



THE BIBLICAL STORY AND ITS KABBALISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this week's Haftorah, we read a fascinating story about an evil king, a poor widow, and children who are almost taken into slavery. What's the deeper meaning? Kabbalah has the answer.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



PARSHAT VAYEIRA

Book of Genesis / Bereshit

Dedicated by
Marty & Kate Rifkin
KMR Group Foundation

Vancouver, WA

For sponsorship opportunities, email jewishinsights@shluchim.org



©

Published and Copyright 2021 by

Shluchim Office International

816 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11213

718.221.0500

5782 - 2021

Founded in 2007 in memory of Rabbi Gabi and Rivky Holtzberg OB" M
Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

Contents:

A. The Evil Creditor.....5

In this week's Haftorah, a woman complains to the prophet that her late husband's creditor wants to take her sons as slaves in leu of payment. The prophet instructs her to take some oil and pour it into empty pots, miraculously creating a huge treasure for her to sell. As the commentators explained, she was the widow of a famous wealthy person, Obadiah, who had spent his entire fortune to protect the prophets of G-d who were undergoing persecution. The creditor was King Jehoram, son of Ahab. The Zohar adds a spiritual dimension, telling us about the conversation in heaven which accompanied the story. (Sources 1-5).

B. The Inside Story.....9

As explained in Source 6, every story in Torah is really a spiritual message.

In this fascinating discourse, the Rebbe reveals the deeper meaning of our story:

The woman refers to the soul, and the prophet is a reference to G-d. The soul cries out to G-d that its love for G-d (=the husband) has died, and the creditor, i.e. the animal soul, has come to enslave the two sons – the emotions of love and awe of G-d – for its own purposes.

G-d asks the soul: What do you have left? The soul responds: Only my pintele yid.

The solution, G-d says: Study Torah and do a lot of mitzvot, even if they seem to be empty of enthusiasm. Don't belittle them as "empty vessels." They will help your soul begin to shine.

Introduction:

Today, we will read one of the most fascinating discourses in Chabad Chassidic teachings, famously known by its opening verse, “*Ve’isha Achas, And One Woman...*”

This discourse takes a story from the Bible about one poor woman and teaches us about its deeper lesson. The Rebbe reads the story line by line, and explains its inner dimension – thereby making the story meaningful and relevant to our lives, our struggles, and our spiritual growth.

A. The Evil Creditor

In the Haftorah this week, we read about the miracles wrought by Elisha, the disciple of Elijah the prophet.

The background to the first miracle: King Ahab and his wife Izebel famously worshipped the Baal and persecuted the prophets of G-d. In their day, there was a wealthy man named Obadiah, an Edomite convert with good connections in the king's court. He was righteous and G-d fearing (Sanhedrin 39b) and he succeeded in saving 100 prophets, hiding them in two caves and providing for all their needs. As the years dragged on, he spent his entire fortune on the prophets, and began borrowing from the king with interest in order to continue supporting them.

After the king expired, his son Jehoram was appointed monarch. When Obadiah died, Jehoram sent his servants to collect the debt from his widow. Hearing that she didn't have money to pay, he threatened to take her two sons as slaves. In distress, she went to cry at her husband's grave. "You, who feared G-d – this is what they are doing to your orphaned children!" Suddenly, she heard her husband's voice. "Go to Elisha and he will advise you."

Source 1 Kings II 4:1

One woman from among the wives of the prophets' disciples, cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant, my husband has died, and you know that your servant feared G-d. But now the creditor has come to take my two sons to be his slaves."

