

MAKING CONNECTIONS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaeschanan

Making Connections

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In this week's parashah, we find the Aseret Ha'dibrot. R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) notes that each of the first five commandments stands alone, while the last five commandments are joined by the letter "vav," i.e. the conjunction "and." He explains:

The first five commandments are mitzvot bein adam la'Makom / between man and G-d. (Even the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother," is bein adam la'Makom, Maharal explains, because our Sages say that there are three partners in the formation of a child: G-d, father and mother. [Thus, honoring two of the partners is like honoring the third partner.] Indeed, our Sages say that if one honors his parents, G-d views it as if He dwells with that person and that person honors Him.) The second five commandments are mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro / interpersonal commandments. Man is charged to perfect himself in both areas; thus, the Gemara (Kiddushin 40a) calls a person who excels in only one of them, "A tzaddik who is not good."

But, there is a difference between the two types of mitzvot, Maharal continues. A person who violates one of the second five commandments not only commits a sin, but he also creates a victim. The sinner leaves an imprint on his victim; they become connected to each other, and this is alluded to by the conjunction, the letter "vav." In contrast, a person who violates one of the first five commandments has committed a sin, but he has not harmed, or even changed, G-d. There is no victim and, in this sense, his sin exists in a vacuum. This is alluded to by the absence of the vav.

The fact that a sin bein adam l'chaveiro leaves an imprint on a victim teaches us, concludes Maharal, that a person who has sinned against another person cannot achieve atonement unless he appeases his victim. (Drush Al Ha'Torah)

"Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon." (3:25)

The Gemara (Sotah 14a) asks: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu want so much to enter Eretz Yisrael? Did he desire its fruit? the Gemara asks rhetorically. Rather, Moshe said: "Bnei Yisrael were commanded regarding many agricultural mitzvot; let them be done by me." Hashem responded, "All you want is the reward; I will count it as if you had done it."

R' Meir ben Eliyahu z"l of Vilna (grand-nephew of the Vilna Gaon; died in Yerushalayim in 1842) writes: Moshe Rabbeinu knew that Hashem rewards those who desire to perform a mitzvah but are unavoidably prevented from doing so as if they actually performed the mitzvah. Thus, Moshe was not concerned with being able to perform the mitzvot himself.

Rather, our Sages teach that causing others to perform mitzvot is greater than doing the mitzvot oneself. Thus, Moshe wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael in order to have the opportunity to lead and instruct Bnei Yisrael in performing the agricultural laws. "Let them be done by me" means "Let me them be done through me." To this Hashem responded: "All you want is the extra reward due one who causes others to perform mitzvot. It's yours!" (Nachalat Avot)

"Shema Yisrael, Hashem is our Elokim, Hashem is One!" (6:4)

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204) writes: "Hashem knows His Essence as it is. He does not know with knowledge that is a separate entity from Himself, the way man knows something. Our existence and our knowledge are not one entity. In contrast, the Creator, His Knowledge, His Existence, and any other Aspect of Him are all One. This is something that we do not possess the vocabulary to describe, nor the ability to understand," Rambam concludes. (Hil. Yesodei Ha'Torah 2:10)

R' David Kohen (1887-1972; Yeshivat Merkaz Ha'Rav; known as the "Nazir") elaborates on the difference between Hashem and everything else: Unlike G-d, nothing else can exist alone. Even angels must be inspired by each other, as we recite in the daily shacharit prayer, "All of them receive the yoke of Heaven upon themselves from each other. We say further, "They give each other permission to sanctify their Maker." Without drawing strength from each other-in the angels' case, each from the one above him--they could not sanctify G-d.

This need for a connection is even more true of humans, R' Kohen writes, and that is why two human souls are drawn to each other in the emotion we call "love." This does not refer to a utilitarian relationship, but rather to something very spiritual. R' Kohen [who studied in his youth at the Universities of Freiburg, Germany and Basel, Switzerland] illustrates this difference by noting that applied sciences do not inspire the same love of learning or the same joy in a person as do pure

sciences. (Zachu Shechinah Beineihem, p.37-38)

"Shema Yisrael, Hashem is our Elokim, Hashem is One!" (6:4)

R' Yissachar Dov Rokeach z"l (1851-1926; Belzer Rebbe) once commented to one of his housekeeping staff, a man known as Reb Mordechai Shamash: "It is Elul, time to repent."

