to understand this, we must preface with the teaching of the Zohar,¹²¹⁶ “The Head of the Academy said, ‘A wooden beam that does not catch fire should be splintered etc., [and similarly] a body into which the light of the soul does not penetrate, should be crushed etc.’”

To explain, the comparison is made to a block of wood that does not catch fire, in that by splintering it into smaller pieces the light takes hold of it. The same is so of the body in relation to the soul, that when the light of the soul does not illuminate in the body, through crushing the body, the light of the soul thereby takes hold and illuminates within it. The Zohar concludes, “Rabbi Shimon prostrated himself and kissed the earth, saying, ‘This teaching, this blessed teaching, all my days I have pursued it etc.’”

However, we must understand why this teaching (“A wooden beam that does not catch fire etc.”) is so great that Rabbi Shimon pursued it all his days, and when he heard this teaching, he prostrated himself and kissed the earth.

¹²¹⁶ Zohar III 168a, cited in Tanya, Ch. 29

This may be understood based on the explanation in Me'ah She'arim,¹²¹⁷ (which was recently printed¹²¹⁸ from one of the manuscripts that recently arrived),¹²¹⁹ in explanation of the order of the day, beginning with the order of prayer. To explain, it states in Talmud,¹²²⁰ “When one wakes up [in the morning] he recites, ‘My God, the soul [that You have placed into me, she is pure] etc.’”¹²²¹ That is, according to the Talmud, this is the first of the morning blessings. However, even so, it does not begin with the word “Blessed-*Baruch*-ברוך,” being that it comes in continuation of the blessing,¹²²² “Who makes the bands of sleep fall upon my eyes” (*HaMapil*).¹²²³

Now, he poses a question there. Namely, at first glance, it is baffling as to who is saying these words, “My God, the soul that You have given into me etc.”. For, since he says “the soul that You have given into me,” it is not the soul who is speaking. However, in and of itself, the body has no vitality, but is like an inanimate stone, such that speaking on its own does not apply to it.

However, the explanation is that these are the words of the animalistic soul, in that it too has ten powers of intellect and emotions and is the intermediary between the Godly soul and

¹²¹⁷ Me'ah She'arim 45b, subsequently printed in Ohr HaTorah, Inyanim p. 305.

¹²¹⁸ Printed around Chanukah 5727

¹²¹⁹ See the citations in Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 393.

¹²²⁰ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 60b

¹²²¹ See “*Elo'hai Neshamah*” in the morning blessings.

¹²²² Of the *Shema* recital before retiring to sleep (*Kriyat Shema Al HaMitah*).

Also see Talmud Bavli, Brachot 60b ibid.

¹²²³ Avudraham, Seder Shacharit Shel Chol, in the name of Raavad.

the body. It is the animalistic soul who says, “The soul that You have given into me etc.” That is, in and of itself, the Godly soul “is pure,” and then, “You created her,” in that the soul descends to the world of Creation (*Briyah*). This is because the world of Creation (*Briyah*) is the beginning of independent existence and sense of self. It then states, “You formed her,” referring to the form that the soul takes on. It finally states, “You blew her into me,” specifying “into me-*Bi*-בי,” that is, “for my sake,” meaning to manifest within the animalistic soul and the physical body.

It then continues, “and You keep her within me.” That is, there must be a keeping of the soul for it to remain bound to the body. This is because, in and of itself, the Godly soul desires to separate and leave the animalistic soul and become subsumed in *HaShem*’s-יהו"ה Godliness.

This is as Tanya explains,¹²²⁴ the verse,¹²²⁵ “The soul of man is the flame of *HaShem*-יהו"ה,” that the soul is like the flame of a candle, whose natural yearning is to separate from the wick and adhere to its root above, even though through this, it will separate and depart from the body and adhere to its root and source in *HaShem*-יהו"ה Above, where it would be completely nullified of its existence. It therefore is necessary that “You keep it within me,” so that the soul remains in the body. This is [solely] in the power of He who does wonders, who keeps the spirit of man within him, and binds the spiritual to the physical (as Rama writes).¹²²⁶

¹²²⁴ Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 19

¹²²⁵ Proverbs 20:27

¹²²⁶ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 6:1

It concludes, “and You are destined to take it from me,” “You” meaning, “You Yourself,” referring to the Essential Self of the Singular Preexistent Intrinsic and Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהוה Himself, blessed is He, the source and root of all existence. This refers to the ascent of the soul “to be subsumed in the body of the King,”¹²²⁷ which is the ultimate purpose of the descent of the soul to below, specifically to come to this ascent.

