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CHOOSING WISELY

Idolatry seems primitive and ludicrous. Why are the Jewish people called "wise" on account of their choice to serve G-d?

A fascinating discussion about the complexities of life and the courage to choose right.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



11 NISSAN

הקדשה

This week's lesson is dedicated
in loving memory of **Rabbi Chaim Gurevitch**

Reb Chaim dedicated his life to the Rebbe's shlichus, with a unique
passion for sharing matzah with his many friends worldwide.

He passed away in the midst of distributing Matzah, **3 Nissan 5781**.
By his children Rabbi **Berel** and **Rivky Gurevitch**

Yasher Koiach to Avremi and Mendy and the entire team!
Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov



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The dedication of the Mishkan took place on the first day of Nissan, and over the next 12 days the chief of each tribe offered special sacrifices. On the eleventh day, the chief of Asher offered his sacrifice. (Source 1).

The Midrash homiletically explains that “Asher” represents the Jewish people’s joy at the time of the redemption, as well as their praise, for their choosing G-d, and His choosing them.

B. A Tough Choice.....9

Why, the Rebbe asks, is choosing G-d over statues and stones particularly special? How can G-d be placed opposite idols and that be called a choice?”

The Rebbe cites another midrash which compares choosing G-d over idols to a wise person choosing the king over the ministers (Sources 3-4). Every child knows that the king is more important than the ministers, the Rebbe asks. Where is the wisdom here?

C. The Evolution of Idolatry.....12

The early generations thought that G-d created the world and runs it, but that he does so through intermediaries like the sun and moon. Therefore, the intermediaries are worthy of appreciation. The next phase of the theology was that the sun and moon run the world almost independently, and G-d intervenes only in extreme cases. If so, the celestial bodies should certainly be worshipped. Maimonides describes the evolution of these beliefs and their popularity. Most of ancient civilization believed this way, except for several lone individuals who worshipped G-d (Source 5).

Accordingly, we can understand the wise person’s choice. They know that the sun and moon are really “an axe in the woodchopper’s hand,” and that G-d runs everything.

D. Choosing Sacrifice.....16

In order to absorb holiness, one needs to nullify himself. Moreover, the resulting flow of holiness is gradual, drop by drop. By contrast, to receive from the other side you don’t need

to nullify yourself and the flow is far greater. This is the wise person's choice: they are ready to put in the effort and make sacrifices to receive holiness.

Willingness to nullify oneself cannot be taken for granted. We are created with a selfish ego. From where do we get the strength to temper it and nullify ourselves? This decision comes from our soul.

E. Choosing Between Good and Better.....22

King David says in Psalms: "A poor man's prayer; enwrapped, he pours out his words before G-d." (Source 6). The Baal Shem Tov explains that the poor man's prayer and request is simply to speak to the King (Source 7). Poor people are brought into the king's palace and can take anything they want. One will take a silver treasure, another will take a lavish meal, and so on. The wise man, however, will not succumb to temptations and will focus on the most valuable thing: to keep going and meet the king. This is the wise poor man whose only request is to "pour out his words before G-d."

Another verse in Psalms: "Whom do I have in heaven, and I desire no one with You on earth." King David doesn't settle for any angels, he wants G-d Himself (Source 8).

The Alter Rebbe was the same way, the Rebbe recounts. In a moment of intense spiritual inspiration he said: "I want nothing. I don't want Your Paradise, I don't want Your World to Come. I want nothing but You alone."

This is the true choice of the wise person. Not only do they choose between the holy and the profane, between comfort and the right thing, but within holiness they choose the holier over the holy.

The Alter Rebbe's statement empowers us all to choose right. One who makes the right decision will ultimately reap material reward as well.

Introduction

A Chassidic discourse is a Torah sermon delivered or written by one of the Chabad Rebbes, expounding on a deep topic within Chabad philosophy—based on the Kabbalah—and giving deep insight into our service of G-d. A Chassidic discourse, or ma'amar, is considered holier than other addresses of the Rebbe. As a result, it is referred to as Da"ch—Divrei Elokim Chaim, words of the living G-d.

A ma'amar generally opens with a verse from the Torah or a saying from the sages of the Talmud, and from there it expands to explaining a subject or concept in Chassidic thought.

The discourses said by the Rebbes were delivered with a special ceremony. First, the Chassidim sang a Chassidic melody reserved for the occasion, and during the recital of the discourse the Chassidim would remain standing out of respect. The ma'amar was recited in a special sing-song tune. The tradition among Chassidim is that when a Rebbe recites a ma'amar, they are in a state of “the Divine speaking through them,” and when they spoke, they were in another place, a loftier plane.

In this class, we'll take on a challenge in honor of the month of Nissan and the Rebbe's birthday to study sections of the ma'amar *Beyom Ashtei Asar* (“On the Eleventh Day”) which the Rebbe delivered on 11 Nissan, 1971, his 69th birthday.

השיעור לקראת י"א ניסן

מאמר דיבור המתחיל ביום עשתי עשר תשל"א
י"א ניסן ה'תשל"א

יצא לאור בקונטרס י"א ניסן – תשמ"ט,
”לקראת יום הבהיר י"א ניסן,
יום הולדת הפ"ז של כ"ק אדמו"ר שליט"א
ערב שה"ג תשמ"ט.”

[לשמיעת המאמר:](#)



A. 12 Days of Festivities

Dedicating the Mishkan

Fifty days after leaving Egypt, the Jews received the Ten Commandments with great pomp and ceremony. Unfortunately, just 40 days later, the sin of the golden calf happened. As a result, Moses broke the Tablets and the Jews were devastated by their fateful mistake. For 80 days, Moses worked hard to gain G-d's forgiveness for the Jewish people, and G-d forgave them, giving Moses a new set of Tablets.

This time there was no celebration, no thundering sounds and lightning, and the nation didn't assemble at the mountain. G-d gave Moses these Tablets privately. We can imagine the way the Jews felt. They lost out. They were guilty.

Right after, Moses told them about a new campaign, a new mitzvah they'd received from G-d: to build Him a mishkan where He could rest. This command changed the atmosphere completely. The Jewish people saw another chance to bring G-d's presence among them and they eagerly involved themselves in the new mitzvah. They donated all the necessary supplies: gold, silver, copper, etc., giving even more than what was needed, until Moses had to tell them to stop. A team of craftsmen was assembled to build the mishkan, and for six months all the Jews lived and breathed this project. They donated to the mishkan, helped with its construction, and waited and watched for it to finally be completed—for G-d to finally rest His presence among them.

The historic dedication took place on the first of Nissan. Moses consecrated the mishkan, Aaron and his sons offered sacrifices, and a heavenly fire descended and consumed the sacrifices before the entire nation—more than a million men, women and children. This demonstrated that the Divine Presence rested among the Jewish people.

The Chiefs' Offerings

For 12 days, the Jews celebrated the dedication of the mishkan. Every day the chief of another tribe brought a sacrifice. On the first day, Nachshon son of Aminadav of Judah brought his offering, on the second day, Netanel son of Tzuar of Issachar brought his, and so on.

These days were greatly cherished by the nation and were established as eternal holidays. Until today, the tachnun prayer supplications aren't recited during the month of Nissan because the days of the mishkan's dedications are holidays.

