

NO BREAD OF SHAME

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)

The following is translated from a sefer called Ner Mitzvah by Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver. Called the "third mouth" of the GR"A (the Vilna Gaon) for expounding and spreading the Torah of the Vilna Gaon, he was called the greatest Kabbalist of his time by Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spector. He is in the middle of a treatise about free-will, and specifically, the concept of Nehama d'Kisufa, commonly translated as "Bread of Shame."

He writes:

Now the statement mentioned in connection to the posuk, "They shall make tzitzis" (Bamidbar 15:38), can be understood. They said that it teaches that the "making" is attributed to the person, and that this is what is meant by "light is sown for the righteous and for the upright of heart, gladness" (Tehillim 97:11). It means that it is already planted in the soul, and the "gladness" of the righteous person is in bringing it into actuality.

[Earlier, the author taught that not only did G-d create all potential at the beginning of Creation, but that ALL the potential that any person will actualize in his lifetime is actually already planted in his soul; that is the light sown for the righteous. If so, then this raises the question of Nehama d'Kisufa (Bread of Shame), the Zohar's term for achievements that come for free as opposed to being earned. However, the answer is that by using our free-will to actualize the potential, it is as if we created the reality on our own and are therefore credited for doing so. This is really what Rashi was asking and answering at the beginning of Parashas Terumah, where G-d called for contributions to be made for the construction of the Mishkan. There Rashi explained, according to the Sifsei Chachamim, that what G-d was really asking for was for us to give HIS property back to Him for the building of the Mishkan, because, after all, everything in Creation really belongs to Him in the first place. If so, then what were the Jewish people really contributing in the end? The answer is their intention; how each contributor gave to the cause depended upon his own free-will, the intention of his heart, a potential that could only be brought into reality by the person himself, even though G-d supplied the means to do so. And doing so, says the author, it is the source of gladness for the upright of heart.]

It also says, "G-d desired for the sake of righteousness that the Torah be made great and glorious"

(Yeshayahu 42:21). The rabbis taught: The Holy One, Blessed is He, wanted give merit to Israel and therefore increased Torah and mitzvos, as it says, "G-d desired for the sake of righteousness . . ." (Makkos 3:16). For, as we have said, the main completion is already planted in the Nefesh, and therefore what can Israel do to merit that what they accomplish should be attributed to them so that it will become clothing for their souls? Thus, G-d increased Torah and mitzvos for them; the actualization of both is attributed to them, as we have said at length. Thus it says, "He wanted to give merit to Israel," that is, that it should come from them for their good.

[In other words, potential needs a vehicle to be brought into reality; necessity is the mother of the actualization of potential. Therefore, G-d gave Torah and mitzvos to act as the cause to actualize all kinds of human and personal potential that otherwise would remain latent and basically go unused. The result is a greater sense of self-fulfillment in this world, and increased reward in the next one. The tzitzis allude to this, since it is a garment that is worn and which alludes to all the 613 Mitzvos, teaching us that our souls are en clothed in the mitzvos that we brought into reality in this world through the use of our free-will.]

SHABBOS DAY:

A good name is better than good oil. (Koheles. 7:1)

This is what is written: The Holy One, Blessed is He, planted the Torah and the mitzvos (Bamidbar Rabbah 17:5). The Holy One, Blessed is He, gives only the potential, planted in the soul like a seed that is planted in the ground, and whose fruits have yet to be revealed. This only happens through the actions of man in order to cause him to inherit the World-to- Come, to merit great reward and not through Bread of Shame.

According to this, the posuk, "Command the Children of Israel" can be understood [along these lines as well]. For, the previous parshah explained the work of the Mishkan, which was a sign and a wonder that the Divine Presence dwells on Israel, and that they themselves are the chariot for the Shechinah, as it says, "Make for Me a Mishkan and I will dwell within them" (Shemos 25:8), as the commentaries explain.

[They explain that the posuk should have said, "and I will dwell within IT," that is, the Mishkan intended to be built. However, it says that G-d will dwell within THEM, implying within the Jewish people themselves, revealing that they themselves are a chariot for the Shechinah.]

For this reason, this (i.e., the first posuk of this week's parshah) follows immediately to teach the basis of the great level of Israel to make them the main dwelling place for the Divine Presence, more than the host Above. It is the word, "Command," a commandment to actualize mitzvos thus teaching that even though the main completion is planted within them, just as the Menorah was made by fire, nevertheless actualization depends upon Israel like the Menorah, which did not give off light until they put oil in it. Likewise, all potential was planted within them but only revealed and brought into reality through the free-will of a person.

[Earlier the author referred to a midrash that used the Menorah as an analogy to make its point (Devarim Rabbah 3:1), and explained that the Menorah was used because, more than any other vessel of the Mishkan, the entire Torah and the mitzvos are compared to the Menorah and the seven branches that come out from its side, because through them (Torah and mitzvos), light is given to a person's soul: At first it is only a potential planted in his soul, and therefore they are not capable of joining together and weaving a garment for his soul until he chooses to actualize them. Secondly, the Menorah was not actually created by men but fashioned by G-d, since Moshe could not grasp how it was to be done, and therefore it represents the latent potential in a person's soul - a given from Heaven that must be illuminated through the choices and actions of people.]

Thus it says: "bring clear olive oil" - it should be free of any wasteful thing or strange thought, G-d forbid. This is what "beaten" means: you need to trouble yourself to bring out this oil into actuality, and this is a positive action that is compared to oil, as it says, "And oil on your head" (Koheles 9:8), and it also says, "A good name is better than good oil" (Ibid. 7:1).

