



PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

LOWLINESS

This Sunday is the 19th of Kislev. 211 years ago on this day, the Alter Rebbe, the founder of Chabad Chassidut was released from prison and an imminent death sentence.

Celebrating his freedom, the Alter Rebbe wrote an open epistle to his chassidim wherein he explained that characteristic of Jewish nature is the quality of lowliness. Lowliness is unique to the Jewish people, whom that Torah describes with the words, “For you are the least of all nations,” meaning not only least in number, but that Jews use their characteristic lowliness to lessen their ego and feelings of self. The ability to lessen ourselves, to feel lowliness before God is part of our national inheritance, beginning with our father Abraham, the man of loving kindness, who said of himself, “I am but dust and ash.”

In the epistle, the Alter Rebbe explains the words of our patriarch Jacob appearing at the beginning of this week’s *parasha*, “I am less (worthy) because of all the acts of kindness and because of all the trustworthiness that You [God] have already shown me.” Let us quote the Alter Rebbe’s words:

“I am less worthy because of all the acts of kindness and because of all...” This means that with each and every act of kindness that God bestows upon an individual, that person’s spirit should become more lowly.

This is because kindness is [represented by] the right arm and [about the right arm, the verse says,] “His right arm embraces me...” meaning that it is the very state of being nearer to God than before. And, whomever is nearer to God, with ever exceeding uplifting and elevation, must be of even lowlier spirit, as it is written, “From afar, God has appeared to me.” And, as known, “All that is, before Him [specifically] is considered as nothing.” Hence, whoever is more “before Him” [i.e., closer to Him] is that much more as nothing, naught, and non-existent.

This is the considered the right aspect of holiness, the loving-kindness of Abraham who said of himself, “I am dust and ash.” This is also the trait of Jacob, because of which he found it necessary to

apologize for his fear of Esau and that the promises made by the Almighty to protect him, “I am with you...,” were insufficient. Because Jacob perceived himself to be very small (lacking) because of all the great kindness bestowed on him by the Almighty, as he says, “For with my staff...” all making him feel unworthy at all of being saved. And, as the sages explain, “[Jacob feared] lest his sins be a factor,” for it appeared to him that he had sinned.

Not so in the negative mirror image of Ishma’el, the symbol of the loving-kindness of the shell of impurity. There, the greater the kindness that is bestowed upon him the more his pride, his haughtiness, and his self-satisfaction grows.

Later in the epistle, the Alter Rebbe demands of his disciples to follow Jacob’s example and act with lowliness towards those who have not yet merited the light of Chassidut, and not to talk ill about them.

Chassidic teachings explain that the authentic lowliness is rooted in the *sefirah* of kingdom and is therefore natural to all Jews, for “all of the people of Israel are kings.” Even though externally kingdom and sovereignty require a king to elevate and magnify his status, at its root and inner essence, kingdom only thrives on a feeling of absolute lowliness and of “I have accomplished nothing.”

Jewish Unity

True unity and solidarity within the Jewish people also depends on lowliness. As explained in length in Chassidic teachings, the experience that Jews are inherently dependant on one another comes from a sense of lowliness.

However, interdependence and unity in this sense are irrelevant when it comes to other nations. By them, each individual is responsible only for his or her own self. This in spite of the fact that every nation has a spiritual minister, from which the people derive their national pride and with it a certain type of solidarity. The same is true at the family level. But, in truth, both their national and familial unity are based on self-interest—in the end

it is the self-interest of each individual to take part in a larger whole than to stand alone.

[Regarding the difference between the Jewish people and all other nations, it is related that when the Alter Rebbe was incarcerated he was interrogated with twenty-two questions. The final question, which ended the interrogation, was about what he had written at the end of the first chapter of the *Tanya*. Namely, that the animating soul in a Jew stems from the intermediate shell that lies between holiness and impurity and therefore the basic nature of a Jew also contains good. This, unlike the animating soul of the nations of the world, which emanates from the three impure shells of reality that have no good in them at all, and therefore all the good that they do is motivated by self-interest. The interrogators wanted to know what the Alter Rebbe's proof for this was. Up to this question, the Alter Rebbe had provided tasteful and satisfying responses. But, in response to this question he saw quietly amused with a smile on his face and offered no explanation. His interrogators accepted his amused silence as an answer to their question, and ended the interrogation.]

Indeed, this special type of unity that connects the Jews together is prominent in the terminology used to describe the collective soul of Israel, called "the Congregation of Israel" (כנסת ישראל). The Hebrew word for "congregation" (כנסת) also means self-imposed limitation (התכנסות), suggesting that in order to reveal our inherent unity, we must first as individuals come in touch with our natural feeling of lowliness, with our willingness to limit our ego and self-interest. By doing so we make room for the revelation of our true sense of responsibility and interdependence for and with every other Jew.

Our inherent lowliness is meant to apply specifically in our relationship with other Jews—i.e., within our people. But, this is not the case when dealing with other nations. There, our inherent lowliness fosters a regal and holy attitude that highlights our having been elevated and made responsible by the Almighty for bringing peace and goodness to all of humanity.

(Based upon *Malchut Yisra'el* vol. 1, pp. 325-8)

GOD LOVES TZADIKIM...

This Shabbat is the *yahrzeit* (day of passing) of Rebbe Baruch of Mezhibuzh, the Ba'al Shem Tov's grandson (he had a special relationship with the Alter Rebbe of Chabad, the Ba'al Shem Tov's spiritual grandson).

The great *tzadik*, Rebbe Shlomo of Karlin was killed by a Kosack at the age of 52. Rebbe Shlomo of Karlin had a young son named Moshe, who was quite young at the time of his death. Rebbe Baruch of Mezhibuzh met him and consoled him, saying, "If there was even another single Jew who was still in need of your father, the Almighty would not have taken him. But, the truth is that you are quite young and still need your father. Therefore, I want to tell you that you should not be consoled—for your sake, I maintain, that the Almighty should, seemingly, not have taken him. As long as you are not consoled, the Almighty will make it up to you, for you deserve it. Each time that you refuse to be consoled you will be elevated higher and higher; your father will accompany you and elevate you."

This story about Rebbe Baruch is a source-document in psychology. When children lose a parent at a young age, they continue to harbor (sometimes subconsciously) a certain resentment towards the parent for having left them. This can effect their entire life.

A psychologist will open the child to the possibility of resenting God instead of resenting the parent. We might think that the Chassidic psychologist, the real *mashpi'ah* would say that of course the child has to learn to forgive. But, here Rebbe Baruch teaches something completely different. The child should not learn to forgive, and as long as he does not forgive God or his parent for having left, he will be elevated spiritually.

(from the *farbrengen* of 24 Tamuz, 5767)

THE REDEMPTION GROWS NEARER...

The Lubavticher Rebbe's often quoted concept of "Living with Mashiach" is not limited to merely living in the new physical reality that Mashiach will bring to the world. Rather, the Mashiach's major innovation will be the "Torah of Mashiach" – as the sages describe it, "A new Torah will emanate from Me." Learning the Mashiach's Torah, this is the innermost aspect of connecting with him. Revealing these teachings is the role of the *Ra'aya Mehemna* (the Faithful Shepherd) of our generation.

(from *Be'ectah Acheeshenah*, p. 15)