This is why we recite, “(You are destined to take it) from me,” in that all this is specifically brought about by toiling with the body. Proof of this is the fact that the primary reward of the soul in the coming future will be upon the resurrection of the dead (*Techiyat HaMeitim*), which will specifically be as the soul is in the body, according to the view of Ramban¹²²⁸ (and not the view of Rambam).¹²²⁹

That is, the primary reward of the coming future will specifically be for souls in bodies. This is to such a degree that in the coming future, the soul will be sustained by the body,¹²³⁰ (not as it is now, that the body receives its vitality from the soul). This is because, in the coming future, the superiority of the body will be revealed, the root of which is higher than the soul. (That is, even presently, the root of the body is higher than the soul, except that this is presently concealed, whereas in the

¹²²⁷ Zohar I 217b

¹²²⁸ See the end of Shaar HaGemul; Also see Likkutei Torah, Tzav 15c; Sefer HaMitzvot of the Tzemach Tzedek 14b

¹²²⁹ Pirush HaMishnayot, Sanhedrin, introduction to Ch. 10 (Perek Chelek).

¹²³⁰ See the discourse entitled “v'Eileh Toldot Noach” 5637; *Hemshech* “v'Kachah” 5637 Ch. 88 and on (Sefer HaMaamarim 5637 Vol. 1, p. 63 and on; Vol. 2, p. 616 and on); Sefer HaMaamarim 5659 p. 99 and on; 5698 p. 219; Sefer HaSichot, Torat Shalom p. 127 and on.

coming future it will be revealed). This is why it specifically is the body that can be in a state of nullification of self (*Bittul*) to the point that “there is nothing else.”¹²³¹ From all the above, it is understood that the ultimate ascent is specifically in the body.

6.

However, to bring the body to its superior state, to this end the Head of the Academy taught, “A wooden beam that does not catch fire should be splintered etc., [and similarly] a body into which the light of the soul does not penetrate should be crushed etc.” In other words, there must be the crushing of the body, and through this there will be the illumination within it of the light of the soul. This is as the Zohar concludes, “Then the light of the soul illuminates.” That is, there then is the illumination of the essential light of the soul, which is “part of God from on high, literally.”¹²³²

This then, is why when Rabbi Shimon heard this teaching from the Head of the Academy, “he prostrated himself and kissed the earth etc.,” because of his great heartfelt excitement, which the vessel of his heart was incapable of containing. (This is similar to how “the eyes [of Rabbi Akiva]

¹²³¹ Deuteronomy 4:39; See Sefer HaMaamarim 5661 p. 197 and on.

¹²³² See Job 31:2; Pardes Rimonim of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, Shaar 32, Ch. 1; Ohr Ne'erav by the same author, Chelek 1, Ch. 3; Likkutei Torah of the Arizal, Bereishit; Etz Chayim, Shaar 42, Ch. 1; Etz HaDa'at Tov of Rabbi Chayim Vital, VaEtchanan; Asis Rimonim v'Pelach HaRimon, Shaar 32, Ch. 1; Hakdama Ben Me'ah Shanah to Shefa Tal; Chessed L'Avraham, Maayan 3, Nahar 25; Introduction to Siddur HaArizal of Rabbi Yaakov Kopel of Mezhritch; Da'at Tevunot of the Ramchal, Section 158; GR"A to Heichalot, Heichala Tinyana, Heichal 1; Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 2; Nefesh HaChayim, Shaar 1, Ch 5, and elsewhere.

flowed with tears”¹²³³ because of the great arousal of his mind, which the vessel of his brain could not contain.)¹²³⁴ This arousal [of Rabbi Shimon] came from the novelty of this teaching about the great superiority of the body, in that the revelation of the Essential Self of the Singular Preexistent Intrinsic and Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהו"ה Himself, blessed is He, (is not through the spiritual, but) specifically through the body.

7.

