



Rebbe Dovid of Lelov

“A Time to be Silent and a Time to Speak”

Rebbe Dovid Biderman of Lelov, the founder of the Lelov dynasty, was born in 5506 (1745) to a family that opposed Chassidut. Nonetheless, he was drawn to Chassidut from his youth. Rebbe Dovid was a disciple of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizansk and afterward, of the Seer of Lublin. He was known for his great love of the Jewish people, for not imparting words of Torah in public and for bringing Jews close to God (among them the Admor the doctor, Rebbe Chaim Dovid Bernhard). It was he who brought the Heilige Yid (Rabbi Yakov Yitzchak of Parshischa) to Chassidut and ultimately sealed their relationship with a marriage between their children. His other disciples included his son, Rebbe Moshe, Rebbe Itche (Yitzchak) of Vorky, Rebbe Yeshayah of Pordborzh and Rebbe Chanoch of Warsaw. Rebbe Dovid passed away on the 7th day of Shevat 5574 (1814) and was brought to rest in Lelov, Poland.

At the end of the shloshim (the 30 days of mourning) for Rebbe Dovid of Lelov, his son Rebbe Moshe – who eventually made aliyah to the land of Israel where he perpetuated the dynasty – and his disciple, Rebbe Itche (Yitzchak) of Vorky – journeyed to Rebbe Mordechai of Chernobyl. The two made their way to Rebbe Mordechai in order to consult with him as to which Rebbe they should adopt after the passing of Rebbe Dovid. Perhaps they even wanted to investigate whether Rebbe Mordechai, himself, should be their next mentor. Due to the distance between Chernobyl and Lelov, Rebbe Mordechai did not know Rebbe Moshe and Rebbe Yitzchak personally.

When the two entered Rebbe Mordechai's room, he began by telling them a story: Before my father, Rebbe Nachum of Chernobyl, passed away, I sat by his bed and cried profusely. My father asked me why I was crying so much. “As long as you are with me,” I answered, “you have taught me Torah, from the time I was a toddler. If you leave me, who will teach me?” My father replied, “Don't worry. Even after I will be in the next world, I will come to you and continue to

teach you." And so it was. My father comes to me regularly to teach me Torah. Recently, my father did not appear for thirty days. I was very worried. Perhaps I did something wrong. Why would my father stop coming to me after so many years? But this morning, my father came, thank God. "Where were you?" I asked him. "Why didn't you come for thirty days? You never stayed away this long...."

"Exactly thirty days ago," my father answered, "one of the great *tzaddikim* (pious people) who you do not know, Rebbe Dovid of Lelov, passed away. Because during his life in this world he never imparted words of Torah, in the Garden of Eden they decided to honor him for the entire thirty-day mourning period with the privilege of teaching Torah in the presence of all the *tzaddikim*. Thus, I was not able to come. Now that the thirty days are over, I have returned to you."

What do we learn from this story? There are *tzaddikim* who do not impart Torah in this world and there are *tzaddikim* (such as the Alter Rebbe of Chabad) who impart Torah with abundance. The latter are *tzaddikim* whose entire lives revolve around teaching Torah, such as Moses and the Mashiach, who will reveal a new dimension of the Torah. In this story, we discover that the *tzaddikim* who do not impart Torah are compensated, as it were, after they pass on, when they teach Torah in the Garden of Eden. Thus, it is not that they do not have Torah to teach. They do. But as far as public teaching of Torah, they are "hidden" *tzaddikim*. It is possible to be a hidden *tzaddik* in one area of life and a revealed *tzaddik* in another.

Times, eras, and lifetimes

This is connected to the secret of *chashmal*.¹ The sages explain that the word *chashmal* is the secret of, "at times they are silent and at times they speak," as is written in Ecclesiastes, "a time to be silent and a time to speak."² The literal intent of the 28 divisions of time listed in Ecclesiastes (a time to be silent, to speak, to cast away stones, to gather stones, etc.) refer to life in this world. There is a day or time in which we are called upon to be silent and there is a time for us to speak.

But the word Ecclesiastes uses for "time" (תַּיִם) can also mean, "an era." It can even refer to an entire lifetime, or incarnation. Thus Ecclesiastes is saying that there can be an entire lifetime in which the *tzaddik* comes to the world and is in an "era of silence" (in which he still does many good things). After he departs

¹ Ezekiel 1:4.