Source 1 Numbers, 7:1, 11, 72-77

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When Moses finished setting up the mishkan, he anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils.

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם כָּלֹת מֹשֶׁה לְהַקִּים אֶת
הַמִּשְׁכָּן וַיִּמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ
וְאֵת כָּל כְּלָיו וְאֵת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְאֵת כָּל
כְּלָיו וַיִּמָּשַׁח וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתָם.

G-d said to Moses, “Each day one tribal chief is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar.

On the eleventh day Pagiel, son of Ochrán, the chief of the people of Asher, brought his offering. His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with the finest flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering; one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering. One male goat for a sin offering; and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Pagiel, son of Ochrán.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה נְשִׂיא אֶחָד לְיוֹם נְשִׂיא אֶחָד לְיוֹם יִקְרִיבוּ אֶת קִרְבָּנָם לְחֻנְכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

בְּיוֹם עֲשֵׂתֵי עֶשֶׂר יוֹם נְשִׂיא לְבְנֵי אֲשֵׁר פַּגְעִיאל בֶּן עֲכָרְוֹ. קִרְבָּנוֹ קִעֲרַת כֶּסֶף אַחַת שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָה מִשְׁקָלָהּ מִזְרָק אֶחָד כֶּסֶף שִׁבְעִים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ שְׁנֵיהֶם מְלֵאִים סֹלֶת בְּלוּלָה בְשֶׁמֶן לְמִנְחָה. כֶּף אַחַת עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מְלֵאָה קְטֹרֶת. פָּר אֶחָד בֶּן בָּקָר אֵיל אֶחָד כֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד בֶּן שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה. שְׁעִיר עִזִּים אֶחָד לְחֻטָּאת. וְלִזְבַּח הַשְּׁלָמִים בָּקָר שְׁנַיִם אֵילִם חֲמִשָּׁה עֲתֻדִים חֲמִשָּׁה כֶּבֶשִׁים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה חֲמִשָּׁה זֶה קִרְבָּנוֹ פַּגְעִיאל בֶּן עֲכָרְוֹ.

The Midrash learns a lot from each offering brought during those 12 days. In this class, we will focus on a midrash about the offerings of the 11th of Nissan, brought by the tribe of Asher.

Asher’s Lofty Intent

Source 2 Bamidbar Rabbah, 14

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Rabbi Tanchuma taught: All the tribes were named for the Jewish people’s redemption and for their praise. Asher is named for the redemption, as the verse states (Malachi 3:12): “Then all the nations will call you blessed (veishru), for yours will be a delightful land,” says G-d Almighty.” Asher is named for their praise as the verse states (Psalms 144:15): “Blessed (ashrei) is the people of whom this is true; blessed (ashrei) is the people whose G-d is the L-rd.” The blessing of the Jews is

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אָמַר רַבִּי תַנְחוּמָא כָּל הַשְּׁבֵטִים לְשֵׁם גְּאֻלְתָּן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלְשֵׁם שְׁבָחוֹ נִקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹתָם, וְאֲשֵׁר נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ לְשֵׁם גְּאֻלְתָּן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּמְה דְתִימָא (מְלֵאכִי ג, יב): וְאֲשֵׁרוֹ אַתְּכֶם כָּל הַגּוֹיִם כִּי תִהְיוּ אַתֶּם אֲרֻצַּי חֲפִצִי אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת. וְלְשֵׁם שְׁבָחוֹ, כִּמְה דְתִימָא (תְהִלִּים קמ"ד, טו): אֲשֵׁרֵי הָעַם שְׂכָכָה לוֹ אֲשֵׁרֵי הָעַם שֶׁה' אֱלֹהָיו, אֵין אֲשׁוּרָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלָא עַל שְׁבָחוֹ בְּהַקְדוּשׁ

their choosing G-d to be their L-rd, and G-d choosing them to be His chosen people.

Therefore, when Asher came with his offering, he brought it thanking G-d for choosing Israel from all the nations, as the verse states (Deuteronomy 14:2): “And G-d chose you to be His chosen people.”

בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְהִיּוֹת לָהֶם יְאֻלְהֵיִם
וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בָּחַר בָּהֶם
לְהִיּוֹתָם לוֹ לְעַם סִגְלָה,
וּלְפִיכֶךָ כְּשֶׁבָא נְשִׂיא אֲשֶׁר לְהַקְרִיב,
הַקְרִיב קָרְבָנוּ עַל שֵׁם הַבְּחִירָה
שֶׁבָחַר הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
מְכַל הָאָמוֹת, כְּמָה דְתִימָא (דְּבָרִים
י"ד, ב): וּבְךָ בָּחַר ה' לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַם
סִגְלָה וּגו'.

The Midrash homiletically interprets the name of the tribe Asher (“blessed”). It quotes two verses and learns from them that Asher represents the redemption and the praise for the Jewish people. One verse says that after the redemption all the nations will bless (“ishru”) the Jews, another says that the Jews are blessed (“ashrei”) for who they are and for having G-d as their L-rd.

The Midrash then continues: What is so blessed about being Jewish? Because they chose G-d and He chose them. On the 11th day, when Asher brought their offering, it was in honor of that excellent choice.

B. A Tough Choice

On the 11th of Nissan, 1971, the Rebbe held a farbrengen in honor of his birthday, and delivered a Chassidic discourse during the event. At the beginning of the discourse, the Rebbe quoted this midrash, about Asher who brought their sacrifice on the 11th of Nissan, and analyzes it at length.

>> The Rebbe

Divine Choice

Student's True choice can only be between two
pg. 5 equal entities, or at least entities that each possess their own unique advantage. How then can it be said that the Jewish people “chose” G-d over the foreign idols?

צריך להבין, דבחירה שייך דוקא בשני דברים ששניהם שוים, או שבכל אחד מהם יש מעלה שאין בזולתו, אבל בנוגע להקב"ה ולהבדיל אלקי הנכר¹, האיך שייך לומר שישראל בחרו בהקב"ה?

The Jewish people needed to choose between the G-d of the heavens and the earth and man-made idols. Why is this such a difficult choice? Why are the Jewish people extolled for their great wisdom in choosing the Creator over idols?

With G-d on one side, and idols on the other, is there really any choice to make?

Choosing The King Over His Ministers

To explain this, the Rebbe brings an additional Midrash regarding a verse in Lamentations that addresses the Jewish people's choice of G-d.

Source 3 Lamentations, 3:24

Student's My soul said, “G-d is my portion; therefore I
pg. 5 will wait for Him.” חֲקִי ה' אֶמְרָה נְפִשִׁי עַל כֵּן אֶחְיֶה לוֹ.

The simple meaning is that choosing G-d comes from the soul, thus “I will wait for Him.”

Source 4 Midrash Eichah Rabbah

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Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: This is analogous to a king who enters a state accompanied by a duke, prefect, and a commander. The leaders of the state gathered together and, one said, "I will choose the duke as my patron." Another said, "I will choose the prefect as my patron." Yet another said, "I will choose the commander as my patron." Then one wise man among them said: "I will choose the king, for all the others are subject to replacement, but the king is not."

