

IN COMMAND OF REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

A Burnt-Offering may be placed on the fire on the altar all night until the morning, with the fire burning. (Vayikra 6:2)

Before Adam HaRishon ate from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, it was a totally different world. The big difference was that everything in Creation was completely good with only one exception, the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, because it was a combination of good and evil, and therefore unlike other parts of Creation it was subject to abuse.

Once Adam HaRishon became involved with the tree, from the time that he first started contemplating it, the rest of Creation also became a mixture of good and evil, including man. Whereas before the sin, man and Creation lived on a higher spiritual plane, higher than the source of evil within Creation, but after the sin we descended within it. It is the evil within Creation and within us, that makes everything so physical.

You also see this in everyday life. People who live immoral lives automatically choose a base lifestyle. On the other hand, people who choose to live morally tend to be loftier by nature. The more a person allows evil into his life, the more he moves away from G-d, the Source of Life, and the more physical he becomes. It is the way of Creation.

It is like iron ore, for example:

Iron ore is a mineral substance which, when heated in the presence of a reductant, will yield metallic iron (Fe). It almost always consists of iron oxides, the primary forms of which are magnetite (Fe₃O₄) and hematite (Fe₂O₃). Iron ore is the source of primary iron for the world's iron and steel industries. It is therefore essential for the production of steel . . .

(http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/iron_ore/)

The iron ore is a material that has good and bad in it. In this case the good being that which is necessary for the production of steel, and the bad being that which is not fit for use. The heating process separates the two and allows man to extract and use the good while rejecting the bad.

If Adam had waited only three hours until Shabbos before eating from the Aitz HaDa'as, the good within it would have been separated completely from the bad, and the bad would have disappeared for good, transforming the Aitz HaDa'as into the Aitz HaChaim. The world would have been

perfected and we would all be in the Garden of Eden right now - forever. Instead, we've had to wait 5,765 years so far to get there, and we're still counting. Moshiach will represent the final stages of this tikun.

It is called birrur, from the Hebrew word l'varrer, which means to separate, or to clarify. A breirrah is a choice, and borrar is the forbidden activity on Shabbos of separating the bad from the good (e.g., removing rotten apples from a bowl of good ones). And, it is a process that is ongoing on all levels of life, including within our own bodies that constantly separate the good from the bad, using the good to sustain our bodies while rejecting the bad to save them from harm.

Every act that we do results in some form of birrur, and every event in history does the same. There is no one way to do anything, and even though choosing one course of action over another, what seems to be the most obvious is not always true. Two people can have entirely different takes on a single situation, and how each one responds separates one from the other and reveals more about each one.

That was a major point of the sacrifices. A sacrifice involved all four aspects of the physical reality: Domaim, Tzomayach, Chayah, and Medabehr - Mineral, Vegetation, Animals, and Man. The wood that was used to burn the sacrifice purified an aspect of the Vegetation World, the salt that was used on the sacrifice did the same for the Mineral World, while the animal used as the sacrifice was spiritually elevated in the service of G-d. Man, the one who carried out all the details of the sacrifice, and in some cases also ate from it, ascended spiritually as a result.

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d told Moshe, "Command Aharon and his sons regarding the law of a Burnt- Offering." (Vayikra 6:1-2)

A commandment works exactly the same way. It creates a choice. Thus, the Talmud makes the following declaration:

Greater is one who is commanded and does than one who is not commanded and does. (Kiddushin 31a)

Greater in which respect? Normally people would assume just the opposite: if we really care about something we don't have to be told to do it. And that is exactly the point. Anyone can do that which he cares about, even if it is for the sake of someone else. However, the true test of any relationship is when I make myself do something that I do not care about for the sake of someone else for whom it is important.

Commandments are the best vehicles of birrur, forcing us to decide where we stand in the service of G-d. Do we believe in G-d, or don't we? If we believe in G-d, do we believe in His Torah, or not? And, if we believe in His Torah, that it came from Him at Mt. Sinai, do we perform the mitzvot? And, if we perform His mitzvot, do we do so scrupulously? And if yes, do we put our mind into them as well?