Commentary, Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel

One woman from among the wives of the prophets' disciples: Our sages explained in the Midrash that she was the wife of Obadiah, and the creditor was Jehoram, the son of Ahab – who had lent Obadiah money with interest; Obadiah had sustained the prophets

וְאִשָּׁה אַחַת מִנְּשֵׂי בְנֵי-
הַנְּבִיאִים צָעָקָה אֶל-
אֵלִישָׁע לֵאמֹר, עֲבָדְךָ
אִישִׁי מָתָה, וְאַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ,
כִּי עֲבָדְךָ הָיָה יָרֵא אֶת-ה';
וְהַנֹּשֶׂה בָּא לְקַחַת אֶת-
שְׁנֵי יְלָדָי לּוֹ, לְעֲבָדִים.

פירוש רבי יצחק אברבנאל על הפסוק

אִשָּׁה אַחַת מִבְּנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים,
וְאָמְרוּ חֲכָמֵינוּ זְכוֹרֹתָם
לְבִרְכָהּ, בְּמִדְרַשׁ תַּנְחוּמָא
(פְּרָשַׁת מִשְׁפָּטִים) שֶׁהָיְתָה
אִשְׁתּוֹ עֲבָדָיו, וְהַנֹּשֶׂה הָיָה
יְהוֹרָם בֶּן אַחָאָב שֶׁהָיָה
מְלוֹךְ לּוֹ מַעוֹת בְּרַבִּית,
שֶׁהָיָה זֶן אֶת הַנְּבִיאִים

during Ahab's reign... it is his widow that cried out to Elisha that her husband had died – and he had feared G-d – and that because he owed this debt and she didn't have possessions with which to repay, the creditor wanted to take her two sons as slaves.

בְּחַיֵּי אָבִיו... וְזָכַר הַפֶּתוּב
שֶׁהָאֱלֹמָנָה הָיְתָה צָעֲקָה
אֶל אֱלִישָׁע שֶׁבַעֲלָה מֵת
וְהָיָה יָרָא אֶת ה', וּלְפִי
שֶׁהָיְתָה חַיֵּבֶת בְּחֹב אֶחָד
וְלֹא הָיוּ לָהּ נְכֹסִים לְפָרַע
אוֹתוֹ הַחֹב, הָיָה רוֹצֵה
הַנּוֹשֵׂה לְקַחַת אֶת שְׁנֵי
יְלָדֶיהָ לוֹ לְעֲבָדִים.

Source 2 Zohar, Ruth 343

Why did her husband send her to Elisha? The Zohar tells us a bit from behind the scenes.

Cried out to Elisha: Obadiah and Ahab died at the same time, and King Jehoram came to enslave his two sons. What did she do? She went to the cemetery, crying hysterically. She stood at her husband's grave and cried out, "You who feared G-d – this is what they are doing to your orphaned children!"

צָעֲקָה אֶל אֱלִישָׁע. בְּאוֹתָהּ
שָׁעָה שְׁמַת עוֹבְדֵיהוּ, מֵת
אֶחָאָב. וּמִלֶּךְ יְהוֹרָם בָּא
לְקַחַת אֶת שְׁנֵי יְלָדָיו. מָה
עָשְׂתָה. הִלְכָה גּוֹעָה צוֹעֶקֶת
וּבוֹכָה לְבֵית הַקְּבָרוֹת.
עֲמָדָה עַל קְבָרוֹ וְצָעֲקָה,
יָרָא אֱלֹהִים, כֵּן וְכֵן עוֹשִׂים
לִיתּוּמֵינֶךָ.

Obadiah was informed, "Your wife is standing at your grave site, screaming and crying." What did he do? He went to Ezekiel [perhaps this should read: Elijah] but he replied, "I have had enough of that world." He went to the forefathers and said, "This is my situation," and they responded, "We already heard her cries. Go to the prophet Elisha."

אָמְרוּ לִיָּה לְעוֹבְדֵיהוּ, הֲרֵי
אֲשַׁתְּךָ עוֹמָדָת וְצוֹעֶקֶת
וּבוֹכָה עַל קְבָרֶיךָ. מָה עָשָׂה.
הִלֵּךְ לוֹ אֶצְל חִזְקִיָּהוּ, אָמַר
לוֹ דַּי בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. הִלֵּךְ
לוֹ אֶצְל הָאֲבוֹת, אָמַר כֵּן
וְכֵן יֵשׁ לִי. אָמְרוּ לוֹ, כָּבֵר
שְׁמַעְנוּ צַעֲקוֹתֶיהָ, לֵךְ אֶצְל
אֱלִישָׁע הַנָּבִיא.

