

ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Moshe gathered the Assembly of Israel and told them, "This is what G-d has commanded you to do. Six days you can work, but the seventh day must be holy to you, a Sabbath of strict rest to G-d." (Shemos 35:1-2)

There are 613 Torah Mitzvos. If you add the numbers together (6+1+3) they total 10, corresponding to the Ten Sefiros and the totality of Creation. If you add those numbers together (1+0) you get 1, as in ONE G-d, ONE Torah, ONE Pshat. In other words, everything in Torah is interconnected, and better yet, it is just a different way of saying the same thing - a different view of a similar concept.

Thus, though the Torah sounds as if it is only talking about gathering the Jewish people together in the desert 3317 years ago to learn about the laws of Shabbos, it is also talking about Purim and Chanukah, not mention Pesach, Shavuos and Succos, because each holiday whether it comes from the Torah or the rabbis is just a different expression of the same mandate of the Creator.

However, Chanukah is history for this year and is Purim coming soon. Therefore, we'll use this week's parshah as a springboard to gain insight into Purim.

As Rashi points out, the juxtaposition of the laws of Shabbos with the construction of the Mishkan is to teach us that the latter does not override Shabbos. As important as it was to complete the Mishkan as soon as possible, it was not more important than observing Shabbos, even though both accomplished the exact same thing, albeit in a different manner.

For, among the many ways in which Shabbos and the Mishkan are similar, one of the most important points is the sublime unity that each represents: Unity of the Jewish people with G-d, and unity of the Jewish people among themselves. Shabbos is called Malchus and is considered feminine, the quality of which is to gather in and unify. Regarding the Mishkan it says:

You shall make fifty loops on the end of the one curtain that is the outermost in the joining, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that joins to the second. You shall make fifty catches of copper, and put the catches into the loops, and join the tent together, THAT IT MAY BE ONE. (Shemos 26:11)

To appreciate just how cosmic the number fifty is, the Talmud reveals:

Nun Sha'arei Binah (Fifty Gates of Understanding) æ were created in the world, and all of them were given to Moshe except for one. (Rosh Hashanah 21b)

The Zohar goes somewhat deeper regarding this idea:

G-d took Yud-Mem (gematria = 50) and threw it to Aleph-Lamed-Heh and made Elokim (Aleph-Lamed-Heh-Yud-Mem). (Zohar 1:4a)

However, the Rabbi Shlomo ben Chaim Chaykel Eliyashiv, zt"l (the Ba'al HaLeshem) whose yartzheit is this week (Adar 27) explains what this actually means:

This matter of thirty-six is to cause a rectification to the letters of Aleph-Lamed-Heh (which total thirty-six) from the name Elokim, alluded to by the prophet who said "Who (Mem-Yud) created these (Aleph-Lamed-Heh)?" (Yeshayahu 40:26). For, the sin of the golden calf caused a separation between the letters Aleph-Lamed-Heh and Yud-Mem, like it says in the Introduction to the Zohar (Bereishis 2a). Since the six sefiros (Chesed through Yesod) are included in each other and each in and of themselves have six sefiros (6 x 6), there are thirty-six all together æ the letters Aleph-Lamed-Heh from Elokim. Their rectification is through the Nun Sha'arei Binah, which is the Yud-Mem of Elokim, bringing perfection to Elokim. (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:151a)

Thus, fifty is a number associated with sublime unity for it alludes to the Nun Sha'arei Binah æ the Fifty Gates of Understanding, that are necessary for creating and maintaining unity. The more Binah, the more there can be unity, for such G-dly knowledge elevates a person in the direction of the Light of Ain Sof which is complete unity, and that is why the Mishkan could become dwelling place for the Shechinah: unity goes to unity.

