

CLASS 54 - CHUKAS

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"Even the individual who prays alone on Erev Shabbos must say 'VaYechulu'....and the Torah considers him as if he has become a partner with G-d in the act of creation." (Shabbos 119b)

The prayer of 'VaYechulu' that we add on Friday evening is our testimony to the creation of heaven and earth, and as witnesses we become part of the Divine process, participants in the unfolding of the Divine plan.

This prayer has an additional characteristic, as well:

"Said Rav Chisda in the name of Mar Ukva: All those who pray on Erev Shabbos and say 'VaYechulu' are accompanied by two heavenly angels who place their hands on his head and say: 'And your sins will be removed and your misdeeds atoned for' (Isaiah 6:7)." (Shabbos 119b)

It is this added factor - the capability of cleansing our sins - that connects 'VaYechulu' to the red heifer, the subject of this week's Parsha.

The Rishonim allude to this idea, in their own way:

"The word 'Asher' is said three times in 'VaYechulu', just as in the Parsha of Parah Adumah, teaching that all who say 'VaYechulu' are cleansed." (Avudraham and Hagahos Maimoni)

Why is it the repetition of the word 'Asher' that signifies a connection to Parah Adumah and spiritual purification?

Let us explain.

1

The word 'Asher' also appears three times at the onset of our Parsha.

"Zos Chukas HaTorah Asher Tzivah Hashem Leimor, Dabber El Bnei Yisrael VeYikchu Eilecha Parah Adumah Temima, Asher Ein Bah Mum, Asher Lo Alah Aleha Ol" (Bamidbar 19:2)

What does this word mean?

'Asher' is always used as a means of connection, a conjunction that joins together two diverse elements.

The word itself, however, is of the same root as 'Ishur' - a permit or validation. In the Talmud it

appears as 'Ashrasa D'Dayni - the judges' validation authorizing a document as authentic and binding (the modern translation of 'Osher' as 'happiness' is incorrect).

A second connotation of Asher is that it serves as an integral part of the Divine name: "E-hy-eh Asher E-hy-eh". The Brisker Rav pointed out that these words, revealed to Moshe at the burning bush, are not translated by Targum Onkelos. Only ordinary words and concepts can be translated, for man has the capability of relating to the Torah on his own terms. But the Divine name has no alternative meaning. It exists in its own independent dimension, and cannot be reduced from the original Lashon HaKodesh.

How then can a word of such lofty implication be utilized as a simple 'that' or 'since' - a predicate with no apparent significance?

Perhaps we can answer this question by analyzing the two different meanings of 'Asher'.

An important principle of Lashon HaKodesh is that no one word can have two separate meanings, and even where that appears to be the case, a closer look reveals that the two definitions are actually two sides of the same coin.

An Ishur is guarantee that the item in question has been approved of by higher authorities, and that it conforms to the demanded requirements. Once doing so, even a trivial matter can reflect the will of G-d, and His word is equally manifest in both heavenly and earthly spheres.

Hence, 'Asher' is both a conjunction connecting one subject to the next, and an aspect of the ineffable Divine name, for it serves to attach this world to the one above.

This connection has three varied aspects.

Man must relate to three aspects of life - his G-d, his world, and his very self.

These three dimensions are reflected in the three different parts of his soul - Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama. The Nefesh is known as 'Shituffa D'Guffa' - a partner of the body, the forces that man utilizes in his relationship to the world around him. The Neshama is the most exalted element of his being, and it remains eternally in heaven, relating to the G-d of creation. The Ruach is that part of man known as 'I' - man as he is meant to be.

These three elements are meant to be perfected, and with them the world arrives at its intended destination. It is only by refining these three aspects of his character that man becomes an appropriate vehicle to express the word of G-d.

This is the perfect 'Asher' - the world connected to G-d, approved and assured by heaven, and guaranteed to fulfill its mandate of destiny.

2

This concept finds expression in two seemingly disparate ideas - the prayer of 'VaYechulu' recited

every Friday evening, and the Parsha of Parah Adumah, the purification from sin, death, and defilement.

Just as no word in Lashon HaKodesh has two divergent meanings, so too, two distinct Mitzvos that share a similar theme are united by an inner connection, a common thread that bonds them as one.

This triad of 'VaYechulu' parallels the three different Shabbos prayers - 'Attah Kiddashtah', 'Yismach Moshe', and 'Attah Echad' - each one representing a different aspect of the heavenly Shabbos.

'Attah Kiddashtah' speaks of Shabbos Breishis, our origin and source; the pinnacle of the act of creation. 'Attah Echad' is the Shabbos that is destined to be, the goal of all history, a world completely at rest. Finally, a world that knows from whence it comes - and is conscious of where it's headed - merits that the will of G-d be present, and this is the focus of the prayer on Shabbos day - 'Yismach Moshe B'Matnas Chelko' - describing the fusion of Torah and Shabbos, the day itself - one most fit for receiving G-d's word.

These three Tefilos together help nurture the perfect human being, one who is aware of his source and confident of reaching his destination - "Da MeiAyin Ba'sa U'L'An Attah Holech." (Avos 3:1) He relates to the one above, understands the purpose of the world around him, and is subsequently capable of developing his own potential.

In this way, he becomes a full partner with G-d in the very act of creation - "Even the individual who prays alone on Erev Shabbos must say 'VaYechulu'....and the Torah considers him as if he has become a partner with G-d in the act of creation." (Shabbos 119b)

The same triplicate 'Asher' appears in the command of Parshas Parah, and there, as well, each of the three aspects we have defined finds expression.

"Asher Tzivah Hashem" - the command of G-d is the means by which our physical deeds relate to their source.

"Asher Ein Bah Mum" - unblemished and pure, the red heifer retains a connection to the heights of perfection.

"Asher Lo Alah Aleha Ol" - freed from the bridling influence of external forces, and unburdened of the obligatory yoke that stunts his growth, the Parah Adumah is capable of guiding man towards his destination, a pristine world of purity and truth.

On Shabbos, the world comes to rest. Not a mere hiatus from the busy affairs of a working world, but at rest after reaching its goal, the entire congregation rises to say "VaYechulu." Bearing witness and testimony to the purpose of life, they are enveloped with the purity of eternity - 'MeiEin Olam HaBa'. In this way, they attach themselves to the essence of existence. Unsullied and without sin, they stand before G-d - forever pure.

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