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Divine Speech and The Unity of G-d

In Lesson three of the course, we encountered the idea of Divine speech: G-d's word. There we see some glimmer of the underlying theory—according to the rational-mystic Hassidic philosophy of Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe—that surrounds and explains the very power speech, particularly G-d's speech. In the Tanya, Likutei Amarim, Shneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe, explains that the essence of speech is its ability to reveal that which was previously hidden. In man's speech we notice, however, that once a word is uttered by man it becomes a separate, independent entity. With G-d this cannot be so. Instead we find that "He and His causations are One" so that G-d's word itself, though seemingly escaping from his mouth, nevertheless is encompassed and permeated by G-d himself, being only an extension of G-d and thus nothing other than Him. Indeed from the consideration of speech we arrive at the very essence of G-d's Unity itself. And by explaining this concept, we may finally understand what the power of Divine speech is, a power that wrought an entire universe and continues to facilitate its very existence.

Everyday during the Shacharis, or morning, prayer service, Jews state that "You are He who was before the world was created, and You are He who is since the world was created." The meaning of this verse can be understood in the context of a simple statement from Malachi, "I, the L-rd, have not changed." We thus see that G-d was unaffected by creation, as amazing as that seems. And indeed one might expect that the creation of a myriad of beings from inanimate rocks to animals and humans and even

angels might create something new. But, no instead we see that just as G-d was lone before created, so too is he alone now. That is, all creation is nothing beside Him, as though nonexistent. The only force sustaining beings of the all of the upper and lower worlds, creating them from nothing is the very Word of G-d, as we saw in class, Pirkei Avot states that “The world was created with Ten Utterances.” And from these ten utterances every single being in this world of physicality and baseness as well as those of the higher worlds of Yetzirah and Beriah each derives its existence from those Ten Utterances. At first this may seem like a ridiculous proposition, but to fully understand the answer to this question we must first understand the very mechanism of speech.

When man utters one word, that word is only one of an infinite number of words that the faculty of speech can produce and is thus is of no value when compared to the very faculty that can produce speech. And therefore this word is of certainly no value when compared to the faculty of speech which is the soul’s most direct means of expression and thus infinitely more so when compared with the essence of the soul itself. However we must understand how such a word comes to be. Before the word is clothes in the garment of one’s speech, it is formed of letters while still man’s thought. And before this lays the word’s source, still nestled deeply in realm of the soul’s intellect, which firsts causes the man to be conscious of the idea the word represents. Thus we see that the word until the very moment of its utterance, even while it is in a state of letters and thus definition, is as if nothing compared to its source. It is only that once uttered it becomes a separate being from the faculty that spoke it and thus takes on a true existence as opposed to its previous inexistence while still enveloped in the garments of the soul, namely thought, speech, and action.

G-d's words however cannot be a separate entity, as "no place is devoid of Him," but instead serve to reveal what was once hidden and concealed in thoughts. It is this similarity with the speech of man that the emergence of the life-force of the Ein Sof, G-d's infinite light, into revelation in order to create is called speech. Concerning the other characteristic of man's speech noted above, Divine speech too seems to produce separate entities but only to the created being it. In reality we know that the created being must be nothing but Him. So how is then that creation and its causations, as all creation came from the Ten Utterances, can view itself as truly existence while in truth it is naught before Him, and He is everywhere. The Alter Rebbe explains that only through many intense contractions which conceal G-d's presence, may creation appear as if it exists and not be nullified by being encompassed in G-dliness.

The contractions the Alter Rebbe refers to in the Tanya are directly related to Divine speech and specifically the Ten Utterances, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters," and the nine other like it. Indeed after the contraction of G-d created force into the very letters of the Ten Utterances, creation is brought about by a further descent of G-d's life-force into the created being by means of combinations and transpositions of the letters occurring in the Ten Utterances. The Baal Shem Tov himself explain this concept more clearly in reference to the verse from Psalms: "Forever, O G-d, Your word stands firm in the heavens." He explains that the very letters and words with which G-d uttered "Let there be a firmament ..." stand firmly within the firmament and clothed within it continually providing the firmament with the force it needs to exist. The Alter Rebbe explains that were the creative letters nourishing the firmament to depart it would return to nothingness as it was before the utterance that brought it in existence in the first