Likewise, idol worshippers bow to the sun, or the moon, some to sticks and stones, but the Jews only serve G-d, as it states: "My soul said, 'G-d is my portion ...,'" for I proclaim His unity twice daily, saying (Deuteronomy, 6:4): Hear, O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one.

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רבי אבהו בשם רבי יוחנן אמר משל למלך שנכנס למדינה והיו עמו דכסין ואפרכין ואיסטרטילוטין, והיו גדולי מדינה יושבים באמצע המדינה, חד אמר אנא נסיב דכסין לגבי, וחד אמר אנא נסיב אפרכין לגבי, וחד אמר אנא נסיב איסטרטילוטין לגבי. הנה פקח אחד לשם, אמר אנא נסיב למלכא, דכולא מתחלפין ומלכא אינו מתחלף.

כן עובדי כוכבים, מהו עובדין לחמה, ומהו עובדין ללבנה, ומהו עובדין לעץ ואבן, אבל ישראל אינו עובדין אלא להקדוש ברוך הוא, הךא הוא דכתיב: חלקי ה' אמרה נפשי, שאני מיחד אותו שתי פעמים בכל יום, ואומר (דברים ו, ד): שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד.

Here too, the midrash praises the right "choice" and the wisdom of the Jews for choosing to serve the Creator and not idols, like the wise person who chose the king and not his officers.

>> The Rebbe

So wise...

Student's
pg. 6

Seemingly, even a small child knows that the king is greater than any of his officers. Why then does the midrash specify that person who chose the king was "wise"? In addition, even if the officers wouldn't have been subject to replacement, it still should have been clear that the king is greater. Why was this additional reason—that all officers are replaceable—needed?

וידוע הדיוק בזה², דלכאורה, הרי גם מי שאינו פקח ואפילו תינוק קטן³ יודע שהמלך הוא גדול יותר מהדוכסין וכו', ומה צריכים לפקחות בכדי לבחור בהמלך? וגם, הרי גם אם הדוכסין וכו' לא היו מתחלפין הי' מובן בפשטות שהמלך הוא גדול מהם .. ולמה צריך להטעם דכולהו מתחלפין?

ס"ה"מ תר"ס ע' יא.
3) כ"ה באוה"ת ובסה"מ תר"ס שם.

2) בד"ה את הוי' האמרת להצ"צ (אוה"ת תבוא ע' תתרעב. שם ע' תתרפג)
ולאדמו"ר מהר"ש (ס"ה"מ תר"ל ע' רצא). ביאוה"ז להצ"צ ע' רמח ואילך.

In summary:

We studied two midrashic texts which praise the wisdom of the Jewish people in choosing the king - G-d, and not officers - idols.

The Rebbe poses the obvious question, why is this such a difficult choice?

We will soon see a long discussion explaining the complications here, examining the different choices, and explaining why indeed this was a wise choice.

C. The Evolution of Idolatry

To understand the deliberations in choosing G-d over idols, we must go back to the beginning of history and see how idolatry began. Adam was created by G-d and even spoke with G-d directly, and he passed knowledge of this to his children and the generations that followed. When did it end? How did a person get up one day and believe that a statue or celestial body created the world?

>> The Rebbe

The Waiters

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One way of explaining this is based on the history of idolatry. The initial idolaters recognized that everything ultimately comes from G-d, not the celestial bodies. Their mistake was that they believed that the celestial bodies exerted choice in serving as conduits for the Divine flow reaching this world. They didn't realize that the celestial bodies in fact have no choice in the matter and they are merely like an axe in the hands of a woodchopper. Due to their error, these people worshipped the celestial bodies, because if they have choice in the matter they deserve appreciation for their role. They also thought that by worshipping the celestial bodies they would be able to receive more from them.

והנה לכאורה היה אפשר לבאר זה על פי הידוע⁴ שבדורות הראשונים, אלו שעבדו לכוכבים ומזלות, ידעו שהשפע שנשפע בארץ על ידי הכוכבים ומזלות (ממגד תבואות שמש וממגד גרש ירחים⁵) הוא (לא שהם עצמם משפיעים, אלא) שהקב"ה משפיע על ידם, אלא שטעו וחשבו שהשפע שנשפע ממנו יתברך על ידי הכוכבים ומזלות הוא בבחירתם, ולא ידעו את האמת שאין להם בחירה כלל, והם רק כגרזן⁶ ביד החוצב⁷. ולכן השתחוו להכוכבים ומזלות ועבדו אותם, כי לפי טעותם (שהשפע שנשפע על ידי הכוכבים ומזלות הוא בבחירתם) ראוי להודות להם על זה, על דרך חמרא למרא טיבותא לשקיי' [=היין של מלך הוא, והשותין אותו מחזיקין טובה לשר המשקה ולא למלך. רש"י שם]⁸. וגם כי לפי טעותם שהכוכבים ומזלות הם בעלי בחירה חשבו שעל ידי שיעבדו אותם ישפיעו להם יותר.

ד"ה כל המאריך תרפ"ו פ"ד (סה"מ תרפ"ו ע' קנו ואילך). ד"ה מים רבים ה'תשי"ז פ"ד (לעיל ח"א ע' שכג ואילך). ושם, שטעות זו (שהם משפיעים בבחירתם) הוא לא ע"ז אלא שיתוף, משא"כ הטעות שעזב ה' את הארץ בידי הכוכבים (דלקמן בפנים) הוא ע"ז. עיי"ש בארוכה.
(8) ב"ק צב, ב.

(4) ראה סהמ"צ להצ"צ 1, א ואילך. וראה ע"ז רמב"ם הל' ע"ז בתהלות. וראה לקמן הערה 75.
(5) ברכה לג, יד.
(6) ע"פ ל' הכתוב - ישע"י י, טו.
(7) ראה גם ד"ה את הוי' האמרת תרע"ח פ"ג (סה"מ תרע"ח ע' תיד).

Humanity during the first generations after creation knew the creation story. They knew Who created the world and what He wanted from them. They were also very intelligent, and understood the forces of nature. They knew about the rotations of the planets and how important the light of the sun and moon and other celestial bodies is for the entire earth.

At some point, they thought that in addition to praying to G-d to send us His blessings and thanking Him for it, they ought to also thank the sun and moon. Why?

They gave an analogy:

When a person is invited to a festive meal where lavish food and drink is served, if they are smart they will tip the waiter at the beginning of the meal. Why? The food is being paid for by the host and the waiter gets paid by the host, so shouldn't they only thank the host? The answer is simple: True, the waiter follows instructions, but in the course of his job he can favor one guest over another, giving them warmer food, serving them more promptly, etc. Therefore, besides thanking the host, it can't hurt to also give the waiter a tip.

This is exactly how the world runs, they figured. Yes, G-d created it and runs it and we pray to Him. But since He has waiters, the sun and the moon which practically deliver life to the world, it would be fitting to thank them too, because they do have some pull...

The CEOs

Student's
pg.7 This later led to an even greater mistake, thinking that G-d abandoned the world to the control of the celestial bodies. They compared this to a king who appointed ministers to administer his country. Even though the ministers derive their authority from the king who appointed them, after their appointment they are the actual rulers of the country and the king doesn't intervene, except in rare instances, when there is a great need.