Meanwhile, she returned to his gravesite, still crying hysterically. He said to her, "Listen, my poor one. Go to Elisha, and he will advise you." She immediately went to Elisha.

בְּתוֹךְ כֵּן, חִזְרָה גּוֹעָה
וְצוֹעֶקֶת עַל קְבָרוֹ, אָמַר
לָהּ שְׁמָעִי עַנְיָה, לְכִי אֶצְל
אֱלִישָׁע, וְהוּא יִתֵּן לְךָ עֲצָה.
מִדְּהִלְכָה אֶצְל אֱלִישָׁע.

In the era of the prophets, when people experienced personal issues, it was common to turn to a prophet for advice and blessings.

Source 3 Kings II 4:2-7

Elisha said to her, “What can I do for you? Tell me, what have you in the house?” She said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house except for a jar of oil.” He said, “Go, borrow vessels for yourself from the outside, from all your neighbors — empty vessels; do not be sparing. Then go in and shut the door behind you and behind your sons. Pour oil into all these vessels and carry away the full ones.” She went from him and shut the door behind her and behind her children. They brought vessels to her and she poured. When all the containers were full she said to her sons, “Bring me another vessel.” He said to her, “There is not another vessel,” and the oil stopped. She came and told the man of G-d, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your creditor, and you and your sons will live on the remainder.”

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ אֱלִישָׁע, מָה
אֲעֲשֶׂה-לָךְ, הַגִּידִי לִי, מֵה-
יֵשׁ-לָךְ בַּבַּיִת; וַתֹּאמֶר, אֲיִן
לְשִׁפְתֹתֶךָ כֹּל בַּבַּיִת, כִּי,
אִם-אֶסוּךָ שָׁמֶן. וַיֹּאמֶר,
לְכִי שְׂאֲלִי-לָךְ פְּלִים מִן-
הַחוּץ, מֵאֵת, כָּל-שִׁכְנֶיךָ -
פְּלִים רַקִּים, אַל-תִּמְעִיטִי.
וּבָאת, וְסָגַרְתְּ הַדְּלֶת בְּעַדְךָ
וּבְעַד-בְּנֶיךָ, וַיִּצְקִתְּ, עַל
כָּל-הַפְּלִים הָאֵלֶּה; וְהִמְלֵא,
תְּסִיעִי. וַתֵּלֶךְ, מֵאֵתוֹ,
וַתִּסְגֹר הַדְּלֶת, בְּעַדָּהּ וּבְעַד
בְּנֵיהָ; הֵם מְגִיִּשִׁים אֵלֶיהָ,
וְהִיא מוֹצֵקֶת. וַיְהִי כִּמְלֵאת
הַפְּלִים, וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-בְּנֶיהָ
הַגִּישָׁה אֵלַי עוֹד פְּלִי,
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ, אֲיִן עוֹד פְּלִי;
וַיַּעֲמֹד, הַשָּׁמֶן. וַתִּבֵּא, וַתִּגַּד
לְאִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי
מִכְרִי אֶת-הַשָּׁמֶן, וְשַׁלְּמִי
אֶת-נִשְׁיֶךָ; וְאֵת וּבְנֶיךָ,
תְּחַיֵּי בְנוֹתֶיךָ.

It was a miracle. The prophet gave her a treasure worth a fortune with which to repay her debt and live the remainder of her life in comfort. But why did he choose oil? Why was it important for him to know what there was in the home? Couldn't he do a miracle without that information?