place, and furthermore this is true of all created beings. Sefer Yetzirah, one of the earliest works of Kabbalah, teaches that though individual creations may not have been specifically mentioned in the Ten Utterances, nevertheless the word representing them receives its vitality by combinations and transpositions of the letters found in those utterances. The relative concealment or revelation of the Ein Sof light is commensurate with the degree of combinations, substitutions, and transpositions the letters of the utterances must endure to reach the level of the created being. Indeed the revelation contained the Ten Utterances was so strong that it had to be diluted and condensed until it could be contained in some being. It is thus that the most inanimate object has a spark of G-dliness as explain in Lesson 3, yet the degree of operations undergone from the first utterances is so great and those operations so numerous that the inanimate object does not show signs of life or growth. Thus the name by which the creation is called in Hebrew, the Holy Tongue, is a vessel for the life-force that continually sustains the creation.

Indeed a point stressed by the Baal Shem Tov is that everyday man must approach life as if it were created anew each morning. More than this is implied, however. In fact, the Alter Rebbe explains that creation truly is renewed every moment and that this is necessary for continued existence of all of G-d's creations. He explains that when man creates something he is merely molding, drawing out existing *in potential*, that is existence whose possibility existed within the very object. A man takes a crucible of silver and turns it into a candelabrum, or a blacksmith takes iron and forges a sword. Creation *ex-nihilo*, as it were, is something entirely different and novel. Where there was nothingness (in actually everythingness as G-d fills and permeates all places, but let us forego this comfortable use of language) G-d forged something finite, something that did

not exist previously. The Alter Rebbe brings the lucid example of the splitting of the Red Sea. In this biblical episode, G-d drove back the sea with a mighty east wind, forcing the water to stand upright. Because it is water's nature to flow from a high place to a low place, it requires energy to cause it to adapt to a state other than its natural one, whereas a stone wall, say, remains erect without the assistance of outside forces. Now changing the nature of the Sea of Reeds so that it stands upright required continuous wind, for if the wind were to stand for one moment, the water would come crashing down. In this case G-d simply changed the nature of something so that this is creation out of something, namely a change in states of the sea, and we see in this far simpler case that constant creative force is required to maintain that state. All the more so then, in the case of creation from nothing. Were G-d's creative force to be withheld for but one moment all of creation would revert to nothingness.

We return then to the question of how existence is not nullified out of existence by G-d's infinite omnipresence. The Alter Rebbe explains from the verse in Psalms, "For a sun and a shield is Havayah Elokim," that *Havayah* denotes that which brings everything into existence out of nothing as the from the root *hoveh* meaning to bring into being. Moreover the initial yud of this name of G-d shows that the action of creation *ex-nihilo* takes place continuously. The Divine name *Elokim* however denotes restriction and contraction. It is the shield to the sun of *Havayah*, meaning that just as the sun radiates light from its core that is too strong to be absorbed without nullifying the viewer in white light and thus needs a shield to protect the viewer so do the emanations from the creative aspect of G-d need something to limit and contract them so that finite existence is sustainable. These two attributes of G-d, Chesed or kindness represented by the name

Havayah and Gevurah or restriction represented by *Elokim*, are both necessary for existence. Moreover, it is through the contractions caused by Gevurah that beings can view themselves as something apart from their creator. Indeed the restricting force and the contractions are called “vessels” and the emanations from *Havayah* “light” because a vessel covers and conceals that which is within it, just as the contractions conceal the essence of each created being.

It is these vessels that are the letters of the Ten Utterances which receive the breath of His mouth in order to give rise to each specific creation in accordance with the degree of transpositions and substitutions of the vessels. Nevertheless, in a world higher than the higher worlds both these aspects, Chesed and Gevurah, are included within each other and indeed are one so that it is still true that from G-d’s perspective all the world is as nothing before Him. He is the singular and wholly unified creator. And it is through the Divine power of speech, the very simple Ten Utterance of Genesis, that all creation is brought into being.