

# THE MERIT OF THE PATRIARCHS

*by Shlomo Katz*

**Parshas Va'era**  
**"The Merit of the Patriarchs"**  
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Sponsored by  
Martin and Michelle Swartz  
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Today's Learning:  
Nach: Yeshayah 49-50  
Taharot 8:1-2  
O.C. 397:9-11  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 148  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Berachot 4

The Midrash Tanchuma comments on the opening verse of our parashah: "Elokim spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am Hashem'" [i.e., He revealed to Moshe the Four Letter Name which we refer to as "Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh"]. The midrash asks: Is a person permitted to pronounce the Name as it is written? The midrash answers: Our rabbis have taught--The following have no portion in the World-to-Come: One who denies that techiyat ha'meitim is alluded to in the Torah; one who denies the Divine origin of the Torah; an apikorus; and one who whispers Biblical verses as healing charms. The sage Abba Shaul says: Also one who pronounces the Name as it is written. [Until here from the midrash.]

R' Avraham Meir Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) asks: Why is the punishment for pronouncing G-d's Name so severe? He explains: Each name of Hashem represents a manifestation of Hashem's relationship with His creations. In particular, Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh represents Pure Mercy, while Elokim represents Justice. G-d is never manifested in our world as Pure Mercy because we are undeserving. Furthermore, the Zohar (Part II, page 51b) teaches that a king is not a king if he is not feared; thus, G-d "cannot" treat us with Pure Mercy. Rather, we see Him as Hashem Elokim-- Mercy and Justice tempering each other--or as Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh pronounced "Aleph-Dalet-Nun-Yud"--Mercy

tempered by a Master-servant relationship. ("Adon" means "Master.") Were a person to pronounce Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh, he would be implying that G-d is not our Judge or Master, and that would diminish His Honor. For the same reason, our Sages have taught that a person who says, "G-d is a vatran," i.e., "He is easy-going and doesn't mind that I sin a little," incurs a harsh punishment. (Be'ur Ma'amarim)

The same idea applies to our understanding of the concept of zechut Avot / the merit of our Patriarchs. When Hashem shows mercy to us because of zechut Avot, we do not understand it as "giving us something for nothing," for then He would be a vatran. Rather, because He does not want Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov to be pained, He has mercy on their descendants. (Ve'halachta B'drachav p.88)

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*"Therefore, say to Bnei Yisrael, 'I am Hashem, and 'I shall take you out' from under the burdens of Egypt; 'I shall rescue you' from their service; 'I shall redeem you' with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 'I shall take you' to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you . . . 'I shall bring you' to the land about which I raised My hand to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.'" (6:6-8)*

The most commonly offered reason for the Four Cups at the Seder is that they parallel the first four phrases underlined above. Some drink a fifth cup paralleling the last underlined phrase as well.

R' David Ha'naggid z"l (1224-1300; grandson of Rambam z"l) offers the following additional reasons for drinking four or five cups of wine at the Seder:

There are four verses in Tanach where a "cup" alludes to the reward awaiting the righteous. They are: "You anointed my head with oil, my cup overflows" (Tehilim 23:5); "Hashem is my allotted portion and my cup" (Tehilim 16:5); "I will raise the cup of salvations" (Tehilim 116:13); and "So that you may nurse and be sated from the cup of her consolations" (Yeshayah 66:11, as interpreted by the Talmud Yerushalmi).

In addition, there are four verses in which a cup alludes to the punishment awaiting the wicked. They are: "Take this cup of the wine of wrath" (Yirmiyah 25:15); "A golden cup was Babylon in the hand of Hashem" (Yirmiyah 51:7); "For there is a cup of punishment in Hashem's hand" (Tehilim 75:9); and "He will rain down coals upon the wicked; fire and brimstone and a burning blast is their allotted cup" (Tehilim 11:6).

In short, the Four Cups were established to remind us of the consequences of good and bad deeds so that we will destroy the yetzer hara, which is compared to chametz, from our hearts, our ideas, our thoughts, and our speech-a total of four "parts" of our beings.

In addition, the Four Cups remind us that Hashem saved us from four aspects of the Egyptian exile: laying bricks, applying mortar, having children drowned in the Nile, and not receiving straw to make

bricks.

Also, the Four Cups allude to the Four Exiles: Bavel (Babylon), Persia, Greece, and Rome. For those who have a fifth cup, it alludes to the partial exile under the reign of the Ishmaelites; partial, because at least they permit us to live in Yerushalayim, R' David writes.

Also, for those who drink five cups, they allude to the ten (2 x 5) recitations that are recited over them: Kiddush and Borei Pri Ha'gafen; the Haggadah and Borei Pri Ha'gafen; Birkat Ha'mazon and Borei Pri Ha'gafen; Hallel and Borei Pri Ha'gafen; and Hallel Ha'gadol (Tehilim ch.136) and Borei Pri Ha'gafen. Together, these ten recitations allude to the Ten Commandments, which were arranged in two columns of five.

