

MIRACULOUS LIGHT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Command the Children of Israel to bring clear olive oil, beaten for the light, so the menorah can burn continuously. (Shemos 27:20)

Life is but a parable. It has to be for important philosophical reasons, the main one being that G-d is Eternal and Infinite, and yet somehow we exist. Not only do we exist, but we even have free-will, which is pretty confusing considering that G-d's will is Absolute.

There are answers for all of this, even some good enough to stop a person from going crazy figuring out the entire issue. Of course, no answer is 100%, meaning that it solves all the paradoxes perfectly, and to think otherwise would be to take the easy way out.

For many, over the millennia the philosophical questions have been strong enough and the answers weak enough to allow them to feel free to choose the path of the non-believer and even play the part of the heretic. For others, the lack of perfect intellectual understanding has always been understood as the result of a shortcoming of the human mind, and that it leaves room for man to have "faith" in G-d, the ultimate measure of ANY relationship.

What the non-believer has never understood - EVER - is that the perfect answer DOES exist. Indeed, it is an answer that solves ALL the philosophical dilemmas, but it is not one that can be arrived at through human reasoning alone. That is the mistake non-believers have always made, going all the way back to the first "heretic" - Adam HaRishon. (Sanhedrin 38b)

In explaining why Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil - the poison - before eating from the Tree of Life - the antidote - the K'li Yekar explains that the fruit of the former was visible whereas the fruit of the latter was its bark. However, if one did not know this, then he could easily be fooled into thinking that the Tree of Life was in fact fruitless, while the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was fruitful.

That WAS the test. Knowing that the Tree of Life was precisely that, Adam HaRishon should have forgone his original assumption and taken from the bark of the Tree of Life first. What he would have learned from "tasting" it would have illuminated his mind far beyond any knowledge the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil could ever have imparted to him, as he found out too late. As they

usually find out too late.

This IS the test. Knowing that the Torah is called the "Tree of Life," or at least that some very intelligent people believe with perfect faith that it was given by G-d to over 3,000,000 Jews over 3,000 years ago should be enough to forgo their original assumptions and "taste" from the Tree of Life first. True, the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is more visible to the naked eye - one can be smarter, richer, or more successful because of it - but tasting from the Tree of Life is what makes all that fruit really mean something; it is the system by which to properly digest and absorb the fruit.

The Menorah, like everything to do with the Mishkan, is one of those important parables of life that allow us to understand the mysterious. We may take it for granted, but personally, I am in awe each week when I fill up our Shabbos candles (glass jars) with that yellow, clear, beautiful "stuff" we call olive oil. It is a liquid, and yet it burns so majestically. It came from a fruit, yet it combusts like a fuel providing invaluable light and warmth, some physical but most of it spiritual.

Ultimately, though, it is a revelation of the hidden. To look at the olive, one cannot see it, or even guess that it resides inside. Even cutting the olive open does not reveal the hidden potential of the oil within, and certainly tasting the unpickled olive provides no clues. No, one must first draw the oil out and then ignite it before its light can VERY MIRACULOUSLY be brought into the world of man.

Thus, the Menorah which is the symbol of Torah wisdom, is a reminder of how the light of understanding miraculously emerges once we initiate the process of seeking the Ultimate Truth, G-d Himself. We can melt the gold and fashion the Menorah. We can pick, squeeze, refine and place the oil in the cup. We can even ignite the wick. However, only G-d can tell the oil to burn and illuminate the path of mankind.

Shabbos Day:

Make holy garments for Aharon, your brother, for glory and for splendor. Speak to the talented whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, so they will make Aharon's clothing to sanctify him, to appoint him as a priest to Me. (Shemos 28:2-3)

It is not unlike the soul of man, which in Hebrew is called "Neshamah" and which shares the same letters as the word "hashemen," which means "the oil." We can provide the body (from the father and mother) and even the opportunities in life to "ignite" the soul of a person, to some degree. However, the soul is from G-d and its ability to burn is a function of the will of G-d.

As we learned in Parashas Yisro, the entire Jewish nation is called a "Nation of Priests" and a "holy

nation" (Shemos 19:6). As such, our clothing must be fitting for people of our holy disposition; they must be "for splendor and glory."

Truly that is a reference to the way we physically present ourselves, both in terms of modesty and "loudness." However, it is more of a reference to our bodies that is the clothing of our souls; they must be for glory and splendor. They must be fitting "garments" for the holy soul that resides within and which lives to serve G-d as one would expect from a nation of priests.

This, by definition, necessitates that we turn to G-d for His help, which we did over 3,300 years ago. His response was the Torah that Moshe Rabbeinu brought down from Heaven and presented to the Jewish people waiting for him at the base of Mt. Sinai. For a millennia now, it has allowed millions of Jews to "train" their bodies to walk in the way of the soul, and in doing so, become refined.

