

EIGHTH PARSHAH, AND COUNTING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Holy they shall be to their G-d, and not profane the name of their G-d. (Vayikra 21:10)

The parshah starts off talking about kohanim, and the special mitzvos that pertain to their rank and office. Last week's parshah -- Parashas Kedoshim -- spoke to the entire nation about the need to be holy and to sanctify the Name of G-d, and this week's parshah talks to the kohanim about their need to be even holier. Nevertheless, it is a parshah that still talks to the entire nation about service of G-d which applies to all Jews, if only for the fact that we are called a "Kingdom of Priests" (Shemos 19:6).

For example, the parshah tells the kohanim that they must be holy, as if to imply that if they are not, they will remain ordinary. Yet, the conclusion of the posuk is that if they are not, then they will profane the Name of G-d, something far worse than simply being an "ordinary Jew." Why is this?

This question comes from the sefer "Darchei Mussar," and his conclusion is that we learn from here that, when it Jew isn't sanctifying the Name of G-d, then he is, G-d forbid, profaning it. It is a lesson that obviously applies to ALL Jews, not just to the kohanim.

For those who believe in G-d and the World-to-Come, it is a VERY heavy lesson for us to hear NOW. For those who don't, it will be an even heavier message for them to hear THEN, on the Final Day of Judgment, for, profanation of G-d's Name is the worst sin one can commit.

To appreciate the Darchei Mussar's words, you have to recall the Nefesh HaChaim's definition of profanation of G-d's Name: any act, word, or thought that reduces the awareness of G-d in creation. Thus, based upon what we are saying here, if you are not increasing awareness of G-d, then you are reducing it.

Take prayer, for example, a real "service of G-d."

If a person prays with reverence, patience, concentration, and enthusiasm, then, clearly, he will draw the Presence of G-d into creation. However, if a person lacks reverence when he prays, perhaps suggested by the way he prays or how he is dressed, then, the Presence of G-d is pushed away.

If a person seems impatient while praying -- before, during, or after -- then what message does he

send to creation -- positive or negative? Or, what if he makes little or no effort to concentrate while praying? Does he convince us, himself, or Heaven that he believes in what he is doing, or, cares for that matter? And, certainly, a lack of enthusiasm to pray does not invite the Divine Presence to descend into our mundane world.

All of this is true about tefillah, and, every other mitzvah we have for that matter, including living itself! We may not always feel up to serve G-d every moment of the day, but, in revealing that to the world, we give the impression that we don't care, and that G-d is unimportant. The world doesn't always know what we are going through at the moment, and that too has to be taken into account when we set out to complete a task.

Shabbos Day:

The kohen that is greater than his brothers ... (Vayikra 21:10)

The midrash writes:

Why was he called "greater" (gadol)? Because he was greater in five aspects: wisdom, strength, etc. Strength, that is, he was very strong. Come and see Aharon, who waved 22,000 Levi'im in one day? How did he do it? Forward and backward, up and down, which took great strength. (Vayikra Rabbah 26:9)

This midrash is consistent with the Talmud which states:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, only dwells upon one who is strong ... (Nedarim 38a)

-- which is a wonder, since physical strength, as great a trait as it may be (and helpful for that matter), still, does not sound like an important criteria for closeness to G-d.

The Rambam was bothered by this problem, and chose to interpret this statement and the midrash as talking in spiritual terms (Yesodei HaTorah, 7:1-2). After all, the mishnah calls one who overcomes his yetzer hara -- evil inclination -- a "gibur" (Pirkei Avos 4:1).

True, say the "Kesef Mishneh" and the "Lechem Mishneh," two commentaries found in the "Yad Chazakah" of the Rambam. However, they argue, the Talmud does not seem to mean that, and besides, Moshe Rabbeinu, about whom the Talmud does mention as an example, was VERY strong PHYSICALLY!

Other later commentaries offer explanations to prove the Rambam right in light of these questions. However, one possible angle in the resolution of this discussion could be Shimshom, who was specifically called "Gibor," the same language of the midrash and the Talmud.

