

SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d said to Moshe: Take yourself spices -- stacte, onycha, etc. (Shemos 30:34)

In all siddurim you will find a quote from this week's parshah speaking about the mitzvah of the Ketores-Offering. However, only in some siddurim, you may find a short little introduction to the paragraph speaking about the importance of reciting this section of Torah daily. Some write that any requests made in Hebrew after reciting this section are bound to be fulfilled, so holy is the mitzvah of the Ketores-Offering!

The Ketores - the Incense-Offering - found in this week's parshah, was a special Divinely-designed mixture of eleven spices that were burned on the Golden Altar every morning and every night. There is nothing apparent within the words or the mitzvah itself to indicate why it stands out more than other mitzvos as a segulah for success, but who are we to argue?

Furthermore, the Arizal says that when one recites the Ketores with accuracy it inspires teshuvah. For this reason (and others), Sephardim and Chassidim say it everyday before Shacharis and at the end of Shacharis. For this reason, Ashkenazim who recite it at all only do so at the beginning of Shacharis, other than on days when working is prohibited for fear that working people who are often in a rush to get to work may slur the words. A big no-no with all prayers, but particularly when reciting the Ketores! However, in Eretz Yisroel all groups say it after Shacharis, if not before as well.

The Ketores is one of those mitzvos whose importance is clear on the surface, but whose understanding lies deep below it, beginning with the concept of Gevuros, which we have discussed before.

Gevuros is strength, but in the Kabbalistic sense it refers to a certain spiritual reality that constricts the light of G-d that is completely Chesedic (kindness-oriented). However, given that all light and situations come from G-d, it is more accurate to describe the light of Gevuros as the "left-hand" of G-d, and the light of Chesed as being from the "right-hand" of G-d.

Another way of looking at Chesed and Gevurah is that Chesed is the "hand" of G-d and Gevurah is the "glove" that covers it. This way the reality of G-d and His involvement in the affairs of man is far less clear, at least without some kind of intellectual investigation, making free-will - the purpose of

creation - possible. Of course, it is precisely this that makes evil possible as well.

Hence, Gevurah is not evil itself; no light of G-d can ever be. However, its existence, particularly in the lower world in which we live, makes evil possible. Our job is to see to it that the potential for gevurah in the world is channeled in a positive way and not a negative way. When this happens, it is called a "sweetening" of the Gevuros, and it is from this that our portion in the World-to-Come is built.

The resistance to learn Torah and to perform mitzvos is strictly a function of Gevuros as well, as is the drive to transgress the Torah. Traditionally, that is what we call the Yetzer Hara - the "Evil Inclination" - but even that is just a function of Gevuros, which is why it won't exist in Yemos HaMoshiach (Succah 52a). By that time, says Kabbalah, all the Gevuros will have already been sweetened, that is, channeled into holy purposes.

If a person overcomes his or her resistance to perform a mitzvah, he or she is said to have used the Gevuros instead for a mitzvah. Hence, the rabbis have taught:

Who is a Gibor (Strong Person)? One who overcomes his Yetzer Hara. (Pirkei Avos 4:1)

Likewise, when one rejects the temptation to sin he has also channeled the force of Gevurah in the direction of mitzvah and into the currency of reward in the World-to-Come.

Shabbos Day:

Make an incense by compounding them as a skilled perfumer would do, blending them well; they should be pure and holy. Grind them finely . . . (Shemos 30:35-36)

Since Gevuros by their very nature are considered "difficult" and "hard," terms associated with the Divine judgment they invoke (judgment is considered to be the opposite of kindness), therefore they are also represented by hard substances. When a hard substance is ground into a fine powder, as in the case with the ingredients of the Ketores, it is also called a "weakening" or "sweetening" of the Gevuros.

The finely ground Ketores mixture represents the sweetening of the Gevuros, and therefore a more favorable judgment. This is why, according to Kabbalah, the Incense mixture is returned to the grinding bowl once again Erev Yom Kippur to be ground down even more finely which is why Yom Kippur is considered to be such a special time of Divine mercy.

Not only is grinding down the spices for the Ketores considered to be a way of sweetening the Gevuros, the completion of which must be finished in advance of Moshiach's arrival one way or

another, but the actual slaughtering of an animal for a holy purpose is considered to accomplish the same thing as well.

Prior to the sin of Adam HaRishon, everything in creation was considered to be holy and free of Gevuros, except for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. G-d had brought the world to near perfection and placed Adam and Chava into it. Their job was to bring creation to its final level of perfection, to which the animal kingdom already belonged, thanks to G-d. The meat they ate - and they DID eat meat - according to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 59b) and Kabbalah, was prepared in Heaven and brought to him from Above.

However, not only did Adam and Chava not finish off the job that G-d had started, but by disobeying G-d and eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they reversed the perfection of creation and caused a great infiltration of Gevuros into those things that until that stage had been free of them, at least in any unholy way.

