

HOW DOES ONE PERCEIVE HIS FELLOW JEW?

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. How Does One Perceive His Fellow Jew?

The Torah states, "You shall not taunt or oppress a stranger (ger), for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Rashi explains that one is not permitted to say anything hurtful to a ger simply because he is a stranger. This applies not only to the convert but also to anyone who is a stranger in the community. The Torah says that the reason for this is that the Jewish people were strangers in Egypt. Thus, they could appreciate what it means to be treated in this manner. Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate Bava Mitziah which states, "If you taunt the ger because he is a stranger, he can respond by saying that you yourselves were strangers in Egypt. One's own blemish should not be projected onto another." What is the linkage between our experience in Egypt and mistreating a "stranger in our midst"?

A person speaks critically of another because he believes that he does not possess the same shortcomings as that person. The Torah tells us that one should not view his fellow Jew in such a light, although he is a stranger, because we ourselves were strangers in Egypt. Meaning, that although we were part of our own community, we were still not accepted by the Egyptian society. If one appreciates the feeling of being rejected due to being different, then it is not possible to reject the person who comes from a different background and orientation.

The Torah tells us that Egypt was a depraved and corrupt, pagan society. If this were the case, why would the Jewish people feel unwanted and unaccepted by the Egyptians when they would not even want anything to do with that caliber of individual? Apparently, regardless of the type of community or society in which one lives, there is a need to be accepted even if it is on a subconscious level. One wants to be valued, acknowledged, and appreciated for what he is.

However if one lives his life to serve G-d he will not be concerned how he is viewed by others. He will not need the validation of others to give him a sense of worth. To be concerned about what others think is considered a failing in one's level of humility. If one is doing the Will of Hashem, then why should he be concerned with not being accepted by those who do not value that which is correct and special? By stating, "You shall not taunt..." the Torah is addressing the individual who only appreciates a person who is similar to himself rather than looking at the quality of that person. If he would look at the other individual as he is seen by G-d, there would be no basis to reject or taunt him even though he is different. If he bases his self worth on how he is viewed by Hashem, then in turn, he will view the stranger according to his intrinsic value rather than how others perceive him.

The Torah states in the Portion of Yisro, "You shall not ascend My Altar with steps, so that your nakedness will not be uncovered upon it." One ascended the altar on a ramp and not with steps. This was because when one lifts his leg it is considered a disrespectful gesture although his body is covered. Rashi cites Chazal who state that exposing oneself to the stones while ascending the Altar is disrespectful to the stones that have a specific function vis-à-vis the Altar. The Torah is teaching us the degree of sensitivity one must have towards his fellow man. If one is sensitive and does not behave in a disrespectful manner towards stones (which have a specific purpose), yet are inanimate, how much more so should one behave with sensitivity towards one's fellow, who is created in the image of G-d for a specific function, i.e. serving Him.

2. The Jew's Participation in Creation

Regarding the building of the Mishkan (Sanctuary), the Torah states, "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion (Terumah), from every man whose heart motivates him you shall take My portion." The Torah is telling us that the only gift that qualified for the building of the Mishkan was one that was given out of the generosity of one's heart. Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "take for Me a portion" means that whatever was given for the building of the Mishkan had to be given for the sake of G-d.

The purpose for building the Mishkan was to create a setting for Hashem to dwell in our midst. As the verse states, "Make for Me a Sanctuary so that I can dwell in your midst." One would think that such an important and crucial task of building the Mishkan would be incumbent upon every Jewish person. As we find regarding the giving of the Machtzis Ha'Shekel (the half silver coin that was compulsory for every Jewish male above the age of twenty to be given for the sake of purchasing communal offerings). However, the Torah tells us that the materials that were presented for the building of the Mishkan were not given as a tax or an obligation but out of the generosity of one's heart. In fact, this was the only circumstance under which they were found acceptable. How do we understand this?

The materials that were given by the Jewish people were used to build the Mishkan rather than as a medium to purchase what was needed. This is because just as existence emanated from G-d Himself when He Willed it, identically the Mishkan had to emanate directly from the Jewish people.

At the beginning of the Portion of Vayakhel, the Torah juxtaposes the building of the Mishkan to the observance of the Sabbath. Chazal ask, "What is the significance of the juxtaposition?" They answer that as important as the building of the Mishkan may be, it did not supercede and override the observance of Shabbos. In addition, we learn from this that all the creative activities that were needed for the building of the Mishkan are the same ones that were forbidden on the Shabbos. What is the relevance of one to the other?

