

This week I'm going beyond my intellectual comfort zone and making an attempt at presenting Chassidic exegesis, specifically the opening section R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev's Kedushat Levi to Parashat Terumah. My thanks are due to Rabbi Dr. Nechemiah Polen for reviving my interest in this work many years after an unfortunate college encounter. This particular section can, I hope, be made comprehensible without extensive kabbalistic commentary, which I would in any case be unqualified to provide.

What I do want to discuss at some length is the question of where Chassidic interpretation falls on the exegesis/eisegesis (reading out of/reading into) axis. Hermeneutic claims can be evaluated on that axis for both correspondence and coherence, in other words

- a) Given my assumptions about the text, does this interpretation provide a plausible reading? (correspondence)
- b) Given the assumptions about the text necessary to produce this interpretation, can the text as a whole be plausibly explained? (coherence)

So for example, if I am convinced that the text of Torah was fully comprehensible to its original audience, and that its original audience was unfamiliar with Aristotelian metaphysics, no Aristotelian reading can satisfy the correspondence criterion. Even if a medieval philosopher explains every instance of the number four in Torah as a reference to the elements or humors, and every instance of the number five as a reference to the senses, his understanding of the war between the four kings and the five kings in Genesis will still strike me as pure eisegesis.

**However**, it is important to recognize that he **intended** it as exegesis and that his position may be perfectly defensible or even compelling given no data other than the text.

On the other hand, even if I accept Freudian symbolism as a theoretically plausible element of Biblical interpretation, Biblical cigars would have to be consistently understandable as phallic symbols for me to accept them as phallic symbols in one particular context. Furthermore, reading under any set of assumptions has to account for the specific semantics and syntactic data of the text.

As opposed to a pure translation, I will try to offer an integrated translation/commentary this week that I hope will enable you to consider Chassidic interpretation in light of the above analysis, possibly more empathetically than heretofore. Discussion of elements of the content would render this piece even more overlong, and so will have to be deferred.

What are some assumptions behind at least this piece of Chassidic exegesis?

1. A classic Chassidic story tells why the rebbe Reb Zusya never learned Torah beyond the first word of Mishnah; he would try to read "Mei'eimatai" but start trembling with religious awe after saying "Me'eima" and be unable to continue. This mode of reading follows the essential insight of midrash (later generalized by the Deconstructionists – I hope to discuss the relationship and differences in a subsequent installment) that all words naturally call to the human mind all other words that sound alike, and accepts the consequent midrashic claim that as part of its perfection a Divine text must include all those "mishearings" in its meaning (the literary Reb Zusya extends this principle to Mishnah, which I believe is why the story is at least partly satire)..

So for a chassid any use of the combination *resh mem* must allude to *romemut*, exaltation, particularly as

2. All Biblical texts must have as their subtext the mental and physical means by which human beings can achieve *devekut* with Divinity. Accordingly, that one should be continually alert to terms that allude to intention or action. In this text, the hanging *taasu* at the unit's end, like the *laasot* in Genesis 1:3, especially combined with the earlier *v'asu*, must be significant.

Furthermore, *li* is translated by Rashi as "*lishmi*", and

3. Rashi's comments are a given part of the text.

With those in mind, I will offer a preliminary translation of the Biblical text as I believe R. Levi saw it before he began consciously making interpretive choices, and then a translation of his commentary.

**Shabbat Shalom**

## Verse

“Speak to the Children of Israel, and they will take for My sake exaltation (*terumah*) – from every man whose heart volunteers him, you will take My exaltation (*terumah*). And this is the exaltation (*terumah*) which you will take from them: gold, silver, and copper ...

and they will have made (*asu*) for Me a sanctum (*mikdash*), and I will InDwell (*v'shokhanti*) among them.

Like all that I am showing you – the model of the DwellingPlace (*mishkani*), and the model of all its utensils.

And so you will make (*taasu*).