Refined, in this discussion, means more spiritual. Think of it like a brown paper bag with a light inside of it. For the most part, the brown bag prevents the inner light from reaching the outside world and benefiting humankind. However, smear some oil on the bag and make it translucent, and immediately the light inside begins to reveal itself on the outside; perform mitzvos with intention and enthusiasm and the body becomes like a Menorah that gives rise to the flame of the soul.

Again, this is not something that is easily believed from the outside. Nor is it meant to be, for that is the test of the person. The intellectually honest individual will forgo his assumptions and biases and enter the world of Torah and mitzvos with a discerning eye and sincerely "taste" it, only to find out that it is sweeter than any other knowledge, and that its fruit are more meaningful than any other kind of fruit.

This is what Shlomo HaMelech wrote and taught:

It is a Tree of Life for all those who grasp it. (Mishlei 3:18)

For those who "grasp" it, the wisest king wrote, for those who first take hold of it and initiate the process. Having done this, there is something of which the miracle can take hold, a container ready and able to receive the holy light of G-d. And then, everything begins to make sense, sometimes even in ways that can't quite be articulated, and you know that your limited mind has entered somewhat into the world of the unlimited, a completely personal, sublime and indescribable experience.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS: **Parashas Zachor**

On the bottom of the robe around the hem place pomegranates of blue-purple, red-purple, and crimson [wool], and bells of gold in-between them all around -- golden bell and pomegranate, golden bell and pomegranate -- around the hem of the robe. When Aaron serves, its sound will be

heard when he comes into the Holy Place before G-d and when he goes out, so that he will not die. (Shemos 28:33-35)

What does the Kohen Gadol's robe teach us?

We see that the bells on the bottom of the Kohen Gadol's "robe" were a way to remind the Kohen Gadol to act with derech erez even before G-d, Who knows just where the Kohen Gadol is and when he will enter the Holy of Holies. Just as one should knock upon entering his own house, so too did the Kohen Gadol have to announce his arrival before entering the Kodesh Kodashim.

We find a similar example of this at Mt. Sinai and at the giving of Torah. At one point, G-d told Moshe to go down the mountain and ask the people about accepting Torah, which the Jewish people did.

All the people answered together and said, "All that G-d has spoken we will do."

Now, it is safe to assume that not only did G-d hear the people's response as Moshe heard it, but one can assume that G-d knew the people's reply even before they said it! Yet, the posuk says:

Moshe brought the people's reply to G-d. (Shemos 19:8)

As Rashi says, it was not because Moshe Rabbeinu thought that G-d was in fact waiting for the reply from his mouth because He had no other way of knowing it. It was, rather, an act of derech erez of Moshe's behalf, simply because it was the completion of the mission G-d had sent him on.

However, the Talmud finds another reason for the bells on the hem of the Kohen Gadol's robe, namely to atone for the sin of loshon hara - derogatory speech about another - on behalf of the entire Jewish nation.

The robe atoned for loshon hara. How do we know this? Rebi Chanina said, "Let something that has a voice (Rashi: The bells that are on it) atone for an evil voice. (Zevachim 88b)

However, why there? Why use the bottom of the Kohen Gadol's robe to atone for loshon hara? Perhaps it is the Torah's way of telling us two things. First, when one speaks loshon hara he has reached an extremely low point in his life and in the world. Secondly, proper speech is the basis of all of life, as Onkeles alludes (Bereishis 2:7), by making speech the result of the infusion of a G-dly soul.

As mentioned in "Redemption-to-Redemption: The Very Deep & Intricate Connection Between Purim & Pesach," speech is one of the most important ways we fend off Amalek and all his descendants, the physical ones AND the spiritual ones. This is one of the reasons why there is a Torah mitzvah to VERBALLY recall Amalek's attack against the Jewish people, as a counter force to his attack on Jewish speech.

The gematria of "Amalek" is equal to the gematria of the Hebrew word for "doubt," for that is Amalek's mission in life: to fester doubt in the minds of the Jews, particularly in our relationship with

G-d. However, doubt is one of those things that until it is verbalized, it can remain somewhat inert. Somehow, by verbalizing one's doubts they take on a life of their own and can consume our faith in G-d.

It was the snake's loshon hara that led Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was Moshe's loshon hara that caused G-d to temporarily inflict him with tzara'as. It was Miriam's loshon hara (and it had been with good intention) that forced her out of the Jewish camp before the eyes of millions of others. Loshon hara is called the "profession of the Snake," and remains to be one of the most power tools in the hand of Amalek to undermine relationships, especially between G-d and the Jewish people.

