

Introduction

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok (also known as Vitebsk, 1730–1788) was one of the foremost disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch and among the first leaders to bring Chassidus to the Land of Israel, where he lived with a group of disciples in Tiberias. His teachings often focus on the refinement of the soul through faith, longing for God, and the transformation of darkness into light. The discourse we are summarizing deals with the theme of Shabbos Teshuvah, exploring the balance between intellect and faith, the role of judgments and mercy, and the way tzaddikim transform barriers into pathways of Divine perception.

Shabbos Teshuvah. "Return, Yisrael, until Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity" (Hoshea 14:2).

Our Sages said (Rashi on Bereishis 1:1): "In the beginning, G-d created" – initially it arose in thought to create the world with the attribute of judgment, but He saw the world would not endure, so He combined the attribute of mercy, as it is written (Bereishis 2:4): "On the day that Hashem Elokim made earth and heavens."

And our Sages said: "A righteous one lives by his faith" (Chavakuk 2:4). The righteousness of the tzaddik is his longing for faith, for all his joy and desire is to bring satisfaction to his Maker, "the Creator of the ends of the earth... there is no searching His understanding" (Yeshayahu 40:28), and only through faith that there is One Who creates all (ibid. 45:7).

And if he cannot comprehend even the edges of His ways, how will he know to bring satisfaction before Him? Therefore the soul of the tzaddik longs to know Hashem in all His ways and to serve Him with that knowledge, as it is written (Divrei HaYamim I 28:9): "Know the G-d of your father and serve Him."

שַׁבַּת תְּשׁוּבָה "שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹקֶיךְּ כִּי (כַשֵּׁלָתַ בַּעֲוֹנֵךְ" (הושע יד, ב...)(בַשֵּׁלָתַ בַּעֲוֹנֵךְ" (הושע

הָנֵּה אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זַ"ל (רש"י בראשית א, א): "בְּרָאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹקִים" -בִּתְחַלָּה עָלָה בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה לִבְרֹא הָעוֹלָם בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין, וְרָאָה שֶׁאֵין הָעוֹלָם מִתְקַיֵּם בּוֹ, עָמַד וְשְׁתֵּף מִדַּת הַרַחֲמִים וְכוּ', כְּמַאֲמֶר (בראשית ב'ב, ד): "בִּיוֹם עֲשׁוֹת ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמָיִם.

וְהָנֵּה אָמְרוּ רַבּּוֹתֵינוּ זַ"ל: "צַדִּיק בֶּצֶמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה"
(חבקוק ב, ד), כִּי צִּדְקַת הַצַּדִּיק הִיא תְּשׁוּקַת הַשָּׁגָתוֹ
אֶל הָצֵמוּנָה, שֶׁהְרֵי כָּל יִשְׁעוֹ וְחֶפְצוֹ שֶׁל צַדִּיק לַעֲשׁוֹת נַחַת רוּחַ לְקוֹנוֹ הַ"בּוֹרֵא קְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ וְכוּ'
וְאֵין חַקֶר לְתְבוּנָתוֹ" (ישעיהו מ, כח), כִּי אִם בָּצֵמוּנָה
וְאֵין חַקֶר בּוֹרֶא הַכֹּל (שם מה, ז
(שַׁיֵשׁ אָחַד בּוֹרֵא הַכֹּל (שם מה, ז

וְאָם אֵינוֹ מַשִּׂיג אֲפָלוּ לְקְצוֹת דְּרָכָיו אֵיכָה יֵדַע-לַעֲשׂוֹת נַחַת רוּחַ לְפָנָיו, לָכֵן כָּלְתָה נֶפֶשׁ הַצַּדִּיק לָדַעַת אֶת ה' בְּכָל דְּרָכָיו וּלְעָבְדֵהוּ עַל אוֹתוֹ יְדִיעָה, כְּמַאְמֶּר (דברי הימים א כח, ט): "דַּע אֶת אֱלֹקֵי אָבִידְּ

Now, it is clear and true: if the guilty were struck and punished by judgment immediately after their sin, and likewise if reward for good were given to the righteous immediately that day, then free choice would be nullified. For he would be struck on his head and compelled to act only in good deeds. הָנֵּה עַל כִּי פָּשׁוּט וָאֱמֶת, שֶׁאָם הָיוּ מַכִּין וְעוֹנְשִׁין מִן הַדִּין לַחַיָּבִים הַּכֶּף אַחָּר עֲשׁוֹתָם הַמְּזְמֶתָה (ירמיה יא, טו), וּכְמוֹ כֵן מְשַׁלְמִים שָׁבָר טוֹב לַצַדִּיקִים עַל מַעֲשֵׂיהָם הַטוֹבִים הֵּכֶף בָּאוֹתוֹ יוֹם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהָאֱמֶת וְהַשֶּׁכֶל מְחַלֵּב, הָיָה מִתְבַּטֵל הַבְּחִירָה שֶׁהְבֵי מַכִּין עַל הָדְקָדוֹ וּמַכְרָח בְּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים.

