

WHAT IS A DIRAH B'TACHTONIM, REALLY?

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As Chabad Chassidim, we are taught from our youth that the reason Hashem created the world is that He had a desire for a dwelling place in the lower world, a dirah b'tachtonim (“נתאוה הקדוש ברוך הוא להיות לו דירה בתחתונים”). But what exactly does that really mean? What is the nature of this “dwelling” that Hashem desires?



Whenever we run into a concept that we often hear quoted but don't understand with complete clarity, a good approach to finding that clarity is to go all the way to the beginning, to the original source of the concept in question. In this case, that leads us to the Medrash Tanchuma on this week's parsha.¹ There, Chazal tell us the following:

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמן, בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את העולם, נתאוה שיהא לו דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש בעליונים. ברא את האדם וצוה אותו ואמר לו: מכל עץ הגן אכל תאכל, ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו (בראשית ב, טז-יז). וקבר על צויו. אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא, כך הייתי מתאוה שיהא לי דירה בתחתונים כמו שיש לי בעליונים, ודבר אחד צויתני אותך ולא שמרת אותו. מיד סלק הקדוש ברוך הוא שכינתו לרקיע הראשון.

Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachman said: “When Hashem created the world, He desired that he should have a dwelling in the lower realms like He has in the higher realms. He created Adam, commanded him, and said to him, ‘From all the trees of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, do not eat,’ and he transgressed His command. Hashem said to him, ‘Such I had desired, that I should have a dwelling in the lower realms just like I have in the higher realms, and one thing I commanded you, and you did not keep it.’ Immediately, Hashem moved His Shechinah [away from the Earth,] to the first Heaven.”

Now, even without a detailed analysis of this Medrash, there is a key phrase here that helps us understand more about the nature of Hashem's dwelling. That is, the Medrash says that Hashem wants a dwelling in the lower world *just like He has in the higher worlds* (“כמו” שיש לי בעליונים). If so, then we have to understand what is happening in the higher worlds that the Medrash refers to as a dirah, and this will help us understand (at least generally) what a dirah b'tachtonim really is.

The answer is that in each of the higher worlds—Atzilus, Beriah, Yetzirah, and even Asiyah Ruchni—the Presence of the Creator is felt in a tangible way. The neshamos and malachim that live in these worlds are all acutely aware of their Source and how they completely depend on Him for their existence. Even though the exact nature of this awareness of Hashem differs in each world, all spiritual worlds share this property that Hashem's Presence is experienced by the creations there in a tangible way.²

The idea of a dirah b'tachtonim, then, is that Hashem should reveal His Presence in a tangible way. It is not only that He should feel “comfortable” here, so to speak, but rather that He should fully *express* and *reveal* Himself here, which means that we will experience His Presence. Chassidus makes clear, however, that this experience of Hashem's Presence will be the most intense and most powerful of all—far greater than the revelation that exists in the higher worlds.³

One of the prophecies about the Geulah that makes this idea very clear is the Navi Yeshaya's reference to “the new heavens and the new earth that I [Hashem] will make” (“השמים החדשים והארץ החדשה אשר אני”) (“עושה”).⁴ The Rebbe explains based on Likkutei Torah that the word (world) is related to the world (concealment), for the nature of the world is that the power that Hashem uses to create the world at every moment (כח/חיות אלוקי) is hidden from us physical creations. What will be *new* about the heavens and the earth is that this power will be revealed—that we will *see in the heavens and the earth* the word of Hashem that is constantly creating them from nothing.⁵ In another source, the Rebbe indicates that this is something we will see with our physical eyes, as the characteristics of the human eye will change such that we will naturally have this capacity to see Elokus.⁶

Obviously, these are deep concepts, and there is much more to explain. However, what we all must understand is that there is such a thing as Hashem's Presence being seen and felt in a real way—with the same tangibility with which we see physical objects.⁷ This *general* understanding of dirah b'tachtonim is a necessary prerequisite to understanding the deeper and finer details that are such a key part of the Rebbe's Torah.

So, in one sentence, what is a dirah b'tachtonim? It is when the physical world comes to experience the Presence of G-d. May it be His Will that this should happen ממש ומיד תכיף ומיד תכיף!

1 ס"ט יז.

2 For more explanation of all of the above ideas in this paragraph, see, for example, ד"ר פדה בשלום תרניט, which explains much of this at length.

3 See, for example, Tanya, ch. 36: "...that the Ohr Ein Sof Baruch Hu should shine ... in this whole world with more intensity and more strength ... than the

ray of it in the higher worlds."

4 66:22.

5 שיחת פרשת נשא תנש"א, ד-ה 5.

6 ד"ר נחמה תשכ"ה, אות 6 ז.

7 See the source cited in the previous footnote.