Now, as the story is told, Shimshon, as physically strong as he may have personally been, was even stronger PHYSICALLY for SPIRITUAL reasons. He had been a "nazir" from birth -- a term used for the kohanim in this week's parshah -- someone to whom special laws of sanctity apply -- like the kohanim -- one of which was to not cut his hair ever. And since, by cutting Shimshon's hair, the Philistines were able to immediately weaken him, we have to assume that his super-human strength had, in fact, been supernatural, as a result of his previous spiritual status.

In other words, though we may have looked at Shimshon as being one-of-a-kind, in truth, that is not so. He represented, instead, an extreme reality of which applies to EVERY Jew, but, especially the Kohen Gadol. For, we are all capable of super-human feats, and often perform many throughout the course of our lifetimes. In fact, it is the performance of such supernatural deeds that often turn many people into "believers."

For the sake of the free-will, G-d doesn't make it too obvious. Spiritual prowess does not always, or even usually, result in world-class boxing form, unless physical exercise is performed rigorously. But then again, I doubt very much if the physical build of the acting Kohen Gadol was ever greater than that of all other ordinary kohanim around him.

No, it was his tremendous spiritual ability to detach himself from the physical and material world that drew down Heavenly light that allowed him to, when he needed to, perform great physical tasks -- to the amazement of all who stood by and watched. Even until this very day. For, whether it's moving large objects, or, getting very little sleep and food and yet still functioning 100%, holy people remain to live outside the normal boundaries of the "Natural World."

The holier one becomes, the more this will be true.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

You must count seven complete weeks from the day after the day of rest, from the day that you brought the omer for the wave-of-fering, until the day after the seventh week, a total of 50 days. (Vayikra 23:15-16)

This week has (had) in it Lag B'Omer, the thirty-third day of the Omer-Counting. Lag B'Omer, we are told, is a day of light. We are told by the rabbis that it is the day on which the great Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai revealed the Zohar to handful of faithful students, just before he left this world for the Bais Midrash L'Ma'alah -- the Heavenly Study Hall.

The Zohar, of course, is one of the main sources of known Kabbalah today, and, when many of us hear THAT word, we just shut down. I don't think anyone will disagree that the Zohar is a very holy work -- for very holy people, that is. "But, what, if anything, does it have to do with everyday life and personal development?" many might ask.

However, a fundamental of Kabbalah is the idea that "Da'as is the koach hachibur," which, loosely translates as, "Knowledge, or awareness, has the power to unite." What this means is that unity, whether on the level of the individual, or the nation, or the whole world is a function of knowledge and understanding. The deeper the knowledge and understanding, the more willing and capable people are of getting along with one another.

After all, isn't that what we are all after? Whether it's to become well and whole ourselves, or, to improve the "shalom bayis" of our homes, or, to unify our people, or, to unify the world ... it's all the same thing in the end: unity and shlaimus.

We want "chibur" -- on the personal level, on the family level, and on the national level. The more esoteric side of our tradition tells us that this is only possible with "da'as" -- godly knowledge that heightens our awareness of what counts most in life and how to go about getting that "most in life."

Torah is "Da'as-Elokim," about which Shlomo HaMelech wrote:

"If you want it like money and pursue it like a buried treasure, then you will understand fear of G-d and Da'as Elokim you will find." (Mishlei 2:4-5)

and it gives us understanding and awareness so that we can put the pieces together, so-to-speak, and imbue our lives and the lives of those whom we love with hope and direction. Kabbalah is the deepest understanding Torah has to offer man, the strongest source of chibur available to us.

That is why Moshe Rabbeinu told Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the following about our time, the time of redemption:

... [Then] the Maskilim (Scholars) will understand, because they are from the side of Binah (eighth sefirah), which is the Aitz HaChaim (Tree of Life). Of them it says, 'The Maskilim will emanate light like the light of the sky ...' (Daniel 12:3) ... with this sefer of yours, Sefer HaZohar, which is from the light of Binah, which is called teshuvah ... In the future Yisroel will taste from the Aitz HaChaim, which is this Sefer HaZohar, they will leave exile in mercy, and "Hashem alone will lead them, and they will have no foreign god" (Devarim 32:12). (Zohar 124b)

Thus, Lag B'Omer is not only a HOLY day, but a very relevant day -- to all of us. It is Hod sh'b'Hod in the Sefirah-Counting -- "Glory that is in Glory" -- the ultimate sanctification of G-d's Name: the cause of redemption, and, the reason for it.