But in truth, faith is always above reason – not yet grasped by intellect. The tzaddik who grows in comprehension: what began as faith without grasp, through service and self-sacrifice becomes understanding, justice, and righteousness. Then his faith is lifted beyond, endlessly.

אֲבָל בֶּאֱמֶת הָאֱמוּנָה לְעוֹלֶם לְמַעְלָה מִן הַשֵּׁכֶל – שָׁצְדֵין אֵין הַשַּׁכֶל מַשִּׁיגוֹ. וְהִנֵּה הַצַּדִּיק הַמִּתְגַּדֵּל בְּהַשָּׁגַת גְּדֻלַּת הַבּוֹרֵא – מַה שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ מִמְּחִלֶּה לֶאֱמוּנָה, נַעֲשֶׂה אֶצְלוֹ בְּשֵׁכֶל וּבְמִסִּירוּת נֶפֶשׁ, וּמִמֵּילָא הַגִּבִּיהַ אֱמוּנָתוֹ לְעוֹלֶם

And after he attains this, he returns — for it has no end. For faith is in the Infinite: "By his faith he shall live" forever. As it says (Bereishis 15:6): "And he believed in Hashem, and He considered it to him as righteousness" — meaning faith attained, becoming eternal merit.

וְאַחֲרֵי שֶׁמַשִּׁיג – חוֹזֵר, כִּי דָּכָר זָה אֵין לוֹ סוֹף, שֶׁהֲרֵי הָאֱמוּנָה בְּאֵין סוֹף – "בָּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יִחְיֶה" לְעוֹלָם. וְזָהוּ (בראשית טו, ו): "וְהָאֱמִן בַּה' וַיַּחְשְׁכָהָ לוֹ צְדָקָה" – הַשָּׂגַת הָאֱמוּנָה נַעֲשֵׁית לוֹ לְצְדָקָה לְעוֹלָם.

By nature, when one tries to gaze at something bright or distant, he narrows the eye so vision can pierce coverings until it sees. So too, our Sages said (Tehillim 102:1): "A prayer of the afflicted when he faints" — only through the wrapping of poverty. David made himself poor, lowly, struck, and burdened with all sufferings (Zohar Vayishlach 168b; Pekudei 232b).

ְּוַעַל דֶּרֶךְ הַטֶּבַע, כְּשֶׁאָדָם מְכַנֵּן לְהִסְתַּכֵּל בְּדָבֶר בָּהִיר אוֹ מֵרְחוֹק, מְכַסֶּה הָעִיִן לְבַקֵּע הַמֶּסְכִים עַד שֶׁיַשִּׁיג. וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה אָמְרוּ (תהלים קב, א): "תְּפָלֶּה לְעָנִי כִּי יַצְטוֹף" – דַּוְקָא בַּצְטִיפַת עֹנִי (זוהר וישלח קסח, ב). וְגָם דְּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם – שַׁוּי גַּרְמֵיה עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן, דַּכָּא וְשָׁפַל, נָגוּעַ וּמְגַנֶּה בְּכָל יִסּוּרֵי עוֹלָם ((זוהר פקודי רלב, ב).).

For they are strong judgments — concealment of the highest level, as it is written (Devarim 31:18): "And I will surely hide," and "a God who hides" (Yeshayahu 45:15) in these judgments. As is known, "there is none else besides Him" (Aleinu). Through these coverings, the tzaddik can gaze at the brightness and truth of the light.

כִּי הֵם גְּבוּרוֹת וְדִינִים הַחֲזָקִים – סֵתֶר הַמַּדְרֵגָה הָעֶלְיוֹנָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוֹב (דברים לֹא, יח): "וְאָנֹכִי הַסְתֵּר" וְגוֹ', וְהוּא "אֵל מִסְתַּתֵּר" (ישעיה מה, טו) בְּדִינִים אֵלוּ, כַּיָּדוּעַ שֶׁאַיִן בִּלְתוֹ וְאֶכֶס זוּלָתוֹ (עֻלֵינוּ לְשַׁבַּחַ). וְעַל יְדֵי הַמְּסָכִים וְסַתֶּר עֶלְיוֹן, הַצַּדִּיק מִסְתַּכֵּל בְּבָהִירוּת הָאוֹר.

So is the path of the tzaddikim: through true self-sacrifice, which is pure judgment, they can reach the supernal light.

וְכֵן דֶּרֶךְ הַצַּדִּיקִים – עַל יְדֵי מְסִירַת נַפְשָׁם בָּאֱמֶת, שָׁהוּא דִּין גַּמוּר, יוּכְלוּ לְהַשֹּׁיג אוֹר עַלִיוֹן.

