

DO YOU KNOW YOUR OWN POWER

by Shlomo Katz

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Pesha Batya bat Zemach a"h (Bessie Rutstein)

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Today's Learning:

Midot 3:6-7

O.C. 25:13-26:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Avodah Zarah 58

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Yoma 18

A large part of this week's parashah is devoted to the laws of the festivals - Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Hakippurim. These laws are introduced by the verse, "G-d's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations." This verse teaches, the Gemara comments,

that "you" - the bet din - are to designate when the festivals will occur. (This was done by hearing the testimony of the witnesses who saw the new moon and declaring which day would be Rosh Chodesh.) Even if the bet din were to miscalculate and declare Rosh Chodesh to be on the wrong day - even if bet din were to intentionally declare Rosh Chodesh on the wrong day - its declaration would be binding.

This halachah is reflected in a number of Midrashim. They record, for example, that the angels ask G-d, "When is Rosh Hashanah?" "I do not know," G-d responds. "Let us all go down to the bet din and see what they have decreed." This is reflected also in our Yom Tov prayers, in which we recite the blessing, "Who sanctifies Yisrael and the festivals." This reflects the fact that G-d sanctifies Yisrael, and Yisrael sanctifies the festivals. In contrast, the parallel blessing on Shabbat is simply, "Who sanctifies the Shabbat." Yisrael is not mentioned because we have no role in determining when Shabbat will occur.

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) notes that G-d has literally given some of His dominion to us. Rosh Hashanah is the day when He judges us, yet we decide when Rosh Hashanah will be! In what other court system does the defendant enjoy that privilege? This power of the Jewish people sheds light as well on the Jewish view of kedushah / holiness, says R' Soloveitchik. Kedushah is not some magical force that appears on its own; it is something that we create through our deeds. Man can imbue time with kedushah and man can imbue objects with kedushah. Without our mitzvot, there would be no kedushah. (Divrei Hashkafah pp. 138-142)

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, `Mo'adei Hashem / G- d's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations, these are My appointed festivals. For six days labor may be done, and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation . . ." (23:2-3)

Why does the Torah say that it will speak about the festivals, but before doing so, it speaks about Shabbat? R' Aryeh Leib Zunz z"l (Poland; died 3 Iyar 1833) answers:

Our Sages say that a person's annual budget is determined on Rosh Hashanah except for what he spends in honor of Shabbat and Yom Tov. The Arizal states that this is alluded to by the word "mo'ed" / "appointed festival" (spelled "mem-vav-ayin-dalet"). Specifically, the gematria of the letters `vav-ayin-dalet' equals twice `mem' -- indicating that a person's wealth will be multiplied after he begins to honor the mo'ed. This, explains R' Zunz, is why Shabbat had to be mentioned here, so that it too would be considered a "mo'ed."

(Me'lo Ha'omer)

"In the seventh month, on the first of the month, there shall be a rest day for you, a zichron /

remembrance with shofar blasts, a holy convocation." (23:24)

R' Yaakov Ba'al Ha'turim z"l (Spain; 14th century) writes: The word "zichron" appears three times in the mesorah (i.e., the traditional spelling of words in Tanach): here; in the verse (Kohelet 1:11), "As there is no remembrance of the first ones . . ."; and in the verse (Kohelet 2:16), "For there is no comparison between the remembrance of the wise man and of the fool at all . . ."

R' Gavriel Ze'ev Margolis z"l (1848-1935; rabbi in Lithuania and Boston) writes that this mesorah teaches the following lesson: Our verse states that blowing the shofar will cause G-d to remember us favorably. One might ask: Why won't G-d remember us favorably in any case, in the merit of our ancestors? The answer may be found in Chazal's teaching that the merit of prior generations protects their descendants only when the later generations follow in their ancestors' footsteps. In contrast, blowing the shofar, which inspires repentance, causes G-d to remember us favorably no matter what our deeds have been. Thus, the mesorah may be read as a give-and-take, as follows:

"There shall be a rest day for you, a zichron / remembrance with shofar blasts." Why are the shofar blasts necessary? "Is there no remembrance of the first ones" - i.e., of the merits of our ancestors?" The answer is, "No! For there is no comparison between the remembrance of the wise man" - who follows in his ancestors' footsteps and who will be protected by their merits - "and of the fool" - who sins, and who will not be helped by the merits of his ancestors.

