חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

CHABAD · TORAH OHR, CHAYEI SARA

A simple deed outranks even the World to Come's joys

Torah Ohr

Although the Baraita appears to descend further than the Mishnah in the chain of transmission—even into the "darkness" of false arguments and dialectical give-and-take—it is actually higher, since "the end of the deed arises first in thought"; the seemingly lesser, detailed action (like the plain deed done without felt pleasure or intellectual grasp) surpasses even the lofty pleasures of the World to Come, which are only an achorayim (indirect, "back-facing" reflection) of true closeness to God. Yitzchak's going out "to converse in the field toward evening" alludes to this process: through yirah (fear of God), one enters into the darkness of halachic debate (the Talmud Bavli) specifically in order to clear it away, transforming that darkness into the light of true halachic clarity (libun). AI SUMMARY

Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field, etc. To explain this: there is Mishnah and Baraita. Baraita explains the Mishnah, for the Mishnah is the general rule and the Baraita is the particular detail of the Mishnah, and the general rule includes only what is in the particular detail. At first glance, the Baraita would seem to be lower than the Mishnah, since it has descended further downward in a greater chain of transmission, but the truth is that the Baraita is actually higher, for "the end of the act is first in thought." For the Torah descended downward even into a matter of falsehood, such as this one who says, "I found it," etc.

According to how it appears, it is a very great descent downward, and nevertheless it is high, for "the end of the deed" [is first in thought], etc. This is like the parable of the tube, where the first thing to enter is the last thing to leave—like man, who is the last of all created beings, yet he is elevated above them all, and everything was created for his sake. Therefore the entire world is found within a single human being, to teach that everything was created for his sake, "for this is the whole of man."

Here is the meaning of what our Sages, of blessed memory, said: "Better one hour..." etc. For regarding the World to Come, "the tzaddikim (righteous ones) sit..." etc., this is only the aspect of achorayim (the 'back,' i.e., a lesser, indirect perception), as it says, "And you shall see My back..." etc. The pleasure that a person attains through his service is the aspect of achorayim (back), and the panim (face, i.e., the fullest, direct perception) is not possible to attain, for "no man shall see Me and live."

And similarly, even the revelation in Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden) is only an aspect of ziv (radiance) and reflected illumination alone, and therefore "better one hour of teshuvah (repentance) and good deeds in this world than all the life of the World to Come" — for this refers to the actual deed itself, without pleasure and without intellect, as compared to all the life of the World to Come, for "the end of the deed arises in thought first." And this is also the matter of Mishnah and Baraita — that the Mishnah is a general rule, such as "four tzitzit (ritual fringes) are indispensable," and likewise a sukkah (booth) that is too high, and so on.

One can find a reason for this, similar to the matter of techelet (sky-blue dye), which resembles the sea, etc., and regarding sukkah there is a reason, "so that your generations may know," up to twenty amos, etc. But the beraita serves to explain the mishnah in all its minutiae and details, such as the sukkah of genav"ch and rakva"sh (various disqualified materials), for which there is no reason for the matter, and it appears by sense that this is above sechel (intellect) and reason.

This is the meaning of "there is nothing in the general rule except what is in the specific"—that the mishnah's general rule contains nothing more than what is in the specific detail of the beraita, and the fact that its reason was not revealed is because it is higher, for the ta'amei hamitzvos (reasons of the commandments) have not been revealed, and in the future, with God's help, they will be revealed.

This is the meaning of "Rabbi Shimon darshens the reasons of verses"—that he expounded that what is stated in the verse as the reason for a matter is not the essential point; rather, there is a reason for this that is higher, above the reason.

It follows that in a mitzvah where one does not grasp a reason, it is higher, and that which one grasps as reason and pleasure is only the aspect of achorayim (the "backside," i.e., a lower, external aspect), and not as the world supposes, that the essential thing is the heart, which grasps pleasure and serves with enthusiasm.

This is not so; the truth is that the essential thing is the action, without pleasure, and the heart is nothing but an aid, the aspect of gadfin (wings).

Now, Mishnah is called "ir" (city), and Beraita has the aspect of "sadeh" (field), in the sense of "bar" (open space) outside the city. At first glance, the city would seem to be the main thing, since people dwell in it. But let us consider: who is it that sustains them? It is the field outside the city, from which the grain is brought in. So too, the Beraita sustains the Mishnah and explains the halachah (law) in greater detail, showing specifically how to act — for the Tannaim (Mishnaic sages), without whom the world could not exist, are preserved through the Mishnah.

This is the meaning of "Vayetze Yitzchak lasuach basadeh" ("And Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field"). "Lasuach" is the language of speech and conversation (sichah), and also the language of bowing down low, as in "vesach rum anashim" ("and the loftiness of man shall be bowed down"), and similarly as it is explained, "ka'asher yifaros hasocheh lisechot" ("as a swimmer spreads out his hands to swim") (Isaiah 25) — (and see what is written on this regarding the verse "tivneh u'sechonen ir Sichon," etc., see there) — "basadeh" ("in the field") is the language of "bar" (open, outside the city).

"And towards evening" (lifnot erev) means to clear away (lefanot) the evening and the darkness. For behold, the Torah unfolded itself into darkness, as it is said, "bamachshakim hoshivani" ("He has made me dwell in darkness") — this refers to the Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), which unfolded downward, even into false argumentation. And why is this so? In order to clear away the evening and the darkness, so that there should be light, as it is said, "le'et erev yihyeh or" ("at evening time there shall be light").

This is like the parable of one who wishes to clear out some place: he must enter into it in order to clear it out, but not in order to remain within it. So too, the fact that the Torah unfolded and clothed itself in the darkness of false arguments is in order to clear away the darkness — to turn darkness into light (lehafocha chashocha lenehora). Likewise, engagement in Torah study serves to push away the darkness and the difficulties that conceal the true understanding of the law in its full truth, and to find the truth — the revelation of the supernal will, blessed be He.

As is written regarding the verse "vehamaskilim yazhiru" ("and the wise shall shine"), etc., see there.

This is the meaning of "And Yitzchak went out to converse (lasuach)." For in order to turn away the evening and the darkness, and to rectify it, this is accomplished through Yitzchak, who represents the aspect of pachad (fear) and yirat Hashem (fear of God), as it is said, "If there is no yirah (fear), there is no chochmah (wisdom)," etc. (See also Zohar, Bereishit, 21a.)

This is also the meaning of one who says, "I have nothing but Torah"—even Torah he does not truly have, and he remains in darkness. But in truth it is written, "He made darkness His concealment (seter)," for even though it is darkness, nevertheless it is His concealment. This is the meaning of "turning away the evening and the darkness," and "toward evening there shall be light"—meaning the clarification (libun) of the halachah (Jewish law). And this is also the explanation of "Blessed is He in Torah." (And see on the verse "The voice of my beloved," and on the verse "There are sixty, the queens [malachot].")

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)