So says the Zohar (Shelach 168a): "Wood that does not burn, they strike." Meaning, if what one attains does not ignite him with light, then his eyes turn to faith — what he cannot grasp. Therefore "they strike him" with judgments and coverings that conceal His Face. From there "he looks upon the face of the wasteland" (Bamidbar 21:20) — through those coverings.

ְוָהֵם דְּבְרֵי הַזּהַר (שלח קסח, א): "אָעָא דְּלָא דָּלִיק מְבַטְשִׁין בֵּיהּ". פַּרוּשׁ "דְּלָא דָּלִיקּ" – מַה שֶׁמַשִּׁיג אֵינוֹ אוֹר לוֹ, וְעֵינָיו לֶאֱמוּנָה – מַה שֶׁאֵינוֹ מַשִּׂיג. לָכֵן "מְבַטְשִׁין בִּיהּ" בְּדִינִים וּמֶסָכִים הַמַּסְתִּירִים סֵתֶר פָּנָיו. וּמִשֶּׁם "נִשְׁקְפָה עַל פְּנֵי הַיְשִׁימוֹן" (במדבר כא, כ) דֵּרַהְ הַמַּסַכִים

And this is what our Sages said: "At first it arose in thought to create the world with judgment." This is a ruling in practice, applying in every generation: at first He conceals, in order that tzaddikim by their thought elevate judgment to gaze, as in "On the day that Hashem God made" (Bereishis 2:4).

וְזֶהוּ אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ: "מִתְּחִלֶּה עָלָה בְּמַחֲשֶׁבָה לִבְרוֹא הָעוֹלָם בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין". זֶה הָלָכָה לְמַצְשֶּׁה, וְנוֹהֵג תָּמִיד בְּלֵלָם בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין". זֶה הָלָכָה לְמַצְשֶּׁה, וְנוֹהֵג תָּמִיד בְּלֵל דּוֹר: מִתְחִלָּה – מֵסְתִּיר, כְּדֵי שֶׁיַּצְלוּ הַצַּדִּיקִים בְּלֵח שַׁבְּתוֹ הַדִּין לְהִסְתַּכֵּל. "בְּיוֹם צְשׁוֹת ה' בְּמַחְשֵׁבְתִּם מִדַּת הַדִּין לְהִסְתַּכֵּל. "בְּיוֹם צְשׁוֹת ה' .'אלקִים" וגוֹ

"He saw the world could not endure" — for comprehension alone cannot sustain the world, only faith above. This is the "joining of mercy."

ְוָזֶהוּ: "רָאָה שֶׁאֵין הָעוֹלָם מִתְקַיֵּם" – שֶׁאֵין הַשָּׂגָה קִיּוּם הָעוֹלָם כִּי אָם הָאֱמוּנָה שֶׁלְמַעְלָה, וְהוּא הַ"שִּׁתּוּף מַדֵּת הָרַחֲמִים" וְגוֹ.

Or one may say: before creation, in Divine perception, there is no choice or existence, only like a flash (Tehillim 144:6). Hence, "He saw the world could not endure."

אוֹ יֵאָמֵר: דְּבָרִים אֵלּוּ – הַשָּׂגַת אֱלוֹקוּת שֶׁקֹדֶם הַבְּּרִיאָה, שָׁם אֵין בְּחִירָה וַעֲמִידָה, רַק כְּרוֹק בָּרָק "(תהלים קמד, ו). וְזֶהוּ: "רָאָה שֶׁאֵין הָעוֹלָם מִתְקַיֵּם."

יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמֵן סֶלָה

Menachem Mendel of Horodak Pri Ha'Eretz Shabbos Teshuvah

The tzaddikim elevate in this thought all severities — sweetening judgments at their root, above creation and time, in simple mercy, "abundant kindness" (Shemos 34:6).	הָנֵּה צַדִּיקִים מַעֲלִים בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה זוֹ כֶּל הַגְּבוּרוֹת, וּמְתִיקַת הַדִּינִים בְּשָׁרְשָׁם לְמַעְלָה מִסֵּדֶר הַבְּּרִיאָה וְהַוְּמַנִּים, שֶׁהֵם רַחֲמִים פְּשׁוּטִים – "וְרַב חֶסֶד" ((שמות לד, ו
For these tzaddikim, no distinctions of judgment or mercy are sensed. All faces join, receiving upon themselves, to perceive the truth of the light, to gaze through that veil upon His Face.	שֶׁאֵין הַמִּדּוֹת נָכָּרִים אֵצֶל הַצַּדִּיקִים, דִּין וְרַחֲמִים, וְכָל אַפִּין שָׁרִין מְקַבְּלִים עַל עַצְמָן כְּדֵי לְהַשִּׁיג אֲמִתּוּת הָאוֹר, וּלְהִסְתַּכֵּל דֶּרֶךְ הַמְּסָךְ אָל פָּנָיו.
So said our Sages (Bereishis Rabbah 1:5): "Israel arose in thought first." Thus, "Return, Israel, to Hashem your God" — return to that primal thought before creation, where all faces dwell and attributes are nullified in "abundant kindness." There knowledge unites with holiness, where there is no forgetfulness or failure. Therefore: "Return, for you have stumbled in your sin."	ְוְכֵן אָמְרוּ רַבּּוֹתֵינוּ (בראשית רבה א, ה): "יִשְּׂרָאֵל עָלוּ בְּמַחָשָׁבָה תְּחָלֶּה". וְזֶהוּ: "שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹקִיךְּ" – לָשׁוּב אֶל תְּחַלֵּת הַמַּחֲשָׁבָה לֹדֶם הַבְּרִיאָה, שֶׁכָּל אַפִּין שָׁרִין וּבִטוּל הַמְּדוֹת דִּין וְרַחֲמִים בְּשְׁרְשָׁם "רַב חֶסֶד". שֶׁהוּא מָקוֹם שֶׁהַדַּעַת מְחַבֵּר מַחְבֶּרָת הַלְּדָשׁ, וְאֵין שִׁכְחָה וּכְשָׁלוֹן שׁוֹלֵט שָׁם. לָכַן: "שׁוּב "מַה שֶׁכָּשַׁלְתָּ בַּעֲוֹנֶךְּ
Or it may be said: the sin becomes for them as unintentional, and even more — it becomes a complete permit.	– אוֹ יַאָמֵר: שֶׁהֶעָוֹן נַעֲשָׂה אֶצְלָם שׁוֹגֵג, וְיוֹתֵר מִזֶּה שָׁנַעֲשָׂה הָתֵּר גָּמוּר.
As our Sages said (Yoma 86b): "If one transgressed and repeated it, it becomes permitted to him."	כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זַ"ל (יומא פו, ב): "עָבַר וְשָׁנָה הַתְּרָה לוֹ "."– הַתְּּרָה לוֹ
Thus all aspects to them — prohibition and permission — are blurred. Therefore they must return to Hashem their God.	וְכָל אַפִּין שָׁרִין אָצְלָם אָסוּר וְהָתֵּר. עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה צְרִיכִים לָשׁוּב עַד ה' אֱלֹקֵיהֶם.
This is the union of judgment and mercy — life and peace upon	שֶׁהוּא שָׁתּוּף מִדַּת הַדִּין וְרַחֲמִים, וְחַיִּים וְשָׁלוֹם עַל כָּל

NOTE Summary

all Israel, Amen, Selah.

The discourse opens with the verse "Return, Israel, to Hashem your God, for you have stumbled in your sin" (Hoshea 14:2). It explains that while the world was initially intended to be governed by strict judgment, God saw it could not endure this way and introduced mercy. This balance teaches that faith stands higher than reason, for the mind cannot grasp God's essence — it is only faith that sustains creation.

The tzaddik constantly strives to transform faith into comprehension through service and self-sacrifice, but as soon as one level is grasped, faith leaps higher, remaining endless. This is the meaning of "the righteous shall live by his faith." Faith is eternal, stretching beyond all intellect, becoming righteousness and merit.

Judgments and concealments, though appearing as obstacles, are actually coverings through which the tzaddik peers at the true light. By mesirus nefesh, the tzaddik can sweeten judgments at their root, elevating them to the source of mercy that precedes creation. Thus the words of Chazal, "Israel arose in thought," mean that the ultimate return is to the primal Divine thought before creation — the place of abundant kindness, beyond good and harsh distinctions. Teshuvah, therefore, is not merely repairing sin but returning to this higher source, where unity, mercy, and infinite light prevail.

Practical Takeaway

Teshuvah is not limited to correcting mistakes; it is about rising above intellect and cleaving to faith. A Jew should not despair when faced with concealment or struggle. Rather, he must realize that barriers are meant to be pierced — they are coverings that allow the soul to access deeper Divine truth. In our daily lives, when mitzvos feel heavy or faith feels obscured, one should push with perseverance, knowing that every act of mesirus nefesh sweetens judgments and draws down mercy, life, and peace.

Chassidic Story

When Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok ascended to Eretz Yisrael, he and his disciples faced enormous hardships — poverty, illness, and hostility. Despite this, he wrote letters filled with encouragement, teaching that even great concealments are meant to awaken deeper faith. Once, when asked how he could bear such suffering, he replied: "If my faith were dependent on comfort, it would not be faith. But because it is beyond all reason, it lifts me above suffering, straight to Hashem Himself." His disciples reported that during those difficult years, he would often break into joyful song, saying that in the very darkness, he felt closest to the light of God. (See *Pri HaAretz*, introduction).

END NOTE