

Q AND A

DO YOU WONDER WHY WE'RE STILL HERE?

BY ARYEH GUREWITZ

Q In the later years, when the Rebbe told us repeatedly that we have finished the avodah of Golus, he also kept guiding our avodas Hashem and giving practical instructions regarding our battle with our nefesh ha-bahamis.¹ Isn't this a bit of a contradiction? If we really finished the avodah of Golus, then why are we still continuing to do it? From the other side, if we are still continuing to do it, doesn't that mean that we didn't really finish? All of this makes it seem like the Rebbe didn't really mean it literally when he said that we have finished the avodah of Golus.

A This is, of course, a vital question, and it deserves a proper response based on thorough investigation into precisely what the Rebbe was saying in different sichos. Before one engages in such an investigation, though, it is important to make sure we have the proper attitude toward the question. To explain what I mean by that, let's examine how the Rebbe asked and addressed this very question in the rather unique Shabbos HaGadol maamar, Avadim Hayinu 5748.

The beginning of the maamar seems quite typical of a maamar from the Mem's. The Rebbe asks a couple of questions on the dibbur ha-maschil and then mentions maamarim of the earlier Rebbeim who also addressed this same topic. The maamar discusses how it was possible for the Yidden to be slaves in Mitzrayim, explaining that such a situation was only possible because Hashem was running the world in a way of chitzoniyus ha-ratzon, while Geulah comes from Hashem's pnimiyus ha-ratzon.² Then, the Rebbe concisely explains³ how a combination of mesiras nefesh and avoda pnimis can cause Hashem to reveal His pnimiyus ha-ratzon and bring the Geulah.

Then, around halfway through the maamar, the Rebbe suddenly turns around and asks *as part of the maamar* exactly the question above. How can the Rebbe ask us to do a specific avodah to bring the Geulah when the Frierdieker Rebbe already announced, "L'altar l'teshuva, l'altar l'Geulah!"⁴ and, "All that's left is to polish the buttons,"⁵ and the Rebbe already announced that we have certainly already finished this avodah since then!⁶

Instead of immediately answering that question, though, the Rebbe first comments on how shocking it is that no one was bothered by the contradiction. How do we know that no one was bothered by it? The Rebbe says that the proof is that if someone had been really, truly affected and bothered by this contradiction, then Moshiach would have already come the day before, or that morning, or certainly that afternoon!

What do we learn from this? We learn that, yes, continuing the avodah of Golus when the Rebbe has told us that it is completed is truly a contradiction! Even if, ultimately, we could come up with an explanation of how to reconcile the two,⁷ that itself is not the only goal here. It is also important that we live with the frustration of that contradiction. However, that frustration also has to take us in the right direction. It should not frustrate us in a way that causes doubts about the Rebbe's statements and the imminence of the Geulah, chas v'shalom. Rather, we should proceed as the Rebbe did, strengthening ourselves in the avodah of Golus, but with complete recognition that it does not make sense that Hashem is running the world in this way. According to the Rebbe in this maamar, just that recognition and that *temiyah* are powerful enough to bring the Geulah.

1 Regarding the term "avodah of Golus," see Tanya ch. 37, i.e., that the avodah of Golus is defined by the collective struggle of Neshamos Yisroel with the kelipah of the nefesh ha-bahamis. In Yemos HaMoshiach, by contrast, the whole Jewish people will be a "merkavah" to Hashem, fulfilling His Will without struggle or resistance.

2 The idea of "chitzoniyus ha-ratzon" vs. "pnimiyus ha-ratzon" is explained using an analogy of a person running a business. On one level, the person wants to run the business, but since the only reason he wants to run the business is to make a profit, it turns out that his will to run the business is more superficial (chitzoniyus) than his desire for the profit, which is his true motivation (pnimiyus). In the same way, Golus is something that Hashem

wants only as a means to an end (chitzoniyus ha-ratzon), with the "end" (pnimiyus ha-ratzon) being Geulah.

3 Based on the maamar Avadim Hayinu in the Alter Rebbe's siddur.

4 Kol Korei in HaKeriah v'HaKedusha 5701-5703.

5 Sicha of Simchas Torah 5689.

6 17 Tammuz 5747 (Hisvadyus, vol. 4, pg. 92). See also Sefer HaSichos 5748, pgs. 91, 126, 181, 279, 355. (Note: these are all sources from before this maamar was said in 5748. Of course, the Rebbe repeated this afterward as well.)

7 See the next paragraph in the maamar.