

CLASS 17 - KI SAVO

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"And it will be when you come to the land that Hashem, your Lord, is giving you as a portion, and you inherit it, and dwell in it. And you shall take from the first of all fruits of the earth, that you bring forth from the land that Hashem, your Lord, has given you, and you shall place it in a vessel, and you shall go to the place that Hashem, your Lord, has chosen to have His Name reside there." (Devarim 26,1-2)

In describing the vessel that is used for the Mitzva of Bikkurim, bringing the first fruits to the Temple, the Torah uses the word 'Tenne'. Rarely utilized, the usage of this word indicates a hidden message.

The Ba'al HaTurim adds a cryptic comment:

"This [Tenne] equals sixty B'Gimmatriya, hinting at Bikkurim, which is one sixtieth, and therefore the letter 'Samech' is missing in the Parsha of Bikkurim."

This idea echoes the statement of Chazal commenting on Breishis 2, 21 - the creation of woman from the body of man - "...and He took one of his ribs, and closed the flesh beneath it."

"...from the beginning of the Torah until this point, 'Samech' is not written. Once she was created, Satan was created with her...." (Breishis Rabbah 17, 9)

Both the Parsha of Bikkurim and the narrative of creation share this point: no Samech. Bikkurim, then, is a returning of sorts to Ma'aseh Breishis, hence the reference to 'Reishis', the first of all fruits, an allusion to the 'Reishis' of all life.

Let us explain the meaning of the disappearing Samech, and the special sanctity of Breishis that precludes its mention. With this, we will understand, as well, the sanctity of Rosh HaShanah, 'Reishis' of each year.

1

The letter Samech is unique. As opposed to the varied lines and diverse shapes of much of the alphabet, Samech is a perfect circle.

Geometrically, our Sages classify two forms that precede the very act of creation, Kav and Iggul, line and circle. Shapes are not merely artistic strokes, rather, the form of each object has inherent meaning, reflecting conceptual frameworks of purpose and design.

From the initial moment one begins to draw a circle, the entire picture is perfectly clear. From the

first etchings of rounded design, a circle can be completed without any change of plan.

As opposed to the line, which allows for a shift to different directions, the circle is self-contained, revolving around itself in a repetitious cycle. The future is apparent, and completely predictable.

It is in this type of life that the Satan thrives.

If we were to analyze modern society's perspective on existence, we would discover that above all else, the primary occupation of today's man is the longing for a good life. Each day heralds the quest for a new thrill, a better taste, or a pleasurable sensation.

The endless chase reveals this: modern man has no purpose or direction, no abiding theme towards which he can focus all energy. With no objective or goal, he remains unfulfilled, and in its absence, the physical pleasures of a materialistic world quiet the gnawing ache of emptiness.

In a life that's heading nowhere, the dulling sameness of a humdrum existence drives man towards the edge, seeking the momentary stimulation acquired when stretching life's limits.

But, what does life itself entail? What is there to do when man is unoccupied? Leaving artificial stimulants aside, what defines man's essential existence?

Nothing. This depressing answer is an accurate assessment of man's mortal condition.

Viewed as an independent entity, life itself has no value. It is a never-ending cycle of work and consumption, increasing one's toil in support of his growing expenditures. In the process, the spiritual senses that are man's only hope are numbed into submission in the hollow vortex that swallows him alive.

Because so many have fallen prey to the deceptive demands of modern life, the patterns of life are so easily predictable. Whether it be a young boy in the Midwest, or a California co-ed; a Southern Baptist, or a modern Orthodox Jew, the general lifestyle is strikingly similar: study hard, go to a top school, get a good job, buy a house, have two or three kids. Along the way you can a) learn to play baseball or b) tennis, if you have style, c) work out regularly or d) run the marathon.

For outside interests, you can a) buy a dog or cat, b) support the Philharmonic, or c) become a member of the local museum. You can vacation in Alaska, the Caribbean, or the Alps. You will climb the Himalayas, or cruise the Atlantic and retire to one of the above.

To give life color and meaning, one can attend church or synagogue regularly, work for charitable causes, or fight for world peace. If nothing unexpected happens, an unfortunate illness or unforeseen death, life is a success, and you can rest in peace.

Everything man needs is within reach in this circular, self-sufficient world.

Man is capable of escaping this world where everyone looks and thinks the same; he can choose to be conscious of a different dimension, one where the free-willed individual exercises the power to follow G-d's straight line, walking with G-d towards eternity.

The Jew is enjoined to know from whence he came, and to be aware of where he is headed. More than mere directions, these commands dictate an approach to life, an attitude that sees life as a cog in G-d's plan, an implement to fulfill His destiny. Rather than an empty vessel waiting to be filled, life's every moment has design and direction.

A life of choice implies a disciplined control of base instincts and desires, utilization of man's physical self in pursuit of a higher goal.

Life in the circle, however, has no choices.

Other than the options of Rocky Road or Chocolate Chip, tape or CD, modern man is unwillingly drawn into a lifestyle beyond his control.

It is here that the Jew faces his test.

Consider a common dilemma: confronting a temptation, or climbing out of bed to catch Minyan, or Shiur. If we were to focus on the wrong choice, sin, we would see that in contrast to Mitzvos, evil is rarely chosen, but rather, it is the result of passive submission to the easy inclination.

While Mitzvos generally require an expenditure of self, an active input of time and energy, sin is a function of inertia. Not a choice, but the inability to fight off desire, dragged without conscious forethought into a G-dless dimension.

Life in the circle.

His future pre-ordained, for the man who chooses not to choose, there is no recourse but the destructive evil that envelops his world.

This is the missing Samech, the Samech of the Satan and his followers.

3

The world G-d creates for man has no Samech.

Hashem has no need for creation, nor does He require anyone to reveal His glory. The creation of man is the ultimate gift, the opportunity for man to express on his own the Heavenly will.

For this to occur, man must reflect the Divine, exemplifying the image of G-d, the Tzelem Elokim that is his focal point, defining his existence.

As G-d is never coerced or influenced by forces outside Himself, the perfect man acts in a manner of willful consideration. His every move is a function of choice, defined by purpose and direction.

He knows where he comes from and understands where he is headed.

It is upon this line that creation travels.

This is the sanctity of Breishis.

The ability to connect one's actions and goals to the origin of life, to remain committed to a Divine plan while functioning in a physical existence, is a mark of the faithful servant of G-d. He fastens Reishis to Tachlis, beginning and end, never straying from the line that unifies heaven and earth.

This is man's produce. After settling in his home and tending his field, he finally brings forth the fruit that will sustain his future. It is this very fruit that he gives back to G-d, returning it to the Bais HaMikdash, the Temple built upon the rock, source of all existence.

He takes one sixtieth, separating the oneness of G-d's creation from the Samech of a circular, materialistic world. This too, is 'Reishis', amending holiness to the profane, imbuing it with plan and purpose.

4

Rosh HaShanah is a term of contradictions. While 'Rosh' implies something new, a fresh and different start, 'Shanah' is repetition; recurrence and duplication.

Each year is a complete cycle, a natural function of a circular world. Those who are aware of nothing but the physical dimension of life doom themselves to the redundant existence that repeats itself each year.

For the Jew who remains attached to the Reishis, life takes new significance. The steady drone of each Shanah, rather than dulling his senses to sleep, is transformed into an opportunity for permanent renewal, a lifeline to eternity.

"Eretz Asher Hashem Elokeicha Doresh Osah, Tamid Einei Hashem Elokeicha Bah, MeiReishis HaShenah V'Ad Acharis HaShanah"

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