Source 4 Abarbanel, Verse 2

The prophet asked her, “What do you have in your home?” This was because it was the custom of the prophets to associate a miracle with physical matter – so that it would not constitute a new creation from nothingness, *ex nihilo*.

הַנְּבִיא שָׁאַלָהּ מָה יֵשׁ לָךְ
בְּבֵיתָ? לְפִי שְׁהִיָּה מִנְהַג
הַנְּבִיאִים לְסִמּוֹךְ הַנֶּס עַל
דְּבַר מָה כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה
בְּרִיאַת יֵשׁ מֵאַיִן.

A miracle needs something to associate with. A prophet takes something that exists and performs the miracle with it. [This also teaches us that we cannot sit at home and wait for miracles to reach us. Whether for a livelihood or for healing, we always need to do something practical – go to work or visit a doctor – and only then pray to G-d and hope for a miracle.]

Source 5 Rashi on Verse 4

Shut the door: It is honorable for the miracle to arrive surreptitiously.

וְסִגְרָתָּהּ הַדְּלֵת. כְּבוֹד הַנֶּס
הוּא לְבֹא בְּהַצְנֵעַ.

Why did the prophet tell her to close the door? Why was it a secret? That is because miracles and blessings come from hidden places – without commotion.

We find the similar idea expressed with the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. G-d gave us the Torah two times. The first time was accompanied by great commotion. The entire nation watched Moses climb the mountain; they experienced the thunder and lightning and heard G-d speak to Moses. What happened in the end? The Tablets were broken.

The second set of Tablets were given quietly. There was no noise, no clouds, no thunder and lightning. When Moses came down from the mountain, he placed the tablets in the ark. Nobody saw them, and therefore, they continue to exist until this very day.

The Talmud relates (Taanis 8b): “Rabbi Yitzchak said: Blessings only rest on matters which are hidden from the eye.” Silence is always better than making noise, because blessings don’t go well with attention. This is why it is customary to count for a minyan by using the verse “Hoshia es Amecha” which contains 10 words, instead of counting normally. This is also why families with many children are not quick to say how many children they have, and workers are not quick to reveal their salary.

B. The Inside Story

When the Torah tells us seemingly simple stories, they also carry a lot of spiritual meaning. Each story contains profound secrets – like an onion; upon peeling back one layer, another layer is always revealed. The outer layer is the literal story, as it happened 2500 years ago. Chassidus reveals the inner layers, and teaches us how such a story is relevant to our lives in 2021.

Source 6 Likkutei Sichos vol. 23, Shavuos 3, Segment 5

There is a well-known rule of the Sages: “The Torah speaks of Heavenly matters and only hints towards physical matters.” In essence, the Torah is actually talking about heavenly matters from a spiritual perspective. Its apparent references to materialistic matters are only a hint of their real character.

ידוע הפלל שמופיע בדברי
חז"ל ש"התורה מדברת
בעצם בעליונים ורומזות
בשניות בתחתונים..."
בעצם התורה מדברת
"בעליונים" - על הענינים
כפי שהם ברוחניות, והיא
רק רומזת לכך לענינים
כפי שהם בגשמיות,
"בתחתונים".

In the following discourse, which the Rebbe said in 1986, the Rebbe uncovers the deeper meaning of this story. It seems to be a story that took place 3000 years ago, but by decoding it according to kabbalistic concepts, we can see how this story takes place with each of us, in our day and age.

>> The Rebbe

The Characters:

The “**woman**” refers to the soul. She is called here “**one woman**,” because the soul is one with G-d.

אִשָּׁה הִיא הַנְּשָׁמָה, וְנִקְרָאת
אִשָּׁה אַחַת כִּי הִיא אַחַת עִם
הוֹי'.

In kabbalah, the relationship between G-d and the soul is compared to the relationship between a husband and wife – G-d being the husband and the soul, the wife.

“**From among the wives of the prophets’ disciples**” – The Hebrew word for prophets, “Nevi'im,” stems from the words “Niv Sfatayim—speech of the lips,” because they received G-d’s word. Likewise, every soul is created with the ability to receive and perceive G-dliness.