ומזה נשתלשל אחר כך שבאו לטעות גדולה יותר, שחשבו שעזב ה' את הארץ בידי הכוכבים ומזלות, והנהגת הארץ תלויה רק בהם. ובדוגמת מלך שמינה שרים להנהיג את המדינה, דהגם שזה שבכחם להנהיג את המדינה הוא מפני שהמלך מינה אותם על זה, מכל מקום, לאחרי שנתמנו, הנהגת המדינה היא על ידי השרים, ואין המלך מתערב בזה (מלבד לפרקים רחוקים, בשביל צורך גדול).

The next phase followed. They thought that the influence of the sun and moon was far broader. The new theory was that G-d did indeed create the world, but He appointed celestial bodies to manage it and He doesn't get involved with every detail. Only on occasion, for very important things, does He personally involve Himself (For example, for the Exodus from Egypt.)

If so, certainly they should invest in thanking and praying to the celestial bodies, for they aren't mere waiters but CEOs! 90% of the time they are running the whole business!

G-d Is Forgotten from The World

Maimonides describes the evolution of their mistake in greater detail:

Source 5 Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idol Worship, 1:2

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As time passed, false prophets arose among the people and said that G-d told them to worship this or that celestial body, and they brought offerings and anointed them and built them sanctuaries and replicated their likenesses for all to bow to them—including the women, children, and common folk. They would claim that a form they'd made up was the shape of a certain celestial body that they were shown in their prophecy. In this manner they began inventing different forms in their sanctuaries and under trees and on mountain tops and in the valleys. They would gather and bow to them, telling the people that this form is responsible for the good and bad and they should fear it and worship it. The priests would explain that this manner of service will bring success and do such and such and don't do such and such. Other charlatans arose and claimed that this star or constellation or angel spoke to them and said "Serve me like this" and told them how to worship them. This phenomenon spread throughout the world and people began serving strange objects, bowing to them and bringing sacrifices.

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As time passed, G-d was forgotten from the face of the earth and everyone only knew of idol worship, the way they were raised. The priests pretended there was no G-d,

ואחר שִׁאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים עָמְדוּ בְּבִנֵי הָאָדָם
נְבִיאֵי שִׁקֵּר וְאָמְרוּ שְׁהָאֵל צִוָּה וְאָמַר
לָהֶם עֲבֹדוּ כּוֹכַב פְּלוּנִי אוֹ כָּל הַכּוֹכָבִים
וְהִקְרִיבוּ לוֹ וְנִסְכּוּ לוֹ כֵּן וְכֵן וּבְנוּ לוֹ
הֵיכָל וַעֲשׂוּ צוּרְתוֹ כְּדִי לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לוֹ כָּל
הָעַם הַנְּשִׂים וְהַקְּטָנִים וְשָׂאֵר עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ.
וּמוֹדִיעַ לָהֶם צוּרָה שֶׁבְּדָה מְלַבּוֹ וְאוֹמֵר
זוֹ הִיא צוּרַת הַכּוֹכַב פְּלוּנִי שֶׁהוֹדִיעָהוּ
בְּנוֹאָתוֹ. וְהִתְחִילוּ עַל דֶּרֶךְ זוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת
צוּרוֹת בְּהֵיכָלוֹת וְתַחַת הָאֵילָנוֹת
וּבְרֵאשֵׁי הַהָרִים וְעַל הַגְּבְעוֹת וּמִתְקַבְּצִין
וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לָהֶם וְאוֹמְרִים לְכָל הָעַם שְׂזוֹ
הַצּוּרָה מִיִּטְיָבָה וּמִרַעָה וְרֵאוי לַעֲבֹדָהּ
וּלְיִרְאָה מִמֶּנָּה. וְכַהֲנִיָּהֶם אוֹמְרִים לָהֶם
שֶׁבַעֲבוּדָה זוֹ תִרְבוּ וְתִצְלִיחוּ וַעֲשׂוּ כֵּן
וְכֵן וְאֵל תַּעֲשׂוּ כֵּן וְכֵן. וְהִתְחִילוּ כּוֹזְבִים
אֲחֵרִים לַעֲמֹד וְלוֹמַר שֶׁהַכּוֹכַב עֲצָמוֹ אוֹ
הַגְּלָגַל אוֹ הַמְּלָאָךְ דִּבֵּר עִמָּהֶם וְאָמַר
לָהֶם עֲבֹדוּנִי בְּכֵן וְכֵן וְהוֹדִיעַ לָהֶם דֶּרֶךְ
עֲבוּדָתוֹ וַעֲשׂוּ כֵּן וְאֵל תַּעֲשׂוּ כֵּן. וּפְשִׁט
דִּבֵּר זֶה בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם לַעֲבֹד אֶת הַצּוּרוֹת
בְּעֲבוּדוֹת מְשֻׁנוֹת זוֹ מִזוֹ וּלְהִקְרִיב לָהֶם
וּלְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת.

וְכִינּוּ שִׁאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים נִשְׁתַּכַּח הַשֵּׁם
הַנִּכְבָּד וְהַנּוֹרָא מִפִּי כָּל הַיְקוּם וּמִדַּעְתָּם
וְלֹא הִפְרִיחוּ וְנִמְצְאוּ כָּל עַם הָאָרֶץ
הַנְּשִׂים וְהַקְּטָנִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים אֵלָא
הַצּוּרָה שֶׁל עֵץ וְשֶׁל אֶבֶן וְהֵיכָל שֶׁל
אֲבָנִים שֶׁנִּתְחַנְּנוּ מִקְטָנוֹתָם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת

only the idols they formed to represent the various deities. There were only very few people who knew G-d, such as Chanoch, Metushelach, Noach, Shem and Ever.

לָהּ וּלְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְהִשָּׁבַע בְּשִׁמְהָ. וְהִחְכְּמִים
שָׁהִיוּ בָהֶם כְּגֹן כְּהִנְיָהֶם וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָהֶן
מִדְּמִין שָׁאִין שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי הַכּוֹכָבִים
וְהַגְּלָגָלִים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ הַצּוּרוֹת הָאֵלוּ בְּגִלְגָּלָם
וּלְדַמּוֹתָן. אָבֵל צוּר הָעוֹלָמִים לֹא הָיָה
שׁוּם אָדָם שֶׁהָיָה מְכִירוֹ וְלֹא יוֹדְעוֹ אֱלֹהֵי
יְחִידִים בְּעוֹלָם כְּגֹן חֲנוּךְ וּמֵתוֹשֵׁלַח נֹחַ
שֵׁם וְעֵבֶר.

As we see, the mistake which started small went further and further from the truth and engulfed the entire world, until 99.9% of humanity were idol worshippers. Only a few individuals still served G-d.

>> The Rebbe

Clear Vision

Student's
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This can explain the wisdom in the choice of the king. The Jewish people's recognition of the truth that all of the intermediaries through which the Divine flow reaches us are merely like an axe in the hand of a woodchopper reflects a profound understanding, seeing the deeper truth. Superficially it would seem that the reason the celestial bodies play a role in the Divine flow is because of their greatness, and the Jewish people's recognition that they are merely like an axe in the hand of a woodchopper is due to their great wisdom.