This also included the animal kingdom. Those animals considered to be "impure" by Torah standards and which a Jew is not allowed to eat other than in extenuating circumstances (like death from starvation, or similar), are said to be so infiltrated that there is no physical action man can perform at this stage of history to rectify the situation. However, those animals through which ritual slaughter as prescribed by Torah law and the proper preparation becomes "kosher" to eat, are said to have been less infiltrated and subject to human tikun, and can be rectified somewhat.

Of course, those countries that ban shechitah have no inkling about spiritual tikunim. This is why Avraham was so intent upon actually slaughtering his beloved son Yitzchak whose very life embodied the concept of Gevuros in a holy way. Avraham, who was Chesed, slaughtering Yitzchak, who was Gevurah, would have created the perfect and final tikun for all of history then and there, and he knew that only too well.

All of this is implied in the Ketores as well, and is the reason why the Ketores is considered to be so holy. Kabbalah explains the reason for each particular spice in the mixture, but that is for research and discussion at another time. However, as the Talmud points out, one of the spices is in fact an allusion to Mordechai (Chullin 139b), and therefore the underlying concept of the redemption of Purim that he brought about.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

G-d told Moshe, "I have appointed Betzalel, the son of Uri, the son of Chur, of the tribe of Yehudah, and have filled him with the spirit of G-d in wisdom and in understanding, in knowledge and in all manner of work . . . (Shemos 31:1-3)

This section seems to have little to do with the previous one about the Ketores, and even less to do

with the section that follows about the golden calf. However, not only is it deeply related to both sections, but it is also a perfect lead-in to the last d'var Torah and installment about "Chanukah & the Wonderful World of Thirty-Six."

What we have not addressed is why there were eleven spices, specifically. In general, when it comes to Torah, numbers are always significant and tellers of stories behind the stories. However, in this case it is the number that is perhaps one of the most telling factors of the Ketores itself.

The number eleven, which is how many spices there were in the Ketores, at first seems rather odd. However, Kabbalistically it is a number of tremendous importance for it alludes to one of the most prized possessions in all of history: Da'as Elokim - G-dly-Knowledge.

It is well-known that there are only ten fixed Sefiros: Keser, Chochmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchus - Crown, Wisdom, Understanding, Kindness, Strength, Harmony, Dominance, Glory, Foundation, and Kingship. They are, for all intents and purposes, the spiritual DNA for all of existence, and the filters through which the G-d of light passes to make it all exist and happen.

Kabbalah explains that there is actually an eleventh sefirah. However, because it is really the product of other sefiros and subject to movement, meaning that it can come and go based upon the efforts of man, it is more like a pseudo-sefirah, though its centrality is not to be under-estimated. (In truth, Da'as is what the light of Keser becomes after being filtered through Chochmah and Binah, which is why it is not really counted independently, but that is already a discussion that goes above our heads.)

Brushing aside the details, Da'as means one thing and one thing only: Redemption. The more of this light that exists in the world, the more redemption will become a real and fixed reality, which is why the prophets describe Yemos HaMoshiach as a time when the world will be filled with Da'as, just as Betzalel was to construct the Mishkan, a microcosm of the entire universe in perfection, as the Zohar said:

Ya'akov wanted to establish the Mystery of Unity below, and composed the twenty-four letters of, "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom forever." He didn't make it twenty-five letters since the Mishkan (Tabernacle) had yet to be built. Once the Mishkan was built, the first word was completed . . . With regard to this it says, "G-d spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying . . ." (Vayikrah 1:1), which has twenty-five letters. (Zohar 2:139b)

The golden calf represents the other extreme - the world without Da'as, a forerunner of modern Western Society. (Ow! The truth hurts.) The Parah Adumah, the subject of this week's special Maftir, of course is the tikun for the golden calf, and therefore an expression of this very concept. (See Rashi at the beginning of Parashas Chukas.)

Thus, there are some very famous elevens through history, and they are all associated with this

concept of Da'as. For example, Yosef was the eleventh son born to Ya'akov, the one through whom the hand of G-d became clear and from whom Moshiach ben Yosef will descend to help us across the threshold into Moshiach's time.

However, perhaps the most famous eleven is the gematria of the letters "Vav-Heh" from G-d's Tetragrammaton Name, purposely left out at the end of Parashas Beshallah when G-d swears there will be war against Amalek until the end of history. The Name of G-d that represents this reality is "Elokim." Once Amalek is finally snuffed out in Moshiach's time, they will return and G-d's Name will once again be one. However, until such time it is as if they remain hidden, like the hand of G-d itself in the affairs of man, allowing Gevuros and Amalek to do their thing.

This is the lead it in to the next d'var Torah.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Chanukah & The Wonderful World of Thirty-Six

Installment #13, Chapter Eight, Part Three: Why Thirty-Six?

Kabbalah explains that every Name of G-d represents a different level of His light and this is implied in the spelling of the Name itself. The Name "Shadd"ai," for example, is made up of two parts, a "shin" and the two letters "dalet-yud." The first part can be read as a prefix that means "that," and the last two letters actually spell the Hebrew word for "enough."