MELAVE MALKAH:

(Sefiros HaOmer)

Continuing on from where we left off last week:

HOD: (Glory): Just as Gevurah was the direct opposite of Chesed, so too is Hod the direct opposite of Netzach. Netzach is an imposing, dominating trait; Hod is often associated with one's ability to be empathetic, and is therefore represented by Aharon HaKohen, Moshe's brother and the High Priest of the Jewish people—a leader famous for making peace among his people.

The difference between Netzach and Hod is clear from the different reactions Moshe and Aharon had to the instigators of the golden calf (Shemos 31:18). Aharon (for good reasons) submitted to the will of the "Erev Rav" (Mixed Multitude) who demanded a replacement for Moshe, whom they thought had died on the mountain. However, when Moshe finally came down the mountain and saw what was happening below, he broke the Tablets and purged the camp of all elements who participated in the building and worshipping of the calf—a more militant approach.

Thus, whereas Netzach results in one taking a domineering role in a relationship, Hod means giving in to the other person—an abandonment of one's individuality for that of another. This is a strong reason why Hod corresponds to the fifth day of creation, on which the fish were created. Compared to the sun, moon, and stars that were "fixed" in the heavens, fish have relatively more freedom to come-and-go as they please.

In a sense, the creation of fish was a transition between the fixed reality of the physical world created before them, and the far more flexible world of man created after them, whose will could determine his direction and outcome in life. As the creation of man approached, G-d was creating a world that was becoming increasingly independent of Him, at least in appearance. This reveals G-d's humility and love for His creations, and, when we mimic this behavior, it reveals our soul—the essence of all that is glorious in humans.

YESOD (Foundation): Just as a harmony between Chesed and Gevurah was necessary to create a meaningful, working balance called Tifferes, so too is one necessary between Netzach and Hod called Yesod. It is this trait that is associated with Yosef HaTzaddik.

Hence, Yesod parallels Tifferes in the lower triad, which explains why Yosef was the closest to his father, Ya'akov, of all the sons, and why he continued on for Ya'akov after his death. As Rashi points out (Bereishis 37:1), all that happened to Ya'akov happened to Yosef as well.

Since Yesod corresponds to the sixth day of creation, the day on which man was created, it is a trait that has special significance to us. Furthermore, just as the sefiros correspond to the six days of creation, they also correspond to the six millennia of history, which means Yesod, the sixth sefirah (down from Chesed), corresponds to our millennium. Understanding Yesod, therefore, is also a way of understanding the nature of our millennium, and the challenges we face (especially since it was on Day Six that Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil).

If Yesod is the balance between the traits of Netzach and Hod, then it is the ability to "give-and-take" in a relationship. It is best expressed by the person who knows when to surrender himself to a situation, how much to do so, and for how long. He will only impose his opinion when doing so is

best for all involved, and back down and follow someone else's lead when it is clear that it is correct to do so. This is what the mishnah means when it says:

In a place where there are no men, try to be a man ... (Pirkei Avos 2:5)

This is why Yesod is called "Foundation," a concept associated with the Tzaddik-the Righteous Individual. Such people are the foundation of creation, for G-d created and maintains the world for such people:

The Tzaddik is the foundation of the world ... (Mishlei 10:25)

Furthermore, they know how to correctly relate to all those around them, in any given situation. It is a Yesod-type personality that allows one to throw his entire being into a relationship-and the necessary self-control and reliability upon which relationships are built.

This is why Yosef was tested with the wife of his master Potiphar, and why he was able to pass the test as well. And, because Yesod is relationship-oriented, it also represents the transition between the sefiros above it, and the sefirah of Malchus below it-just as Yosef was the transition between the Forefathers (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov) before him, and the nation that was to be formed after his death.

One final, important point with respect to this sefirah. In Kabbalah, Yesod is divided into two parts: Yesod proper, and Ateres HaYesod-the "Crown of Yesod." According to the Kabbalists, as long as the Yesod proper governs history, the Jewish people will remain in exile. However, the moment history reaches the part referred to as "Ateres HaYesod"-a specific and set time-exile ends and the period of Moshiach begins. This is the time known as "b'ittah"-the final time for Moshiach's arrival.