ועל פי זה היה אפשר לבאר פקחותו של זה שאמר אנא נסיב מלכא (בהנמשל), דזה שישראל יודעים את האמת שכל הממוצעים שעל ידם באה ההשפעה הם רק כגרזן ביד החוצב, הוא מצד גודל הדעת שלהם, שהם רואים את הפנימיות. שהרי בחיצוניות נראה דזה שההשפעה היא על ידי הכוכבים ומזלות, הוא מפני שיש בהם מעלה שמצד זה הם ראויים להיות ממוצעים, וזה שישראל יודעים שהם רק כגרזן ביד החוצב הוא מצד גודל הדעת שלהם.

It's already been a few thousand years during which G-d hasn't revealed Himself openly in our world. He hasn't split the sea for us, and hasn't held a rerun of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Looking at the world superficially, we see a world governed by forces of nature. Perceiving the real truth that G-d is the Creator and Ruler of the world, and is pulling the strings behind the natural forces, requires great wisdom.

D. Choosing to Sacrifice

Until now, we explained that a person needs wisdom to remember that G-d runs the world, and that all of nature and creation is G-d's handiwork and He runs it exactly the way He wants. Now the Rebbe explains a deeper level in the wise person's choice. More than just deeper understanding or sharper insight, it's a choice of sacrifice.

>> The Rebbe

Holiness Requires Sacrifice

Student's pg.10 The main reason why the idolaters worshipped the celestial bodies was because receiving the Divine flow from the side of holiness requires self-negation. The idolaters didn't want to practice self-negation so they worshipped the celestial bodies, for which no self-negation is required. The Zohar states that the flow from the impure side is given freely, demanding no sacrifice from its recipients.

והענין הוא, דעיקר הטעם על זה שעבדו לכוכבים ומזלות הוא¹⁰, כי בכדי לקבל השפעה מהקדושה צריך להיות בביטול, ולהיות שלא רצו לבטל את עצמם, לכן עבדו להכוכבים ומזלות, שבכדי לקבל ההשפעה מהם אין צריך לביטול, וכדאיתא בזהר¹¹ דרוח מסאבא אזדמן תדיר במגנא ובריקנייא [=רוח הטמאה מזדמנת תמיד בחינם ובריקנות], כמו שכתוב¹² אשר נאכל במצרים חנם, דההשפעה מלעומת זה (מצרים) היא חנם.

In order to receive Divine flow a person must nullify themselves. Kabbalah and chassidic philosophy always stress the importance of self-negation as the key to all good. Why?

An Empty Vessel Can Receive

The simplest analogue is a cup. When you want to fill a cup with expensive wine, you first need to do something really easy - make sure the cup is empty. If the cup is full, the wine won't be able to fill it.

When you go to hear a lecture which you think can improve your life, whether on parenting, marriage,

בנדיבים (נו, ד).
(12) בהעלותך יא, ה. ולהעיר מספרי (הובא בפרש"י) עה"פ: חנם מן המצוות.

(10) שבהערה 12 (אוה"ת שם ס"ע תתרכב ואילך. שם ע' תתרפד. סה"מ תר"ל שם ע' רצב ואילך. ביאורו"ז שם. סה"מ תר"ס ע' יא ואילך). וראה גם סידור (עם דא"ח) קמב, ג. סהמ"צ להצ"צ ו, א. ובכ"מ.
(11) ח"ב קנה, א. וראה בארוכה סידור (עם דא"ח) עה"פ אל תבטח

business, etc., if you arrive with a “full cup,” with the attitude that you know everything, and you are smarter than everyone else, you’ll never be able to accept what’s being said. You won’t connect, and your life won’t improve.

Letting Go Of Prior Notions To Attain Deeper Understanding

This also applies to loftier things. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Zeira was very wise, and would learn Torah in the Babylonian tradition. After many years of study, he decided to go to Israel and learn in the Jerusalem tradition, which was much deeper, but he couldn’t understand anything. He was so accustomed to his previous way of learning and trapped in previously-held notions, which, though very lofty, weren’t at the Jerusalem level. He couldn’t free himself from them and advance to a new level.

He fasted for 100 days! He spent 100 days freeing himself from the previous way of learning and only then did he succeed in understanding the Jerusalem way.

When a person wants to advance from level to level they need self-negation. They need to understand they don’t know everything and make space for something else.

Tempering The Ego To Feel Another

Self-negation isn’t only in understanding, but also in feeling. In order to make room in your heart for someone else, you can’t be full of yourself. You need to nullify yourself.

*

Not everyone is willing to do that however. For some people, letting go of their ego is too difficult. Who is this person to tell me about marriage? What do they know that I don’t?

Such people can receive the flow from the negative side. They can accept a pat on the back from others with that kind of ego. They are comfortable in an environment of haughtiness and egoism. They know it all, they have it all, and everything revolves around them.

The Zohar says that the spirit of the profane always rests in a place of emptiness and no cost, meaning there is no demand for hard work; you get it all without any effort.

We see this in all areas of life. When you pay you get quality, if it is free, that’s what it’s worth. As the Talmud (Bava Kama 85) says a doctor who costs nothing is worth nothing. Or in today’s world, if you aren’t paying for a product then you are the product.

(The Zohar recommends paying for mitzvot, because nothing good comes from something free.)

This is the wise people’s choice: they are prepared to practice self-negation and make an effort to receive the flow from holiness. They aren’t tempted to inflate their ego and receive from the negative side.

Holiness Gives Slowly

Student's Another reason for preferring the
pg. 10 celestial bodies is that the flow that comes through them is greater.

ועוד טעם על זה שרצו לקבל השפעתם מהכוכבים ומזלות¹³, כי גם ההשפעה עצמה (הנמשכת על ידי הכוכבים ומזלות) היא גדולה יותר.

It stands to reason that something deep and true flows more gradually, step by step. Something shallow flows quicker and in greater volume.

Making the right choice requires great wisdom. The wise person needs to nullify their ego, and also accept that the holy flow will come more gradually. Because things that are deep and true take time.

Student's This underlines the great wisdom and
pg. 10 virtue of the Jewish people, who only serve G-d. Being on the side of holiness demands hard work and effort, and the return is measured, commensurate with the work invested. Nevertheless, they willingly give up materialism and prefer to receive the more limited flow from the side of holiness.

ומזה מובן גודל השבח והפקחות דישראל שאינם עובדין אלא להקב"ה, והגם שבכדי לקבל מהקדושה צריך לעבודה ויגיעה, וגם אז ההשפעה היא (מלכתחילה) במדידה והגבלה לפי מדת העבודה, מכל מקום, הם מוותרים על ריבוי השפע (בגשמיות) [אף שגם ישראל יכולים לקבל (לפי שעה) שפע מלעומת זה¹⁴, ולא עוד אלא שהם נוטלים חלק בראש¹⁵, מכל מקום הם מוותרים על זה] וחביב להם יותר ההשפעה המצומצמת שנמשכת מהקדושה.

Why Choose Sacrifice?

Choosing self-negation is not intuitive. We are all created with an ego and selfish desires. What gives a person the ability and desire to negate himself?

It's The Soul

Student's The Jewish people's willingness to give
pg. 11 up personal benefit and choose G-d is due to their Divine soul, which supra-rationally chooses G-dliness. This

זה שבישראל ישנה ההכרה שצריך לוותר על התועלת והמציאות שלהם ולבחור באלקות, הוא מצד הנשמה¹⁶ (חלק הוי') שבחירתה באלקות היא בחירה עצמית

שרוצה לידבק בה' הוא מפני שהוא "חיי החיים" (תכלית העילוי), מ"מ, מכיון שהוא יהי ע"ז אין ואפס, הרצון לידבק בשרשו הוא טבע שלמעלה מהשכל.