Reb Mordechai replied, "The Rebbe should repent."

"For what?" asked the Rebbe, and Reb Mordechai answered that the Rebbe took too long to say Shema and kept the congregation waiting when it was hungry and thirsty. [In fact, the Rebbe was known as a quick davener, except for his Kriat Shema which took between 15 and 45 minutes.]

The Rebbe replied, "What can I do? Look how long Rashi's commentary on Shema is! At a minimum, a person who says Shema needs to have in mind the plain meaning of the words, i.e., all of Rashi's commentary." (Quoted in Orchot Rabboteinu p.26)

"You shall love Hashem, your Elokim, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your resources." (6:5)

R' Itamar Schwartz shlita (Yerushalayim) writes: Complete love of G-d is not dependent on receiving anything from Him. Nevertheless, the first step toward fulfilling the mitzvah of loving G-d is to recognize what He gives a person.

Imagine, R' Schwartz continues, that you are sitting at a table and somebody brings you a drink. You look up to see who it was, but he or she is gone. While you might feel gratitude toward your unseen benefactor, you will never develop love for him or her, since you don't know whom to love.

Imagine now that you enter a room and find a drink on the table. You mistakenly believe that you left that drink there earlier. Here, notes R' Schwartz, the reason you will never love your benefactor is because you don't even know you had a benefactor.

In order to begin to love Hashem, one must overcome both of these challenges. First, one has to recognize that he did not do anything for himself; it all came from a benefactor. Second, one has to recognize who that benefactor is, i.e., Hashem. (B'lvavi Mishkan Evneh II p.204-205)

"If your son asks you tomorrow, saying, 'What are the testimonies and the decrees and the ordinances that Hashem, our Elokim, commanded you?'" (6:20)

This is the question that the Pesach Haggadah attributes to the wise son. R' Avraham Aharon Prag z"l (Yerushalayim: 1870-1921) notes that this question begins, "If your son asks," unlike the simple son's question (Shmot 13:14), "When your son will ask you at some future time, 'What is this?'" The reason for this difference, R' Prag explains, is that it is inevitable that a child beginning his education will ask questions. He becomes alarmed when he doesn't understand, and he exclaims, "What is this?" However, as he learns more and his intellect develops, he becomes more deliberate. He might ask a question, or he might say to himself, "If I don't figure this out today, I will figure it out after I learn more." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tavlin L'mitzvah p.32)

Shabbat

The Gemara states that when Shabbat arrives, a person should not feel as if Shabbat is interrupting his work; rather, he should feel as if all of his work is done, even if it is not. How does one achieve this level?

R' Avraham Zvi Kluger shlita (Bet Shemesh, Israel) explains, based on a number of 18th and 19th century chassidic works: When the Talmud speaks of the melachot / labors that are prohibited on Shabbat, it never says that there are 39 melachot. Rather, it always speaks of the "40 melachot missing one." This is teaching us that the feeling that one needs to work always comes from the sense that one is missing something. If, when Shabbat arrives, a person felt like he was a guest in the palace of the King (i.e., Hashem), he would not feel that he is lacking anything, and he would not feel like he is neglecting his work.

This requires explanation, for one can see with his own eyes that his work is not done just because Shabbat has arrived! R' Kluger writes: It is human nature that parents worry about and care for their children until they are certain that the children are mature enough and have the tools to begin to care for themselves. The more that the child makes efforts to care for himself, the more readily parents will let go and allow the child to become self-sufficient. In contrast, when the child was an infant and incapable of caring for himself, his parents took care of all of his needs, while he needed to do nothing.

We are Hashem's children. During the six days of the work week, we are like those older children who do their best to find their own way. Just as with our parents, the more we attempt to cut the ties between ourselves and Hashem, the more He will leave us to our own devices. On Shabbat, however, even though we know intellectually that there is work to be done, we must concentrate on the knowledge that, as compared to Hashem's ability to provide, we are like infants in the crib, whose every need is provided by our loving parents. (In reality, R' Kluger notes, one who works on the trait of bitachon could feel this every day.) (Nezer Yisrael, Vol.I p.285)

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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