

PART 10: THE SYNAGOGUE, AND OTHER SAYINGS OF R.CHELBO QUOTING R.HUNA

by Rabbi Dr. Azriel Rosenfeld

10. The Synagogue, and other sayings of R.Chelbo quoting R.Huna (Tractate Berachos, 6b):

If a person is accustomed to come to the synagogue, and one day he doesn't come, G-d inquires after him, as it says "Which of you who fears G-d... walks in darkness and has no light, let him trust in G-d's name" (Isaiah 50:10); if he was absent because he was fulfilling another "mitzvah" (commandment) he will have light, but if it was for another reason he will have no light, because he should have trusted in G-d's name and didn't. If G-d comes to a synagogue and doesn't find ten men in it, He immediately becomes angry, as it says "Why did I come and there was no man?" (Isaiah 50:2).

A person who establishes a regular place in which to stand for his prayer is helped by the G-d of Abraham, and when he dies they [should] say about him "Where is the pious one, the humble one, the disciple of our father Abraham?" We know that Abraham assigned a place for prayer, as it says "Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before G-d" (Gen.19:27): The expression "standing" is interpreted as referring to prayer, as it says: "And Pinchas stood up and prayed" (Psalms 106:30). When a person assigns a regular place for prayer his enemies fall, as it says "I will fix a place for my people Israel... and the wicked will no longer oppress them..." (2 Sam.7:10). In 1 Chron.17:19 (which recounts the same prophecy) the verse ends "[no longer] annihilate them": [this means] that at first [the wicked merely] "oppress" [the Jews], but in the end, they try to "annihilate" them.

When a person leaves the synagogue he shouldn't take long strides, but when he is on the way there he should run, as it says "Let us run to know G-d" (Hosea 6:3). When R.Zeira saw the scholars running to the sermon on Sabbath he used to say: "The scholars are desecrating the Sabbath", but when he heard it said that everyone should run to listen to words of halachah (law) even on the Sabbath, as it says: "They shall follow after G-d, Who will roar like a lion" (Hosea 11:10), he too began to run.

A person who prays behind a synagogue and deliberately faces away from it is regarded as wicked, as it says: "The wicked walk round about" (Psalms 12:9).

[The verse continues]: "...when baseness is exalted (KERUM) by men" (ibid.): People neglect even exalted things. [Another interpretation] is that when a person needs to be supported by others, his

face changes color (from shame) like a KERUM (a coastal bird that changes into many colors when the sun shines on it), and it is as if he is punished with fire and water, as it says "You mounted a mortal over our heads, we entered fire and water..." (Psalms 66:12).

A person should always be careful regarding the afternoon prayer, since Elijah was answered only at that time, as it says "When the afternoon offering was brought up, Elijah the prophet approached and said 'Answer me, G-d, answer me'" (1 Kings 18:36-37): Answer me by fire coming down from heaven, and answer me so people won't say it was done by magic. The same applies to the evening prayer and morning prayer, as it says, "May my prayer stand before you like incense, the raising of my hands like the evening offering" (Psalms 141:2), and it says "G-d, hear my voice in the morning" (Psalms 5:4).

A person who benefits from a bridegroom's feast and doesn't attempt to bring him joy violates five "voices": "The voice of joy, the voice of happiness, the voice of a groom, the voice of a bride, the voice of those who say 'give thanks'" (Jeremiah 33:11). If he does bring him joy, [this wedding guest] merits acquiring Torah, which was given with five "voices": "On the third day... there were thunders... and the sound of the shofar... and the sound of the shofar... and G-d answered in a voice" (Ex.19:16,19); but the sounds referred to in the verse: "All the people perceived the thunders..." (Ex.20:15) happened before the Torah was given (and therefore it is not counted among the sounds heard while the Torah was being given). It is also as if [this guest] had brought a Thanksgiving-offering, for the aforementioned verse which lists the five "voices" continues with "Who bring a thanksgiving-offering to G-d's house" (Jeremiah 33:11); also, it is as if he had rebuilt one of the ruins of Jerusalem, for the verse concludes: "I will restore the land" (ibid.).

If a person fears Heaven, his words are heard, as it says: "After all has been heard, fear G-d" (Eccles.12:13); the verse continues: "for this is all of man" (ibid.).*

If a person knows that his friend is accustomed to greet him, he should greet him first, as it says "Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms 34:15). If he greets him and he doesn't respond, he (the one who didn't respond) is called a robber, as it says "You have consumed the vineyard; property robbed from the poor is in your houses" (Isaiah 3:14).**

** This is interpreted to mean that the entire world was created only for the sake of this person [who fears G-d] (that is, the world was created so that a person like this would eventually be born); or, this person is equal in value to the entire world; or, the entire world was created only to accompany this person.*

*** The only "property" that the poor possess, is the right to a response to their greeting (Rashi, Brachos 6b).*

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