

CHANNELS OF A DIFFERENT TYPE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

According to this week's parsha, a woman who was suspected of committing adultery was brought up to the Temple to be tested. There she was made to go through a certain ceremony performed by a kohen to confirm her guilt or to prove her innocence.

However, what is interesting is Rashi's comment concerning the "location" of this section of law. The Torah preceded the law of the suspected adulteress with the following:

The sacred offerings of each individual remain his own property. When they are given to the kohen, they become [the kohen's] property. (BaMidbar 5:9)

On the juxtaposition of these two seemingly unrelated laws, Rashi asks and answers:

What relevance is there between the verse of "The sacred offerings of each individual remain his own property..." and [this one dealing with] the suspected adulteress? If a man holds back on the gifts due to the priest, in time he will bring his wife up to the priest as a suspected adulteress. (Rashi)

To what does Rashi allude? What is the connection between the two separate commandments of giving gifts to the priest and the suspected adulteress? The answer, perhaps, emerges by comparing the role of a priest to the role of a wife.

In each case, a man's success stems from the work of either the priest or his wife-the priest through his service of G-d on behalf of the nation, and the woman by the way she builds her home and raises her children. Indeed, the Talmud states that the woman is the source, or channel if you will, of blessing in the home (Baba Metzia 59b).

Why might a person deny the priest his due? If the priest is the source of a person's blessing, is it not counterproductive to hold back on sharing that blessing with the priest? The answer is yes, if one believes the priest is in fact the source of one's blessing.

"After all, is it not I," the person rationalizes (perhaps on a less conscious level), "who wakes up early every morning and works the field? Is it not I who works long hours to harvest the crop? No doubt the priest works very hard praying on behalf of the nation, and is quite successful doing so, but my personal success is the result of my personal effort"

The same attitude can develop in a husband towards his wife as well, who, in general, has been responsible for the creation of the home and its maintenance. It is the woman who encircles her husband under the chupah, symbolizing that it is she who transforms a house into a home. It is the mother that spends the most time with the children during the early formative years, while the father is often somewhere else, being "successful" either at work, or in Kollel, etc.

Hence, like the kohen, the work the wife performs is usually out of eyeshot of her husband, who can even tend to see what does not get accomplished more than what does. The husband sees what he does and accomplishes, but unless he is a prophet, he will have difficulty knowing what his wife has done and accomplished unless he takes the time to find out and appreciate ... before it becomes too late.

The Torah may be teaching us here, through the juxtaposition of the laws of giving gifts to the priest and the laws of the Sota, that one can never be too sure that it is his efforts primarily that have led to his success and blessing. If one loses perspective of how the blessing of the priests is the source of one's own blessing (indicated by the way we deny him his due), Rashi, warns, then one will also have difficulty recognizing the "invisible" efforts of his wife and deny her the respect and appreciation due to her.

And when a husband ceases to show appreciation for his wife's efforts, and attributes his own success to himself only, what is his wife to do? Where is she to go to be appreciated and to have a sense of fulfillment? This, Rashi says, is a dangerous situation, one which can lead to the destruction of what should have been an eternal relationship.

On another level, this idea opens up our minds to realize that, as much as we feel able to take credit for our successes, we may only be partly right in doing so. For every success story, there is a failure story as well; often the difference between the former and the latter has nothing to do with personal talent or brains, but more to do with "timing" and other elements we have absolutely no control over.

This is what the Talmud means when it says:

All is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven. (Brochos 33b)

In other words, try as we might, we will not be successful at what we aim to accomplish without G-d's help. Even when we don't ask for it, and even when we don't deserve it. To appreciate this is to further this relationship to the point that the rabbis teach us that "a tzaddik wills, and G-d fulfills."

On the other hand, what we do control in any given situation is our attitude. The "good" and "bad" in life may be somewhat beyond our control; how we respond to each is very much in our control. That's the "fear of Heaven" half of the statement, which alludes to the perspective that one develops and uses to interpret the events of daily life, to "see" G-d in all that occurs ("fear" and "see" are expressed by the same Hebrew word "yireh").

Through our attitude in life, we can even gain control over the events of our lives as well. For, once

G-d sees that we appreciate how the world works and understand the True Source of Blessing, then He becomes very willing to let us "call the shots." When we live by the above Talmudic statement, we prove ourselves out for a common goal, and trustworthy.

Shabbos Day:

G-d spoke to Moshe saying, "Speak to Aharon and his sons and tell them, 'This is how you will bless the children of Israel ...' " (BaMidbar 6:22)

After the Torah deals with the laws of the nazir, the person who vowed to abstain from wine and to let his grow for a period of time, it briefly turns its attention to Birchas Kohanim, the priestly blessing.

Outside of Israel, Birchas Kohanim is a rare event, occurring only during the Mussaf section of the Holiday prayer. However, in Israel it is a regular event, occurring every morning in the regular prayer service. The difference is based upon the fact that there is more joy in living in Eretz Yisroel.

It is a short blessing, consisting of three verses:

"G-d should bless you and protect you. May G-d illuminate His countenance upon you and be gracious to you. May G-d turn His countenance to you, and establish peace for you."

Rashi explains, word-by-word, what each of these blessings incorporate. However, the Ba'al HaTurim points out something that provides an interesting insight into the uniqueness of this blessing, and why it is inserted in what appears to be an odd place: between the nazir and the priestly gifts.