SHABBOS DAY:

He has said, "Because the hand is upon the Throne of G-d; it is a war for G-d with Amalek in each generation." (Shemos 17:16)

That is why Amalek is defined in terms of a lack of knowledge, for his name totals 240, the gematria of the Hebrew word for doubt: suffek (Samech- Peh-Kuf). Amalek subscribes to the idea that to conquer one must first divide, and thus he promotes doubt, doubt in G-d, doubt in Torah, and doubt in the Divine basis of the Jewish people. Therefore he is also said to divide the Name of G-d, at least in the minds of men:

He has said, "Because the hand is upon the Throne of G-d; it is a war for G-d with Amalek in each generation." (Shemos 17:16)

Why is Throne written Chof-Samech and not Chof-Samech-Aleph? And why is G- d's Name divided in half? The Holy One, Blessed is He, swears that neither His Name nor His Throne will be whole until the name of Amalek is completely eradicated. (Rashi)

All of this is alluded to in the name itself for within the word Mishkan (Mem-Shin-Chof-Nun) are the letters of Shechem plus a Nun. For, Shechem is where Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery and they were prepared to divide the family into two forever. It is a place of division, the very word

shechem implying this characteristic (Rashi, Bereishis 48:22). Indeed, Shechem and Amalek have something else in common:

Shechem is a place set aside for punishment. (Sotah 11a)

Amalek is a punishing strap for Israel, always ready for punishment. (Rashi, Bamidbar 21:1)

And therefore, each is remedied by the same fifty, the Nun Sha'arei Binah, which is why, explains the Pri Tzaddik:

Haman sensed that an emanation of Torah Sh'b'al Peh was about to occur, which is the Fifty Gates of Understanding, because understanding means understanding something from Chochmah (wisdom) . . . And this is why he made an aitz fifty amos high, to allude to the fact that he had overcome the Da'as of Yisroel . . . However, just the opposite occurred since the Jewish people accepted Torah Sh'b'al Peh with love. (Pri Tzaddik, Purim 2)

Hence, analyzing the story of Purim we see that the war between Mordechai and Haman was really a war between the Jewish people and Amalek, between Da'as Torah and Da'as Amalek. If so, then this explains the Talmud's question:

Where is there an allusion to Haman in the Torah? In the verse, "Did you eat from (hamin: Heh-Mem-Nun) the tree?" (Bereishis 3:11). (Chullin 139b)

It is a play on the word hamin which can also be read, Haman, establishing a connection between Haman and the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), a tree of good da'as and bad da'as. Therefore, not only can hamin refer to Haman, but the aitz can also refer to Haman's gallows, for as it says:

The aitz that Haman built fifty amos high corresponded to the Fifty Gates of Understanding that are in Torah Sh'b'al Peh which is of the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah. (Pri Tzaddik, Purim 2)

In fact, Haman is spelled: Heh-Mem-Nun, which could be broken into two parts: Heh-Mem æ They [are], and Nun æ fifty, that is, the Jewish people are fifty, or on the level of fifty, or at least are supposed to try and ascend to the level of the Nun Sha'arei Binah. Therefore, Haman arises out of the fact that we do not, and his whole war is against the Nun Sha'arei Binah, for it is this element specifically that transforms Shechem into Mishkan, resulting in Divine unity on earth æ and the end of Amalek once- and-for-all.

It is the Nun that draws the Chof (TWENTY) out from between the Shin and the Mem, and ends the type of spiritual blindness that allows Shechem to be a place of punishment, resulting in the kind of brotherly discord that led to the sale of Yosef and the division of the family.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

The life of Sarah was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; these were the years of the life

of Sarah. Sarah died in Kiryat Arbah, which is Chevron in the Land of Canaan, and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah, and cried. (Bereishis 23:2)

In the posuk above, the word for cried is spelled: Vav-Lamed-Bais-Chof-Tav- Heh - v'livkovsah. However, in a Sefer Torah the Chof is written smaller and the commentators ask why. The Midrash answers: to indicate that Avraham did not mourn excessively for his beloved Sarah. However, in light of this discussion and the following Talmudic passage during which G-d is rebuking Moshe Rabbeinu, we can find another lesson from the undersized Chof.