In a sense, the Torah is one very sophisticated sorter. Like a school test, it is designed to force people to reveal what they know or don't know, to reveal how they react to one thing or another. This is what the prophet alluded to when he said:

Who is wise and will understand these things; understanding and will know them? For the ways of G-d are straight; the righteous walk in them and sinners stumble in them. (Hoshea 14:10)

Darchei Hashem - the ways of G-d? That is Torah. For the righteous, the Torah is a smooth path to be walked and that which even offers support. For the sinners, it is a bumpy road over which they constantly trip and fall.

The Talmud puts it in these terms:

Why does it write, "This is the Torah which Moshe placed (sum). . ." (Devarim 4:44). [To teach that] if one merits it, it is a potion (sum) for life and if he does not merit it then it becomes a potion for death. (Yoma 72b)

How can one elixir be both a potion for life and for death? The truth is, there are real life examples of this, where a medicine is a cure for an unhealthy person but can damage a healthy one. Furthermore, some information can help some people while misleading others, and in each case the result depends upon where the person is holding. Like allergy testing, it's all in the reaction to the event that we can see what the person is made of.

They say that this is what the final War of Gog and Magog is all about: birrur. It will be an event made up of certain components and of a specific magnitude that Heaven-designed to test a person's belief in G-d and in the prophecies of Tanach. It will test a person's resolve and one's trust and faith in G-d, His goodness, and a person's willingness to do teshuvah, and put his or her house in order.

For, the ultimate birrur is redemption. This we saw in Egypt where four- fifths of the Jewish people died in the Plague of Darkness and were not part of those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. They were separated out, but not so much as a result of G-d's doing as much as it was as a result of their own choices that denied them the chance to see what they were losing by not leaving Egypt.

We have finished our celebration of Purim and are now preparing for Pesach. But what we may not have been aware of is that passing through Purim was like passing through a sieve. Birrur took place on a very high spiritual plane, in preparation for the level of redemption that Pesach has to offer, both on a personal level and on a national level. This is why we push off Purim until Adar II, in order to perform the mitzvah the first chance we have, as we normally do.

The question is, what does this mean and how does one take advantage of it?

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

If an individual presents a Meal-Offering to G-d his offering must consist of the best grade of wheat

meal. (Vayikra 2:1)

This was called Soles, and it was a coarsely ground meal that was carefully sifted to remove all the fine flour - thirteen times altogether corresponding to the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. For birrur results in mercy, and it only results in crisis when we do not initiate the birrur process ourselves.

The four mitzvos of Purim act in very much the same way. We have already discussed how they correspond to the four letters of G-d's Name, Y-H-V-H, and therefore as we move from mitzvah to mitzvah we climb a spiritual ladder from letter to letter, becoming more spiritually refined at each step of the process. If we do not, there would be no way to approach G-d and enter higher spiritual planes.

Therefore, each mitzvah is like a spiritual sieve through which we flow to become human soles, so-to-speak. Mikrah Megillah says, wake-up and realize that G-d runs the world even when it is impossible to see how, and know sorrow and difficulty will always, in the end, result in redemption, so be ready. Matanos L'Evyonim says, so therefore, become a partner with Him in Creation and take some responsibility for your fellow man. Learn to think about the plight of others as He does, for it will help you to get out of yourself.

Mishloach Manos teaches that one must be concerned about achdus (unity of the Jewish people). A Jew has to learn to see his fellow Jew as an equal partner and to treat him or her likewise, an extension of the mitzvah to love your neighbor as yourself. As the Ramban points out, this mitzvah is really about being objective, which is as close to being G-dly as one can become.

Finally, the Mishteh is a mitzvah of hisbatlus (self-cancellation). However, it is not self-deprecation that comes from feeling worthless or unworthy, but a realization that you are not only a body, that you are primarily a soul. It is like living as a commoner for many years before finding out that you actually have royal blood running through your veins, and that you are in fact a prince and destined to one day be king.