מְנַשֵּׂי בְּנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים, כִּי נְבִיאִים
מִלְשׁוֹן נִיב שְׁפָתַיִם¹ הוּא
שְׁמֻקְבָּלִים מִבְּחִינַת דְּבַר הוֹי',
וְהַנְּשָׁמָה הִיא כָּלִי קַבּוּל לְקַבֵּל
הַשְּׂגוּת וְגִלּוּי אֱלֻקוֹת.

The word Navi stems from the fact that the prophet becomes the lips which receive a message from G-d. So too, every soul receives a G-dly revelation. (In other words: A prophet is someone who hears the word of G-d. But in truth, every soul hears the word of G-d as well. Jewish sources often speak about the heavenly voices (Bas kol) that emerge occasionally. Who hears them? The soul. As the Alter Rebbe explains, when a person is awakened in middle of the day with an urge to do a mitzvah, that is a bas kol.)

“**Elisha**” – when the word is broken apart – refers to G-d Himself.

וְאֵלִישַׁע אוֹתִיּוֹת אֵלֵי שַׁע הוּא
הַקַּב"ה.

The first half of the name is G-d’s name. The second half – “sha” – means to turn, or to respond.

When the verse describes how the woman “**cried out to Elisha**,” it is a reference to the soul crying out to G-d.

וְזֶהוּ וְאִשָּׁה אַחַת גּוֹ' צָעָקָה
אֶל אֵלִישַׁע, שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה צוֹעֶקֶת
לְהַקַּב"ה.

A soul crying out to G-d. This is not a story that happened 3000 years ago. It’s a story that happens every single day. A soul is crying out to G-d.

(1) לשון הכתוב – ישע'י נז, יט.

The Cry:

“Your servant, my husband has died.” The Hebrew for “My husband—ishi” is a combination of the word “eish—fire” and the letter Yud. The soul cries out: “I harbored a fiery love, an intense yearning to be connected and subsumed by G-dliness, [represented in the letter Yud]. But it has died. The love is no longer.”

עבְדְךָ אִישִׁי מֵת, אִישִׁי הוּא
אִשׁ יו"ד, דְּהֶאֱהָבָה כְּרִשְׁפֵי אִשׁ
שְׁהִיְתָה אֶצְלִי לְהַכְלִיל וּלְהַבְטִיל
בְּבַחֲיִנַת יו"ד חֲכָמָה עֲלָאָה -
מֵת, שְׁעֲכָשׂוּ אֵינן לִי אֶהְבָּה זֶה.

The Hebrew for “My husband—ishi” is a combination of the word “eish—fire” and the letter Yud. The fire represents our love for G-d, and the Yud represents G-d himself. The verse is telling us that the love for G-d in his heart has died.

Jewish observance – the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot – are to be done with love and awe of G-d. We fulfill the commandments and study his Torah because we love Him and we want to grow close to Him. We safeguard ourselves from all prohibitions because we are in awe of Him.

The best performance of a mitzvah is that which expresses both emotions. When we pray to G-d, we should feel this love and awe. When we say in the Shema, “and you should love G-d,” you should feel that love in your heart. When you observe the Shabbat, you should be full of joy and pleasure and feel close to G-d.

But the soul is in a bind. It complains that it doesn't feel that love and awe. When it fulfills a mitzvah, it doesn't feel that joy or pleasure. The soul complains that it's fulfills commandments out of rote. His prayers are dry and his heart is unfeeling.

“But now the creditor has come to take my two sons to be his slaves.” The Hebrew word for creditor, “Noshe,” also means to forget. It refers to the “Animal Soul,” which causes the soul to forget about G-d.

