

# CLASS 68 - SHAVUOS

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

## KABBALAS HaTORAH

*"Barich Rachmana - who has given us a Torah of three, to a nation of three, through [a man] who is third, on the third day, in the third month..." (Shabbos 88a)*

"a Torah of three - Torah, Neviim, Kesuvim"

"a nation of three - Kohanim, Leviim, Yisraelim"

"through [a man] who is third - Moshe was born third; Miriam, Aharon and Moshe."

"on the third day - after separation" (Rashi, ad. loc.)

"in the third month" - Sivan

"...because the Torah is threefold, teaching us that it is eternal. For all matters that have an interruption have an end, for when it deteriorates, that it is its end. But when it is threefold, the middle between them has no end at all, and a matter that has no end, will not cease. Because the Torah is eternal, and it has no end, therefore it is threefold....." (Maharal, Tiferes Yisrael, Ch. 50)

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The Torah is three, the nation of Israel is three, and Kabbalas HaTorah takes place through three. Three is solid, consistent and eternal. In our shiur this week, we will explain why the number three supports and defines all of Klal Yisrael.

1 We are accustomed to using numbers as a means of arranging, counting or categorizing groups of varied items. Understood thus, the numerical system is an artificial construct, agreed upon by all men as a helpful convenience.

The Torah teaches however, that true numbers are actually concepts, with each integer reflecting a different aspect of creation, one that is brought into existence by G-d. It is the idea behind each number that forms the basis of each subsequent worldly development, and these essential characteristics define all worldly elements.

For example, G-d is One. This means more than attesting to the existence of one G-d. Rather, it teaches that Hashem defines the very nature of One; that His unity encompasses all of creation, and

that all of existence is part of His being. He is One, and there is nothing else - 'Ain Od Milvado'.

From here follows the number two - the creation of an other, and the possibility of an alternative entity, one that is separate and distinct from the Divine. Every number two touches this idea, the notion of two disparate items that remain apart.

For this reason, the second day of creation is marked by the absence of good, and is the onset of evil and dispute, for all troubles begin when the world sees itself as an independent existence, surviving on its own and apart from its Maker. Every couple must navigate this chasm, learning to merge together in harmony rather than focusing upon their differing identities.

Again, two is an idea, not a mere number.

All this underscores a well-known song, which was not intended for little children: "Who knows One? I know One! One is our G-d of heaven and earth!"

Two are the Luchos HaBris - the tablets of the covenant. While one tablet prescribes the behavior of man towards his Creator, the second tablet governs all human interaction, defining the dimensions of a corporeal existence. This is two, the dual aspect of creation, G-d and an other.

But two entities that co-exist side by side will forever be unable to unite. This is the purpose of three.

In order for the two extremes to be reconciled, a third element must be introduced that will consolidate the two entities into one amalgamated whole. Three is a chain - hence, the word 'Shalshelles' - from the root 'Shalosh'. It strings together the past and the future, blending heaven and earth; man's actions and G-d's will.

Let us explain.

The act of creation presents humanity with a choice, allowing for the possibility that man may follow an errant path. To the extent that he cleaves to the materialistic world, he loses all connection to the world of the spirit.

Every side has an extremity, and every border has its edge. Were man to follow either alternative, be it heaven or earth, his time would be limited, bound by the two rims that frame his every move. Man's role is to navigate his own middle way; to forge a path between left and right that will incorporate all other directions.

Klal Yisrael is called 'Yeshurun' - as in 'Yashar' - straight and true. While a circle has no identifiably unique area, and every point of reference is similar to any other, a straight line, in contrast, has a beginning, middle, and end.

When one's path is crooked, he may leap ahead with abandon, following any direction he chooses, and stray farther and farther from his source and origin. But to walk a straight line, one step must flow from another, and with each succeeding stride, man actualizes all his energies, utilizing the

forces that pull in different directions to create his own way, in harmony with his Creator.

This is the number three. A middle, with no rough edges. It is the connecting glue that links heaven and earth. It is an internal compass, one that has man aware of his innermost drives, and yet, at the same time, it leads him to pursue his own path in the external world that surrounds him.

Two-legged chairs cannot stand on their own, but the addition of a third pole solidifies its base. For this reason, the Torah validates the strength of three: "On three things the world stands...." (Avos 1:2), or, in legal terms: true ownership requires possession of three years to be accepted as solid proof, a Chazakah.

"Who knows three? I know three! Three fathers!" - the three Avos are the righteous men around whom G-d can build a holy, strong and everlasting people.

The Torah is given here - on the third day.

The Torah is G-d's word directed towards man, and it enables man to accomplish what angels cannot, the creation of a middle path, one that encompasses all of creation to produce a new and independent line of action. Connected to G-d, but deserving on its own, man actualizes his own Torah, and recreates the world in a new form.

3 The man who observes the Torah does than more than behave properly, and deserves more than credit for past performance. He is a Tzelem Elokim, and he brings to life the will of G-d in a different dimension - not G-d alone, and not man - a third way.

When Klal Yisrael receives the Torah at the foot of Har Sinai, they are not merely expressing their acquiescence. Rather, they bring down to earth the Dvar Hashem, and henceforth, their every experience must be measured in threes. For them, each occurrence is threefold, and is a measured statement of G-d, man, and Torah.

This is true on an individual level as well, where each man is made up of three distinct elements - body, heart, and soul, or, alternatively, in the language of Chazal: Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama. His life becomes a living manifestation of Torah, and in this way, he manages to achieve a taste of eternity.

Man is the center of the universe, and all of life revolves around his words and deeds. He is the fulcrum of existence, and is the catalyst for the Divine providence that mirrors his own relationship towards G-d.

This is the middle path, the power of three. Man has the ability to assimilate this force into the very fiber of his being; to accept and receive the capability of molding heaven's word to a physical world.

This is Kabbalas HaTorah - accepting the burden and responsibilities of the center of existence.

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Have a good Yom Tov.

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