

# THE POWER OF UNITY

*by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky*

## 1. The Significance of Unity

We read in this week's parsha that Hashem asked the Klal Yisroel to participate in the building of the Mishkan (Portable Tabernacle), "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take to Me a portion, from every man whose heart will motivate him you shall take My portion. This is the portion that you shall take from them: gold, silver, copper, turquoise wool, purple wool, scarlet wool, linen, goats' hair, ram skins that are dyed red, techashim skins, shittim wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for raising the smoke of incense... They shall make Me a Sanctuary - so that I may dwell among them."

As we can see, Hashem enumerated thirteen different items that were to be used for the building of the Mishkan. The Midrash explains that the significance of using thirteen materials to build the Mishkan is to reflect the thirteen miraculous acts that Hashem had performed for the Jews in order to bring about the exodus from Egypt. In return for Hashem's thirteen actions, the Jews were to use thirteen materials to bring about the full function of the Mishkan. What is the significance of Hashem performing thirteen different actions to bring about the exodus?

The Maharal explains that thirteen is the numerical value of the word echad (One). The Jewish people are comprised of thirteen tribes- twelve who were given a share in the Land of Israel and one (Levy), which was not. Thus, the Maharal explains that the thirteen tribes of the Jewish people reflect the Unity of Hashem, which is echad. The Maharal explains further that even within the context of the thirteen tribes that there is a more specific allusion to echad.

The most spiritual of the thirteen tribes was the tribe of Levy because they were chosen to be the officiates of G-d. Therefore in order to indicate his uniqueness we would classify Levy as aleph (number one). Of the four wives of Yaakov two of them were considered Matriarchs (Rachel and Leah) and two were considered concubines (Bilhah and Zilpah). The Matriarchs, who were of special spiritual status, bore Yaakov eight sons- Leah mothered six and Rachel two. The number eight is denoted in Hebrew with the letter ches. The concubines of Yaakov bore him four sons, which is denoted in Hebrew with the letter dahled. Identifying the various levels of spirituality contained within the tribes of Israel: we have tribe of Levy (aleph), we have ches (the sons of the Matriarchs), and we have dahled (the sons of the concubines) spelling -echad (one). The Maharal explains that not only do the tribes numerically reflect the unity of Hashem but also the innate spirituality within

each tribe reflects echad (alpeh ches dahled).

Hashem brought about the miracles in Egypt not only to punish the Egyptians but also for the Jews to understand who He is - as it says in the verse, "And You will know that I am G-d." As a result of the sum total of all the miracles and supernatural events that took place at this time, Hashem revealed to the Jews that He is the Omnipotent Being. All that exists is only a manifestation of His Will. This was demonstrated through the thirteen acts of kindness to communicate to the Jewish people that G-d is Echad.

Moshe was taken aback when he was told by Hashem to build the Mishkan for the purpose of having a "dwelling place" among the Jewish people. Moshe asked G-d, "How is it possible that Your Presence can be contained in such a limited location when all existence cannot contain Your Presence?" Hashem responded to Moshe, "You concern yourself with your responsibilities (building the Mishkan) and let Me concern Myself with My responsibilities (how to dwell within it)."

The Mishkan was the medium through which G-d had a relationship with every Jew. In order for this special location to accommodate G-d's Presence it was necessary for it to reflect His essence which is unity - Echad. Unity - Echad (One). Thus since Hashem is Echad the number of the materials used to build His dwelling place needed to be numerically echad.

Echad represents the unity of G-d and the thirteen materials of the Mishkan were the prerequisite for the location to contain Hashem's Presence. Although the Jewish people are comprised of thirteen tribes nevertheless they are one people. The Second Temple was destroyed because of lack of unity among the Jewish people - "sinaas cheenam" (unwarranted hate). In order for the Jewish people to be qualified to be taken as G-d's people at Sinai we needed to be likened to, "one man with one heart." As it is stated in the Torah, "They camped at the foot of the mountain." (with "camped" written in the singular). Therefore in order for us to reinstate our intimate relationship with G-d who is Echad and the ultimate redemption, we must become echad - a unified people.

## **2. Infusing our Actions with Value**

In this week's parsha, the Torah enumerates the materials, which were needed for the building the Mishkan. The Torah lists these building materials apparently in descending order of preciousness - commencing with "Gold and silver" which are the most precious. We see, however, that the last two materials mentioned are the "avnei shoham v' avnei milooyim (the shoham stones and the filling stones)" which were precious gems such as diamonds, sapphires, and rubies. If the Torah was listing the materials in order of preciousness one would think that these gems should have been listed first and then followed by "Gold and silver". Why are the avnei shoham and avnei milooyim the last materials in the list if they are more valuable than gold and silver?