וְהַנוֹשֶׁה בָּא לְקַחַת אֶת שְׁנֵי
יְלָדָי לֹו לְעֲבָדִים, וְהַנוֹשֶׁה
מְלִשׁוֹן כִּי נִשְׁכַּח אֱלֹהִים² קָאִי
עַל נֶפֶשׁ הַבְּהֵמָיִת שְׁמִשְׁכַּחַת
אוֹתִי מֵאֱלֹהִים.

The Hebrew word for creditor, “Noshe,” also means to forget, as in the words, “Ki nashani Elokim (Mikeitz 41:51), “for G-d made me forget...” The animal soul causes the G-dly soul to forget about its true source

“My two sons” refers to the love and awe of G-d. [As Tanya explains, emotions are called “offspring” – and the two main emotions are love and awe].

וְשְׁנֵי יְלָדָי הֵם הָאֱהָבָה וְהִירָאָה
[וְכַמְבוּאָר בְּתַנְיָא³ שֶׁהַמְדוּת
נִקְרָאִים בְּשֵׁם תּוֹלְדוּת, וְעֵיקָרֵי
הַמְדוּת הֵם אֱהָבָה וְיִרְאָה⁴].

The children in this story are a reference to the emotions of love and awe.

As explained in Chassidus, emotions are the offspring of our intellect. When a person wants to develop a love for something, he first needs to contemplate the matter and conclude that it is good for him. That is when a love will arise. The same is true of awe and fear – you will only fear something if you understand the danger in it. It is your intellect that creates and guides the emotions in your heart.

For example, a young child isn’t afraid to touch fire – not because he is brave, but because he isn’t mature enough to understand that it could burn him. He is ready to jump off the table because he doesn’t properly comprehend the consequences. Fear, therefore, stems first and foremost from our understanding.

The same is true of love or excitement. If you give a small child the choice between a candy or money, he will choose the candy. Why? because he doesn’t understand the power of money, while he does understand that the candy is tasty.

Since emotions are offspring of the mind, therefore, in Kabbalah, intellect is called “the forefathers” and the emotions are called “the children.”

And the creditor has come to take the children as “**slaves**” – to other, foreign, loves and awes. [In addition to the fact that the Animal Soul makes me forget about G-d and wants to, G-d forbid, nullify my love and awe of Him, it also wants to take my love and awe as slaves – for his own animalistic pursuits and passions.]

וְזֶהוּ וְהַנֶּשֶׁה בָּא לְקַחַת אֶת שְׁנֵי
יְלָדָי לּוֹ לְעֶבְדִּים, לְאֱהָבוֹת
זָרוֹת וְלִירָאוֹת זָרוֹת]. דְּנוֹסָף
לְזֶה שֶׁנֶּפֶשׁ הַבְּהֵמִית מְשַׁכַּחַת
אוֹתִי מֵאֲלֻקוֹת וְרוֹצֵה לְבַטֵּל
חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם אֶת הָאֱהָבָה וְיִרְאָה
בְּאֲלֻקוֹת, הִיא רוֹצֵה לְקַחַת אֶת
הָאֱהָבָה וְיִרְאָה דְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאֲלֻקִּית
שִׁיהִיו עֲבָדִים לְנֶפֶשׁ הַבְּהֵמִית].

The complaint here is that not only have the love and awe for G-d died and dried out, but the animal soul, the creditor, wants to use those same emotions and passions to love and be in awe of its own pursuits. He is taking them as slaves.

In that terrible position, the soul cries out to G-d: “What should I do?”

(3) פ"ג.

(4) ראה תניא שם (ז, ב): ושאר המדות הן ענפי היראה והאהבה ותולדותיהן.

The Beginning of the Resolution

Elisha said to her, “What have you in the house?” Which capacities do you retain control over? What has the Animal Soul not conquered yet?

ויאמר אליה אלישע גו' מה יש
לך בבית, איזה כחות נשארו
לך שאין לנפש הבהמית
שליטה עליהם.⁵

G-d asks the soul: If you don't have love and awe, what do you have? Is there anything that you still retain control over?

