

A REMEDY BEFORE SICKNESS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

The mitzvah to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was given to the Jewish people when Moshe descended Har Sinai on the day after the first Yom Kippur. After 80 days of prayer and pleading with G-d, Moshe came down with the good news that "all was forgiven" regarding the golden calf, and the second set of Tablets upon which G-d had re-written the Ten Commandments. Now the Jewish people were to be given a way to positively channel their spiritual energies and contributions of gold and silver.

"What?" you say. "The golden calf doesn't spring up on us until Parashas Ki Sisa, two parshios from now. True, but as the Talmud points out, G-d prefers to make the "remedy" ready in advance of the "sickness," which translates here into the account of the Mishkan in advance of the episode of the golden calf. This is a very important principle to keep in mind whenever bad things happen to the Jewish people, for, it lets us know that even as we go through hardship we can at least take solace in the fact that the "cure" already exists and will be administered at the right time.

The verse states:

G-d said to Moshe: Speak to the children of Israel, that they should take for Me an elevated-offering; from every person whose heart compels him, take My elevated-offering. (Shemos 25:1)

On the surface, there seems little need to explain regarding this possuk; the statement itself is clear: G-d asked the Jewish people to contribute to the making of the Mishkan according to personal discretion. Whatever a person was moved to contribute, that was to be his or her contribution.

However, Rashi (who comes only to provide a simple explanation of the words) thought differently. As a result, he interpreted the words "for Me" to mean "in My Name." But isn't that exactly what the reader would have thought when he read the verse? What then is Rashi adding that we don't already know?

The Sifsei Chachamim explains that Rashi was troubled by a dilemma: if the whole world belongs to G-d, and any gift we bring to Him is already His property, then how is it possible to give something to

G-d? Thus, Rashi concludes, it is not possible, for everything belongs to Him - everything, that is, except for how we give, as the Talmud confirms.

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

What this means is that Heaven owns everything except for the way we choose to perceive reality, and respond to it. That is something we decide, and it is that for which we are either rewarded or punished.

A simple analogy illustrates this point. Let's say there is a father who wishes to reward his son, purely because he loves him. The father knows, however, that a reward can only be appreciated if the son believes he has earned it. Therefore, the father plans for the son to give him a gift to express his appreciation for all his father has done for him, after which the father can reward his son's act.

Unfortunately though, the son has little personal property with which to honor his father. Therefore, the father devises a scheme. He calls his son in before him, and tells him that his (the father's) birthday is approaching. The father says, "Go my son, and buy me a gift, and do not worry about the expense, for I will provide you with the money."

Now, even still, when the son returns with the gift, can it really be called a gift? Did the father not buy it for himself? What did the father gain through the exercise? The answer is simple. The gift was never meant to be the real gift, but just a vehicle for bringing the true gift: love. If the son presents the gift in a detached manner, then the gift is nothing more to the father than his own property being returned. However, if the gift shows thoughtfulness and is given with a full heart showing love for the father, then the father has received the best gift of all - one that he did not previously own.

The analogy holds true with G-d as well, who is our loving Father. It is G-d who provides the environment and the vehicles necessary to inspire our desire to relate to Him and enable us to do so.

The Holy One, Blessed is He, wished to cause merit for Israel, and therefore increased their mitzvos. (Makkos 23b)

The only gift we can give G-d are nedavos haleiv - gifts of the heart. All else already belongs to Him. This is what the verse and Rashi are coming to teach, that everything we possess physically is really G-d's, on loan to us (even our children!). However, what we do with what we have to express our love and gratitude to G-d is uniquely a gift from us to Him. This is the true Mishkan we build within which to serve our Creator.

Shabbos Day:

But even nedavos haleiv only have value when given within the guidelines G-d has established.

To begin with, as Rashi points out in this week's parsha, there were actually three contributions made by the Jewish people for the construction and operation of the Mishkan. Two of the "gifts" were obligatory while one was mandatory; it is the latter which the Torah called nedavos haleiv - gifts of the heart. One obligatory contribution, a half-shekel, was made towards the construction of the sockets which held together the boards of the walls of the Mishkan. The second obligatory contribution, another half-shekel, was for the purchase of communal sacrifices. The third contribution, the nedavos haleiv, was for the construction of the vessels to be used within the Mishkan.