ואולי יש לומר דמ"ש בלקו"ת שם שהסיבה לרצון זה הוא "דעת חזק" [בפרט שבלקו"ת גופא מציין לתניא שם] - הכוונה היא, דהרצון שמצד טבע הנשמה פועל על השכל, כדלקמן בפנים.

13) כ"ה להדיא בביאורו"ז להצ"צ שם (ע' רמט).

14) ראה קונטרס ומעין מאמר ו' בסופו. מ"ז פ"ד. מ"א פ"ב.

15) ראה אגה"ת ספ"ו. קונטרס ומעין מאמר ז' שם.

16) להעיר מתניא פי"ט (הובא בלקו"ת שם), דזה שנשמת האדם רוצה

לידבק בשרשה ומקורה בה' חיי החיים ב"ה הגם שתהי' אין ואפס

ותתבטל שם במציאות לגמרי, הוא טבע שלמעלה מהשכל. דהגם שזה

choice is not based on an understanding that G-dliness is greater, because “the king isn’t replaced,” but is an expression of the essential being of the soul. This essential identity influences their logic, causing it to rationally understand that since G-dliness is the eternal, irreplaceable truth, it is worth setting aside one’s selfish identity in order to choose G-dliness.

שלמעלה מהשכל (דבחירה זו היא לא מצד העילוי דאלקות, שמלכא לא מתחלף, אלא מצד העצמות), וזה פועל על שכלם¹⁷, שגם השכל מכיר דמכיון שאלקות הוא האמת שחי וקיים בקיום נצחי (מלכא לא מתחלף), צריך הוא לוותר על המציאות שלו ולבחור באלקות.

At the end of the day, logic can’t convince a person to transcend his ego and choose the difficult path instead of the easy one. Such a choice is motivated by the soul, which transcends logic.

To illustrate, we are going to tell two contemporary stories of people who made costly decisions and have no logical explanation for them. It was a soul decision.

Story Viktor Frankl's Fateful Decision

A short while before the U.S. joined World War II, I was invited by the U.S. embassy in Vienna to accept my immigration papers. At the time, my elderly parents and I lived in Vienna. They expected that I would take the documents and immediately immigrate. But at the last minute, I began to deliberate. “Should I really do this? Can I really do this?” I suddenly understood what would happen to my parents. In just several weeks they’d be sent to a concentration camp, or, more precisely, a death camp. Could I leave them to their fate? Until now, I was able to protect them, in my position as head of neurology at Vienna’s Jewish hospital. If I would leave, the situation would change right away. While I was deciding what the right thing to do would be, I thought this was one of those times where you wish for a “sign from heaven.”

I went home, and I saw a piece of marble on the table. I asked my father how it got there. “Ah Viktor, I found it this morning at a site which used to be a synagogue.” (The Nazis had burned it down.) “Why did you take it?” I asked. “Because it is a shard of the stones which had the Ten Commandments,” he said. He showed me a Hebrew letter engraved on the stone. “Besides,” he continued, “This letter is shorthand for one of the ten commandments.” “Which one?” I asked, and he replied: “Honor your father and mother so that G-d will give you long life on this earth ...” At that moment, I decided to stay in Vienna with my parents and forgo the opportunity to escape.

(17) ראה גם סה"מ תר"ס ע' טז "מצד הדביקות שמעצמות הנפש .. לכן יש לו הנש"י בכח חכמתו להבין את הטוב דאלקות ולבחור בטוב".

This story demonstrates the difficulty of making the right and wise choice. Viktor chose to remain with his parents instead of escaping the European inferno, though the price he would pay was clear to him. This strength he received from heaven. It was his soul deciding.

He paid dearly, but never regretted it, because it was the right thing to do.

Story Yuli Edelstein's Important Question

The former head of the Israeli Parliament, Yuli Edelstein, recalls:

“The date was December 19, 1984. The day I was sentenced to three years of forced labor in a Soviet camp in southern Siberia. The official verdict stated it was for “harboring illicit substances,” but the real reason was my Zionist activities and Hebrew classes that I taught.

“[It was] after three months in limbo, I arrived for my court hearing. The room was full of police and security officers. Family members are allowed at a regular hearing, but they filled all the seats with officers so my family had no room to enter. Only my wife and mother managed to come inside.

“After they handed down my sentence, I was surrounded by security officers waiting to return me to my cell. Somehow, I managed to raise my head above the security ring. I had one thing to tell my wife, whom I hadn’t seen in three months and whom I didn’t know when I’d see next. “Tanya, which candle is it tonight?”

“The Soviets thought I’d lost my mind after hearing my sentence. My wife also did, she didn’t understand what I was talking about. So I yelled again, “which candle is it tonight?”

“Only on the third try did she understand me. “Tonight we light the second candle,” she shouted back. Yes, it was the first day of Chanukah 1984. I didn’t have a Hebrew calendar, but when they said the secular date I calculated that it must be Chanukah. I wanted to light Chanukah candles.”

Yuli didn’t know when he’d see his wife next, and what did he say? Not “I love you,” but “which candle is it tonight?”

That night, already in a different cell for sentenced prisoners, Yuli managed to find two matches. Opposite the bars on the window, he emotionally recited the blessings: “...to kindle the Chanukah lights; ...Who has made miracles for our ancestors in those days and in these times; ...Who has preserved us, renewed us and brought us to this time,” and lit the two matches. “And so,” he continued, “I stood at the window, for several moments until the matches singed my fingers. I don’t know if it was a kosher lighting from a halachic perspective, but I know that for me on that night, a little light pushed away a lot of darkness.”

An incredible story about someone who lives in our times. This isn't Chana and her seven sons, not Judah the Maccabee.

What made Yuli do this? Why did he decide that the most important thing in his life right then was to know how many candles to light? It's something deep within the soul. "G-d is my portion ..."

*

This is the choice we are talking about. It's the soul's choice. An inner voice telling you to do the right thing, even if it's not easy or fun. This is what the verse in Lamentations is saying: My soul said, "G-d is my portion." The fact that I choose G-d is from my soul.

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Thank G-d, most people today don't have to make decisions like Yuli Edelstein or Viktor Frankl, but our lives are full of choices between the right and difficult option or the easy and wrong choice. Sometimes, it's easy to choose correctly, but other times it can be really hard. We need the strength of our soul to sacrifice, to toil and to choose right.

E. Choosing Between Good and Better

The Wise Pauper's Prayer

Source 6 Psalms 92:1

Student's
pg. 12

A poor man's prayer; enwrapped, he pours out his words before G-d.

תַּפְּלָה לְעֲנִי כִי יַעֲטֹף וְלִפְנֵי ה' יִשְׁפֹךְ שִׁיחוֹ.

The simple meaning of the verse is that the poor man prays and pours out his words to G-d, and his requests are in the following verses.

Source 7 Keser Shem Tov 94

Student's
pg. 12

I heard from my master an explanation of the verse "A poor man's prayer; enwrapped, he pours out his words before G-d," according to this analogy: The king announced on his day of joy that anyone who requests something from that king will have their request fulfilled. Some requested honor, some requested wealth, and each received their request.