[G-d said to Moshe,] "What a shame about the ones who are lost and are not to be found. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as E"l Shadd"ai, and they never questioned Me, nor did they ask, 'What is Your Name?' I told Avraham, 'Arise, and walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you.' (Bereishis 13:17). Yet, when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn't find anything until he purchased land for four hundred shekels!" (Sanhedrin 111a)

If so, then the Chof shows us how Avraham overcame the intellectual doubt and blindness that results from the hidden hand of G-d; the small Chof is telling all of Avraham's descendants that, in the mind of Avraham, G-d was one. Avraham was a man who saw with his mind's eye, and for that reason was not subject to the visual limitations represented by the number twenty.

Interestingly enough, it is at this very place in the Torah that there is a direct allusion to Purim:

The life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years ...

For, as Rebi Akiva pointed out, the 127 years of Sarah's life were the merit for the future Queen Esther to rule over one hundred and twenty- seven provinces of Persia!

Thus, the battle against Amalek is a battle for Da'as Elokim and this helps to explain why the age for bringing the Machtzis-Hashekel æ the Half- Shekel we spoke about in Ki Sisa and a symbol of such Da'as, was twenty years and older. The shekel itself, the Torah tells us, was equal to twenty gerahs, and we learn this from a posuk that just happens to allude to the sale of Yosef:

Take five shekels a piece for each of them for the count, according to the holy shekel of the sanctuary which is equal to twenty gerahs. (Bamidbar 3:47)

This was for the firstborn who were yet to be redeemed among the Israelites . . . since the selling price of Yosef, the firstborn of Rachel, was twenty pieces of silver. (Rashi)

It was the spiritual short-sightedness of Yosef's brothers that blinded them to the mistake they had made in Shechem that fateful day. It had been a mistake that they quickly came to regret, especially once they realized that their father, Ya'akov, refused to be comforted over the loss of his son.

Thus, an Amalekian view is one that excludes a vision of direct and obvious Divine Providence, a weak spiritual vision alluded to by the number twenty and the letter Chof. The Chof positioned between the Shin and the Mem in the name Shechem indicates that Shechem was an ideal setting

for Amalek to do his work. This is why it was a place set aside for exile and punishment, for that is the very cause of exile and suffering.

MELAVE MALKAH:

However, there is another very important principle to remember: whatever possesses the potential for anti-holiness must, by definition, possess the potential for tremendous holiness. The fact that Shechem contains such powers of divisiveness indicates that somewhere within Shechem there is the power to unify. Indeed, the posuk said immediately after the Shema:

Blessed be the Name of His glorious Kingdom forever

alludes to this very potential. For, the words formed from the combination of the first letter of each Hebrew word are: Bais-Shin-Chof-Mem-Lamed-Vav æ in Shechem, thirty-six! This is the number that alludes to the Hidden Light of Creation. In short, thirty-six is a number that also alludes to the Da'as of the Fifty Gates of Understanding. Thus,

When G-d, your G-d, has brought you into the land you are to possess, you should arrange those blessing on Mount Gerizim, and those cursing on Mount Eival. They are on the other side of the Jordan to the west, on the way to Gilgal, near the plains of Moreh, in the territory of the Canaanites. (Devarim 11:29-30)

It was there that they camped prior to entering the land after forty years in the desert. At Shechem, they ascended Har Gerizim and Har Eival and pronounced the blessings for those that follow the Torah, and the curses for those that stray from the Torah. This is why Shechem was given to Yosef, and why he was buried there (Bereishis 48:22). It takes a Yosef who had access to the Da'as of the Fifty Gates of Understanding, to counteract Amalek and rectify Shechem. It was Yosef HaTzaddik who could make the transition from the forty-ninth gate of understanding to the fiftieth gate, from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah to the Aitz Chaim, for:

The fruit of the tzaddik is the Tree of Life. (Mishlei 11:30)

This refers to Yosef the Tzaddik, the fruit of the Tree of Life. (Zohar Chadash, Chukas)

Thus, it takes the Fifty Gates of Understanding to neutralize the negative forces of Chof, or more importantly, utilize them in a positive way. It is the Fifty Gates of Understanding that extract the Chof from between the Shin and the Mem and which obliterate the barrier between Hashem and Elokim, and allow the Name of G-d to become One. This concept is actually realized through the Mishkan, both conceptually and in the actual spelling of the word itself.