In other words, the Mishkan itself was the product of "gifts" we were obligated to give, and of a fixed amount. These "gifts" were not dependent upon what each person's heart motivated him to contribute. What were the actual nedavos haleiv used to construct? These gifts were for the klei HaMishkan - the implements used within the Mishkan to perform the service.

One can draw a very deep and important message from this. When it comes to building that which the world stands upon (for the Mishkan was a microcosm of the world, and the sockets held this up and in place), G-d does not depend upon the whims of flesh-and-blood, or the world could never stand. (Today a person wants to do the right thing, tomorrow he doesn't...) That is the limitation of man's free will: up until a decision that can destroy the world. Hence, the all-important sockets were the result of a commandment, whereas the vessels to be used in the daily service were the result of the gifts of the people.

This theme surfaces again elsewhere, brought out through the genius of the Maharal (Tifferes Yisroel, Chapter 32).

It is well known that when G-d offered the Torah to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai that they accepted it by saying, "We will do, and we will understand" (Shemos 24:7), for which they were exceedingly praised. It is also well known that the Talmud states that at Mt. Sinai, G-d held a mountain over the heads of the entire people "like a barrel," and threatened, "If you accept the Torah, well and good. If not, then this will be your burial place" (Shabbos 88a).

The question has always been: from the Torah it seems that acceptance of the Torah was a free will decision; from the midrash it seems as if Torah was forced upon the Jewish people. If the Jewish people had already accepted the Torah willingly, what purpose was served by threatening them? If they had been coerced into accepting Torah, what praise do they deserve for saying, "We will do and we will understand?"

Answers the Maharal: The Jewish people did accept the Torah of their own volition. However, the mountain was held over their heads to send an important message: Do not think for a moment that

you could have chosen to decline Torah. For, had you done so, the world would have resorted back to its original state of "null and void." This was a condition, Rashi points out, that was built into creation:

...And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day (ha-shishi; heh, shin, shin, yud). (Bereishis 1:31)

The sixth day... The letter "heh" [preceding the word hashishi (sixth)] is extra at the end of the creation process to say that [G-d] made a condition with them (all of creation), "If the Jewish people accept the Five Books of Torah [then well and good (heh equals 5); if not, then you will resort back to null and void]." -Rashi

Thus, from the contributions for the Mishkan to the receiving of the Torah, we learn the same fundamental lesson concerning man's most precious gift. Yes, Man has free will to choose and make decisions. However, that free will only has value up until it threatens the existence of the world.

Seudos Shlishi:

If any verse expressed the overall theme of the Mishkan, it is this one from this week's parsha:

"You shall make 50 loops on the end of the one curtain that is the outermost in the joining, and 50 loops on the edge of the curtain that joins to the second. You shall make 50 catches of copper, and put the catches into the loops, and join the tent together, that it may become one." (Shemos 26:11)

Fifty is a number associated with unity, and everything holy in Judaism because it alludes to the ultimate spiritual understanding approachable by man, the "Fifty Gates of Understanding" (see "Redemption to Redemption," Section One: Purim). Just as the number "eight" symbolizes the departure from the physical reality (since the physical world was created in seven days), so too does the number 50 (which is the first number after "seven times seven"), represent the entrance into a sublime spiritual consciousness, within which there is only unity.

This idea is also expressed in the word "chayn," which, in Hebrew is spelled, ches-nun (as in "Noach found chayn (grace) in the eyes of G-d"), letters that represent "8" and "50" respectively. Chayn symbolizes one's ability to go outside of the physical reality and to tap into a godly understanding, one that speaks more to the mind's eye than to the physical eye, at least at first. It is ignorance that leads to pettiness and all that divides mankind, internally, and from G-d.

This is why "chayn" is the root of the words "chinuch" (education) and "chanukah" (dedication), as if to say: the essence of education should be to help a child mature intellectually and spiritually to the point that he is no longer "blinded" by the limitations of the physical world; it is to this philosophy that we, as a nation, are to be dedicated. Only when we stray from this ideology to we become fragmented as a people.

This was the unifying aspect of the Mishkan too; everything about the Mishkan hinted to this reality. First of all, the entrance to the courtyard was veiled by a curtain 20 amos in width, a number that symbolizes physical limitation (see "Redemption"). Successfully passing this curtain, one was confronted by a courtyard 50 amos square, the traversing of which placed one at the front door to the Mishkan itself. The Sanctuary inside also was 20 amos in length, but, coming after the 50 amos of the Courtyard, it did not hide the hand of G-d, but, instead, revealed it; for it placed a person at the curtain to the Holy of Holies, and the "home" of the miraculous Holy Ark (which, the Talmud says, took up more space than it was allotted!).