He continues the discourse¹²³⁵ by explaining the order of prayer, and that the verses of song (*Pesukei d'Zimrah*) are the matter of contemplating (*Hitbonenut*) the heavens and the earth and all therein, that “You enliven them all, and the hosts of the heavens bow to You etc.”¹²³⁶ Then, in [the blessing] “He who forms light” (*Yotzer Ohr*), one contemplates (*Hitbonenut*) the nullification to *HaShem*-יהו"ה of the angels, the fiery-*Seraphim* angels and the holy animal angels-*Chayot HaKodesh* etc. After this, in the recital of *Shema*, one gives up his soul [for the Oneness of *HaShem*-יהו"ה], meaning that he gives over all his desires to the service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. Then comes the Amidah prayer, this being the complete

¹²³³ See Zohar I 98b (Midrash HaNe'elam); Ta”Z to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 288 S”K 2 (citing Zohar Chadash); Also see Zohar Chadash Bereishit 7a

¹²³⁴ See Shaar HaYichud of the Mittler Rebbe, translated as The Gate of Unity, Ch. 6.

¹²³⁵ Me’ah She’arim 46b; Ohr HaTorah ibid. p. 307

¹²³⁶ Nehemiah 9:6

nullification of his independent existence (*Bittul b'Metziyut*) before *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

Now, within the nullification of the *Amidah* prayer, there also is the nullification (*Bittul*) of the body, in that during the *Amidah* prayer, the body is completely nullified (*Bittul*), like an inanimate stone. Thus, obviously one should not allude to something with his eyes, nor should one open and close his mouth [to give over a message, nor gesture to someone with his fingers] etc.¹²³⁷ This is to such an extent that even the prayer itself must be in a way of a “a still small voice.”¹²³⁸ This is as stated about the prayer of Chanah,¹²³⁹ (from which many important laws (*Halachot*) are derived in the Talmud),¹²⁴⁰ “Her voice was not heard.” On the contrary, “One who sounds his voice during the [*Amidah*] prayer is counted amongst those of little faith.”¹²⁴¹ In contrast, the verses of song (*Pesukei d'Zimra*) must be in a way of song (according to their name), meaning, with the voice (and to the point of “the sound of a great commotion”),¹²⁴² specifically.¹²⁴³

As explained elsewhere, the difference between the verses of song (*Pesukei d'Zimra*) and the *Amidah* prayer is the difference between the externality (*Chitoniyyut*) of the emotions (*Midot*) and the innerness (*Pnimiyyut*) of the emotions (*Midot*). That is, the matter of the verses of song (*Pesukei d'Zimra*) is

¹²³⁷ Talmud Bavli, Yoma 19b [regarding the *Shema* recital (which therefore is “obvious” in regard to the *Amidah* prayer)].

¹²³⁸ Kings I 19:12; See Torah Ohr, Vayigash 44a

¹²³⁹ Samuel I 1:13

¹²⁴⁰ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 31a; Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe, Orach Chayim 1:2

¹²⁴¹ Talmud Bavli, Brachot 24b; Shulchan Aruch of the Alter Rebbe *ibid*.

¹²⁴² Ezekiel 3:12

¹²⁴³ See Torat Chayim, Noach 52a and on.

the externality (*Chitzoniyut*) of the emotions (*Midot*), which are in a way that is felt, (which is why they are with commotion etc.). In contrast, the matter of the Amidah prayer is the innerness (*Pnimiyyut*) of the emotions (*Midot*). (This is similar to what was explained before¹²⁴⁴ about the matter of the kindnesses that are revealed (*Chassadim HaMegulim*) and the kindnesses that are concealed (*Chassadim HaMechusim*).)¹²⁴⁵

In addition to the difference in the matter of the emotional qualities (*Midot*), there is also the difference in the matter of the intellectual qualities (*Mochin*), meaning, in the contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) that gives rise to the emotions (*Midot*). (This is as explained in Tanya,¹²⁴⁶ that the aspects of Wisdom-*Chochmah*, Understanding-*Binah*, and Knowledge-*Da'at* are called “the mothers” and source of the emotions (*Midot*), since the emotions (*Midot*) are the offspring of Wisdom-*Chochmah*, Understanding-*Binah*, and Knowledge-*Da'at*.)