שָׁמַעְתִּי מִמּוֹרֵי פְרוֹשׁ הַפְּסוּק "תַּפְּלָה לְעֲנִי כִי יַעֲטֹף וְלִפְנֵי ה' יִשְׁפֹךְ שִׁיחוֹ", עַל פִּי מִשְׁל, שֶׁהַכְרִיז הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּיוֹם שְׂמֵחָתוֹ: כָּל מִי שִׁיבִקֵּשׁ דָּבָר מִן הַמֶּלֶךְ יִמְלָאוּ לוֹ מִבְּקָשׁוֹ. וַיֵּשׁ מִי שֶׁבִקֵּשׁ שְׂרָרָה וְכָבוֹד, וַיֵּשׁ שֶׁבִקֵּשׁ עֶשֶׂר, וְנִתְּנוּ לְכֹל אֶחָד מִבְּקָשׁוֹ.

One wise man said that his request is to speak to the king three times a day. The king favored this request because his speaking was dearer to him than honor or money. He granted permission for the man to enter his chambers to speak with him, and there they would open the king's treasures and allow him to take from there as well. This is the meaning of the verse: "A poor man's prayer: to pour out his words." Speaking with G-d is the poor man's request.

וְהָיָה שֶׁם חָכָם אֶחָד שֶׁאָמַר, שֶׁשְּׂאֵלְתוֹ וּמִבְּקָשׁוֹ שִׁיְדַבֵּר הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעֶצְמוֹ עִמּוֹ ג' פְּעָמִים בְּיוֹם. וְהוּטַב מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, מֵאַחַר שֶׁדַּבְּרוּ חֲבִיב עֲלָיו מִן עֶשֶׂר וְכָבוֹד. לָכֵן יִמְלָא בְּקִשְׁתּוֹ שִׁיתְּנוּ לוֹ רִשׁוֹת לְכֹסֶס בְּהִיכְלוֹ לְדַבֵּר עִמּוֹ, וְשֵׁם יִפְתְּחוּ לוֹ הָאוֹצְרוֹת, שֶׁיִּקַּח מִן עֶשֶׂר וְכָבוֹד גַּם כֵּן. וְזֶהוּ שֶׁכָּתוּב תַּפְּלָה לְעֲנִי וְגו' לִפְנֵי ה' יִשְׁפֹךְ שִׁיחוֹ, שֶׁזֶה מִבְּקָשׁוֹ.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that the poor man's prayer is to speak to G-d, to speak to the king.

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 13

A verse in Psalms states: “A prayer for a poor man when he enwraps himself and pours out his speech before G-d.” The Baal Shem Tov interprets this verse as saying that the poor person doesn’t ask G-d for anything, all he prays for is that his speech should be before G-d. The Baal Shem Tov says that this requires great wisdom. He compares it to a visitor to a physical king, who on his way to the king’s chamber passes through many rooms, each of which holds great treasures. Some people see the great treasure in the outer hall and enjoy it so much that they stop to spend some time there. Others have this experience when they reach the halls further in the palace. But the true wise person pays no attention at all to the treasures of even the innermost hall, because all he desires is to enter the king’s chamber and see the king’s face.

וכתורת הבעל שם טוב¹⁸ הידועה על הפסוק¹⁹ תפלה לעני כי יעטוף ולפני הוי' ישפוך שיחו, שאינו מבקש שום דבר ותפלתו היא שלפני הוי' ישפוך שיחו. ולזה צריך פקחות גדולה. ובדוגמת מלך בשר ודם, שבכדי ליכנס להקיטון שבו נמצא המלך ולראות את פני המלך, צריך לעבור תחילה דרך כמה וכמה היכלות שבכל אחד מהם יש הון יקר, וישנם כאלו שכשרואים את ההון יקר שבהיכל החיצון, הם מתענגים מזה בתענוג נפלא ומתעכבים שם. ויש כאלו שמתענגים בהיכל פנימי יותר. ודוקא מי שהוא חכם גדול, גייט אים ניט אָן {הוא לא מתפעל מזה} החשיבות והיוקר של ההון עצום הנמצא גם בהיכל הכי פנימי, וכל רצונו ותשוקתו היא ליכנס להקיטון בו נמצא המלך ולראות את פני המלך.

The poor person is given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to enter the king’s palace and take whatever he wants. One person will choose to take home a large amount of money, another will choose to partake in a gourmet meal, and a third will enjoy a beautiful concert. But the wise man will rise above all the distractions and focus on the ultimate goal - meeting the king.

The Alter Rebbe’s Yearning

Source 8 Psalms, 73:25

Student's
pg. 13

“Who do I have in heaven [besides You]? And on earth I desire no one but You.

מי לי בשמים ועמך לא חפצתי בארץ.

Who do I have in heaven. I haven't chosen any angel as a G-d, I have chosen only You.

מי לי בשמים. שום מלאך
שבחרתי לי לאלה לא בחרתי
אלא אותך.

King David prays to G-d and declares that he wants nothing on heaven or earth, not material things nor an angel, only G-d.

>> The Rebbe

This love for G-d is like that described by the verse "Who do I have in heaven besides You? And on earth I desire no one but You." The founder of the Chabad movement, the Alter Rebbe, once expressed this feeling: "I want nothing at all. I don't want Your Paradise, I don't want Your World to Come. All I want is You Yourself." The revelations experienced in Paradise and the World to Come are incredibly profound, and the Alter Rebbe understood this very well. Yet he didn't want any of these revelations of G-dliness, all he yearned for was G-d Himself.

ויש לומר, שענין זה הוא האהבה דמי לי בשמים ועמך לא חפצתי²⁰, וכלשון אדמו"ר הזקן²¹ "איך וויל זע גאָר ניסט איך וויל ניט דאין גן עדן איך וויל ניט דאין עולם הבא כו' איך וויל מער ניט אַז דיך אַליין" [=איני רוצה מאומה. איני רוצה בגן עדן שלך, איני רוצה בעולם הבא שלך כו' איני רוצה – אלא בך לבדך]. דהגם שהגילויים שבגן עדן ומכל שכן הגילויים דעולם הבא הם גילויים נעלים ביותר, ואדמו"ר הזקן היתה לו השגה בזה, השגה אמיתית, אף על פי כן אינו רוצה לא בהגילויים דגן עדן ולא בהגילויים דעולם הבא, וכל רצונו הוא רק בהעצמות, דיך אַליין [=בך לבדך].

The spiritual worlds are awash with Divine revelation, from which the soul can derive immense spiritual pleasure. But the Alter Rebbe would declare that he won't make do with any great spiritual level, all he wants is a relationship with G-d Himself.

This is the choice of the truly wise person. It's not just a choice between pure and impure, comfort and justice. Even within the realm of holiness one needs to be able to choose between good and better. Between the holy experience in Paradise and the direct relationship with G-d Himself.

*

It seems we are talking about very high levels with which we don't have a connection. But if we dig deeper, we'll see this is present in our daily lives.

Story The British Student's Decision

I was in my 20s, I was studying philosophy, I had written my doctorate, I had studied for rabbinic ordination and been ordained. I felt this was it. I had done what I needed to as a Jew, and now I could continue with my life's plans.

