

THE COMPLETE BODY OF MITZVOS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

ROSH CHODESH ADAR:

This Shabbos is also the first day of Adar, the second day of Rosh Chodesh. As the Talmud invites, "When Adar arrives, simchah is increased" (Ta'anis 29a), for, as Rashi explains, days of miracles for the Jewish people begin, with Purim only two weeks away, and Pesach coming fast on its heels.

The symbol of the month of Adar is the fish, and it corresponds to Yosef HaTzaddik, who is compared to a fish (for good reasons; Brochos 20a). In the Sefiros, the one that corresponds to Yosef is called "Yesod" (Foundation), which the Zohar calls "Goel," or, "Redeemer."

Everything about Yosef leads to redemption. Even the age he died at, says the Arizal -- 110 years -- is equal in gematria to the word "neis" (nun-samech), for he was one for whom miracles constantly happened, and, in whose merit miracles will happen for us in the future as well, b"H.

One of the most important aspects of the Purim-miracle was the way events got progressively worse for the Jewish people every day that Haman was in power. And, at the very moment that everything should have dovetailed in the destruction of the Jewish people, at the moment that seemed the least hopeful, all of sudden, events and the fortune of the Jewish people reversed itself with lightning speed.

Very little brings as much simchah as a quick reversal of bad fortune to good fortune.

May we merit this Adar to witness ourselves such a reversal of fortune, and the simchah that accompanies it. May we live to see the glory of Torah restored, and its light shining to and from every aspect of creation, a time of which it is said, "On that day, it will be that G-d is One and His Name One" (Zechariah 14:9).

Friday Night:

These are the judgments that you should place before them. (Shemos 21:1)

There are the opening words of this week's parshah, and what follows is the source of much

discussion in the Talmud, but not at most Shabbos tables. I mean, who talks about slaves that much in this day and age? Though people do complain about being "worked to the bone," in the Western world, that is hardly called "slavery."

One might think, therefore, that there is not much relevance to these mitzvos today, that they once applied when slavery was still common practice, but not today when slavery, for the most part, has been abolished. That is why this may be as good a place as any to launch into a discussion about the "TaRYaG Mitzvos" (613 Mitzvos), from a more esoteric point of view.

The Zohar says:

All the mitzvos of the Torah unify in the "Holy Elevated King," some in the "head" of the King, some in the "body" of the King, some in the "hands" of the King, and some in the "legs." (Zohar, Yisro 85b)

All the mitzvos of the Torah are "limbs" in the "Upper Mystery," and when they are unified like one then they ascend together with sublime oneness. A The collective body of 613 Mitzvos are the entire basis of the upper and lower mysteries; all of them are "portions" and "limbs" through which are revealed the secret of Faith. One who does not pay attention to them and investigate the mysteries of the mitzvos of the Torah cannot know or see how he is bringing rectification to the limbs in the sublime Above; all the limbs of the "body" are rectified through the mysteries of the mitzvos of the Torah. (Zohar, Terumah 165b)

There are many similar statements in the Zohar, and other sources. The entire body of 613 Mitzvos is exactly that -- one complete body, completely inter-connected and inter-dependent, just like the limbs on our bodies. This is not merely a metaphor, as the Arizal explains:

A Furthermore, all 613 mitzvos divide into 613 "limbs" and "tendons" of Adam HaRishon, and are called "613 Large Roots." Each limb consists of specific mitzvos, for example, every Left Shoulder-Limb contains eleven Positive Mitzvos and fifteen Negative Mitzvos (for a total of 26 -- the numerical value of G-d's Four-Letter Ineffable Name). Any individual from this shoulder must fulfill these mitzvos more so than other mitzvos from the 613 mitzvos. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah 11)

In other words, every physical limb of a human being has a spiritual counterpart in the Sefiros. In this way, man can directly interact with creation, guiding it with his actions, words, and thoughts, because, each is spiritually attached to the World Above.

In fact, perhaps this is the lesson of "inter-active" videos and computer programs today. For, as the rabbis teach us, all that happens in the physical world does so to reveal to us what we can't see, but need to understand, about the spiritual world.

Until recently, videos were one-sided. That is, the producer produced it, and what you got was what you saw; you had very little input in the turn of events once the project was complete. All you could be was a captive audience, no matter what you thought about what you were watching.

Enter the world of inter-active computing. Now, with the help of super-technology and smaller but more powerful micro chips, you can be an active audience, participating in the outcome of events, through your thoughts and actions, and, eventually, your verbal instructions as well. And, though there still may exist limitations on just how much impact you can have on what you are playing with, still, they are certainly fewer limitations than a decade ago.

So, too, is creation "inter-active," except that we can have greater impact than we know, that we have less awareness about this than we ought to, and, we have more invested in the outcome than we do in a computer game. For the outcome directly affects the direction of history, our level of self-fulfillment, and, eventually, our portion in the World-to-Come.

