

A Mother's Role

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In a well-known letter, the Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote that his first childhood recollections revolved around the verse: "I will thank you God for being angry with me..." (Isaiah 12:1). The Rebbe explained that as a child he yearned for the time when having received consolation as only the Almighty can offer it, the Jewish people would be able to look back at all the hardships and pain of our long exile and give thanks to God, acknowledging that everything that had come to pass was for the good.

Obviously, as talented as the Rebbe was as a two or three year old child, such thoughts came to him whether consciously or subconsciously from his holy parents, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and Rebbetzin Chanah. Specifically, as we shall see, this first instance of the Rebbe's Messianic consciousness was given to him by his mother.

In Kabbalah, the ability to give thanks and to acknowledge a truth is of course the power of the *sefirah* of acknowledgment (*hod*). Acknowledgment is a relatively feminine *sefirah* and in fact is the termination of the feminine influence of understanding; in the idiom of Kabbalah: Understanding extends to acknowledgment (בינה עד הוד אתפשטת). Using Kabbalistic terminology to analyze the Rebbe's words, we recognize that the hardships and pain of the exile are the product of the *sefirah* of might, which is also known as judgment, even severe and harsh judgment. The sufferings of our exile are the harsh judgment passed on the sins of our past as deemed fitting from the perspective of the *sefirah* of might. Though the source of harsh judgment is ultimately in understanding, understanding is also the mother principle, whose womb is considered the source of great mercy (the word "womb" in Hebrew is from the root whose basic meaning is "mercy"). Thus, it is the mother principle that teaches acknowledgment (its final extension) how to thank God even for the negative by revealing the perspective of His mercy that is inherent in everything that comes to pass.

Indeed, the termination of the verse that the Rebbe quoted is "Your anger turns away from me, and You will comfort me." The act of comforting is explicitly linked by Isaiah to a person's mother: "Like a man whose mother will comfort him, so will I [God] comfort you..." (Ibid. 66:13).

A beautiful detail revealing that this was indeed the Rebbe's first Messianic awareness is found in the first two words of the verse "I will thank You, God (*Havayah*)..." ("אֲדַבֵּר הוֹי") which in Hebrew equals 57, the numerical value of the English word "now," when transliterated into Hebrew: הוֹי. The Rebbe spoke many times about the significance of this word in the cry, "Mashiach Now!" and its *gematria*, teaching us that even foreign words consecrated by the Jewish people in their prayers, become meaningful when written in Hebrew letters. More in depth, it is the power of acknowledgment in particular that makes it possible for us to experience the Mashiach here and now, in the present, as the letters of הוֹי become, when infused by the mother principle, the word הוֹה, meaning "the present."

As much as a *tzadik* like the Rebbe is considered to be a new soul, one that has never been in this world, he also carries the burden of all the troubles of all the souls who have been and are in the world. It is the *tzadik's* mother—the mother principle is also called "*knesset yisrael*," the source of all the Jewish souls—that teaches him to identify with all the hardships of those around him. It is also his mother that comforts him by revealing that the source of even the harshest judgments is full of mercy. In this sense, it was the Rebbetzin Chanah who gave the Rebbe the foundation of his life's mission—his first conscious longing toward the true and complete redemption with the coming of the Mashiach, who with the Almighty will comfort us and allow us to truly acknowledge God's infinite goodness in all that was, is, and will be.