## Interpretation

Every human being is obligated to serve the Creator Who is Blessed in deed and in thought,

because via holy intent and thought he raises the InDwelling (*shekhinah*) from the dust, whereas action is for the sake of exalting the human being and causing good for himself.

This resolves the verse

“every human being whose heart volunteers him”,

which alludes to thought,

via this “you will take My *exaltation*”,

meaning that through this (thought) the InDwelling will be exalted (as if that were possible),

“but this is the *exaltation* which you will take from them”,

meaning that the exaltation which a person takes for himself is that which comes via deeds,

namely “gold, silver, and copper”,

meaning actions.

Investigate and you will find this easy.

(ADK – Possibly he intends to parse the verse as follows: “But the exaltation which *you* will take (for yourselves) – from them (must come) gold, silver, and copper”. But even that attempt does not account for the shift from “you will take” to “from them” *when* the antecedent of both pronouns is the same.)

## Alternative Interpretation

We find here that Hashem said to Mosheh “Speak to the Children of Israel”

for the first time after the giving of the Torah. (Why?)

The Rabbis famously said “Any man whom Resh Lakish spends time with, they would do business with him without witnesses”.

The significance of this is that the *tzaddik* guards very carefully his speech with the commons, because when a person speaks with common people they can interrupt his *devekut* with Hashem Who Will be Blessed.

So the *tzaddik* is authorized to speak to such a person only if this (common) person can be exalted via the speech of the *tzaddik*, when on the contrary via (the *tzaddik's*) speaking (to the common person) while in *devekut* with Hashem he makes an impression and brings the other as well in toward holiness.

This is the significance here, for Resh Lakish was a *tzaddik* who was very careful not to speak with any person except those whom he could exalt toward holiness.

Therefore certainly anyone he spent time with was certainly straightforward and worthy, and they could do business with him without witnesses.

So when (the Children of Israel) sinned via the Calf, and were interrupted in their holiness and reacquired their spiritual miasma, Mosheh was afraid to speak with them, and consequently the command from Hashem Who Will be Blessed came to him “Speak to the Children of Israel”,

meaning because they are the offspring of Israel, the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov whom your speaking to will certainly raise up and exalt them toward holiness, and they will cleave (yidbiku) to Me for My sake, therefore you must speak with them.

This is easy to understand.

(ADK – So the correct translation is “Speak to the children of Israel, and *as a result* they will be exalted toward Me for My Sake”.)

...

“And so you will make” –

And Rashi explained “for all generations”.

Tosafot challenge: But the altar made by Mosheh was not the same dimensions as the altar of Shlomoh? And Ramban challenged similarly.

But according to our previous words this is fine, and the intent of “and so you will make” is ...

The words of Chazal are known that “no two prophets prophesy in one style”, rather each one according to his own distinction,

and in the way that he serves G-d, in that very distinction the spirit of prophecy appears to him ...

meaning that in every generation which seeks to build a Beit HaMikdash, the making must be in accordance with the model of the prophecy as it is perceived then, that is how the form of the sanctum and the utensils must be,

and Shlomoh, in accordance with his service and the spirit of prophecy that he achieved, that is how he made the form.

So the challenge of Ramban is no challenge at all, that the altar was not similar ...

On the contrary, the command was thus, that it should not always be made in the same form, rather in accordance with the basking in prophecy, so will the model of the utensils be formed below.

A further resolution is that “and so you will make” refers back to “all that I am showing you”,

Meaning that just as you (Mosheh) are not authorized to diverge, but rather must make (the Mishkan and utensils) just as I am showing you, so too you (the Children of Israel) must do for all generations just as I show via the prophets who will be in that generation.

This is easy to understand.

דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה  
מאת על איש אשר ידבנו לבו תקחו את תרומתי  
וזאת התרומה אשר תקחו מאתם: זהב וכסף ונחושת . . .  
ועשו לי מקדש  
ושכנתי בתוכם  
ככל אשר אני מראב אותך בהר את תבנית המשכן ואת תבנית כל כליו  
וכן תעשו

דהנה כל אדם מחויב לעבוד את הבורא ב"ה במעשה ובמחשבה  
שע"י הכוונה והמחשבה קדושה אזי בזה מקים לשכינתא מעפרא  
והמעשה הוא בכדי שיתרומם האדם ולהטיב לעצמו  
ובזה מיושב הכתוב:  
"כל איש אשר ידבנו לבו",  
דהוא מרומז על המחשבה,  
ע"י זה "תקחו את תרומתי",  
רוצה לומר: שבזה יתרומם השכינה כביכול,  
"וזאת התרומה אשר תקחו מאתם",  
רצה לומר: זה ההתרוממות אשר האדם לוקח לעצמו, זה הוא הא על ידי מעשה,  
דהוא "זהב וכסף ונחושת",  
רצה לומר על ידי העובדא,  
ודו"ק.

או יש לומר:  
דהנה כאן מצינו שאמר ה' אל משה "דבר אל בני ישראל",  
וזה הוא פעם ראשון אחר מתן תורה שנכתב "דבר אל בני ישראל",  
אך יש לומר דידוע דאמרו רבותינו: "בהדי מאן דריש לקיש משתעי הוי יהבין ליה עסקא בלא סהדי",  
והענין הוא דהצדיק שומר מאד את דיבורו שלו עם המון עם, משום כשאדם מדבר עם בני אדם המונים יכולין  
להפסיק אותו מדביקות הש",  
זולת אם זה האדם יכול להתרומם על ידי דיבור הצדיק, אז רשאי הצדיק לדבר עמו, כי אדרבה – על ידי  
דיבורו בדביקות ה' עושה רושם בדיבורו ויכניס אותו כ"כ אל הקדושה,  
כן הוא הענין, דריש לקיש היה צדיק גדוך והיה שומר מאד דיבורו שלא לדבר עם בני אדם כלל - זולת עם זה  
האדם אשר היה יכול לרומם אותו אל הקדושה,

אז כד הוה משתעי בהדיה בוודאי אותו האיש היה ישר וכשר, חזה יהבים ליה עסקא בלא סהדי.  
והנה כשחטאו בעגל ונפסקו מקדושתם, שחזרו לזוהמתן, אז היה משה מתיירא לדבר עמהם,  
לזה בא הצווי מאת הש"י אליו "דבר אל בני ישראל",  
רצה לומר שהם זרע ישראל בני אברהם יצחק וישראל, אשר בדברך עמהם בוודאי תגביה ותרומם  
אותם אל הקדושה וידבקו לי לשמי, ע"כ דבר אתה עמהם,  
וק"ל.

...  
"וכן תעשו" –

ופירש רש"י "וכן תעשו לדורות".

ומקשה התוספות: הלא הלא היה שוה מזבח שעשה משה למזבח שעשה שלמה?! וכן הקשה הרמב"ן.

אך לפי דברינו הנ"ל ניחא, דכוונת הכתוב "וכן תעשו" . . .

וידוע דברי חז"ל ד"אין שני נביאים מתנבאים בסיגנון א", רק כל אחד לפי בחינתו,

וכפי שעובד השם, באותו הבחינה עצמה נראה אליו רוח הנבואה . . .

רצה לומר: בכל דור ודור כשתרצה לבנות בית המקדש יהיה עש"י כתבנית הנבואה אשר ישיג אז, כך

יעשה הציור של המקדש והכלים,

ושלמה כפי עבודתו ורוח נבואתו אשר השיג כך היה עושה הציור,

ולא קשה כלל קושית הרמב"ן . . .

דאדרבה כך היה הצווי, שלא יעשה תמיד על ציור אחד, רק כפי השראת הנבואה כך יהיה מצויר

למטה תבנית הכלים.

ועוד נראה לתרץ כי "כן תעשו" חוזר על "כל אשר אני מראה",

כמו שאתה אינך רשאי לשנות, רק לעשות כאשר אני מראה אותך, כן תעשו לדורות כאשר אני מראה

על פי הנביאים אשר יהיה באותו הדור,

וק"ל.