Finally, the Four Cups allude to the four mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael performed prior to leaving Egypt-- Brit Milah, Korban Pesach, matzah and maror, and the four meritorious practices because of which they deserved to be redeemed--not changing their language, not changing their names, not changing their alphabet, and not revealing each others' secrets. (Midrash Rabbi David Hanaggid al Haggadah Shel Pesach p.30-33)

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*"I shall make a 'pedut' / distinction between My people and your people -- tomorrow this sign will come about." (8:19)*

The word "pedut" appears three times in Tanach--once here, once in the verse (Tehilim 111:9), "He sent 'pedut' / redemption to His people," and once in the verse (Tehilim 130:7), "For with Hashem is kindness, and with Him is abundant 'pedut' / redemption."

R' Yitzchak Weiss z"l Hy"d (rabbi of Verbau, Czechoslovakia; killed in the Holocaust) writes: When Hashem redeems the Jewish People, it can be for one of two reasons. Sometimes, it is because we are worthy of being redeemed. Other times, however, we are unworthy of being redeemed in our own right, but Hashem, in His kindness, redeems us because we compare favorably to the nations among whom we live. This was the case when Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt, as alluded to by the above verses: "He sent redemption to His people." Why? "For with Hashem is kindness, and with Him is abundant redemption." How did He justify it? "I shall make a distinction between My people and your people."

R' Weiss adds: R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (Chida; 1724-1806) writes that sometimes redemption occurs in the merit of the fact that the Jewish People anticipate that Hashem will redeem them. This is the meaning of the oft-recited verses in Tehilim (130:6-8), "My soul yearns for Hashem, among those longing for the dawn, those longing for the dawn. Let Yisrael hope for Hashem, for with Hashem is kindness, and with Him is abundant 'pedut' / redemption. And He shall redeem Yisrael from all its iniquities." (Siach Yitzchak)

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We read in the Pesach Haggadah that Rabbi Yehuda provided a mnemonic for remembering the Ten Plagues: "Detzach adash be'achav." But this mnemonic is nothing more than an acronym of the names of the plagues! What does it add to our understanding?

R' Elazar Rokeach z"l (Germany; 1160-1238) explains: In the book of Tehilim (78:44-51; 105:28-36), the plagues are listed in two different orders. With his mnemonic, Rabbi Yehuda teaches us that the order in which the plagues are listed in the Torah is the historical order in which they occurred [which we would not necessarily have known, as our Sages teach that the Torah is not entirely in chronological order.]

In addition, Rabbi Yehuda is highlighting a pattern within the Ten Plagues. In each set of three, Pharaoh was warned before the first two plagues, but the third occurred without warning. This is consistent with the opinion in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 81b) that a person who sinned twice after being warned and received the punishment of makkot / lashes each time can be punished for his third offense even without a warning. (Haggadah Shel Pesach im Peirush Rokeach)

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## **Shabbat: Equal to All the Mitzvot - Part 2**

There are seven mitzvot which are described in the Gemara or other sources as being "equal to all of the mitzvot." R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) writes that each of these mitzvot represents one aspect of man's complete service of Hashem. The seven mitzvot and the ideas they represent, according to R' Wolbe, are: (1) rejecting idolatry--using one's ability to evaluate alternatives; (2) giving tzedakah--perfecting one's "power of giving," which is the root of all good character traits; (3) tzitzit--perfecting one's memory (since tzitzit are a reminder of all the mitzvot); (4) brit milah--the sanctity of one's body; (5) Torah study--the sanctity of one's mind; (6) Shabbat--the sanctity of time; and (7) living in Eretz Yisrael--the sanctity of place.

Regarding Shabbat and the sanctity of time, R' Wolbe writes: The pasuk (Bereishit 1:1), "In the beginning, G-d created . . ." refers to the creation of time. At the end of creation, G-d created Shabbat, which invested time with sanctity. We recite in the Shabbat (Friday night) prayers, based on the Zohar: "Toward Shabbat, let us go, for it is the source of all blessing." This teaches that Shabbat is not holy for itself alone; rather, its holiness flows to the entire week. The work Reishit Chochmah quotes R' Moshe Cordevero z"l (Remak; 1522-1570) who says that this is the basis for the halachah that a person who is lost in a desert and has lost track of time should count six days and observe the seventh day as Shabbat. How can a person recite kiddush on a day which is not Shabbat? Remak explains: Since every day derives its holiness from Shabbat, there is an element of the holiness of Shabbat in every day.

It turns out, R' Wolbe continues, that Hashem created motion (which could not exist if time did not

exist) on the first day of creation, and rest on the last day. Which of these is the source of blessing? Rest! Time (motion) is only a vessel into which G-d pours the blessing which originates from rest. What is the meaning of this day of rest? It represents eternity (consistency) within time, which is why Shabbat is called "A microcosm of Olam Haba." It is a manifestation of the holiness imparted to the world by the one Constant that is above time--i.e., Hashem. (Ha'mitzvot Ha'shekulot)

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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 **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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