The Torah tells us that all the Jews were asked to participate in the building of the Mishkan by donating the necessary materials, "...They shall take to Me a portion, from every man whose heart will motivate him..." When the Princes of Israel donated the precious gems (the avnei shoham and

millioyim) the word "Nisseeyim (Princes)" is written without a yud. The Ohr Ha'Chaim HaKadosh cites the Chazzal that explain that the significance of the deletion of the yud indicates that their participation in the building of the Mishkan was deficient. The Princes of Israel said, "Let the Jewish People donate what they can for the building of the Mishkan and we will complete what they are not able to complete." The Jewish people contributed all that was needed for the building of the Mishkan except for the avnei shoham and avnei millioyim, which were given by the Princes.

G-d reprimanded the Princes by saying, "How could you wait to see what was lacking and only then complete the Mishkan for the sake of your own glory and take a chance that your participation would not be necessary." This is the significance of the word Nisseeyim stated in a deleted form to indicate that their participation was deficient. Thus their mitzvah was spiritually lacking.

The Ohr Ha'Chaim HaKadosh explains that although the intrinsic material worth of the avnei shoham and avnei millioyim was considered invaluable; on the spiritual scale they were considered something of inferior worth because Hashem does not evaluate value based on physical properties but rather on spiritual purity. Since the intent and motivation behind the giving of the gems was deficient, the Torah mentions them last.

The Torah tells us that there is a certain sin offering that is brought to the Bais HaMikdash based on one's financial status. A wealthy man brings a meat offering while a poor man brought a bird for his sin offering. The Gemara in Menachos states that the wealth man brings a meat offering of significant material value and a poor man brings a bird offering of little material value. The Gemara concludes that although the financial disparity between the rich man and the poor man is great, nevertheless the Torah states regarding each of their offerings, "It gives great pleasure to G-d". This teaches us, "Regardless of how much or how little one does, as long as it is done with the proper intent for the sake of Hashem, it is valued."

The Gemara in Sakhedrin states, "All that Hashem desires from a person is his heart", meaning feeling and dedication to the mitzvah or the cause. Does this mean that it is sufficient for one to mean well in his heart without actually performing the mitzvah. Or does it mean that when one performs a mitzvah, Hashem will value it in a special way only if it is infused with dedication. We see that Hashem viewed the precious stones that were given by the Princes as something of inferior quality, because they did not perform this mitzvah with zeal and proper intent. Not performing a mitzvah with alacrity causes the action to be diminished in value.

The Gemara tells us that if one has a mitzvah at hand one should not delay its performance but attend to it immediately. Rav Hutner zt'l asks if one was to delay the performance of a mitzvah but did eventually fulfill it perfectly - is this mitzvah because of its delay considered deficient? Or is it considered perfect because of the manner in which it was performed, regardless of its delay? Rav Hutner concludes that not performing a mitzvah with alacrity causes the action to be diminished in value based on the principle that if one has a mitzvah at hand one should not delay its performance.

The Torah teaches us this principle from the verse, "You shall watch over the matzos." In Hebrew the word -matzos without its vowels can be read - mitzvos. The Torah is stating, "You shall watch over the mitzvos" - meaning if one has a mitzvah at hand he should not delay it for a later time. If one delays the baking of the dough after it is kneaded it will become chometz (leavened). Therefore the Torah instructs us to watch over the matzos. Just as the deficiency in the matzah (if it is not watched properly) is an inherent deficiency in the matzah; so too if the mitzvah is delayed (regardless of how well it is performed at a later time) the mitzvah is classified as deficient.

Therefore our own glory and our personal priorities must be secondary to the performance of mitzvos. Since Hashem values our intent and zeal, we should infuse all of our actions with the proper intent at the proper time. Only then that it can be truly considered that we gave our "hearts" to Hashem.

### **3. The Purity of Truth**

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us in detail about the construction of the Holy Ark (the Aron HaKodesh). The Aron HaKodesh contained the Luchos (the second set of stone Tablets) and the Shivrei Luchos (the first tablets that were broken) and a Torah scroll. The Aron (the Ark) was the repository, which contained the Torah.

The Torah states that the Aron was cast in pure gold- "On the inside and on the outside". The Gemara in Yomah states that a Talmud Chacham (Torah Sage) whose inside is not consistent with his outside is not a Talmud Chacham. The paradigm to teach us this is the Holy Ark. Just as the Ark only qualified as the repository to contain the Torah because it was cast in gold on the inside and outside to indicate a consistency, so too the Torah Sage must have consistency. In order for one to be classified as a true Talmud Chacham, one's essence and commitment must be consistent with his proficiency in Torah knowledge. If one is not a tzaddik (righteous person) and his outward behavior is merely a façade then he is not a Talmud Chacham. His proficiency may make him a Torah "Scholar", but he is not a Talmud Chacham.