She said, “Your maidservant has nothing . . . except for a jar of oil.” The only thing the soul has left is — the soul itself.

ותאמר אין לשפחתך גו' כי
אם אסוך שמן, שלא נשאר
אצלה שום דבר מלבד עצם
נקודת הנשמה.

The Torah is compared to three liquids: water, wine, and oil.

The revealed elements of Torah — Talmud and Jewish law etc. — is compared to water, which quenches our thirst, because Torah quenches our thirst for G-d. The inner dimension of Torah is compared to wine; just as wine is initially concealed within grapes, the inner dimension of Torah is hidden — and can only be revealed through work. Oil refers to the Torah's deepest secrets; it is far more difficult to extract oil from an olive than to extract wine from a grape.

In the human being, oil refers to the deepest levels of the soul. In Yiddish, we call it the “pintele yid,” the essence of the Jewish soul which can never be lost and never be enslaved. Every Jew has a moment when his Jewish soul awakens, and that can never be taken away.

When you inspect an olive, you won't see the oil. But when you crush the olive, the oil will come out. Likewise, there are some Jews who will seem to have no soul in them, but when you give a squeeze, the Judaism becomes revealed. Every Jew has a jug of olive oil with the seal of the High Priest, which cannot be impurified.

The soul in this story, or this experience, tells G-d: I have nothing left. All I have left is my pintele yid.

(5) כ"ה בד"ה ואשה אחת שם.

The Resolution

He said, “Go, borrow vessels for yourself from the outside . . . do not be sparing.” Study the Torah and observe the mitzvot. Those are vessels for receiving the light of G-d. Even if they seem to be empty vessels at the moment (lacking love and awe of G-d), nevertheless, do not be sparing.

וַיֹּאמֶר לְכִי שְׂאֲלִי לָךְ כֵּלִים
מִן הַחוּץ גּוֹ' כֵּלִים רִיקִים אֶל
תְּמַעֲיִטִי, שְׁתַּעֲסוֹק בְּתוֹרָה
וּבְמִצְוֹת⁶ שֶׁהֵם כֵּלִים לְאוֹר
הוֹי⁷, וְאִם שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת
שְׁעוֹסְקוֹת בָּהֶם עֲכָשׂוּ הֵם כֵּלִים
רִיקִים (כֵּלִי אֶהְבֶּה וַיִּרְאֶה⁸)
מִכָּל מְקוֹם אֶל תְּמַעֲיִטִי בָהֶם.

The mitzvos are the vessels for G-dliness. When the soul loves G-d, it expresses its love by doing these mitzvot. In other words, empty vessels are mitzvot that are fulfilled without emotion or enthusiasm. (Like a husband who expresses his love to his wife by purchasing gifts and helping her around the house. If he would just declare his love without helping at all, his announcements are worthless...)

People often ask: What is the point of doing a mitzvah, if one does not identify with its meaning? When we do things without identifying with them, it's like a dead action. Why is it worthwhile?

Here, G-d tells the soul: Do not be sparing. Don't belittle the mitzvot that are fulfilled without the proper enthusiasm. You've fulfilled many mitzvot – albeit without love and awe; don't underestimate their power.

Why?

“Pour oil into all these vessels.” Channel that essence of the soul [the “oil”] into all your actions. [Tanya explains that the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvot is really dependent on the constant memory that we should sacrifice our lives for G-d. Self-sacrifice comes from the essence of the soul.]

וַיִּצְקֵת עַל כָּל הַכֵּלִים הָאֵלֶּה,
לְהַמְשִׁיךְ בָּהֶם הַגִּילּוּי דְעֵצָם
הַנְּשָׂמָה [וְעַל דְּרֶךְ הַמְּבוֹאֵר
בְּתַנְיָא⁹ שְׁקִיּוֹם הַתּוֹרָה
וּמִצְוֹתֶיהָ תְּלוּי בָּזָה שְׂיִזְכּוֹר
תְּמִיד עֲנִין מְסִירַת נַפְשׁוֹ לָהּ,
דְּמְסִירוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ הוּא מְצַד עֵצָם
הַנְּשָׂמָה¹⁰].