MALCHUS (Kingship): Malchus corresponds to Shabbos, which indicates that it is the completion of physical existence. Logically, it also corresponds to King David, who is the ancestor of Moshiach, whose kingdom will come at the end of history, when G-d's mandate for creation has been fulfilled.

Hence, Malchus represents the time in history when G-d's kingdom is firmly established on earth, as well as in Heaven. All that was ever accomplished for good during the previous six millennia will be synergized into a completed whole, just as Shabbos allows an individual to integrate all that was spiritually achieved during the previous six days of the week.

Thus Malchus and Shabbos are considered feminine in nature. It is a feminine trait to receive, gestate, and give back a completed whole. The previous six days of the week are considered masculine, full of energy expended in many directions, often simultaneously. It is Shabbos that brings "peace-and-quiet" to creation, allowing the person to re-focus on his or her relationship with G-d, and to enjoy the fruits of the previous days' labor.

In other words, whereas the previous six days efforts are considered to be in a horizontal direction, Shabbos moves a person in a vertical direction, closer to G-d. Shabbos is the time to absorb new

levels of spiritual realization into one's consciousness, so that Motzei Shabbos, one emerges as a "briah chadashah"-a "new creation."

Kabbalah points out that Malchus is really just the revelation on the lowest level of what exists on the highest level. The uppermost sefirah is called "Keser," which means "Crown." Since this sefirah is so sublime, it is completely beyond man's ability to grasp, and is therefore referred to as "Ayin," which means "Nothing." Compared to what comes after it, which is far more "physical," it is as if it does not exist.

Malchus is called "Ani," which means "I"-the ultimate expression of individuality and existence. It is the same letters as the word "ayin," except that they are arranged differently:

Ayin - Ani

(aleph-yud-nun) - (aleph, nun-yud)

What this expresses is that the light that makes up our physical world, and gives life to all that exists, is really the light of Keser, after it has been filtered and "splintered" through the eight sefiros between Keser and Malchus. However, it is in Malchus that the light becomes unified once again, with the important exception that it has also been revealed and realized along the way. It has gone from "Ayin" to "Ani," which was the whole point of creation in the first place-and of a person's life.

This is also expressed in the last word of the Shema: Echad. The word Echad is made up of three letters: aleph, ches, dalet. The rabbis explain that the aleph refers to the sefirah Keser, because the letter aleph represents the number "one," and G-d is One. The ches, corresponds to the number eight, and hence, the eight sefiros that follow Keser. The dalet always symbolizes Malchus, because it corresponds to the number four, which emphasizes G-d's kingship over all four directions of physical existence.

In a Sefer Torah, the dalet is written larger than the previous two letters, to emphasize that it represents the fulfillment of creation: the revelation of G-d to all mankind, and the permanent establishment of His Kingdom throughout all of existence.

This has been a brief description of the lower seven sefiros, and the traits they reveal. Now we will apply these insights to the period of Sefiros HaOmer-the forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuos.

* * *

Each middah (trait) first mentions the specific trait of the general trait, such "Chesed sh'b'Chesed," which means: the aspect of chesed unique to the general trait of Chesed. "Netzach sh'b'Chesed" means the aspect of Netzach as found within the trait of Chesed, and so on. For, as we have already mentioned, each of the seven general sefiros contain their own sub-set of seven sefiros.

This means that an aspect of each of the general sefiros can be found in each other. This is because

each sefirah is just another filtering of the same light that began with G-d. In other words, it is one light that is responsible for all ten sefiros, which means they must be related to each other, sharing a common "ancestry." Thus each sefirah, as unique as it may be in its own right, is also an insight into the other sefiros as well.

The following table of forty-nine questions focuses on specific aspects of the Middah-Hayom (Trait-of-the-Day). They represent one perspective in an overall system, and are, by no means, the only way to discuss the middah. Based upon the previous introduction to the seven sefiros, one should be able to design his own questions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the spiritual opportunity of the day.

Each day, ask yourself the question pertaining to that day, and discuss it with others in order to share and enhance your perspectives. At the very least, this simple process will serve to focus you on the "theme" of the day. At the very most, it can transform you into a fitting "container" for the light of G-d that emanates best at that time, and allow you to properly prepare for that awesome day that G-d spoke to us and gave us His Torah.

