

AN OFFERING WE CAN'T REFUSE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d told Moshe, "Speak to the Children of Israel, that they should bring Me an Elevated-Offering (T'rumah) ... (Shemos 25:1)

On this posuk, the Ba'al HaTurim writes:

"The letters are "Torah" and "mem"-the Torah that was given in forty days is for those who eat t'rumah." (Ba'al HaTurim)

The word "t'rumah" is spelled, tav, raish, vav, mem, heh. If the "mem" is removed, then the letters that spell "Torah" remain. The Hebrew letter "mem" represents the number forty, and hence, the Ba'al HaTurim's connection to the forty days during which Moshe received Torah from G-d on Mt. Sinai.

As we have mentioned many times before, forty is a significant number, because it represents a period of development and gestation. At forty days the soul is said to enter the body of the fetus, and therefore the gender of the child is then decided (Brochos 60a).

The rains of Noach lasted 40 days and 40 nights, as part of the purification process after the immoral generations of the Flood. Moshe was up on Mt. Sinai for three sets of 40 days, and lived for three sets of 40 years. The Jewish people wandered in the desert for a total of 40 years, after being "strangers in a land not their own" for 400 years (40 x 10 is another level of the same idea).

Why the letter "mem"--why does it represent so much?

The answer is becomes clearer if you look at a real letter "mem," that is, the one that is found in a Sefer Torah. For a scribe to properly "construct" a mem, he attaches two other letters together: a "chof" to the right, and a "vav" to the left.

Combined, the gematria of the chof and the vav equals twenty-six, the same numerical value of G-d's Four-Letter, Ineffable Name--a Name so holy we don't even pronounce it the way it is written. It was also twenty-six generations since Adam ate from the Forbidden Tree, until Moshe stood upon Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah.

Torah is revelation. Even though Torah is a composite of narration, stories, and mitzvos, it is, first and

foremost, the revelation of G-d's master plan for creation. Remarkably, Torah is the way the Master of the Universe thinks, and what He thinks about His creation.

Nature is the opposite. Nature is a veil over the hand of G-d, so-to-speak. On this level of "revelation," G-d is referred to as "Elokim" (with an "h" and not the "k"), which has the same numerical value as the word "ha-teva" (86), which means "the nature." Just like the body is clothing for the soul, and hides its presence, so too does Nature "enclothe" G-d's revelation and hides His Presence.

It is to this that the Ba'al HaTurim alludes, for, halachically, only kohanim (priests) can eat t'rumah. But, as we know, Torah is for all Jews. Therefore, here, we must conclude, "T'rumah-Eaters" are those who look at Torah as being injected with the "mem," that is, on the level of revelation of "chof-vav," twenty-six, of G-d's Ineffable Name.

It is with such an approach to Torah that it opens its "gates" and reveal its "soul" to us, or better yet, its "sod". On such a level of recognition and respect, our Torah learning itself becomes an "Elevated-Offering" to G-d, and even allows us to contribute to building a Mishkan--a world within which the Divine Presence can dwell.

Shabbos Day:

"Make an Ark from acacia wood two amos, and a half in length ..." (Shemos 25:10)

The Talmud asks an interesting question, and answers from an even more interesting source:

How do we know that one who adds really lessens? Because it says:

"Make an Ark from acacia wood two amos (ammasayim: aleph, mem, tav, yud, mem), and a half in length ..." (Shemos 25:10)

"Take away the 'aleph' and you are left with two hundreds (masayim: mem, tav, yud, mem) amah ..." (Rashi)

In other words, according to Rashi, the addition of the aleph to the word reduces its value from "200" to "2." The Maharshah has problems with Rashi's interpretation, and the Vilna Gaon offers his own. However, what is interesting is that this very important lesson is taught "by-the-way" while talking about something seemingly totally unrelated to the issue, the building of the Ark.

Of course, that's the first clue that there is something important to learn here that we otherwise would have overlooked. In fact, the other two opinions bring a source from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the curtains made for the Appointed Tent, also in this week's parshah.

Though it is not necessarily always true that "more is less," it is true that, when it comes to the service of G-d, one has to keep in mind that over-indulgence in the physical world interferes with spiritual

growth:

"... It has become an accepted philosophy in Jewish circles that it is the goal of life to attain as many luxuries and as much enjoyment as possible, but in a 'kosher' manner, of course ... A Jew must not think that it is correct to seek the fulfillment of all possible desires. Aspirations to buy an elegant car or a luxuriously furnished house with the most modern gadgets generate the need for money ... If we only resist the yetzer hara that demands all attainable luxuries, we will be able to spend less time on business and find more time for Torah-study." (HaGaon R' Moshe Feinstein; June 1975)

As Rabbi Feinstein mentions in another part of this quote, we don't have to live according to the frugal standards of European, pre-war Jewry. However, alludes the posuk, it is hard to build an "Ark" for G-d while one is building his own personal estate--and everyone must build an Ark for G-d, at least spiritually.