רקים.
(9) ספכ"ה.
(10) ראה תניא פי"ה-ט.

(6) כ"ה בד"ה ואשה אחת שם. ובד"ה כשם שצועקים, דפירוש כלים רקים
אל תמעטי הוא שיתבונן איך שהוא כלי ריקן, כדלקמן בפנים.
(7) להעיר מלקו"ת ראה לב, ד.
(8) שאז הם כגוף בלי נשמה (תניא פל"ה ואילך) ואפשר שלכן הם נק' כלים
(8)

The mitzvot that you fulfill even when lacking enthusiasm – is an expression of the essence of your soul. And by doing those mitzvot again and again, that essence will come to fore, and bring along with it love and awe of G-d. How so?

[Optional:

The Talmud tells us about three generations that studied Torah:

The Generation of Moses: The generation that left Egypt lived comfortably in the desert, with all their needs taken care of. They were able to invest all their time and effort into studying Torah from Moses – the very person who received it from G-d. Needless to say, they were on a very high spiritual level.

The Generation of Joshua: The generation which entered the Land of Israel also experienced miracles. They lived in the Land of Israel, settle down, and we're still able to study Torah on a high level – albeit not exactly as Moses' generation.

The Generation of Persecution: there have always been generations of persecution during which governments forbade the study of Torah, when life was hard and people were terribly poor. "Six would cover themselves with one blanket and study Torah." Obviously, the quality of such Torah study will go down. Without books, undergoing persecution – how much can you study?

But which generation is considered most important?

The Talmud explains that the generations of Moses and Joshua studied Torah because they loved it. It was a pleasure. There was nothing standing in their way. The moment they would experience hardship or disturbance – who knows if they would continue? Their association with Torah was not necessarily so deep.

On the other hand, in a generation of persecution – even though the study itself seems to be lacking, it is the greatest expression of connection to G-d.

It's like a husband who loves his wife even during those moments when she isn't exactly glowing; it is specifically those moments that expresses true love.]

Here too: when a Jew fulfills the commandments because he loves G-d and because he feels enthusiasm and joy with every mitzvah he does, it's not evidence of a truly profound connection. In a circumstance when we don't feel that closeness; when fulfilling those commandments is a nuisance, and we nonetheless fulfill G-d's command – that is when we reveal our true connection. If you can keep it up during the difficult times, your love and awe of G-d will come along in time.

When that will be the case, **“you and your sons will live on the remainder.”** That essence of the soul will sustain you far better than before.

וְכִשְׁתַּעֲשֶׂה כֵּן אָזִי וְאֶת וּבְנֵיךְ,
תִּתְחַיֵּי בְּנוֹתֶךָ, כִּי־תִרְוֶן הָאוֹר
הַבָּא מִן הַחֹשֶׁךְ.¹¹

This is an amazing summary of the Rebbe’s approach to spreading Judaism. When the Rebbe announced the Tefillin campaign, many people asked: What is the point of doing a mitzvah one time? The person committing the act isn’t even thinking about G-d! He is just doing it like a machine – without any enthusiasm or understanding.

The answer is in this discourse: Don’t minimize the value of the ‘empty’ mitzvos, because they have the power to awaken the soul.

In Jewish thought, the heart follows the actions. When you begin doing something, you begin to understand it, feel for it and identify with it. In time, the oil will begin to flow.

If you don’t do it at all, there is no doubt that the love won’t come at all. But if you insist on collecting empty vessels, you will come to love it as well.

(11) ע"פ לשון הכתוב – קהלת ב, יג. וראה ספר הערכים-חב"ד ערך אור –
ביחס לחושך ס"ח. וש"נ.