The Torah states in the Portion of Yisro regarding the Ten Commandments, "Remember the Shabbos and sanctify it because G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day."

On the seventh day, He refrained from creative activity. The Yalkut tells us that every aspect of creation was alluded to and represented in the Mishkan. For example, the curtains of the Mishkan corresponded to the heavens. As the verse states in Tehillim (Psalms), "Hashem spread the heavens like a curtain..." At the time of creation, Hashem had said, "Let the waters gather..." This corresponds to the laver, which contained water that was used to ritualize the hands and feet of the Kohen before his service. When Hashem entered existence, the entire world radiated with His glory. The lighting of the Menorah corresponds and represents to that radiance. Thus, the Mishkan was a microcosm of existence in its entirety. Therefore, all the creative activities that were performed in the building of the Mishkan correspond to G-d's creativity that brought about existence. Since the Jewish people are the testament to the world that Hashem created existence, they must emulate Him by being involved in creativity for six days and refraining from it on the seventh day.

It is stated in Tehillim, "LeOlam chesed yiboneh -the world was created out of chesed (the kindness of Hashem)." Creation was an expression of G- d's chesed to give mankind an opportunity to merit the ultimate goodness. Just as creation came into existence because of chesed, identically the Mishkan, which is a replication of existence, must emanate in a similar manner. Therefore, all the materials that were given for the building of the Mishkan had to meet the prerequisite of the characteristic of chesed - "take for Me a portion (Terumah), from every man whose heart motivates him." It was only then that Hashem could "dwell in our midst."

3. The Exodus from Egypt - A Re-Enactment of Creation

The Gemara in Tractate Chullin tells us that if a person is an apostate regarding the observance of Shabbos, he is the equivalent of one who rejects the entire Torah. Rashi explains that the observance of Shabbos is a testament to the world that G-d is the Creator of existence. Just as He created for six days and refrained on the seventh, so too the Jew (who is Hashem's representation vis-à-vis mankind) also works six days and rests on the seventh. If the Jew does not observe the Shabbos, he is denying the fact that G-d is the Creator. Thus, he is classified as a heretic.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Father) tells us that the world was created through the Ten Utterances of Hashem. We find that the number "ten" manifests itself many times during the developmental period of the Jewish people. Rabbeinu Bachya explains in the Portion of Bereishis that because there were the Ten Utterances, which brought about creation, there were Ten Plagues in Egypt concluding with the Ten Commandments at Sinai.

Although the Jewish people became G-d's people at Sinai, the process began in Egypt. Initially when Hashem sent Moshe to tell Pharaoh to release the Jewish people from bondage, He said to Moshe "Tell Pharaoh... Release My son, My firstborn (Beni Bechori)." Hashem identified the Jewish people as his first-born child, which signifies a close relationship, as between a father and his son. Subsequently, the Torah tells us that Hashem said to Moshe "Tell Pharaoh in My Name Shlach Ami - Send out My people." This verse identifies the Jewish People as "My People." Meaning, that at that

moment the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people was as a King to His subjects.

The evolution of the Jewish people as a Nation began with the Ten Plagues in Egypt. It is interesting to note that during the period of the Plagues, the Jewish people played a passive role. They did not need to take any action in order to bring about the Plagues. Just as Creation came about purely because G-d Willed it, so too the Plagues come upon Egypt because of the Will of Hashem. The moment it was time for the Jewish people to be redeemed, Hashem brought it about without their participation. Just as creation came about without anyone's initiative, it was only G-d Himself who Willed it to be. In addition, the Jewish people were passive regarding the splitting of the Sea. As the verse states, "Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem that He will perform for you today...Hashem shall do battle for you, and you shall remain silent."

The only prerequisite for the miracles to have taken place was that the Jewish people should maintain their faith in Hashem. The period between the exodus from Egypt and culminating with the giving of the Torah at Sinai was a re-enactment of creation. Before the Jews left Egypt, they were not deserving of redemption because of their pagan beliefs. Just as creation came about as a result of the Chesed of Hashem, so too, the redemption and all that transpired during that time (revealed miracles) came about because of G-d's unlimited Kindness.