Who knows how much emotional and financial damage has been wrought through loshon hara? Who knows how many lives have been ruined because such incorrect usage of man's greatest power: speech? This Shabbos, as we "remember" what Amalek did to us on the way out of Egypt, we should also recall what it does to us every day of our lives, opening our mouths to empower the side of spiritual impurity.

In the meantime, while we are discussing the bells on the Kohen Gadol's robe, it is also very interesting to point out that there were a specific amount of them - THIRTY-SIX to be exact. Why thirty-six? That is the topic of the next d'var Torah.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Chanukah & The Wonderful World of Thirty-Six

Installment #10, Chapter Eight, Part Two: Why Thirty-Six

From last week:

Being the light unto the nations that we were redeemed from Egypt to be, through the wisdom of the Torah we are supposed to elevate the spiritual consciousness of the entire world. This results in more light coming down from the upper sefiros which causes the lower sefiros to "mature" and become able to handle an increased capacity of G-d's light. All that we affect and are affected by is by way of the Sefiros, which in a sense are the place that G-d encoded His master plan for creation.

Obviously there is much more to understand regarding such a holy concept as the Ten Sefiros. Nevertheless, this is as Kabbalistic a definition of redemption as you will find, for as long as these six sefiros remain spiritually underdeveloped and are denied the light of the upper three sefiros, then exile is the result. However, the more light these specific six sefiros can handle and receive, the more redemption the world can enjoy and the less evil can exist.

This week:

The minimal amount of sefiros each of these six sefiros have, which represents the stage of exile, is six. In other words, each of the six sefiros in its under-developed stage possesses its own subset of six sefiros as well. Thus, if the six Sefiros of Chesed through Yesod are said to have access to only six of their ten sefiros at this time, then the total amount of sefiros governing our six thousand years of history would be - THIRTY-SIX.

In other words, the number thirty-six represents the state of creation in need of tikun, which is why the light that can bring rectification, is also represented by the same number. When that light is drawn into creation through Torah and mitzvos, then it expands the capacity of the six incomplete sefiros and causes them to mature, so-to-speak, somewhat, in very much the same way added knowledge can cause a child to grow up and mature faster.

This idea, according to Kabbalah, is reflected in the Name of G-d, "Eloh'im," which is made up of two parts: aleph-lamed-heh, and yud-mem. The first part, which is pronounced "eileh" has the gematria of thirty-six and therefore is said to correspond to the six Sefiros that govern our history, Chesed through Yesod. The second part has the gematria of fifty, an allusion to the "Nun Sha'arei Binah," the "Fifty Gates of Understanding" which are associated with the level above the six Sefiros, Binah.

This is the reason why Eloh'im is the Name of G-d that is used when describing the more hidden Providence of G-d, which works through nature. If the Name represents the flow of light from Above to Below, then when the Name is written vertically it would begin (from the top) with the "mem," and end (at the bottom) with the "aleph." This tells us that the light of the thirty-six is just the light of the Fifty Gates of Understanding, albeit filtered. However, from top to bottom it is still the light of G-d, represented by the letter "aleph."

Thus, our role is to unify the aleph-lamed-heh with the yud-mem, which, as we shall see G-d willing, is the same task as unifying the Yud-Heh and the Vav-Heh of G-d's Four-Letter Ineffable Name.

Another way of expressing the same idea is as follows. Kabbalah describes the process that G-d used to make creation by sending a "thin" line of light (Kav Ain Sof) into a massive spiritual void (Challal) that G-d Himself created for this purpose. As the light moved inward from the round surface through the opening into the void, it resulted in the creation of different levels of existence referred to as "worlds" in Kabbalah.

There are five main worlds in total: Adam Kadmon, Atzilus, Beriyah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah - Adam Kadmon coming after the Light of Ain Sof, and Asiyah being the lowest of the five. Each of these worlds in turn have ten Sefiros of their own, or ten levels, making fifty levels in total from top to bottom, all of which the Light of Ain Sof must reach at some point in history if all of creation is ever going to be completely G-dly and perfect.

However, if the Light of Ain Sof had been allowed to reach the bottom of all fifty levels from the start, then nothing of creation would have remained imperfect for man to perfect - the goal of creation. Therefore, G-d did not allow His holy light to emanate to the bottom of creation in full glory

for this very reason, but instead stopped it short and left an aspect of the spiritual void for man to draw the light into and raise the spiritual level of creation to "Holy to G-d," the inscription on the Kohen Gadol's head plate.

This is what it means to unify the Name of G-d and end the existence of Amalek.

The question is, at what point did G-d stop the light? How many levels from the bottom did the light not reach, and therefore, how many levels from the top did the light actually illuminate and perfect? The answer to this question lies in another well-known Name of G-d - Shadd'ai - which will be the topic of the next and FINAL installment in this series, G-d willing, just in time for Purim.

Have a great Shabbos,
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