WEEK ONE: Chesed

1. Chesed sh'b'Chesed: What is unbridled Chesed?
2. Gevurah sh'b'Chesed: What is constricted Chesed?
3. Tifferes sh'b'Chesed: What is perfectly balanced Chesed?
4. Netzach sh'b'Chesed: When is Chesed an imposition on others?
5. Hod sh'b'Chesed: What kind of Chesed take away my independence?
6. Yesod sh'b'Chesed: What Chesed is the basis of well-balanced relationship?
7. Malchus sh'b'Chesed: What type of Chesed unifies and reveals godliness?

WEEK TWO: Gevurah

8. Chesed sh'b'Gevurah: When is holding back a Chesed for another?
9. Gevurah sh'b'Gevurah: When is strict justice might appropriate?
10. Tifferes sh'b'Gevurah: When does strict judgment bring balance and harmony?
11. Netzach sh'b'Gevurah: What is imposing about strict justice?
12. Hod sh'b'Gevurah: What aspect of judgment forces the "judge" into submission?
13. Yesod sh'b'Gevurah: What extent is judgment necessary for a good relationship?
14. Malchus sh'b'Gevurah: How does judgment reveal G-d?

WEEK FOUR: Tifferes

15. Chesed sh'b'Tifferes: Easy question: What is the Chesed in harmony?
16. Netzach sh'b'Tifferes: What type of discipline does harmony promote?
17. Tifferes sh'b'Tifferes: What is the ultimate state of harmony?
18. Netzach sh'b'Tifferes: What is imposing about balance?
19. Hod sh'b'Tifferes: When does harmony promote withdrawal and submission?

20. Yesod sh'b'Tifferes: What role does harmony play in maintaining relationships?
21. Malchus sh'b'Tifferes: What is the unifying factor in harmony?
WEEK FOUR: Netzach
22. Chesed sh'b'Netzach: Do I dominate others for their benefit?
23. Gevurah sh'b'Netzach: How does my domination stifle others?
24. Tifferes sh'b'Netzach: When does domination result in balance and harmony?
25. Netzach sh'b'Netzach: When is domination too extreme?
26. Hod sh'b'Netzach: When is domination just a way of abandoning one's self?
27. Yesod sh'b'Netzach: When does domination result in relationship?
28. Malchus sh'b'Netzach: What role does domination play in building brotherhood?
WEEK FIVE: Hod
29. Chesed sh'b'Hod: When is submitting to another an act of kindness?
30. Gevurah sh'b'Hod: When does capitulation result in holding back from others?
31. Tifferes sh'b'Hod: What level of submission results in harmony and balance?
32. Netzach sh'b'Hod: What type of submission really results in dominating others?
33. Hod sh'b'Hod: LAG B'OMER: What is total submission to truth, and what results?
34. Yesod sh'b'Hod: How does submission result in and maintain a stable relationship?
35. Malchus sh'b'Hod: What is soul-like about submission, and how is it glorious?
WEEK SIX: Yesod
36. Chesed sh'b'Yesod: What is the kindness in being a stable and reliable partner?
37. Gevurah sh'b'Yesod: When does reliability require one to be strict with another?
38. Tifferes sh'b'Yesod: How does reliability promote harmony in life and relationships?
39. Netzach sh'b'Yesod: What is imposing about a reliable person?
40. Hod sh'b'Yesod: When does reliability/self-control mean submitting to others?
41. Yesod sh'b'Yesod: What is the ultimate measure of self-control and reliability?
42. Malchus sh'b'Yesod: Why is self-control and reliability crucial for universal brotherhood?
WEEK SEVEN: Malchus
43. Chesed sh'b'Malchus: How does unity result in good for all mankind?
44. Gevurah sh'b'Malchus: What type of justice does unity demand?
45. Tifferes sh'b'Malchus: What is the beauty of unity (on all levels of relationship)?
46. Netzach sh'b'Malchus: How can some forms of "unity" be over domineering?
47. Hod sh'b'Malchus: What is glorious about unity-how does it draw out one's soul?
48. Yesod sh'b'Malchus: What binds different people together into one cohesive whole?
49. Malchus sh'b'Malchus: What is the ultimate goal of perfect unity?
Have a great Shabbos, and Meaningful Omer,
Pinchas Winston