After G-d created light by saying, "There shall be light," the Torah states, "It was evening it was morning it was yom echad (Day one)." The Midrash asks, "Why is the first day referred to as yom echad (day one) and not yom rishon (first day)?" Seemingly, the proper reference should have been the "first day" of the seven days of creation. The Midrash answers that the reason the Torah uses the term yom echad is to indicate that the only thing that existed on that day was G-d Himself. Even the angels were created on the second day. The first day of creation is referred to as "yom echad" to indicate that only the unity of Hashem existed and nothing else. Once the angels, who were spiritual beings of various dimensions, came into existence, the obviousness of G-d's Unity became slightly blurred.

Prior to receiving the Torah at Sinai, the Torah states, "They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped (vayichan) there, opposite the mountain." Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the Torah uses the term "vayichan - encamped" in the singular form rather than the plural to indicate that the Jewish people gathered opposite the mountain like a single person with a "single heart." Being unified was a prerequisite for the Jewish people to receive the Torah because that oneness reflects the unity of Hashem - which is the commonality between the Jewish people and G-d.

Through their unity, the Jewish people reached the level of "Naaseh v'nishma - we will do and we will listen." This astounded even the angels in heaven. When the Jewish people negated themselves by stating that they were committed to the Torah without knowing the extent of its obligation, they were acknowledging that there is nothing in existence except G-d Himself. This moment at Sinai was

similar to the "yom echad" of creation. Just as on the first day of creation when all that existed was G-d and there was nothing to detract from Him, so too at Sinai the Jewish people had a level of clarity that enabled them to see that nothing existed other than Hashem. Thus, when the Jewish people declared, "Naaseh v'nishma" they became G-d's people - a holy and priestly nation.

4. What is the Significance of "Make for Me a Dwelling Place?"

The Ramchal writes in his work *Derech Hashem* that when G-d created the world it had the capacity to accommodate His Presence. This was the intent of creation. However, because of the sin of Adam and the spiritual impurity that resulted, existence could no longer function in that context. It was not until Sinai that existence was elevated and restored to its original level of spirituality, thus having the capacity to accommodate Hashem's Presence.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that when the Jewish people said, "Naaseh v'nishma - we will do and we will listen" the world was restored to the spiritual level that existed before the sin of Adam. Had the Jewish people not participated in the sin of the Golden Calf, they would have lived eternally as initially intended. Rashi cites the Midrash, which says that at the giving of the Torah at Sinai G-d, brought heaven down to earth. However, due to the sin of the Golden Calf, existence reverted to the post-sin status. Consequently, the world could no longer accommodate G-d's Presence.

Since the world was not able to contain Hashem's Presence, which was the initial intent of creation, Hashem said to the Jewish people, "Make for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in your midst." This commandment needed to be carried out by the Jewish people themselves. Until Sinai, they were in a passive capacity vis-à-vis redemption, the miracles, etc. Hashem carried them all the way and there was no need for them to take any initiative. However, once the Jews failed with the Golden Calf, they themselves had to take steps to bring about change. Their efforts from below brought about efforts from above. The Jewish people needed to actively participate in the building of the Mishkan.

As the Midrash explains, the Mishkan was a microcosm of existence. Every aspect of creation was represented in the Mishkan. It was in the context of the Mishkan that Hashem would be able to dwell amongst the Jewish people. This is because the building of the Mishkan was a reenactment of creation.

There were thirteen materials needed to build the Mishkan. The numerical value of the word "echad-one" is also thirteen. One could say that the reason Hashem wanted the Jewish people to build the Mishkan comprised of thirteen materials was that it had to accommodate His Oneness.

The Yalkut tells us that Hashem said to the Jewish people, "Do not think that you are doing an act of chesed (kindness) for Me by giving Me all the materials that were needed for the Mishkan. The thirteen materials which you are giving Me correspond to the thirteen levels of accommodation that I provided for you in Egypt before the exodus." Meaning, Hashem regarded the materials of the

Mishkan as an expression of a debt of gratitude. If Hashem commanded them to build a location for Him to dwell in their midst, why must He stress the fact that by providing the materials they were not doing Him a favor? Why was it important for them to know that the materials expressed a debt of gratitude to Him? The question becomes even more difficult, because the materials, which the Jews were providing for the Mishkan, were the same valuables that Hashem had given them in Egypt. The Torah states, "They found favor in the eyes of the Egyptians." Hashem performed a miracle, which caused the Egyptians to view the Jewish people in a positive light and thus enabled them to relinquish their wealth to the Jews. Since this was the case, why would the donor think he was doing an act of chesed for Hashem when providing these materials to build the Mishkan?

