חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

CHABAD · TORAH OHR, VAYERA

Why God goes down to see rather than hear

Torah Ohr

The Torah Ohr explains God's words "I will go down now and see" (Bereshit 18:21) through the Kabbalistic structure of the ten sefirot, in which chesed belongs to the right line and is "long," extending to rich and poor alike. Drawing on Rashi's reading that this teaches judges to rule in capital cases only on the basis of seeing, the author connects sight with the aspect of chochmah and chesed, and hearing with binah and the left line, so that God's "descent" to see the outcry expresses the merciful, far-reaching aspect rather than the severe one. AI SUMMARY

Now Rashi explains in the Chumash (the Five Books of Moshe), on the words "I will go down now," that this teaches judges not to rule in capital cases except on the basis of seeing. The matter is as stated in Tikkunei Zohar: "And these ten sefirot (divine attributes) go in their order: one long, one short, and one intermediate." That is, the ten sefirot divide into three lines. The right line, chochmah (wisdom), chesed (lovingkindness), and netzach (victory, endurance), is called "long," because chesed extends and spreads further. Therefore acts of kindness (gemilut chasadim) are done for both poor and rich. Thus chesed spreads further than mercy, since toward the rich there is no pity, only toward the poor. The left line, binah (understanding), gevurah (strength, severity), and hod (splendor), is called "short," because it extends only to one who is especially worthy. The middle line is called "intermediate," because it has mercy on one who is deserving of pity.

Now there is seeing and there is hearing. Seeing is drawn from the aspect of chochmah, the right line, and hearing from binah, the left line, as is known from the matter of Reuven and Shimon. Therefore seeing is from above to below, while hearing is from below to above, for the letters rise and enter the ear of the one who hears. For this reason, too, seeing descends lower than hearing, since one sees a physical thing, whereas hearing is only voice and speech.

For seeing comes from the aspect of the "long" one, and as is known, the yesod (foundation) of Abba is long. This is the meaning of "I will go down now and see whether, according to its outcry that has come..." The "outcry that has come" is like the aspect of hearing, which is from binah, and therefore it "has come" from below to above, and it is the aspect of the left line. But "I will go down now and see" is in the aspect of seeing, which is the aspect of chasadim.

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