In the word Mishkan, we find the letters of Shechem re-arranged; the Shin and the Mem are together and the letter Chof follows. The final letter is Nun. Hence, it is as if the addition of the Nun æ the Fifty Gates of Understanding, rectified the problem of Shechem by extracting the Chof out from between the Shin and the Mem, allowing the Name of G-d to become One, conceptually-speaking.

This is not as difficult to accept when one considers the actual plan of the Mishkan and the surrounding Courtyard. To begin with, there was a veil of twenty amos across the opening of the Tent of Meeting (Appointed Tent) that blocked the vision of an outsider so that he could not see what was occurring inside the Tent. The world outside the tent can be compared to the everyday, mundane, natural world, whereas inside the tent was like another spiritual, dimension altogether.

After penetrating the veil, one entered an area of fifty amos by fifty amos æ the Courtyard, within which the larger of the two altars stood, upon which the sacrifices were offered. In this area, miracles occurred as a matter of daily routine. Completely traversing the fifty amos of the Courtyard brought one to the entrance of the Heichel, or Sanctuary. As the name implies, entering the Sanctuary meant entering a new level of Holiness, and therefore a more intense revelation of G-d. This was the place that the smaller, Incense-altar was positioned, as well as the Menorah and Table for the Showbread.

The Heichel was also twenty amos in length, but this was a twenty that followed a fifty, which transformed it from a spiritually-blinding twenty to one that reveals the hand of G-d. In fact, combined with the fifty the sum became seventy, the number that alludes to the deepest secrets of Torah:

Anyone who becomes settled through wine has the knowledge (Da'as) of his Creator . . . has the knowledge (da'as) of the Seventy Elders; wine was given with seventy letters (Rashi: the gematria of wine is 70), and Sod (mystery of Torah) was given with seventy letters (Sod also equals 70). When wine goes in, secrets go out. (Eiruvin 65a)

Hence, seventy is a number that indicates a certain high level of spiritual knowledge and awareness that reveals the hand of G-d in Creation. The Babylonian Exile lasted seventy years for this reason and then resulted in Purim, the holiday that celebrates G-d's victorious, but hidden hand, revealed through the Jewish people's miraculous victory over Haman. In the Mishkan, the seventy amos brought one to the Paroches, the final veil in front of the Kodesh Kodashim (Holy of Holies) within which was placed the Aron HaKodesh (the Holy Ark).

The Holy of Holies was so spiritually-elevating that only the High Priest could enter once a year on Yom Kippur as part of the Incense-Offering service.

Thus, within the Mishkan Shechem was transformed from a place of golus (exile) to a place of geulah (redemption). In the Mishkan, the hidden light was revealed and the ultimate unity achieved:

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 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)

Combined, the Shema and Blessed be the Name, which total fifty letters, result in the unity found in

the Mishkan, and later, the Temple. No wonder Achashveros was prepared to promise Esther up to "half the kingdom," that is until a re-built Bais HaMikdosh (Megillah 11b), and a re-built "prism" through which the light and Da'as of the Fifty Gates of Understanding could filter down to the forlorn Jewish nation.

And, no wonder the Kohen Gadol æ Chof-Heh-NUN, wore the letters of the names of the Tribes (25 letters for each of the 6 names) on his shoulders, twenty-five letters on the right shoulder and twenty-five letters on the left shoulder, using his very being to unify the Jewish people in a way that his ancestors did not. And, in a way that Purim did to some degree, but not completely for as Megillas Esther finishes, Mordechai was favored only by the majority of his brothers, and not by all of them.

Apparently, the final stages of unification will be Moshiach Ben Yosef's job.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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