**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Rabbinic Tales: In the Talmud and in Chasidut**

**By Rav Dr. Yonatan Feintuch**

Shiur #53: Epilogue to Rabbinic Tales Series

The previous *shiur*, about dreams and sleep in Rabbinic narratives and in Chasidic stories, concludes this series of *shiurim*. There is much that remains for some other time: both Rabbinic and Chasidic sources hold an almost infinite wealth of stories, and this series, over the past two years, has touched on just a very few of them.

As I wrote in the introduction to the series, what I attempted to do here was to create a dialogue between the narratives recounted by *Chazal* and the *sugyot* in which they are integrated, on one hand, and the stories and teachings of the Chasidic masters, on the other. This dialogue would seem almost self-evident, considering that these are two points in Jewish time, on the axis that is the development of the Oral Law, where stories were awarded a prominent place in religious literature. *Chazal* and the Chasidic masters, who held stories in such esteem, seem to have engaged in similar contemplation of the points of contact between Torah and the world, existence, man, and life. Of course, each generation, and each *beit midrash*, expressed things differently, in keeping with its particular time and place. The stories relate to all of this in an unmediated way, creating a living dialogue between the *beit midrash* and the profound Torah teachings that arise within its walls (be they physical or virtual walls) and the world, nature, and the human psyche. This dialogue expresses a world view which is encapsulated in *Chasidut* with the phrases “The entire world is filled with His glory” and “There is no place that is devoid of Him” – a deep sense of God’s presence in every location, every phenomenon, and every creation. It is possible to encounter this Divinity, which is sometimes known as the *Shekhina*, in different ways in different places – both within man, in his most inward thoughts, and outside of him, in the animal world, the plant world, the inanimate world, and in every place that stories touch. Thus, a circle of feedback (a “running and returning”) is also created between the *beit midrash* and the world outside of it.

*Chazal* do not express themselves in these words, but I believe that the important place that they award to stories in general in their teachings, testifies to their thinking in this direction. These points in common seemed to me a good basis for dialogue between sources representing the two genres – obviously, taking into account the development of ideas in the Torah over time, and the emergence of new conceptual language that did not exist in previous generations. Sometimes these developments merely offer new words for ideas that *Chazal* expressed in their writings; at other times, the ideas and concepts themselves are new or take new and different directions. All this is part of the ongoing discourse of the Oral Law, which is continuously multiplying and bearing new fruit.

As I wrote several times over the course of the *shiurim*, this “dialogue” between *Chazal* and the Chasidic masters is not always explicit or deliberate; it is not even necessarily a conscious act. Sometimes I found Chasidic stories or teachings that clearly and explicitly related to specific Talmudic sources; at other times, I tried to make the “introduction,” prompted by what struck me as points of contact and trains of thought that could meet in an interesting and fruitful encounter.

It is my hope that the Almighty, who endows man with knowledge and bestows insight in his heart, guided my thoughts in ways that were true and meaningful, such that they will have value for readers of the series, too. I did not present the thoughts, interpretations, and ideas in these *shiurim* as definitive statements or as the last word on the topic. On the contrary, they are meant as an introduction and invitation to join the discussion. The sources that were quoted and the thoughts surrounding them were intended to lead to further study, exploration, thought, debate, and creative output. Creativity in Torah is an infinite sea, and it is my prayer that these *shiurim* will open the hearts and minds of readers and arouse inner discourse that will continue within their own minds, between them and God, and between them and their fellow seekers of Torah in the *beit midrash*.

I concluded the series with some thoughts about dreams, sleep, and the cyclical nature of human existence. To my mind, part of the greatness of both *Chazal* and the Chasidic masters is in their recognition of this humanity – the awareness that life oscillates between higher states and lower ones, between ascents and descents. This recognition entails a great degree of sensitivity to the partial and incomplete nature of life, to the contraction that is an integral part of the existence of God (and, *le-havdil*, of man) in the world, along with a remarkable capacity for dreaming of ascent and repair, and for investing continuous efforts in achieving them. These are characteristics that are very central to stories, and with God’s help, these insights will continue to accompany and energize our religious life day by day as we stand before God while paying attention to the inner voice of the soul.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)