There is a balance that a Jew must strike between the physical and spiritual worlds. We must recognize when our pursuit of wealth and increasement of comfort is, in fact, bringing a diminution to our spiritual side, and maintain that balance at all costs.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

You shall set up the Mishkan according to how you were shown by the mountain [Sinai]. (Shemos 26:30)

After having been given the instructions for the different parts of the Mishkan, G-d gave Moshe the commandment to put it all together, and bring into reality a microcosmic version of creation. And, even though the construction of the Mishkan was one of the most positive and enthralling moments in the entire history of mankind, still, the Chasam Sofer finds an allusion in this posuk to just the opposite:

"You shall set up the Mishkan" (Hebrew: va-hakaimosa es HaMishkan)--the last letter of each word when combined is "tav, tav, nun," which has the same numerical value as the number of years the Jewish people were in Eretz Yisroel until the destruction of the First Temple (from the time the Jewish people left Egypt until they built the Temple 480 years, which stood for 410 years; subtract the years spent in the desert--40 years--and you arrive at the 850 years they were in Eretz Yisroel). The first letters of the entire verse total forty, corresponding to the forty years the Jewish people were in the desert ..." (Chasam Sofer, T'rumah)

The Chasam Sofer does not finish there. He makes more calculations, one showing the number of years that the Jewish people offered sacrifices to G-d. He ends off with a reference to a verse in Daniel that hints to the day destined for the arrival of Moshiach!

The question is, why so much from one posuk (ignoring the question of, how so much from one posuk)?

The answer is, when we say that the Mishkan was a miniature replication of the entire universe, we aren't kidding. Just like the world is the physical expression of the Torah, which is the "blueprint" for creation, so too was the Mishkan, albeit on a smaller scale.

Therefore, one could expect that the verse that deals with the building of the Mishkan is in itself, like a miniature Torah with important historical details. And it would make a lot of sense that those details should include exiles and redemptions, and sacrifices.

In the end, all of this brings to mind the instructive statement from Pirkei Avos:

Ben Bag Bag said: Turn it [Torah] over and over again, for everything is in it ... (Pirkei Avos 5:26)

How much of "everything"?

"The principle is that all that has been, is now, or will ever be is included in the Torah, from [the word] "Bereishis" until [the last words of the Torah] "before all the eyes of Israel." This does not only mean the general things, but even all the specifics of every species and person, including all that will happen to him from the day he is born until the day he dies, including all his reincarnations and minutest details ..." (Biur HaGra, Safra D'Tzniusa, Chapter Five)

Melave Malkah:

Rav Yehudah son of Rav Shmuel son of Shilas said in the name of Rav: Just as we reduce joy when the month of Av comes in, so too do we increase joy when Adar comes in. (Ta'anis 29a)

This week, G-d willing, is Rosh Chodesh Adar (Tuesday and Wednesday, beginning Monday night). This time of year is a reverse image of what we feel during the summer time, when the month of Av comes in, heralding the beginning of the "Nine Days," and the final stages of that period of mourning over the loss of the Temples. This week, however, we gear up for the joy of Purim, and the period of redemption that it begins, climaxing with Pesach and Seder-Night.

Is the comparison between Av and Adar merely circumstantial? Tisha B'Av mourns the loss of the Temple, while Purim represents the redemption from Babylonian Exile and Haman's "Final Solution." What connection could there be?

Megillas Esther begins with Achashveros' 180-day feast. What was he celebrating? He was celebrating the end of the mysterious seventy years of Jewish exile, by the end of which the Jewish people were supposed to have been redeemed. If they were redeemed, then Achashveros would have had little to celebrate. If they weren't redeemed, it would have meant that G-d had severed His relationship to the forlorn Jewish nation--forever.

To emphasize to his Jewish subjects the latter, Achashveros insisted upon using the holy Temple

vessels at his very unholy party (Megillah 11b). How would that make his point? Because, as we learn in this week's parshah:

G-d told Moshe, "Speak to the Children of Israel, that they should bring Me an Elevated-Offering, every person according to what his heart compels ... (Shemos 25:1)

These offerings of gold and silver were called "gifts of the heart," and they were used to make the Temple vessels. They represented the Jewish people's love of G-d, and their desire to serve Him. What they made for the Mishkan in this week's parshah was used in the Temple later as well, and did not lose its meaning.

When Achashveros took those very same vessels and used them as if they now belonged to him, he was making a statement: Your G-d has abandoned you, and now your hearts belong to me.

Of course, we have lived to see how wrong he was, and Purim is the celebration of this error. This is why Adar is the "flip-side" of Av. For, whereas Av focuses the nation on the fact that we cannot be whole until we regain the Temple, Adar encourages us by saying: Even still, Jewish life can, and MUST go on, because G-d is still with you, and will ALWAYS be with you, wherever you go.

However, the time will come when, G-d willing, both times will merge, and each will become its own celebration of the rebuilding of the final Holy Temple, and the complete redemption of the Jewish people. Then we will see how, though the hand of G-d was hidden, it never really went away. We will finally understand what it means that the Divine Presence went into exile with its people, because, we will witness its redemption while we witness our very own.

We should merit to live to see this day.

Have a great Shabbos,

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