² Ecclesiastes 3:7

from the world, he enters an era in which he is called upon, “to speak.” The era to speak could be in the Garden of Eden, as in the story about Rebbe Dovid of Lelov, who was given the honor to speak there. However, it would seem that just thirty days in which be in “a time to speak” in the Garden of Eden is not enough to compensate for the silence of an entire lifetime. The tzaddik is then told, as we find in some stories from the Ba’al Shem Tov: “In your previous incarnation, you did not speak. You have much to say to the Jewish people, so return to this world again and in your next incarnation, speak with abundance.” Indeed, one of the explanations of contraction is that it is meant to increase the flow. For example, water that is held back by a dam, when it first bursts through the barrier, it flows with great strength.

“Truly God does all these twice or thrice to a man”³

From this, we learn that there are pairs of incarnations of a soul—one silent, one loquacious—corresponding to the secret of *chash-mal*: silence and speech. According to the Ba’al Shem Tov, the *mal* part of *chashmal* actually splits into two distinct stages, both called *mal*, which can be the source of some confusion. However, the first *mal* refers to a state of separation, following the etymology of *mal* as “circumcision” (מילה) and the second *mal* is the one that refers to sweetening or speech, following the etymology of *mal* as “word” (מלה). So the full process includes three stages, which the Ba’al Shem Tov usually referred to as submission-separation-sweetening (הכניעה הבדלה המתקנה). So, now we can speak of three incarnations for each tzaddik.

In his first incarnation, the *tzaddik* is silent. He is completely concealed. Rebbe Dovid of Lelov was a concealed *tzaddik* only in the realm of publicly imparting Torah, but there are hidden *tzaddikim* who are completely silent and totally unknown. In his second incarnation, the *tzaddik* appears as the first *mal* related to circumcision, apparently to face a trial that has to do with rectified sexual conduct. In his third incarnation, the *mal* related to speech comes to the fore. Since the *tzaddik* has already been silent, and he has already withstood various trials, he is now granted the freedom to speak and pour forth an endless stream of the sweet and living waters of Torah into the world.

Three personas

The intermediary stage of *mal* (as in seaparation or circumcision) is best personified by Joseph, who had to withstand the most difficult trials related to his identity while in Egypt, particularly when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce

³. Job 33:29. This verse was cited by the Arizal as one of the main sources for his teachings on incarnation.

him.⁴ Joseph passes all his tests with flying colors, retaining his holy identity as a Jew amidst the decrepit spiritual state of Egypt.

The archetypal silent *tzaddik* is personified in Chassidic teachings with Isaac (Joseph's grandfather, who was the only one who knew that Joseph was still alive and in Egypt). Whereas Abraham journeyed and publicized faith in One God throughout the world, Isaac stayed at home, effecting Divine-spiritual unifications and digging wells. By digging those wells, he performed an act that is described in Chassidut as "raising feminine waters" (הַעֲלֵא אֶת מַיֵּי נְוִקְבֵּיין), awakening people to return to God. Isaac brought people back to God, but we do not hear many words of Torah from him.

Joseph and David are very different archetypal souls. However, these archetypes complement one another, especially in the figures of Mashiach the son of Joseph and Mashiach the son of David. Joseph's self sacrifice to preserve his identity and purity⁵ *mal* reappears as David's sweet Psalms full of God's praises. As Joseph's complement, David was not required to withstand a trial similar to Joseph's. Instead, David's challenge was to repent and return to God. The King Mashiach, who will reveal a new dimension of the Torah is also a returnee to God.

Fittingly, the sum of the numerical values of these three souls, Isaac (יִצְחָק), Joseph (יֹסֵף), and David (דָּוִד) exactly equal *chashmal* (חֲשָׁמַל)!

4. Sexuality is associated in Chassidut with identity. This was explained by the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe as the reason why improper sexual conduct, even the type that is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, is so destructive. It chips away at our fidelity to our very selves and causes havoc in our ability to pursue our mission in life, which is our true spiritual identity.

5. All Jewish leaders identified as exemplifying Mashiach, the son of Joseph dedicated their lives to strengthening the Jewish people's identity as Jews by encouraging Torah learning and the performance of God's commandments. Following the example of Joseph the *tzaddik* who did the same for the children of Israel that were in exile in Egypt, they are all called *tzaddikim*.