There is a Positive Commandment stated in the Portion of Ki Savo that when the Jewish people entered into the Promised Land of Israel they were obligated to bring once a year the new fruits and grains to the Bais HaMikdosh, on the Temple Mount, and make the declaration of Bekurim (first fruit). The declaration was an expression of the debt of gratitude for all that Hashem had done for Jewish people. At the conclusion, the person proclaimed, "These are the fruits from the Land that You gave us."

The Midrash cites the position of Reb Yossi who rules that one is not obliged to bring the new fruits and grains from the trans-Jordan side of the river because they are the produce of a land that was taken by two and a half tribes and not given to them by G-d. These two and a half tribes, who took the initiative, approached Moshe Rabbeinu, and asked him if they could settle the trans-Jordan side of the river because of all the grazing lands that were needed for their sheep and cattle. Moshe consulted with G-d and He allowed them to receive that land as their portion as long as they crossed the Jordan and conquered Israel with their brothers.

If in fact the only reason they received the trans-Jordan side as their portion because G-d allowed it, then why is that land considered any less (vis-à-vis the Bekurim obligation) than the other side of the Jordan, which was considered Israel proper? One can say that although they were only able to retain their portion on the trans-Jordan side of the river was because G-d allowed them to; nevertheless, since they had taken the initiative to ask for that portion, they (in their minds) attributed their possession of the land to their own initiative. Therefore, the debt of gratitude for what they had received was not as clear as the level of gratitude that the Jewish people had for the Land of Israel.

Thus, Reb Yossi is of the position that one has no obligation to bring the Bekurim from the fruits and grains of the trans-Jordan side of the river. The quality of the expression of gratitude that is proclaimed regarding the Bekurim ritual needs to be an acknowledgement that the person is only giving back to Hashem that which is His. It is not sufficient for one to think that the fruits he is giving were somehow brought about through his own efforts.

The concept of "Echad - Unity" is an understanding and recognition that Hashem is everything and there is nothing but Him. Everything is a manifestation of His expression. When G-d asked the Jewish

people to provide the thirteen materials of the Mishkan, which is the numerical value of "Echad," G-d was conveying that He was asking for these materials as a debt of gratitude for them to understand that what they were giving was in fact His. The only way the Mishkan had capacity to accommodate Hashem's Presence was if there was an understanding that there is nothing but Him. It was imperative for the Jewish people to understand that what they were doing vis-à-vis the Mishkan was not an act of chesed because that would have interfered with the understanding of Echad.

5. What Determines True Value?

The Torah enumerates the materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan. The Torah lists these materials seemingly in descending order of preciousness - commencing with "gold and silver" which are the most precious. We see, however, that the last two items mentioned are the "avnei shoham v' avnei miluim (the shoham stones and the filling stones)." These were precious colored gems. If the Torah were listing the materials in order of preciousness, one would think that these items should have been listed first and then followed by "gold and silver." Why are the avnei shoham and avnei miluim mentioned last if they are the most valuable?

The Torah states 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..." The Midrash tells us that the Princes of Israel donated the precious gems (the avnei shoham and miluim) that were needed for the breastplate worn by the High Priest and the Ephod (garment of the High Priest). When the Torah writes the word "Niseeim (Princes)" regarding their participation in the building of the Mishkan, it is written with the yud deleted even though the yud is usually needed to express the plural form. This indicated that the Princes were deficient because of their gifts. The Midrash tells us that the Niseeim initially did not participate in the building of the Mishkan. They had said, "Let the Jews participate in the building to the extent that they can and whatever remains unfinished we will complete." 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 needed."

The Ohr Ha'Chaim HaKadosh explains that although the intrinsic material worth of the avnei shoham and avnei miluim was considered of great value, on the spiritual scale they were considered of inferior worth because of the purity that the Princes were lacking. Hashem does not recognize value based on material worth but rather on spiritual purity. Since the intent and motivation behind the giving of the precious stones was deficient, the Torah mentions them last.

The Ohr Ha'Chaim HaKadosh offers another reason the gems were mentioned last, despite their material worth. He cites the Midrash, which says that the avnei shoham and avnei miluim were given to the Jewish people together with the mann (manna-spiritual food). Since these precious stones came to the Jewish people without any effort whatsoever, it was not difficult to give them away for the building of the Mishkan. If one performs a mitzvah that is difficult for him to perform then it takes

on greater value. The avnei shoham and avnei miluim are mentioned last relative to the other materials because they were less difficult to relinquish.