The Torah tells us that the location of the Shechina (the Divine Presence) was in the location of the Holy Ark. The Ark was present in the Mishkan (portable Temple) as well as in the First Bais HaMikdash (first Temple in Jerusalem); however after the destruction of the first Temple the Ark was hidden away and therefore the Second Bais HaMikdash did not have it. Therefore the Gemara tells us, the Shechina was not present on a continuous basis during the period of the Second Bais HaMikdash. In addition, when the Ark was not in the Mishkan it assumed the status of a Baamah (Alter) that did not have Hashem's Presence. The Ark that contained the Torah was the location of the location of the Divine Presence. Therefore if the Aron was not present then the Shechina did not dwell in that location.

The Gemara in Berachos tells us based on a pasuk in Tehillim (Psalms), "Hashem loves the Gates of Tzion more than the sanctuaries of Yaakov." The Gemara explains this to mean that Hashem loves

the location that are outstanding in the study of definitive Halacha (Jewish Law) more than synagogues and study halls. The Gemara continues to say, "After the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash G-d's location in this existence is within the four cubits (dahled amos) of Halacha." The reason for this is because Hashem's Presence only identifies with the location of the Torah - as we saw in the Bais HaMikdash with regard to the Holy Ark.

Does this mean that any location of study is similar to the Holy Ark? The Torah tells very specifically how the Aron HaKodesh is to be constructed - "it must be cast in pure gold on the inside and on the outside". The Shechina dwells in a location that must be internally and externally consistent with purity. We see from this that unless a location of study has these qualities of consistent purity, only then will the Divine Presence dwell in that location. Why does the location of the Shechina require this consistency?

The Gemara tells us, "The Signet of Hashem is Truth." The nature of Truth is that it must be completely pure and unadulterated. The Maharal states that Truth must be completely unadulterated and even if it is 99.999% true - it is not Truth. This is indicated by the word Emmes (which means Truth). The spelling of the word Emmes is spelled aleph mem tuf. If even the smallest letter "aleph" (which indicates an iota) is removed from the word Emmes, what remains is "mem tuf" which spells "mes" (death). Meaning that even if an iota of truth is missing this is not Truth. If a person or a location is only outwardly pure and only has a façade of Torah then this lacking in truthfulness. Thus, the Divine Presence will not dwell or be associated with that person or location. Hashem will only rest on a person whose behavior is consistent with his knowledge and internal commitment to the Torah.

#### **4. Going Beyond Our Limits**

In this week's parsha Hashem asked the Jewish people to donate materials for the building of the Mishkan (Portable Tabernacle) based on the generosity of each individual's heart. The Torah tells us that there were two types of people who gave to the Mishkan - those who gave with a "generous heart" - yidvenu leebo and those who gave with an "inspired heart" - yeesah leebo. The Torah states that after Yaakov experienced his prophetic dream on Mount Moriah he was so inspired that his legs carried him as if he was floating on air. The Torah uses the terms "Veiyiso" to indicate that he was inspired. What is the difference between the person who gives with a "generous heart" yidvenu leebo and the one who gives with an "inspired heart" - yeesah leebo?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh explains the difference between these two people. A person who has a generous heart will give to the "best of his ability" to support a cause that he values. Giving to the best of one's ability means giving to the point that it does not infringe on his own needs. In contrast, the "inspired" person gives beyond his means without taking into consideration his own needs, because of the degree of his inspiration. This is the difference between yidvenu leebo and yeesah leebo.

Hashem, the King of the Universe said to the Jewish people. "...Make for Me a Sanctuary - so that I may dwell among you". One would think this would be sufficient to motivate and inspire one's heart to donate for the building of the Mishkan without limit. However we do see there were those who only gave with a "generous" heart despite the gravity of the request.

The Rambam in Hilchos Talmud Torah (The Laws of studying Torah) explains the characteristics necessary for one to acquire the "Crown of Torah" (Kesser Torah). The Rambam states that a person's living necessities should be reduced to a minimal level and that one should live a life of deprivation in order to acquire the Crown of Torah. The Rambam does not say that if one "chooses" to acquire the Crown of Torah one should live their life their life in this manner. But rather, the Rambam states that only one whose "heart is inspired" to acquire the Crown of Torah must follow the specific prescription of life to succeed in this endeavor. Meaning, only one who is innately inspired has relevance to acquire the Crown of Torah. It is not a choice that one makes but rather a passion, which consumes the person to the extent of devotion without limit. Anyone who does not have an "inspired heart" will inevitably be conflicted with self-interest and therefore will not be able to acquire the Crown of Torah.