The Name is said to allude to G-d as the One Who said "Enough!" Enough to what? Enough to the light!

When it came time to put into reality what G-d had willed, He emanated out a most powerful and sublime light that traveled deep into the spiritual vacuum He had already created for this purpose. As planned by G-d, there were five separate spiritual realities this light was meant to create and fill with life on the level suited for it, each world having its own ten levels. Thus, there were fifty levels the light could have descended, from the very top to the very bottom of G-d's creation.

However, everywhere this light goes, evil cannot go, for the light is eternal and completely good, and evil is temporary and is only the result of the absence of this light. Where there is the Light, there is no evil, and no free-will. Where there is no free-will, there is no purpose of man, and no reward in the World-to-Come.

Therefore, as the light flowed at a perfect and Divinely-acceptable rate, at some point it would have to stop in order to leave room for the potential for evil, and therefore, for free-will. The question is, how many levels from the top should the light be allowed to descend? How many levels from the bottom should the light be prevented from reaching?

Well, G-d Himself supplied the answer to that question in His Name "Shadd"ai," since not only does "dalet-yud" spell the Hebrew "di" (enough), but it also totals "14" in gematria. In other words, Shadd"ai is the Name that teaches us that G-d stopped the light fourteen levels from the bottom. Hence, fifty levels less fourteen levels is, that is correct: THIRTY-SIX LEVELS OF LIGHT.

The Light of THIRTY-SIX levels!

However, we started this discussion weeks ago by relating the Supernal Light of creation to the number twenty-five, and the number twenty-five to the purpose of the Jewish people to be a LIGHT unto the nations. How can two numbers represent one idea?!

The answer is that they CAN, because the number twenty-five represents the "raw" light that G-d has put into creation. This is why the first time the word appears in the Torah, it is the twenty-fifth word preceded by a word ("yehi") whose gematria is twenty-five. It is the light of TWENTY-FIVE, and one that can be hidden from man.

Thirty-six is the number that represents the revelation of that "Hidden Light," which is why we light thirty-six candles from the twenty-fifth day of Kislev onward. Chanukah is about "pirsumi nissa" - the revelation of the miracle and the hand of G-d (Shabbos 22a). That's why there are thirty-six righteous people holding up the world, whose very lives act as a testimony to G-d's existence and the truth of His Torah.

Hence, anywhere the number twenty-five appears, it is an allusion to Hidden Light of creation just waiting to emerge into the reality of man through the actions of righteous people. And, anywhere the number thirty-six appears is an allusion to a successful revelation of that light.

The difference between the two of them: ELEVEN.

As Rashi points out at the beginning of the Torah:

He saw that the evil were unworthy of using it, and therefore set it apart for the righteous in the Time-to-Come. (Rashi, Bereishis, 1:4)

As Kabbalah points out, this does not mean that righteous people cannot access this light prior to the World-to-Come. Chanukah itself is a testimony to just the opposite! The light is there at all times, and in fact, it is what maintains the world and man within it.

However, it is the harnessing of this light that G-d has made impossible - for those unworthy. The capability to transform the "Light of Twenty-Five" into the "Light of Thirty-Six," one that can consume the intellectual doubt that Amalek represents, and rid the world of evil once-and-for-all (or at least on a personal level until the knowledge spreads to others, remains only for those who possess the "Key of Eleven").

Yosef, Ya'akov's ELEVENTH son did possess this capability, and this is why he was able to act as G-d's vehicle on earth for revelation. This is the REAL reason why he is called "tzaddik," and this is the

reason why he is so well-connected to Chanukah, and spoke about after Chapter Thirty-Six and the chieftains of Eisav.????

This is also why he is associated with the sefirah called "Yesod," which represents a conduit for G-d's light and which corresponds to the sixth millennium, OUR millennium, during which the Final Redemption will occur, may it come speedily in our time, and probably will. Yesod is called "Redeemer" by the Zohar.

Oh, the connections are endless!

This is what we are doing here, and this is the reason why we have been created. This is the way we earn our portion in the World-to-Come and rectify the world. The Light of Twenty-Five is a given. The Light of Thirty-Six is a result. However, the Da'as necessary to transform the former into the latter is a function of our own free-will as we probe ever deeper into the depths of Torah, moving from the simplest levels of understanding to the most profound. Everything else is merely a side show at best and a distraction at worst.

As a man who understood the equation of light and history only too well once wrote:

If you pursue it like money and seek after it like hidden treasures, then you will understand fear of G-d and you will find Da'as Elokim. (Mishlei 2:4-5)

That is, the Da'as represented by the number eleven, and of "Elokim," the Name of G-d that symbolizes the letters of "Vav-Heh," is in need of revelation.

There is so much more to say about this. However, this is where this book ends and our task begins, in pursuit of Da'as Elokim and unification of the "Vav-Heh" with the "Yud-Heh" of G-d's Holy Ineffable Name.

On that day, He will be One and His Name will be One. (Zechariah 14:9)

Never before has it been so close.

Have a great Shabbos,
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