

CHAPTER 1: MISHNA 18: PART 2

by Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: Upon three things the world is sustained: On judgment ("din") on truth ("emeth") and on peace ("shalom"). As it is written (Zechariah 8:16) "Truth, and judgment of peace [you should] judge in your gates.

(There are now a number of paragraphs in the Maharal that deal with clearly Kabbalistic matters, and we will skip them. Even the coming paragraphs are not that accessible, but I will simplify them as I understand them, and hope that we succeed in grasping part of what is begin taught to us. For those of you who are using these shiurim to learn the text inside, we are continuing with the paragraph that begins "V'ahmnam hapeirush...")

When G-d created the world, it involved three steps. First, the activator (G-d) brought the world into existence as a result of His action. The created world was the imperative result of that action, which is why we are taught the world was created with the attribute ("midah") of strict judgment ("din"). (We have written at the beginning of the chapter that "din" implies a compelling imperative; true judgment is the conclusion that something MUST be EXACTLY a specific way, with no deviation). In the verses of creation at the beginning of Breishith, G-d is called "Elokim," which is the name implying the attribute of "din," strict judgment. (The Kabbalists point out that the name "Elokim" has the same numerical value, 86 [remember to replace the kuf with a heil] as the word "hateva," which means "nature." The laws of nature are immutable and the results of those laws are compelling. Just as one who puts his hand in fire will be burned, no matter what the reason or excuse, so too the attribute of "din," strict judgment, requires immutable consequences for every violation of G-d's will. It was only because the world would not have been able to exist under those circumstances (at least not as a world of free will) that G-d blended mercy and patience ("rachamim") with the original "din." In human jurisprudence, however, it is the job of the judges to issue "din," ensuring that a person who has something that doesn't belong to him makes full restituion. There can be no flexibility for the benefit of one party at the expense of the other party. The Torah gives the judges two specific commands to this effect: Not to favor a poor person because of his poverty, and not to favor a rich person because of his wealth and power. AFTER precise judgement, it will be the responsibility of the communal leaders in poverty cases to deal with the personal problem or need that may have led the guilty party to commit his crime.)

In addition to the decree of the Creator being imperative, it must also be one of "emeth," truth, to

ensure that it can endure. "Sheker," a falsehood, has no ability to endure. None of the things that G-d created deviate from "emeth." (See Psalms 111:8)

(The concept of "emeth" in this context needs to be expanded. It goes far beyond the standard idea of truth, which is usually understood simply as being an accurate reflection of reality, correct information. >From the Torah's perspective, the concept of "emeth" is one of integrity, completeness, and continuity. This is alluded to in the three letters of the word. "Aleph" is the first letter of the aleph- beth. "Mem" is the middle letter. "Taf" is the last letter. The word implies something which is all-encompassing, beginning at the beginning, continuing through on its way to the proper conclusion. Falsehood has no such integrity. The three letters of the word "sheker" are all located at the end of the aleph-bet. And they are out of order. This contrast should remind us of the famous maxim "When you tell someone the truth, you never have to remember what you said." Every step of the truth flows naturally from the previous step. Falsehoods are convoluted.

(Additionally, there is a message in the physical structure of the letters. The three letters of "emeth" are all written on the line in a form that exudes stability. The aleph and taf each have two legs, while the mem has a long base. The three letters of "sheker" all sit on the line perched on only one point. (The Biblical look of the shin is not the way it is printed in books today. All three vertical lines come together at a single point. Look at the engraved shin on Tefillin, or the writing in a Torah scroll.)

Finally, there is the conclusion of creation, a coming to rest (Shabbat), which itself creates a state of completion, perfection and harmony. Shabbat itself was not part of the six days of creation, coming after creation had been completed. So, asks the Midrash (Breishith Rabba 10:12) what was created after G-d ceased creation? Tranquility, calm, serenity and quiet. This final step in the creation process was the "peaceful" completion which ensured the endurance of that creation. It is this step that the Torah describes in the verse "And G-d concluded, on the seventh day, the handiwork which He had created..." (Breishith 2:2). During the six days of creation, there was a constant dynamic to actualize the creation process. Only at the end of this process was there a state of rest and stability. The harmonious conclusion itself ensured the stable existence of the creation. It is for this peace and harmony that the Mitzvah of lighting candles on Shabbath was instituted, to ensure peace and harmony in the home (Shabbath 25b).

In summary, the world was created by the decree of G-d ("din"), its elements organized in a straight path of truth ("emeth"), with an ultimate purpose of peace and harmony. It is the combination of these elements of creation that ensure the continued existence of the created world. On three things the world is sustained: On "din," on "emeth," and on "shalom."

There is a relationship between these three things and the three taught to us by Shimon HaTzadik.

"Avodah," service, parallels "din." Chazal teach us that the juxtaposition of the laws of the altar in the Tabernacle with the laws of jurisprudence (Shemoth Chapters 20 and 21) teaches that the courts were to be located near the place of the sacrifices. (See Yerushalmi Makoth 7:1 and Bavli Sanhedrin

7b for similar teachings; my CD-Rom search did not turn up an exact statement like the one quoted by the Maharal.) What is the connection? Because both uniquely emanate from G-d Himself. (It is G-d who determines how He is supposed to be served, what is considered service and what is not. And absolute truth and justice can only come from the Divine.) "For justice is to G-d" (Devarim 1:17); "You are not judging for men, but for G-d" (Divrei HaYamim II 19:6). And in Parshath Shoftim (Devarim 16:19-20) first it warns about justice -- "Righteousness you must pursue" and "Do not distort justice, do not favor (a litigant), and do not accept bribes" - - and afterwards (verses 21-22) it teaches about forbidden forms of worship "Do not establish a pillar..." "Do not plant a tree of idol worship..." And then (17:1) "Do not sacrifice to G-d an ox or a sheep which has a blemish." (For a more detailed explanation of the relationship between "avodah" and "din," both of which are the attributes of our forefather Yitzchak, refer back to the last two shiurim on Mishna 2.)

"Torah" parallels "emeth," for Torah is completely truth, and there is no truth like the Torah. These are the attributes of Yakov.

"Gemiluth chasadim," acts of loving kindness, parallels "shalom," for it is these acts of kindness which implant peace and harmony among people. It is written (Isaiah 32:17) "And the acts of charity are (themselves acts of) peace." And we are taught (Ch. 2, Mishna 7) that one who gives a surplus of charity creates a surplus of peace, which will be explained in more detail at that time.

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