The Ramban states that Positive Commandments represent the "Love of Hashem" whereas the Negative Commandments signify "the Fear of Hashem". In order for one to refrain from transgressing the Will of Hashem it is sufficient to fear Divine retribution. However, in order to perform a Positive Commandment one needs to be motivated, and love is the motivating factor. If one is imbued with love for Hashem there are no limits to one's commitment. This is why we ask Hashem every day in our prayers to place "love in our hearts" so that we will be inspired to respond unimpeded to serve Hashem.

Although one needs to merit "love" which comes through siyata de'shamaya (the help of heaven), one needs to have a desire to possess it. This is why we pray to Hashem to give us "love" in our hearts so that we can be inspired to the point of going beyond being "generous".

## **5. Why do We Rejoice in the Month of Adar?**

The Gemara in Taanis states, "When the month of Adar begins one should increase his level of joy. When the month of Av begins one should decrease his level of joy." The Mishna tells us that the month of Av is the most tragic month in the Jewish calendar because during Av both the First and Second Batei HaMikdash (first and second Temples) were destroyed on the same day, among many other tragic events. The month of Adar, by contrast, is a month of good fortune and joy because it was during this month that the miracle of Purim took place.

There was a decree during the reign of the Persian King Achashveirosh to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child and at the last moment Hashem turned the situation completely around. Instead of the Jews being destroyed by their enemies, the Jewish people destroyed their enemies (the Amalikites). Thus, the Gemara tells us that the month of Adar is a time of good fortune (mazel)

for the Jewish people and if one has legal proceedings with a non-Jew, Adar is the best month to receive adjudication.

What is the focus of the month of Av? We decrease our level of joy by contemplating the destruction of the two Temples and the other tragedies that had befallen the Jewish people during this month. During the month of Av we reflect on the things that we do not have. By minimizing joy during the month of Av, we are able to focus on the cause of all the tragedies, which have befallen us during this month. If we were to be involved with joyous activities during the month of Av (as during any other time of the year) we would not be able to focus and appreciate our loss thus not being able correct our situation.

What is the focus of our celebration during the month of Adar? On an obvious level, we celebrate and rejoice that Hashem saved us from immanent destruction. The question is - why did Hashem save the Jewish people? Mordechai, the leader of the Jewish people, instructed them not to attend the feast of King Achashveirosh, which was the precursor to the decree against the Jews. Nevertheless the Jews did not heed his warnings and attended the feast. Did Hashem save the Jewish people because they were deserving of His help?

The Gemara quotes the verse of the Magillah, "La Yehudim hoisa ohra v'simcha v'sasson v'kor." The Gemara explains the verse to mean that after the miracle of Purim the Jews recommitted themselves to Torah which is (Ohr "light") to (sasson "joy") which is circumcision and v'kor, which is the mitzvah of wearing Tefillin. Evidently it is indicated that before the miracle of Purim the Jews were deficient of all of these mitzvos. Nevertheless we see that Hashem saved the Jewish people - why?

The Maharal of Prague cites the Chazal which states that Yom Kipurim (the Day of Atonement) can also be interpreted as Yom Kee Purim (a day like Purim). Seemingly one would think that each of these two days is the antithesis of the other. Yom Kippur is the most solemn day during which we fast and we pray for atonement; whereas Purim is a day of rejoicing, feasting and indulgence in physical pleasure. The Maharal asks - what is the common ground between Yom Kippur and Purim?

The Maharal answers that Yom Kippur is a day in which we focus on our spirituality and are completely undistracted from repentance. During Yom Kippur we understand our relationship with G-d and we reflect on His greatness and our own insignificance. We believe that because of our special relationship with G-d that He will forgive the sins of the Jewish people. On Purim, we are also cognizant of our special relationship with G-d. Hashem saved the Jewish people from annihilation not because of our devoutness or our level of observance, but rather because we are His children, His people and we have a special relationship with Him. Just as during Yom Kippur we have that level of understanding of our relationship with Hashem so too do we have this clarity on Purim.

At Sinai Hashem coerced the Jews to accept the Torah (the Oral Law) by holding a mountain over their head with the threat of destruction if they do not accept. Out of fear the Jewish people

accepted the Torah. We read in the Megillah Esther (the Book of Esther), "Keemu v'kiblu" (they fulfilled and accepted [the Torah]). This signifies that on Purim after Hashem saved the Jews from annihilation, they reaffirmed their acceptance of Torah and accepted the Torah upon themselves as a result of their love. On Purim the Jewish people accepted the Torah out of love for Hashem and not out of fear because they understood that Hashem valued them. The Jews comprehended that the only reason why Hashem saved them from destruction was out of their special relationship with G-d.

From this, we can appreciate and understand why we celebrate during the month of Adar. It is during this month that we understood how much Hashem values us despite our shortcomings. By appreciating how much Hashem values us, regardless of our failings, we will come to know that whatever Hashem wants for us is in our best interest and not for His own sake.

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