And then I went to meet the Rebbe, to seek his advice on my future plans.

My Chabad friends told me exactly what to do: Write your questions on a paper and give the Rebbe three options: 1, 2 and 3. The Rebbe will choose an option from those which you present him with.

So I set out my options. I said to the Rebbe, "I have a career in front of me, I have three choices." Number one, maybe I would like to be an academic—perhaps one day I would be a professor or maybe a fellow of my college in Cambridge. Or number two—I went to university initially to study economics—I'd like to be an economist. Or number three, I'd like to be a barrister, an advocate. I was a member of one of the Inns of Court, the Inner Temple where you study to be a lawyer.

I went in to the yechidus [private audience] not knowing what the Rebbe would answer, would it be one, would it be two, would it be three? The Rebbe looked at me and he went through the list; not one, not two, not three.

I thought, "Hang on, this is against the rules!"

The Rebbe did not give me time to reply. He told me Anglo Jewry was short of Rabbis, and therefore he said to me, "You must train Rabbis." He specified Jews College, where rabbis were trained in Britain. And then he said, you yourself must become a congregational Rabbi, so that your students will come and they will hear you give—I still remember the way he pronounced the word—"Sermons". They will hear you give sermons and they will learn. He said you will train rabbis and you will become a rabbi. Well, I was a little farblonged—a word I've introduced into the English language courtesy of the BBC—but if the Rebbe says do it, I did it. I gave up my three ambitions, I trained rabbis, I taught in Jews College, eventually I became head of Jews College, and I became a congregational rabbi, in Golders Green and Marble Arch.

This is the story of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, in his own words.

Before we read the second part of the story, let's analyze it. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks is a good Jew, with his entire life ahead of him. All his options, whether to be an academic, an economist or a lawyer, were good options and he could have lived a happy and fulfilling life. But when he consulted with the Rebbe, the Rebbe answered that he must choose not only what's good for him, but what will be good for the Jewish community, what G-d wants from him. Thus, he should become a rabbi and educate other rabbis.

The Rebbe requested that, despite all his perfectly good options, he choose a holier option, even though it would be harder for him.

Perhaps this is the message from the poor man's prayer where he insists on meeting the king and doesn't suffice with the palace treasures. Although many good options come before us, we need to always search for the holiest and best objective.

>> The Rebbe

We Can Too

Student's The fact that the Alter Rebbe said
pg. 14 this, and his grandson and successor the Tzemach Tzedek publicized it, empowers every Jew—especially those that follow the path of the Rebbe—to have this same feeling. We all have many desires, including materialistic desires, but they can be pursued dispassionately, while our main desire is to fulfill G-d's deepest wish that this world become a home for G-d. Even our material desires can be channeled toward the purpose of turning the mundane into a vehicle for the spiritual.

ויש לומר דעל ידי שאמר אדמו"ר הזקן איך וויל מער ניט אַז דיך אַליין [=איני רוצה – אלא בך לבד], ובפרט לאחרי שנתפרסם זה על ידי הצמח צדק, ניתן הכח (עוד יותר) לכל אחד ואחד מישראל, ובפרט לההולכים בעקבותיו ובדרכיו, דהגם שיש לו ריבוי רצונות, ועד לרצונות שמצד נפש הבהמית, שכל הרצונות שלו יהיו בלא לב ולב, ועיקר רצונו יהיה להשלים כוונת העצמות לעשות לו יתברך דירה בתחתונים (על דרך ומעין שהיה אצל אדמו"ר הזקן שלא רצה מער ניט אַז דיך אַליין [=בך לבדך]), וגם רצונו בגשמיות יהיה (בעיקר) בכדי לעשות את הגשמיות כלי לאלקות.

The Alter Rebbe empowers us not to make do with our mundane desires, or even with our spiritual ones. We can aim for the highest aspiration of all – doing what G-d wants from us, making this world a holier place.

The Wise Person Gains

Student's Living with this mindset will also bring
pg. 15 us great physical blessings. The Alter Rebbe says that G-d gives us physical matters, and we make them spiritual. So when we receive abundant physical blessings, we generate abundant spiritual blessings, abundant in both quantity and quality. This should all happen with gladness and joy, during the period of preparation for Pesach, our festival of freedom. May this freedom lead us to the freedom of the redemption by our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days.

ועל ידי זה יומשך לו גם ריבוי השפעה בגשמיות, כמאמר אדמו"ר הזקן²² אַז דער אויבערשטער גיט אידן גשמיות און אידן מאַכן פון די גשמיות רוחניות [=הקב"ה] נותן לבני ישראל גשמיות, ובני ישראל עושים מהגשמיות – רוחניות], דמזה מובן, דכשהקב"ה נותן לישראל ריבוי גשמיות עושים ישראל ריבוי רוחניות, ריבוי בכמות וריבוי באיכות, ועד לתכלית השלימות, ועד שמתקשרים ומתאחדים בהקב"ה, ישראל (אורייתא) וקודשא בריך הוא כולא חד²³. וכל זה נעשה מתוך שמחה וטוב לבב, בימי ההכנה לזמן חירותנו, וזה מביא גם את זמן חירותנו בפועל, גאולה האמיתית והשלימה על ידי משיח צדקנו, בקרוב ממש.

מאמר דיבור המתחיל ביום עשתי עשר תשל"א
י"א ניסן ה'תשל"א.

In the long run, the Rebbe assures us, those that make the hard choice will also receive material benefit. Just like in the Baal Shem Tov's parable, where the poor man who insisted only on speaking with the king eventually received great treasures to take home with him. When we insist on fulfilling G-d's greatest expectations from us and make the right choices, G-d will eventually reward us with a shower of blessings, in the physical sense as well.

Story - Continued The British Student's Decision

This is what ultimately happened with Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

You know, a funny thing happened.

Having given up all my three ambitions, having decided to walk in the complete opposite direction, a funny thing happened. I did become a fellow of my college in Cambridge. I did become a professor. In fact, this year I have three professorships; one in Oxford University, two in London University. I did deliver Britain's top two economics lectures, the Mais lecture and the Hayek lecture, and Inner Temple made me an honorary barrister and invited me to give a law lecture in front of six hundred barristers, the Lord Chancellor – the highest lawyer in Britain, and Princess Anne who's the Master.

You know, you never lose anything – by putting yiddishkeit first.

And I learned something very deep: Sometimes the best way of achieving your ambitions is to stop pursuing them, and let them pursue you.

This discourse became one of the fundamental teachings of Chabad. Every Chabad child studies it, especially at this time, the Rebbe's birthday.

Perhaps it's because it expresses everything the Rebbe demanded of each of us. He demanded from his followers to leave the comforts of their communities and leave everything behind and go open a Chabad center at the other end of the world. Even if they won't have easy access to kosher food or local Jewish education for their children, because this is what G-d wants.

Even from regular people he demanded they forgo different opportunities and find another Jew to wrap tefillin with, or invite for Shabbat, because that's what G-d wants.

The Rebbe asked us to make the “wise” choice:

Not only must we remember that G-d runs the world,

Not only must we choose holiness even when it's hard,

But even within holy pursuits we must choose the loftiest objective for which we were created, and which G-d expects of us.