At first you remain in disbelief. But, as the guards who found you remove your common clothing and dress you in royal garb, you begin to feel the part until eventually it feels like the most natural thing in the world. You even wonder how you could have ever assumed you were only a commoner in the first place. The rest of the transformation is merely a process of refinement after refinement, until you are royalty inside and out.

The point of the Mishteh on Purim is to discover your royal blood. Wine went in and a secret came out: You are more a soul than a body. Though the Western world has undergone countless transformations and seems very different today than it was in the past, the essence of the Jews has not and should not change. It is that which keeps us bound to G-d, our Forefathers, Torah, and our ultimate destiny: the World-to-Come.

Mikrah Megillah to Matanos L'Evyonim to Mishloach Manos to Mishteh. Pshat to Remez to Drush to

Sod. Nefesh to Ruach to Neshamah to Chiyah. It is all the same process of going from Heh to Vav to Heh to Yud . . . to G-d. This is why Purim must be close to Pesach even in a leap year which means postponing it for a month: too long a gap between the two holidays can undo the spiritual preparation of the first that is necessary for the second.

For, Pesach is the holiday of the mouth, and nothing reveals the level of a person's refinement more than the way he speaks.

MELAVE MALKAH

G-d formed man from dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils a living soul, and the man became a living spirit. (Bereishis 2:7)

A living spirit: A speaking spirit. (Onkeles)

Speech, as all-important as it is in life is made supremely important by the Talmud:

Rebi Elazar said: Every man was created to toil, as it says, "Because man was made to toil" (Iyov 5:7). Now, I do not know if that means to toil through speech, or in actual labor; however, once it says, "A toiling soul toils for him, for his mouth compels him." (Mishlei 16:26), I know that a person was created to toil with his mouth. I do not know, though, if this means to toil in Torah or just in regular conversation. However, once it says, "This Torah should not leave your mouth" (Yehoshua 1: 8), I know that man was created to toil in Torah [through speech]. (Sanhedrin 99b)

Rava said: Anyone who speaks of non-holy matters (Rashi: childishly and light headedly) has transgressed a positive commandment, as it says, "And speak of them" (Devarim 6:7) - them (Rashi: words of Torah), and not other words. (Yoma 19b)

Indeed, so holy is one's mouth that the unimaginable is made possible through it:

G-d said, "My spirit that is upon you and My words that I have placed in your mouth." (Yeshayahu 59:21)

Indeed, the Talmud explains:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, only made a covenant with Israel because of the oral things (i.e., the Oral Law), as it says, "For it is according to these words that I have made a bris with you and with Israel" (Shemos 34:27). (Gittin 60b)

Thus, the more spiritually-refined a person becomes, the more he can act as a mouthpiece for G-d, so-to-speak. And this is not only about being a partner with G-d in bringing Creation to fulfillment, but it is also about achieving personal and ultimately, national freedom. For it is spiritual- refinement, as measured by the content of one's speech, that elevates a person out of the world of the yetzer hara, the real taskmaster of mankind.

That is why matzah is the symbol of the holiday of Peh Sach - the mouth that spoke. As the Maharal

and the Meiri explain, the simple mixture of refined flour and water symbolizes the sublime simplicity of the World-to-Come. It symbolizes man, who possesses the ability to take coarse bran (a yet-to-be-developed human being), still possessing plenty of chometz, and refine it into soles (a righteous person).

And with righteousness comes freedom, as the Mishnah teaches:

"And the tablets were made by G-d, and the writing was G-d's writing, engraved (charus) on the tablets" (Shemos 32:16). Do not read charus (engraved), but rather chairus (freedom), for no one else is free but he who occupies himself in Torah learning. (Pirkei Avos 6:2)

Though physically, Purim seems like a time to increase chometz in advance of Pesach, it is, in actuality, the first stage of biyur chometz on a spiritual plane. And thus, Pesach is the end of the refinement process that began with Purim. Actually, even that is not true, for from the night after the first day of Pesach we begin to count the Omer in preparation for the receiving of Torah. And THAT, we shall discuss, b'eZRas Hashem Yisborach, is when the process of spiritual refinement goes into high gear.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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