The combined distance of Courtyard and Sanctuary was 70 amos, a number that symbolizes Divine wisdom, and the number of years that transpired between the destruction of the First Temple, and Haman's miraculous overthrow.

No wonder Haman built the gallows to hang Mordechai... 50 amos high! (I know, I know, see "Redemption to Redemption," Section One: Purim)

Melave Malkah:

The opening words of this week's Haftarah are:

And G-d gave Shlomo wisdom, as He had promised him, and there was peace between Chiram and Shlomo, and they made a covenant with each other. And Shlomo HaMelech raised a tax from all of Israel... (Melachim 1:5:26)

This week's Haftarah concerns itself, naturally, with the building of the first Temple. Coming on the heels of the instructions from this week's parsha to build the first (portable) Temple, the Mishkan, it is only logical to speak about how Shlomo 480 years later built the first Temple in Yerushalayim, and how he went about raising the funds to do so.

The only thing is, the fulfillment of G-d's promise to grant him wisdom mentioned here is out of place. Most commentators point this out, and offer some kind of explanation as to why it is written here. Of those who comment, the Malbim states that this is to emphasize that, though, King Chiram respected Dovid HaMelech for his great and powerful military skills, he respected Dovid's son, Shlomo, for his great wisdom.

Interestingly enough, the word for "peace" (shalom) in the verse is written defectively (i.e., the vav is left out. Instead of being written "shin, lamed, vav, mem," the "vav" is absent, though the word is read the same. This way, the word can be read either "shalom" (peace) or "shalaim" (completeness). Reading this into the verse would yield:

And G-d gave Shlomo wisdom, as He had promised him, and there was "completeness" between Chiram and Shlomo, and they made a covenant with each other.

Perhaps this is why Shlomo's wisdom is mentioned here as well. After all, it is easy, when in the process of serving G-d and "constructing" important projects to get "caught up" in the fervor of the moment, and justify violations of mitzvos between one and his fellow in the name of mitzvos between man and G-d. A lot has been wrongly justified, and is still being wrongly justified, in the name G-d (even Saddam Hussein is fighting a "holy" war against the Americans and the Jews!).

When you build a Mishkan, or a Temple, or anything for G-d to "dwell" within, it is to be built with far more than dollars and cents, more than from bricks and mortar, and a lot of clever design. In fact, an important way to measure the quality of the physical construction is by the quality of the spiritual construction that went into it, so-to-speak.

In Shlomo's wisdom, when he set out to build the House of G-d, he made a point of not stepping on toes, or giving people the impression that he considered himself the center of attention, though he was. Whoever he involved in the construction of the Temple, even the non-Jew Chiram, walked away feeling "shalaim," complete, as if he was not taken advantage of, or lacked being appreciated.

To help others feel this way definitely takes a lot of wisdom, and help from G-d, for people are sensitive, and they are fickle, and they can be so demanding sometimes, if not most of the time. People can be so petty, and when we are, the first thing to go out the window is "derech eretz," refined behavior towards our fellow human beings. It can be so taxing sometimes that one could just throw his hands up in the air and justifiably say, "Who cares?! Who needs them anyway?!"

It is not a question of whether we need others or not, especially when we don't. It is a question of being a "mentsch," of making others feel needed, and cared for, and involved. After all, if G-d was willing to risk giving heretics an opening for their heretical views, so that He could teach this point to us, we ought to take it to heart and act just as He did, when He built His own version of a portable Temple:

G-d said, "Let Us make man..." (Bereishis 1:26)

Let Us make... Although [the angels] did not assist [G-d] in forming him, and although the plural may give heretics an opening to reject [the notion of a monotheism, still] the Torah did not refrain [writing "us"]. This is in order to teach derech eretz and the trait of humility, that the greater should consult and request permission from those less important... (Rashi)

What a fitting way to greet the new month of Adar, of which we are told, "When Adar comes in, increase joy..." May our understanding and implementation of all that is embodied in the Mishkan empower us to do just that...

Have a constructive Shabbos. Your welcome, don't mentsch-ion it (sorry).

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