[That is, the process of physically crushing the olive in order to extract the oil, and then the refinement of it is an analogy for applying oneself to do mitzvos in the most pure way possible. To what end?]

"For illumination," but it does not say "to illuminate," because the former is something that refers to the light itself that is planted within the soul, as it says, "Light is sown for the righteous." That is, they combine their actions to the light that is planted in their souls in order that it should be a continual candle, to actualize potential just as fire comes out from the soul through crushing and beating [the olive].

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

In the Ohel Moed - Appointed Tent - outside the Partition Veil, which is before the Testimony, Aharon and his sons will set up [the Menorah] to burn from evening until morning, before G-d. (Shemos 27:21)

It says, "[in the] Appointed Tent." Now, the rabbis teach that "this world is similar to a corridor before the World-to-Come . . . Rectify yourself, etc." (Pirkei Avos 4:16). Thus, the Upper World is called Moed (Appointed) since it is the Bais Moed (Appointed House) for all living beings. It is there that the Divine Presence is revealed to the souls of the righteous. This world, on the other hand, is the ohel (tent) before the Moed (Appointed); it is called tent because it is a temporary dwelling for the time being, unlike the Upper World which is a house and lasts forever.

[The Ohel Moed (Appointed Tent) was the enclosed area in which the Mishkan and the Altar were placed. However, the author is teaching that within a single name is a hint into two different levels of reality, one temporary and one eternal. Thus, the actual structure itself was made from curtains and had a less permanent presence than the Mishkan, which was made from heavy boards.]

... outside the Partition Veil ... It says, "I heard from behind the Pargud - Curtain ..." (Brochos 18b)

[This is from an account of man who was able to hear what one soul told another based upon what it heard in Heaven from behind the Curtain.]

This world is empty of the upper perfection and therefore it is a place of spiritual impurity and the yetzer hara in order to make free-will possible. Therefore, a veil exists to make a separation between the upper and lower world so that the true perfection should not be seen.

[The Partition Veil in the Mishkan alludes to this reality.]

There, "Aharon and his sons will set up [the Menorah] to burn from evening until morning, before G-d, an eternal decree for the generations, from the Children of Israel. In other words, a person only arranges and orders but never actually makes anything of his own, just as was explained regarding the assembling of the Menorah.

[G-d is a Boreh (Creator), meaning that He can create something from nothing, as opposed to man who is a Yotzer (Former), and can only arrange and re-arrange that which already exists in Creation.]

This was given to Israel, as it says, "All is in the hands of Heaven except fear of Heaven." (Brochos 34b)

[That is, everything was created by Heaven except for the will that man uses to make use of it.]

This is why it writes "from the Children of Israel."

[The order and arrangement comes from Israel.]

MELAVE MALKAH:

"And He said to me, 'What do you see?' and I said, 'I see, and behold! - a menorah [made entirely] of gold with its bowl on top; its seven lamps are upon it, and there are seven ducts for [each of] its lamps on its top. There are two olive trees over it, one on the right of the bowl and one on the left.' I spoke up and said to the angel who was speaking to me, saying, 'What are these, my lord?' The angel who was speaking to me said, 'Do you not know what these are?' And I said, 'No, my lord.' He spoke up and said to me, saying, 'This is the word of G-d to Zerubavel, saying, "Not through army and not through strength, but through My spirit," said G-d, Master of Legions.' " (Zechariah 4:2-6)

Thus, we can understand the menorah that Zechariah saw. As we have said, Torah and mitzvos are compared to a menorah: the seven branches are the six sections of Positive Mitzvos and Negative Mitzvos, and the study of Torah [the middle branch] equals them all.

Therefore, the entire time that free-will is possible a person must "place oil" in the "candles" to bring the potential that is latent in his soul to actuality, as we have explained. However, in the Time-to-Come when free-will is no more (i.e., in Yemos HaMoshiach), then the "candles" of Israel will give off light, but not as a result of their efforts, but because of the Spirit of G-d. (Ner Mitzvah, p. 109-110)

Thus, in the end, the Mishkan was really one very complex lesson about life. And, if the Mishkan came in response to the golden calf, then it means the latter was the antithesis of this lesson, summed up by the following posuk:

And you may say in your heart, "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth."
(Devarim 8:17)

The Mishkan says, "No." It says the potential to become successful was planted in your soul before you were even born. It says that the physical means to do so was created by Heaven back at the beginning of Creation. The only question was, would you be willing to take advantage of both and make it a reality?

But was that what you were supposed to do with all that latent potential? Did it have only a path to fulfillment, only one route to actualization? Both the Mishkan and the golden calf answer "no" this time, for they represent the two extreme choices on one continuum of potential. In which direction the potential is used depends entirely upon the person, and it is for this that each person is evaluated on their final day of judgment.

It's like the story of the fisherman that Eliyahu HaNavi came upon. After the fisherman told the prophet of his success at his trade, Eliyahu asked him about his effort to learn Torah.

"Oh," replied the fisherman, "for that G-d did not give me ability to do."

"Really?" answered an astonished Eliyahu. "G-d gave you understanding to fish, but He did not give you understanding to learn His beloved Torah?"

Needless to say, the fisherman was taken aback and was heart stricken. What would he answer G-d on the Day of Judgment for having used his potential only in the realm of parnassah, but not in the realm of spiritual development?

"Do not cry too hard," Eliyahu told the broken man. "You will not be alone on that awesome day, for countless others will come to G-d with the same answer, and the same problem."

The Mishkan came to spare us making the same mistake twice.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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