Thus, in this case, world perfection is the name, mitzvos the game -- even the ones we don't relate to, for, as the Arizal adds:

Also, you must know that a person must fulfill all 613 mitzvos in action and in speech -- in such a way as Chazal say that one who is involved with the section dealing with the Burnt-Offering is considered to be one who has offered it -- and, in thought as well. One who has not performed a mitzvah on all three levels must reincarnate until all three levels have been fulfilled. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah 11)

Shabbos Day:

Serve (va'avadetem) G-d, your G-d, and He will bless your bread and your water, and remove sickness from amongst you. (Shemos 23:25)

On this posuk, the Talmud writes:

SERVE G-D YOUR G-D: This is the saying of the Shema and prayer; BLESS YOUR BREAD AND YOUR WATER: This is bread with salt and a container of water, and, from that point onward I will REMOVE SICKNESS FROM AMONGST YOU. (Bava Metzia 107b)

As the rabbis point, and the Nefesh HaChaim emphasizes, "avodah" always means prayer. In most societies, prayer is prayer, and servitude is servitude, and rarely do the two meet. But then again, Torah society is rarely like most societies, and G-d is a unique Master, Who does not need buildings built or fields plowed or clothing cleaned. He simply wants our hearts.

So what about all those mitzvos, 613 of THEM to be exact? Those are just to help us get to the point where we can be loyal to G-d. Sometimes, it is just a question of getting us to do the mitzvah, as an act of loyalty. However, most of the time it is about rectification of ourselves, like the previous d'var Torah pointed out. Everything flows from self- and world-rectification.

What does rectification mean? It means bringing the body and soul together in spiritual unity. Though they may be together enough to provide life, in most cases, they are not working in tandem, each going in separate spiritual directions.

Once mankind had a body that was more like light than flesh, until Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and brought spiritual darkness upon creation. The result is a far more physical world, one that is so material that one can even live with the belief that there is NO soul, though it lives before our very noses. Rectification means to reverse this procedure.

Can a body be loyal to a spiritual goal? Can a child? They are not much different from each other, and, in truth, the latter is really the way he is because of the former. A child is born with only his yetzer hara, the yetzer tov not arriving onto the scene until Bar and Bas Mitzvah years later.

What does it mean to be loyal? It means to be faithful, trustworthy, devoted, reliable, dependable, steadfast, and constant. What does it take to make a person that way? Can it be imposed? Never. Can it be bought? Not usually. Then how does one earn the loyalty of others?

People are loyal to loyal people. People care about people who care. They dedicate themselves to people who are dedicated, and the more important the value is to which they dedicate themselves, the deeper the sense of dedication there will be from others to them. This is especially true when it comes to parents are their children, which is why the Hebrew word for "education" is "chinuch," which means "dedication."

If you think about it, you will see that loyalty is the basis of any civilized and productive society. Cheating is the result of a lack of loyalty, which, by definition, is a function of a lack of devotion to important values by society and its members. It is very hard to cheat loyal, dedicated, and selfless and self-sacrificing people.

This is why "avodah" for us is saying the Shema and praying. Both these spiritual instruments act as view finders for us to see just how dedicated and selfless G-d is when it comes to creation and running His world. He didn't need to make us, or this entire universe, and derives no benefit from doing so. He owes us NOTHING, yet, He did it anyhow, and continues to do so every moment, strictly for OUR benefit.

All we have to do is recognize this, when focussing during the Shema and saying our prayers. Our loyalty which naturally follow. We will HUNGER to be loyal to G-d, and thirst for ways to show Him just how loyal we are. But, that is not going to happen until we elevate our bodies, and bring their vision in line with our souls'.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Then Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended. They saw the G-d of Israel, and under His feet there was a something like sapphire brick, like the essence of heaven in purity. (Shemos 24:9-10)

Whatever THAT means. The Torah rarely does this, describing such a sublime reality in such physical terms, which, of course, are only "borrowed" terms. For, elsewhere it says, "What form can you ascribe to Him?" (Yeshayahu 40:18).

The question is, why did the Torah feel compelled to provide such a description, to provide such an overt Kabbalistic explanation of these great men saw? Perhaps, part of the answer lies in the following discussion of the Talmud, which is discussing the mitzvah of wearing "Techeles" -- the purple-blue thread -- on Tzitzis:

It was taught in a brisa: Rebi Meir asked, "What is unique about Techeles from all other colors? Because, Techeles is similar to the (color of the) sea, and, the (color of the) sea is similar to the (color of the) firmament, and, the (color of the) firmament is similar the Throne of Glory, as it says, "under His feet there was a something like sapphire brick, like the essence of heaven in purity. (Shemos 24:10)(Menachos 43b)

Maybe this is also why the Talmud says:

Another brisa taught: "You shall see them, and remember all the mitzvos of G-d" (Bamidbar 15:39); This mitzvah (of wearing Tzitzis) is equal to all of them. Another brisa taught: "You shall see them and remember them and do them"; seeing brings to remembering, and remembering brings to doing. Rebi Shimon bar Yochai said: All who zealously perform this mitzvah merit to greet the "face" of the Divine Presence(Menachos 43b)

Hence, the gematria of the word "tzitzis" is equal to 600, the rabbis teach, and, when you add the number eight (for the strings of one corner) and the five knots that are tied, then, the total is equal to 613, the number of mitzvos of the Torah. Thus, the mitzvah of Tzitzis is truly a global one, with the Techeles-string acting as the link between Earth and Heaven.