(Torat Gavriel)

"The son of an Israelite woman went out . . . The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed . . ." (24:10-11)

The Midrash asks: "From where did he go out? He left his world." R' Pinchas Horowitz z"l (rabbi of Frankfurt, known as the Hafla'ah; 1730-1805) explains: Commentaries ask how this blasphemer could have been executed, since it is clear that he was not warned. (A warning is a halachic prerequisite to execution, yet the Torah is clear that before this incident occurred, Bnei Yisrael did not even know what the punishment for blasphemy was.) The answer is that a person may be executed if he is warned that he will receive a harsher punishment than he actually deserves, and he says, "Even so, I will sin." This blasphemer was warned that he would forfeit his share in the World to Come if he blasphemed, and he accepted that punishment. "He left his world," as the Midrash says. Therefore, he could receive the less harsh punishment of stoning.

(Panim Yafot)

Pirkei Avot

"Rabbi Elazar Ha'modai says, 'One who desecrates sacred things, who disgraces the Festivals, who

humiliates his fellow in public, who nullifies the covenant of our forefather Avraham, or who perverts the Torah [by interpreting it] contrary to the halachah - though he may have Torah and good deeds, he has no share in the World to Come'."

(Chapter 3, Mishnah 15)

R' Gedaliah Silverstone z"l (1871-1944; rabbi in Belfast, Ireland and Washington, D.C.) writes that this mishnah is speaking of talking in shul. Firstly, those who talk in shul desecrate those holy places. On Shabbat and Festivals, when children come to shul and see their fathers behaving thus, the Shabbat and Festivals themselves end up being disgraced. What do people discuss in shul? Much of it is lashon hara - humiliating their fellows in public. The effect of all of this is to drive people away from shul, with the result that those children discard the covenant of the Patriarchs and pervert the Torah.

(Lev Avot)

"He [Rabbi Akiva] used to say, 'Everything is given on collateral, and a net is spread over all the living. The shop is open; the Merchant [G-d] extends credit; the ledger is open; the hand writes; and whoever wishes to borrow, let him come and borrow. The collectors make their rounds constantly, every day, and collect payment from the person whether he realizes it or not. They have proof to rely upon; the judgment is a truthful judgment; and everything is prepared for the banquet'."

(Chapter 3, Mishnah 20)

The "banquet" is a reference to the final reward after death. Why is it called a banquet? R' Simcha of Vitry z"l (see below) quotes R' Meshulam ben Klonimus of Rome z"l who explains that just as at a banquet, each person is assigned a seat according to his rank, so in Gan Eden, each person is given a "seat" commensurate with his performance of mitzvot. In this light we can understand the verse (Kohelet 12:5), "So man goes to his eternal home." Each person has his own home in the World to Come appropriate to what he accomplished during his life.

(Machzor Vitry)

R' Simcha of Vitry z"l

R' Simcha ben Shmuel of Vitry was one of the outstanding disciples of Rashi. R' Simcha's work, Machzor Vitry, records many of the halachic decisions regarding prayer and other subjects that he heard either directly from Rashi or from his (R' Simcha's) colleague R' Shemariah in their teacher's name. Machzor Vitry also cites rulings by earlier authorities including R' Amram Gaon, R' Hai Gaon, Rabbeinu Gershom Me'or Hagolah and R' Yitzchak Alfasi.

Together with the siddur of the aforementioned R' Amram Gaon, Machzor Vitry is one of the

foundations of our prayer-book. It begins with the laws of prayer and berachot followed by the Shabbat liturgy and the laws governing work on Shabbat. Another section defines the 39 categories of prohibited labor on Shabbat. The machzor also contains a commentary on Pirkei Avot, though some attribute this to a different author. Other sections discuss kashrut, family purity, tefilin, mezuzah and ethics. Some aggadic sources, including quotations from the Jerusalem Talmud, are not found in any other source. Many later halachic works quote from Machzor Vitry.

R' Simcha's son, R' Shmuel, married Rashi's granddaughter Miriam (daughter of R' Meir ben Shmuel and Rashi's daughter Yocheved). Their son was the Tosafist R' Yitzchak of Dampierre, commonly known as "Ri" or "Ri Hazaken."

R' Simcha died in the year 1105.

In Machzor Vitry, R' Simcha offers the following advice for one who wishes to improve his concentration during his prayers: Pronounce each word carefully, one word at a time, and concentrate on the meanings of the words. Although the words appear as many separate units that address many different topics, they are all share one purpose.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