That is, there is the contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) that “closeness to God is good **for me**,”¹²⁴⁷ in a way of sense of self, due to which there is caused to be the birth of the emotions (*Midot*) in a way of kindnesses that are revealed (*Chassadim HaMegulim*). Then there is the contemplation (*Hitbonenut*) into the essential goodness of *HaShem's* יהו"ה Godliness

¹²⁴⁴ In the discourse entitled “*Padah b'Shalom* – He redeemed my soul in peace” of the 19th of Kislev of this year, 5727, Discourse 12, Ch. 6 and on, and in the discourse entitled “*Vayeishev Yaakov* – Yaakov settled,” of Shabbat Parshat Vayeishev of this year 5727, Discourse 13, Ch. 5 and on (Sefer HaMaamarim 5727 p. 93 and on; p. 106 and on).

¹²⁴⁵ Also see *Hemshech* 5672 Vol. 2, p. 823.

¹²⁴⁶ Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 3

¹²⁴⁷ Psalms 73:28

[itself], absent of a sense of self, from which there is caused to be the birth of the emotions (*Midot*) in a way of kindnesses that are concealed (*Chassadim HaMechusim*).

However, the nullification (*Bittul*) of the body during the Amidah prayer is brought about by itself, not by way of toil. However, there also is a nullification of the body that comes about through toil. This matter must take place before [the Amidah] prayer. About this our sages, of blessed memory, stated,¹²⁴⁸ “One should only stand to pray [the Amidah prayer] from an approach of gravity [and submission],” meaning, with humility and lowliness. This comes about through the matter of “crushing” the body, and it is through the preface of “crushing” the body that one can then come to the service of the verses of song (*Pesukei d’Zimrah*) etc., and then to the nullification of self (*Bittul*) of the Amidah prayer.

8.

With the above in mind, we can understand the matter of the difficult servitude in Egypt with hard labor. For, to bring about the refinement of the world, so that it will be befitting of the revelation of the giving of the Torah, the refinement of the Jewish people was first necessary. This is because the whole world depends on the Jewish people, and as the verse states,¹²⁴⁹ “He even placed the world into their hearts.”

¹²⁴⁸ Mishnah and Talmud Bavli Brachot 5:1 and Rashi there; Also see Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 34 p. 69, note 18.

¹²⁴⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:11; Also see Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar 5b

The refinement of the Jewish people was brought about through the difficult servitude and hard labor, in which the Egyptians exchanged the work of the men with the work of the women and the work of the women with the work of the men.¹²⁵⁰ This change in the natural order causes the “crushing” of the body. However, through this there is an illumination within him of the essential light of the soul. This is as explained before about the great superiority of the body, specifically, in that through it we reach even higher, up to the Essential Self of the Singular Preexistent Intrinsic and Unlimited One, *HaShem*-יהוה Himself, blessed is He.

Now, the verse states,¹²⁵¹ “As in the days that you went out of the land of Egypt, I will show them wonders.” Therefore,¹²⁵² just as there was the exile in Egypt, in “the iron crucible,” for there to thereby be the giving of the Torah, so likewise, the exile of Edom is the “iron crucible” for there to thereby be the days of Moshiach.

In other words, the entire lengthiness of this exile is to merit the revelation of the innerness (*Pnimitiyut*) of the Torah, which will take place in the coming future. For, at the giving of the Torah we received the revealed parts of the Torah, whereas the inner reasons of the Torah will be revealed in the coming future, about which the verse states, “I will show them wonders.”

Nevertheless, in our times the matter of difficult servitude etc., is no longer necessary, being that there already

¹²⁵⁰ Talmud Bavli, Sotah 11b

¹²⁵¹ Micah 7:15

¹²⁵² See Torah Ohr Shemot 49a; Yitro 74a and on

has been more than enough to suffice the obligations required of exile. This is as stated by the Mittler Rebbe,¹²⁵³ that forced conversions have already ended, and shall not occur again etc., and “misfortune will not arise twice.”¹²⁵⁴ We shall thus immediately merit the revelation of the innerness (*Pnimityut*) of the Torah, (beyond the beginning of the revelation through the teachings of Chassidus), as the verse states,¹²⁵⁵ “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth,” with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, speedily and in the most literal sense!

¹²⁵³ Shaarei Teshuvah Vol. 1 5b

¹²⁵⁴ Nahum 1:9; See Likkutei Sichot, Vol. 23 p. 306.

¹²⁵⁵ Song of Songs 1:2 and Rashi there; See Likkutei Torah, Tzav 17a