"This (koh) is how you will bless ..." This is to allude to the merit [of the Akeida when Avraham said] "I and the lad will walk until there (koh) ..." (Bereishis 22:5); and "thus (koh) will be your seed" (Bereishis 15:5); and "as G-d has blessed me thus (koh)" (Yehoshua 17:14). "Koh" has the numerical value of "25" which is how many letters are in "Shema Yisroel." As well, the language of blessing occurs in the entire Torah 25 times, as does the word "shalom" (peace) ...

What the Ba'al HaTurim is pointing out is that the word "koh," which seems to be only an opening word, especially for prophets, is far from that. It may function that way grammatically, but it is really an allusion to something very special.

In fact, in the beginning of creation, when G-d first shone the holy, supernal light onto creation, He said, "Yehi Ohr," which translates as, "Let there be light." However, the word "yehi" can be understood literally "let there be," or as a gematria (i.e., it can be translated into its numerical value: yud, heh, yud, or 10+5+10), which is ... exactly! Twenty-five!

In other words, the number twenty-five, and the word "koh" allude to revelations of the original light

of creation. It is this spectacular and G-dly light that is used to perform miracles of the type witnessed by the Jewish in Egypt and in the desert. In a lesser manner, we have witnessed this light through the miracles that have occurred for us. The more spectacular the miracle, the greater the revelation of light and the greater the revelation of G-d.

This is why the word "koh" in gematria kollel (an extra number is added for each word, which in this case is only one) is equal to "26," the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton Name of G-d that is so holy we don't say it as it is written. And this is why we make a point of not looking at the fingers of the kohanim during the time they are blessing us; this was especially so during Temple times.

Hence, Birchas Kohanim is a very special connection to the light of G-d, a unique way to "channel" it from above down to us through the kohanim. Not only must the kohanim bless the people, but it is a mitzvah for the people to be blessed by them. Hence, during Birchas Kohanim, one must stand still and concentrate on each word, and think about being a worthy recipient for such a special and unique blessing.

Therein lies a reason for the placement of this section. One of the main reasons for becoming a nazir was to become elevated in holiness in order to better connect to G-d and to serve Him. Abstaining from wine and not becoming spiritually defiled was a way of rising above the mundane reality to live on a higher spiritual plain, to channel the light from Above.

As we will now discuss, the gifts of the princes to inaugurate the Mishkan were meant to accomplish a similar result. They too had been thoughtfully chosen to accomplish a major channeling of G-d's light down to earth in order to bring blessing and rectification to history. It is appropriate then, that Birchas Kohanim itself act as a channel to connect up the parsha of the Nazir with the parsha of the Princes' gifts.

Seudos Shlishi:

One of the most remarkable things about the end of this parsha is the gifts of the princes, particularly how they are exactly the same, though the Torah presents them as if they are different (BaMidbar 7:12).

The truth is, they were very different. By virtue of the fact that each tribe has its own unique identity, and that every moment in time is different from the rest, each gift to inaugurate the Mishkan was also different, though the medium of presentation was the same for each tribe. The intention behind each gift was special and designed to have a specific effect, and this is why the Torah can record each one as if it was unique.

One of the prevalent words used with the respect to the gifts is the word "mishkalah," which means

"its weight." The Arizal points out that the word "mishkalah" (mem, shin, kuf, lamed, heh) can be broken into two parts, "Moshe" (mem, shin, heh) and the letters "kuf" and "lamed." Moshe obviously refers to Moshe himself, but the kuf-lamed equals the number 130 (which was also the weight of the silver bowls that were brought); this was the number of years Adam separated from his wife Chava while trying to repent for having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Not only that, but the Arizal explains that the 130 years that Ya'akov had lived before descending to Egypt to join Yosef there, was also as a preparation to involve himself in this rectification process. And this is why Yosef, in advance of his father's coming, had all the Egyptian perform Bris Milah in exchange for food after the famine began to take its toll.

All of this is in connection to the gifts brought by the princes in this week's parsha, the explanation of which, is, beyond the scope of this page (sorry). However, it suffices to say that, whatever was going on with these gifts, it anything but mundane.

Melave Malkah:

We're not finished yet with these gifts. Rashi himself brings his own gematrios to tie the gifts back to Adam HaRishon and other historical events.

On possuk 7:19, he mentions that the gematria of the words "ka'aras kesef" (silver bowl) is equal to 930, the years Adam lived ...

"The weight was 130 shekels" alludes to the number of years that passed before Adam raised children to keep the world going ...

After all, Hevel died very young after being murdered by his brother Kayin, and all of Kayin's descendants were wiped out in the Flood. It was from Shais' line that Noach came, and the generations that followed the Flood.

"Mizruk echad kesef" (one silver spoon) equal 520, the number of years and allude to the number of years before Noach had children, and the 20 years before they were born that the decree of the flood was made ...

The Flood was a major historical turning point.

"Seventy shekels" alludes to the seventy nations ...

The Jewish people are the "seventy-first" nation, and this is an allusion to our task of being a "light unto the nations."

"Kuff echad" (one spoon) corresponds to the Torah, which was given by the hand of G-d ...

"Asarah zahav" (ten of gold) alludes to the Ten Commandments ...

There's even an atonement for the sale of Yosef in the goat that was brought by each tribe. As we know from the Yom Kippur service, atoning for the sale of Yosef has been an ongoing process, one which cost the 10 martyrs their lives in the time of Rebi Akiva.

Through all of this, maybe Rashi is making the same point, that what seems repetitive and mundane on the outside can often be the camouflage for some of the deepest insights possible. As Dovid HaMelech wrote about himself, "The stone that was rejected by the builders became the cornerstone [for G-d]." Perhaps, ultimately, it is this very lesson that is the greatest of all the gifts the princes gave.

Have a great Shabbos.

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