It is also a fantastic lesson in education as well. There are different ways to teach children, and adults for that matter. One such way is to focus on the details of a subject, for example, a particular mitzvah, and to keep providing them, one after another, or a bunch at a time, and hope that somehow the person gains from them what exist to teach.

Unfortunately, though, many people find such an approach to learning "dry" and even confusing. Very often, interest in the subject is lost, and, the student begins to lose his connection with the concept all together. The result can be a global change for the worst: an abandonment of Torah and mitzvos completely, G-d forbid.

Then there is the "Global Approach." This is a system of education where the principle "pieces" of the intellectual puzzle are provided, which are usually quite deep and profound, and, stimulating, for

that matter. They provide an intellectual glimpse into the inner workings of creation, which allows all the details to find their correct context and meaning.

In fact, this was, IS, really the difference between the Aitz HaChaim -- Tree of Life -- and, the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah - the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Tree of Life is the "Big Picture," the principles of creation and the axioms of truth. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the myriad of details about how to put the knowledge of the Tree of Life into action.

Adam HaRishon made the mistake, not of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but, of doing so before eating from the Tree of Life (Arizal, Leshem). He "consumed" the details before the "generalities," and ended up be consumed by them. Did it bring him closer to G-d? No, it pushed him further away from G-d, and made him hide!

Perhaps this is why this section comes at the tail end of a very detail-oriented parshah, to remind us of the need to build the Tree of Life into which to merge the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And, true to the analogy of Tzitzis, "seeing leads to remembering, and, remembering leads to doing."

MELAVE MALKAH:

For the Conductor, by Dovid, a psalm. O G-d, You have scrutinized me and You know. You know my sitting down and my rising up, You understand my thought from afar. You encompass my path and my rest; You are familiar with all my ways. For, the word is not yet on my tongue, yet, You knew it all. (Tehillim 139:1-4)

This is a psalm about G-d's omnipotence, and, about man's naiveté, for, man lives and acts as if he can hide something from G-d, when in fact, G-d knows man's innermost thoughts, thoughts of which man himself might not even be aware yet.

This is why one of the main pseudonyms for G-d is "HaMakom" -- "The Place." This is to remind man that, G-d is not in creation, but rather, creation is within G-d, so-to-speak. Nothing can exist outside of Him, and therefore, everything is a part of Him -- including US -- what we think, what we say, and what we do.

In fact, if you want to get really abstract, you can say that we exist as figments of G-d's imagination, if you will. The implication of this is quite obvious and dramatic: the moment G-d ceases to will ANYTHING -- including US -- then, at that split moment, that thing ceases to exist AT ALL. Death, then, is not absolute. For, if G-d stopped willing the existence of someone completely, then, the body would leave with the soul, and both would disappear entirely. However, the soul remains after, as does the body, though separate from each other. Death, therefore, is when G-d only ceases to will the union of a particular body and soul, at least for the time being.

For You created my mind; You have covered me in my mother's womb. I acknowledge You, for I am

awesomely, wondrously fashioned; wondrous are Your works, and my soul knows it well. (13-14)

Correct -- the soul knows it well, VERY well indeed, but, the body. Now, that's a different story altogether. Just as a child takes for granted the miracle of life, and assumes that all he sees and experiences are givens for being in This World, the parent knows otherwise. If only the child could tap into the parent's mind, and experience through the parent what the latter has gained over time. How wise the child, adolescent, and teenager would be!

If only the body would tap into the soul's knowledge base -- ho wise a body it would be! And when they don't, the world is filled with a lot of very unwise bodies that can bring creation to ruination.

For those who hate You, G-d, I hate them, and I quarrel with those who rise up against You. With the utmost hatred, I hate them, I regard them as my own enemies. Search me, O G-d, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. And see if I have displeasing ways; and lead me in the way of eternity. (21-24)

That is the path of eternity -- to wake and realize that you can't hide from G-d, and you can't even run from Him. He is everywhere, at all times, and we are a part of Him. Becoming one with Him, and achieving completion and perfection are all the same thing. Learning this earlier, rather than later, is the test and struggle of life.

Have a great Shabbos,
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