חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

SHINOVA · MAREH YECHEZKEL ON TORAH, TOLDOT

How can we humble ourselves and still stand tall in prayer?

Mareh Yechezkel

The teaching builds on the Sefer Yetzirah's account of sleep as one of the twelve governing forces, and on the morning prayer's pairing of self-abasement with exalted praise. Its central claim is that worldly sayings and natural images, such as coals kept alive under ashes, teach how to serve G-d, so that a person who humbles himself in the dust can kindle the fire of devotion that lies hidden within him, as Avraham Avinu did when he called himself "dust and ashes" before speaking to G-d. AI SUMMARY

"And the servants of Yitzchak dug in the valley," etc. "And the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled," etc. "The water is ours," etc. "And they quarreled over that one also. And he moved from there," etc. "And he called its name Rechovot," etc. "And he went up from there to Be'er Sheva." The difficulties in these verses are many. First, what is the point of these wells, and what does the story and the giving of the names come to teach us? Also, why does it say of the first well that they quarreled and said, "The water is ours," whereas of the second it says only that they quarreled, without more? Further, why did they not quarrel over the third as well? And further, after all the disputes he left the wells and went from there to Be'er Sheva, so that he seems to have labored in vain.

But the matter, in my humble opinion, is this. One of the twelve leaders is sleep, as is written in Sefer Yetzirah [chapter 5, mishnah 9]: "He made the letter Samech reign over sleep," etc., "and He formed with them the rainbow in the world, Kislev in the year, and the stomach in the soul," etc. In order to understand the connection and the relevance of these five things, we shall first raise a difficulty about what was instituted to be said in the morning prayer: "A person should always," etc., "and rise early and say: Master of all worlds," etc., "Not because of our righteousness," etc., "What are we," etc., "But we are Your people," etc., "for out of Your love," etc. We need to understand this. First we lower ourselves to the dust, likened to beasts, and then immediately, after hardly a moment, we raise ourselves on high, head held in exceeding greatness. And why must this be said right away in the morning, upon rising?

But the matter is the well-known one, concerning what we were promised: "And your ears shall hear a word behind you," etc. ("saying, This is the way, walk in it," Isaiah 30:21). From all the words in the world that we hear, and all the deeds of people that we see, we can take and learn extra wisdom and counsel for serving G-d, for He created everything for His glory. For this reason Chazal (our Sages) saw fit in the Gemara to explain a number of worldly matters, such as "Whence is this saying that people say," and the like.

We too shall say: it is common on people's lips that whoever needs fire must search for it in the ashes. And in truth it is so by nature: when people want the coals not to go out, they cover them with ashes, and afterward they uncover them, and the coals are still smoldering. So too it is with heavenly matters. And so Avraham Avinu, alav hashalom (peace be upon him), said: "Behold now, I have undertaken to speak

to my Lord, and I am dust and ashes." He needed fire, so he searched for it in the ashes and covered himself with ashes.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)