The value of a mitzvah is determined by the effort that one expends to perform it. For example, there are two aspects to the study of Torah: one is the gaining of Torah knowledge (yidiaas Ha'Torah) and the other is the study of Torah (limud Ha'Torah) for its own sake. Even if one is proficient in every aspect of Torah, he still has the obligation to study the Torah. If one is endowed with exceptional intelligence and is able to comprehend the Torah without much effort, this accomplishment is related to yidiaas Ha'Torah. However, he must toil in the process of limud Ha'Torah regardless of his abilities. It is the toiling, struggling, and effort that infuse the mitzvah with greater value.

The Torah tells us that there is a certain sin offering that was brought to the Bais HaMikdash based on one's financial status. A wealthy man brought a meat offering while a poor man brought a bird for his sin offering. The Gemara in Menachos states that although the wealthy man brought a meat offering of significant value and a poor man brought a bird offering of little material value, and although when one burns the meat offering it has a fragrant smell and the bird with its feathers has a foul smell, the Torah states regarding both of their offerings, "It gives great pleasure to G-d." The Gemara states that the Torah is teaching 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 identically valued."

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, "All that Hashem desires from a person is his heart," which means one's feeling and dedication to the mitzvah. When one performs a mitzvah, Hashem will value it in a special way only if it is infused with dedication and feeling. 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. It is not what one gives, but how one gives it.

6. Understanding the Value of Inspiration

The Torah states regarding the building of the Mishkan (Sanctuary), "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and let them take for Me a portion (Terumah), from every man whose heart motivates him (yidvenu leebo) you shall take My portion." In the Portion of Vayakhel the Torah states regarding the building of the Mishkan, "Every man whose heart inspired him (yeesah leebo) came; and everyone whose spirit motivated him brought the portion of Hashem..." We see from these two references that there were two types of people who provided for the building of the Mishkan - those who were "motivated by their hearts" - yidvenu leebo and those who gave with an "inspired heart" - yeesah leebo. What is the difference between these people?

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

of the degree of his own inspiration. To this person all that exists is the cause that needs to be supported and all other concerns are not considered. He is consumed with the cause. Clearly, the person at the level of yeesah leebo "inspired heart" is at a more advanced level than the person who is "motivated" by his heart.

When Hashem said to the Jewish people, "...Make for Me a Sanctuary - so that I may dwell in your midst," the person with the inspired heart understood this as the ultimate moment of opportunity. That person gave whatever was needed to build the Mishkan without consideration of anything else. However, the Torah tells us that despite the invaluable opportunity that was at hand, there were those who only gave in a calculated manner. Those were the people with a "generous" heart. They valued the cause but were not consumed with it.

Rambam in Hilchos Talmud Torah (The Laws of studying Torah) explains the manner in which one acquires the "Crown of Torah" (Kesser Torah). Rambam states, "The Crown of Torah is lying in the corner. It is available for every Jew who wants to partake of it." He states, "The one who is inspired by his heart (to acquire the Crown of Torah) should not be distracted by anything. He must be singly focused." Rambam cites Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers), which outlines how one must live his life to acquire Torah. "This is the way of Torah - bread with salt you shall eat, water in measured amounts you shall drink, on the floor you shall sleep, and a life of deprivation you shall live." Rambam uses the term "the one who is inspired" by his heart to mean that he is addressing the one who is consumed with the need to achieve that special level of involvement in Torah. To this person, what he eats and where he sleeps is irrelevant. All that exists for this person is the Torah itself. Anything else in life is an incidental. According to this understanding, what is stated in Pirkei Avos is not a prescription to acquire the Crown of Torah, but rather that mode of life which is described is an indication of one who is sufficiently inspired to acquire Torah.

The Torah refers to the decedents of Esav as "alufim." The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that the meaning of "aluf" is a "king without a crown." The commentators explain that only the emperor wore the crown, but the monarchs of the vassal states (the alufim) did not because they were not the true kings. A crown identifies the essence of the person. Thus, if one is not the true king, he does not wear the crown of a king. Similarly, one who possesses the crown of Torah is an embodiment of Torah. He is not someone who merely possesses and engages in Torah study. His entire being is permeated and imbued with Torah. The one who is permeated and imbued with Torah is the one who is "inspired" by his heart to acquire it.

If a person, wants to reach this level of inspiration to be driven to acquire Torah he needs to have a special level of appreciation of Torah, which can only come about with Divine Assistance (siyata d'shmaya). We say in the blessing of the Shema, "...instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn, safeguard, perform, and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love." We pray that Hashem should inspire our hearts and give us that special level of appreciation.

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